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A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY GROUNDED IN THE EXPERIENCE OF TRUTH

Abstract. This paper focuses on a Christian philosophy grounded in the experience of truth. To better understand this, it will explore: (1) the kind of philosophical approach that provides a space for people to preoccupy themselves with truth and draws them to further probe into the fundamental questions; (2) a return to the basics: philosophy as love of wisdom and for love of wisdom is *personal*, an experiential journey; (3) finally, a vision of Christian philosophy that is not purely theoretical but teaches one how to incarnate every truth and virtue. Christian philosophy provides us with an experience in, with, and of the truth in terms of understanding and developing certain traits and virtues such as prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. The shaping and molding of these good habits within each person are important in maintaining a Christian worldview to keep one grounded while being immersed in the world and its realities, allowing the Christian to become a *reality* within oneself and for others.

Keywords: Christian philosophy; love of wisdom; personal experience; truth; virtue

1. Introduction. 2. A personal causal experience. 3. Back to the basis: philosophy as love of wisdom and for love of wisdom. 4. The union between theory and a virtuous life. 5. Conclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The question of what is true has been at the center of philosophy throughout the ages. This is because the concern for the search for truth is one of the most fundamental and enduring interests of human beings. The ancient Greek thinkers down to the contemporary ones have tried to figure out what truth is, how it relates to knowledge, and what role it plays in the lives of persons. In many ways, it is the ultimate goal of human knowledge and any form of inquiry. While the search for truth can take many forms and can be pursued through various means, it is ultimately a task of philosophy. Philosophy is the field that asks the most basic questions about the nature of reality,

knowledge, freedom, ethics, and the human person, to name a few. These questions are at the core of all human inquiry.

If the search for and the arrival at truth are as central in philosophy as in human inquiry, then these would warrant an exploration of the relationship between truth and human nature, with the presupposition that philosophy must be grounded in an understanding of the truth of man. For our purposes, however, we will focus on the kind of philosophy or philosophical position that could give us a unique perspective and valuable insights into the nature of truth as grounded in the lived experience of its adherents: Christian philosophy.

One of the ways in which we could claim that Christian philosophy has an edge compared to other means of philosophizing concerns its understanding of the nature of truth and of the human person. The understanding of truth is not just an abstract concept or formulation, but it is something that is intimately connected to the lived experience of human beings. On the other hand, the Christian way of understanding the human person is founded on the Christian belief that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God; and this offers a distinctive viewpoint on reality.

Here, it is worth highlighting the human person and his role because he is the one who is face to face with reality as it is, and to philosophize demands entering the realm of philosophical anthropology. Josef Pieper affirms this when he says: "Someone, on the other hand, who raises and attempts to answer the question, »What does it mean to philosophize?« is quite unmistakably engaged in doing philosophy. This question is not a provisional one but an imminently philosophical one; raising it, one stands already at the very heart of philosophical questioning. To be more precise: I cannot say anything concerning the essence of philosophy and philosophizing without at the same time saying something about the essence of man and, with this, we have entered one of philosophy's innermost provinces" (Pieper

2006, 23). A proper understanding of the human person, therefore, is essential for developing a sound Christian philosophical framework.

Now there are multiple sources of knowledge about reality, i.e., intuition, reflection, the sciences, and divine revelation. The human person may approach philosophical questions from different points of view, but a Christian, being true to his identity, approaches them from a Christian point of view. In a certain sense, his perspective may be different from that of a non-believer who might have attempted to separate scientific reasoning and faith. Löffler, in presenting the methodological prerequisites of the frequently labeled Christian philosophy – Augustinian and Thomistic – considers the following: “... let us think of a religious believer’s belief system as a vast set of propositions of which a certain subset can only be known by relying on revelation (i.e., ‘theological beliefs’ in a narrower sense), whereas the bigger bulk of his knowledge can be acquired by natural reason alone, and hence in principle by anyone” (Löffler 2013, 117).

Christian philosophy works out an answer consistent with a theological view of man and the world (Aquinas 1911-1925, II-II, q.2, a.4). “In the act of philosophizing, man and God are thus joined by a common rationality or perfection in the contemplation of those ultimate causes which account for the totality of the real” (Wasserman 2006, as cited in Pieper 2006, 21). Philosophizing is the fulfillment of human existence in that it is a process that examines fundamental questions regarding existence, reality, knowledge, and morality to gain a deeper understanding of the world and the human person’s place in it. The specific form of philosophizing based on the lived experience of a person who is a Christian is, precisely, Christian philosophy.¹ This kind of philosophizing is founded on

1 Before diving deeper into the kind of Christian philosophy framework involved here, let us rewind and establish what we mean here as Christian philosophy. If we trace back history, the words “Christian philosophy” do not belong to St. Thomas Aquinas’s language. “Christian philosophy” is the label with which Pope Leo XIII, in his Encyclical Letter *Aeterni Patris* designated the doctrine of the *Doctor Communis* in 1879. “Christian philosophy” then

the living experience of a Christian as a reality. Peter Kreeft's words can enlighten us on this: "Christian philosophizing is uniquely characterized by the fact that it sees itself obliged to endure a tension that goes beyond the realm of purely conceptual problems. Christian philosophizing is more complicated because it forbids itself from arriving at »obvious« formulations by overlooking realities, by choosing that and omitting this; because, cast into productive disquiet through its having caught sight of revealed truth, it is forced to think in broader terms and, above all, not to rest content with the blandness of rationalist generalizations. It is this welling up of the spirit as it breaks against the rock of Christian revelation that distinguishes Christian philosophizing" (Kreeft 2021, 117).

In doing philosophy, the philosopher experiences doubt, certainty, and a sense of submission. But doubt about what? Certainty about what? And submission to what? Philosophizing from a Christian perspective requires thinking through the stance from which one is philosophically busy: the absolute truth about man, the world, and God. Such a position enables the philosopher to help one, both Christian and non-Christian, to live more deeply and authentically through the lens of a more holistic and integrated understanding of reality.

Possessing a Christian identity and doing philosophy are not two poles that repel each other. Christian philosophy, whose point of departure is the natural light of reason, must not be detached from the notion of the Supreme Being, God, as if the inclusion

can be defined as the way of philosophizing in which the Christian faith and the human intellect join forces in a common investigation of philosophical truth. In other words, Christian philosophy celebrates the Christian faith as a source of inspiration or life commitment (see: Leo XIII 1879). Christian philosophizing sheds light on the key question that a philosopher addresses through himself and the world: *How does the inspiration of and the commitment to the Christian faith relate to the content of philosophy?* We can have a further understanding of what Christian philosophy means using J.D. Capehart's article on Etienne Gilson, where he talks about Gilson's examination of Aquinas' thought, which appears to be the former's first definition of Christian philosophy (Capehart 2021, 57).

of the conception and understanding of the latter pertains only to the area of faith. Articulating one's worldview through philosophy illuminated by faith serves to convey where one stands with respect to other approaches.

For someone with a Christian identity, to philosophize means reflecting the totality of the reality encountered regarding its ultimate meaning and end, and that includes the God of faith who is the same God of the philosophers (Ratzinger 2004).

A Christian philosopher is someone who does not bracket his knowledge when he does philosophy. He is not someone who only entertains either pure reflection or divine revelation (see: Gilson 1956). "... The Thomistic notion of philosophy would never imply something so markedly separate from Christian Wisdom that it would not be uninfluenced by it" (Capehart 2021, 57). He assents to everything because he believes that in seeking to know and understand things, he should leave room for acquiescence. Is Christian philosophy grounded in the experience of truth the only robust kind of philosophy then? This question naturally arises when the idea of being a "robust" philosophy we are called to undertake is one that is comprehensive, logically consistent, capable of withstanding scrutiny and criticism, and personal.² In this context, Christian philosophy, which is based on the experience of truth, refers to a philosophy that is resilient and long-lasting.

In the following sections, we will explore three approximations of this framework of Christian philosophy that could work well as one particular way of engaging in this process of inquiry that is rooted in the distinctive Christian perspective. These approximations in Christian philosophy grounded in the experience of truth are: (1) a personal causal experience; (2) a going back to the basics

² By "personal" we mean the following: (1) as experienced by the human person as the subject or doer of philosophizing, and (2) as a philosophy that penetrates into the entire spectrum of human existence.

of philosophy as love of wisdom as *pondering*; and (3) a union between theory and virtuous life.

2. A PERSONAL CAUSAL EXPERIENCE

There can be a plethora of approaches to doing philosophy just as there are various branches of philosophy and schools of thought. Considering philosophy etymologically, as *love of wisdom*, we are led to the Ancient Greeks' widely known understanding of it as born of wonder. And philosophy is concerned with what is essential in man as such. Philosophy enables one to turn this wonder upon himself – “Mihi queastio factus sum” (Augustine 1993).³ I have become a question to myself, echoes St. Augustine. This said, the human person – that *someone* who will bring to the fore the kind of Christian philosophy we need – is the one subject that we should know well. It is important to reflect on this *subject*⁴ because it directly concerns us human beings. Moreover, philosophizing is a personal causal experience of a joint endeavor between persons either in a classroom setting, in an academic discussion, or in casual conversations. Here, we are appropriating the person's experience of the self, identifying therein not only the existential and the phenomenological modes of philosophizing but its foundation. This meant that the Christian way of philosophical inquiry can open us to neither only the understanding of the truth of man nor only the objective knowledge acquired, but also the subjective experience of the human person.

As stated above and as known by way of general knowledge that philosophy is the loving search for wisdom,⁵ the knowledge of the ultimate causes of reality, we can also shift our focus to asking:

³ See also: Lombo *et al.* 2014, who mentions this statement from Augustine.

⁴ “Subject” here is understood as the doer of the action. As Plato wrote, a philosopher, even at the cost of becoming an object of derision, never ceases to account for his existence. See: Plato 1990, 174 B.

⁵ This will be dealt with in depth in the next section.

who seeks this love of wisdom? *Who* does philosophy? Once we establish the *who*, then it would be easier for us to pin down the kind of holistic philosophical approach that we would need in philosophizing. The idea of *person* is inseparably bound up with the idea of philosophizing; and in philosophizing, the human person has to face himself.⁶ To clarify such, we can turn to Karol Wojtyła's explanation in exploring the human experience as understood in a twofold manner: "He who experiences is man, and he, whom the subject of the experience experiences, is also man; he is both the subject and the object. His subjectivity belongs to the essence of experience, which is always experiencing 'something' or 'someone'" (Wojtyła 2021, 273).

Hence, doing philosophy does not exist in the Abstract. It exists in a concrete reality - in the here and now - because it is carried out by a someone (the efficient cause). Who seeks this love of wisdom?⁷ Who does philosophy? It's the human person himself who is the *subject*, the doer of the action, of philosophy. The human person, a rational being and the only creature⁸ who opens himself to the truth and the good, is the one who does philosophy. When discussing the human person as the subject and the core of what it means to personally experience something, we do so because he is this someone who should always recognize himself as the object and purpose of all his forms of expression, and in this case, philosophizing. The human subject cannot be separated from experience. This is one way in which philosophy is *personal*, an experiential journey for those who devote themselves to it, and in this respect, the human person's subjectivity - of his being a subject - is understood through the personal experience of truth within the framework of Christian philosophy.

6 We are employing here Wojtyła's idea of man's experience of himself. See: Wojtyła 2021.

7 "Love of wisdom" here is understood as the final cause of doing philosophy.

8 Creature here refers to beings who are a composite of matter and form to distinguish them from the angels, who are creatures, yes, but without a material composition.

Considering that the human person is the subject⁹ of philosophical activity, there emerges Christian philosophy's contribution to deepening the centrality of the person.¹⁰ This does not mean, however, that Christian philosophy is reduced to the human person. On the contrary, a Christian philosophy that has the person¹¹ at the center of its endeavors will pave the way to a more personal journey toward the truth, who in the end is the Supreme Being who is the foundation and source of this search for the love of wisdom. If in doing philosophy we look at each of our recipients – both in the context of teaching or in philosophical discussion – as someone, as *this* person, and not as a mere receptacle of philosophical knowledge, then we will be able to carry it out *subjectively*,¹² existentially,¹³ with openness, and with a welcoming environment, without compromising the objective truth. This kind of philosophical approach requires that the philosophical content is genuinely understood by others, and this calls for the transmission of affection and one's experience of truth. Likewise, philosophizing involves interpersonal relationships among

9 To give this term, "subject," employed here more merit following Wojtyła's philosophy as cited in the work of Deborah Savage, it must be noted that the Polish philosopher "is not referencing experience as a supplement to moral relativism or personal preference as a method for addressing questions of the true and the good. Wojtyła remains grounded in the metaphysical and ontological categories that not only constitute our intellectual heritage but also refer to real and profound truths, while simultaneously accounting for the subjectivity and dynamic nature of the individual" (Savage 2013, 21). In contrast, I hope to demonstrate in this paper that philosopher Karol Wojtyła provides a way to remain grounded in the metaphysical and ontological categories that not only constitute our intellectual heritage, but also refer to real and profound truths, while simultaneously accounting for subjectivity and the dynamic nature of the individual.

10 We can refer to Deborah Savage's article on *The centrality of lived experience in Wojtyła* (Savage 2013). One of the points she raised was how Wojtyła argues "that the philosophical issue at the center of the ideological battles of this our present age is the truth about the human being. The philosopher's most critical contribution will be a response to the question of the meaning of human personhood" (Savage 2013, 19-20).

11 One who is created according to the image and likeness of God.

12 As referring to the subject: the human person himself.

13 This refers to the sense of one's existence, the sense of life, the sense of the universe.

Christian philosophy's undertakers and stakeholders. This is because it brings into play, other than knowing concepts, the capacity to entrust oneself to others. In the words of St. John Paul II in *Fides et ratio*, "knowledge through belief, grounded as it is on trust between persons, is linked to the truth: in the act of believing men and women entrust themselves to the truth which the other declares to them" (John Paul 1998, 32).

In advocating for a personal causal experience of Christian philosophy, it is imperative that we go back to establishing first that good philosophy strives to evaluate all beliefs in line with what is in accord with right reason. Good philosophy emanates from the philosophizing persons. The latter may at times not agree on certain notions, yet this is not an indicator of the impossibility of doing philosophy together. The example of Aquinas taking on Aristotle's approach proves that there is a way for both ends – a saint and a pagan – to touch on each other (Gilson 1979, 17).¹⁴

As seen in Aquinas' legacy, good philosophy tries to understand the beliefs of those who may not be totally in line with ours.¹⁵

14 "For him, however, science, logic, and philosophy never serve any other end than to permit a more perfect contemplation of God. To the often-disputed question, »Is there any philosophy in the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas?« the simplest answer is, »Yes, there is, but it is always there with a view to facilitating man's knowledge of God«. The fact itself is beyond discussion. The next question is: would a philosopher call »philosophy« this study of nature and this pursuit of philosophical speculation conceived as an approach to the contemplation of God? The answer to this question naturally depends on the philosopher himself and on his own idea of what philosophy is. The Thomistic view of philosophy would not appeal to the supporters of scientism or logical positivism, but neither would the view of philosophy proper to these schools agree with the philosophical aspirations of all our contemporaries. Many philosophers who have nothing in common with Thomas Aquinas would definitely refuse to accept such a narrowing field of philosophy. At any rate, the Greek philosophers – to consider the only philosophers whom Thomas knew – were of the opinion that to know God was the supreme aim of all true lovers of wisdom" (Gilson 1979, 17).

15 Gilson points out that the philosophical value of the Thomistic system is the synthesis of faith and reason while respecting the terms of both (see: Gilson 1937, 51-52). Brock

Consequently, a good Christian philosophical approach that revives the centrality of the human person finds a common ground for dialogue; it seeks for what unites all men and not what divides. Dialogue with non-Christians doing philosophy is compatible with Christianity. “Far from imagining that one should find any conflict between the ends of philosophical inquiry and those of theological inquiry, Thomas thinks that their ultimate object is one and the same. If the knowledge of God is the »highest peak at which human investigation can arrive«, there is essential agreement between the teaching of the doctor of Christian truth and that of the philosopher. At the level of natural knowledge, the philosopher too is a theologian” (Gilson 1993, 19). “Inclusivity in philosophizing then is a quest of a believer and a non-believer alike rooted in the fact that both form a self-communicative and relational philosophical experience. Through the relational aspect, in which dialogue is made possible, the philosopher enlightened by faith and the one who is not is both actively present to each other. The entire development of a person-centered Christian philosophy unfolds through the active dialogue with an ever-growing matrix of relations to other seekers of wisdom and the larger world beyond them” (Clarke 2015, 22).

makes a useful summary of Aquinas’s authoritative sources; of the non-Christian writers, Brock affirms that the most influential was Aristotle. Aquinas’s direct knowledge of Plato was limited to the *Timaeus*; what he knew of Platonic thought was drawn either from Aristotle or authors of Neoplatonic inspiration (Boethius, Augustine, pseudo-Dionysius, and Proclus). Another definite influence was Stoicism, especially as presented in Seneca and Cicero. Finally, Aquinas also referred to Jewish and Islamic thinkers such as Moses Maimonides, Avicenna, Algazel, and Averroes. Brock comments that Thomas was intent on getting to the truth of things, but that he also paid attention to the real meaning of the author, and he “does sometimes take the opportunity to carry the discussion of the things well beyond what he thinks the author is saying about them. On a few occasions, he even disagrees explicitly with the author’s position. These points suggest that usually, if he does not say otherwise, Thomas accepts the author’s view as true” (Brock 2015, 4-7).

3. BACK TO THE BASIS: PHILOSOPHY AS LOVE OF WISDOM AND FOR LOVE OF WISDOM

Why must a Christian way of philosophizing go back to a radical vision of philosophy as love of wisdom and, we endeavor to add, for love of wisdom? In this section, we propose that a Christian philosophy grounded in the experience of truth must go back to the basics of love and for love of wisdom as *pondering*. What is “pondering” and what did the classical word understand by “pondering,” and how would this shed light on the fundamental attitude for a truly Christian philosophy?

To reflect on, to ponder in Greek is *ἐνθυμέομαι*, which means in a state or condition, or in a passionate frame of mind to lay to heart and consider well producing fervent, inner cogitation (Liddell *et al.* 1996). As a state or condition, pondering is the natural fruit of deeper questioning.

When we go back to the development of love of wisdom in Ancient Greek philosophy, as it emerges in Plato and in Aristotle, it turns out that the introduction of the concept at the time meant a pivotal point in the understanding of the wise. Plato, in the *Symposium*, associated philosophizing with *eros*. Plato asks “What, finally, is love?” (Plato 1996, 180c-193e). In the Discourse of Socrates with Diotima, Plato explains the nature of *Eros*¹⁶ (Plato 1996, 201e-204c). It’s in this section where Plato argues that the highest love is the philosopher’s love of wisdom and love of truth. “»Who are the lovers of wisdom, Diotima», I asked, »if they are neither the wise nor the ignorant?« »Even a child«, she said, »would realize by now that it is those who fall between these two and that Love is one of them. Wisdom is one

16 As to origin, Eros is son of Poros and Penia, and partakes of the nature of both parents – the fertile vigor of the one, the wastrel neediness of the other. As he is a mean between the mortal and the immortal, so he is a mean between the wise and the unwise, i.e., a wisdom-lover (*philosopher*). The notion that Eros is a beautiful god is due to a confusion between subjective Eros and the object loved. See: Plato 1996, 201e-204c.

of the most beautiful things, and Love is the love of beauty. So, love must necessarily be a lover of wisdom; and as a lover of wisdom, he falls between wisdom and ignorance. Again, the reason for this origin: his father is wise and resourceful while his mother has neither quality. So, this is the nature of the spirit of Love, my dear Socrates...«” (Plato 1996, 201d-204c).

Plato emphasizes here the joy of one who has achieved a philosophical life, which will often defy social conventions.

For Aristotle, on the other hand, wisdom or *σοφία* is possessing a comprehensive knowledge or understanding. It's the most exact (*ἀκριβῶς*) knowledge. Wisdom encompasses and integrates episteme and nous in that "... it is clear that Wisdom is knowledge of certain principles and causes. Since we are investigating this kind of knowledge, we must consider what these causes and principles are whose knowledge is Wisdom. Perhaps it is clearer if we take the opinions we hold about the wise man. We consider first, then, that the wise man knows all things, so far it is possible, without having knowledge of every one of them individually; next, that the wise man is he who comprehends difficult things, such as are not easy comprehension (for sense-perception, being common to all, is easy, and has nothing to do with Wisdom); and further that in every branch of knowledge, a man is wiser in proportion as he is more accurately informed and better able to expound the causes" (Aristotle 1923, I, 1, 982a 1-19).

Here, Aristotle is giving us an excellent example of what a truly philosophizing and philosophical way of life is. A lover of wisdom has a true conception of and grasps the truth of the first principles that are supplied by the other disposition of the intellect. Given philosophy's task of providing man with a grounded experience of truth, Aristotle's conception of wisdom, and eventually, the love of it, points us to live a life of wisdom, the highest form of which is contemplation. Love of wisdom as contemplation is closely linked to *pondering* as understood at the beginning of this section. Going

back to its etymology, contemplation, or *θεωρία* in Greek, means that the attention paid to what is being considered or apprehended is intense (Liddell *et al.* 1996). Thus, we could say that in *Metaphysics*, Aristotle's association with the philosopher is similar to the poet in that both are concerned with what arouses wonder or awe, the *mirandum* (Aristotle 1923, I, 3, 55). Through this lens, we understand the philosopher who in his act of philosophizing, and in the pursuit of love of wisdom, can flourish if he transcends his reality and recognizes the dimension that goes beyond him. To this Aquinas argues that to comprehend something is to know it in as much as it is knowable in itself, and to know it to its very depths¹⁷ (Aquinas 2011, I, II).

"Philosophizing," argues Pieper, "is the purest form of *theoria*, of *speculari*, of a purely receptive gazing at reality, in which the things alone provide the measure, and the soul only receives this measure" (Pieper 2006, 31). Christian philosophizing opens the philosopher to a further form of questioning and active wondering about the love of wisdom of the world as he finds himself in relation to that world. As the subject of philosophizing, he is this "*someone* for whom the world is in some way venerable – creation – in the strictest sense and who will be able to view the world »theoretically« in the full acceptance of that term" (Pieper 2006, 31).

It belongs to the nature of philosophy that it aims at wisdom that nevertheless remains unattainable to it, albeit not in such a way that absolutely no relation exists between the two (Pieper 2006). Pieper elucidates further: "This wisdom is the object of philosophy – but as something lovingly sought, not something that is ever had. This, then, is the first point that is being made in the Pythagorean and Socratic-Platonic interpretation of the word *philosophia*. This idea is taken up and made more precise in the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. It also

17 "Comprehendere autem proprie dicitur aliquis aliquam rem cognoscendo, qui cognoscit rem illam quantum in se cognoscibilis est; alias, quamvis cognoscat eam, non tamen comprehendit" (Aquinas 2011, I, II).

found its way, partly through Aristotle, into the works of the great medieval thinkers” (Pieper 2006, 52).

The Christian philosopher ponders as much as he contemplates the wisdom of created reality, deepens in it each time, and transcends it. In order to understand the wisdom inherent in the created reality, the Christian philosopher engages in a process of reflection and contemplation in which an ongoing deepening of comprehension and insight into the nature of this reality is required. It is beyond doubt that the philosopher ventures into realms that are beyond the bounds of what can be directly observed or experienced in the physical world. On account of this, a Christian philosopher seeks wisdom and comprehension of the world but also acknowledges that this knowledge and wisdom he possesses have its boundaries and that there might be deeper truths that go beyond what can be perceived or felt through the senses.

In this we distinguish Christian philosophy, in so far as it is love of and for love of wisdom, from the classical Greek attitude as the former uses reason to understand the faith: outside the influence of Christianity, current philosophy that has historically developed in a Christian environment based on certain philosophical and doctrinal stances would not have arisen (Sebastine 2022, 61). In other words, in Christian philosophy, faith purifies reason (John Paul II, 1998). Christian philosophers do not see religious faith as a hindrance to gaining intellectual freedom.¹⁸ That is why they strive to be always ready to give a reason for what they believe in,¹⁹ convinced that reason

18 “For philosophy and, albeit in a different way, for theology, listening to the great experiences and insights of the religious traditions of humanity, and those of the Christian faith in particular, is a source of knowledge, and to ignore it would be an unacceptable restriction of our listening and responding” (Benedict XVI, 2022).

19 This approach is the opposite of what the Enlightenment proposes: a project of reason without faith and doing religion within the limits of reason alone.

and philosophy are the handmaid to faith and theology.²⁰ The significance of these claims is expounded by Pieper in the following: “In that original construal of the word »philosophy«, however, is contained yet a second idea, which only rarely tends to receive explicit attention. Both in the legendary utterance of Pythagoras and in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, as well as in Aristotle, the human *philosophos* is contrasted with the divine *Sophos*. Philosophy is not man’s loving search for just any type of wisdom; it is oriented toward wisdom such as God possesses. Aristotle even goes so far as to refer to philosophy itself as »divine science« because it aims at a truth that only God fully possesses as his own” (Pieper 2006, 53).

The Christian, as a philosopher, is called to seek this love of wisdom in a *personal* – from one interiority to the other – way because this search is *personal*. We say that it is *personal* in the sense that the search for love of wisdom is seen as an outcome of the philosopher’s experience of truth so that he becomes wise. We will look more into this practical fruit of philosophizing in the next section.

In going back to the basics of Christian philosophy, the philosopher uses Plato’s centuries-old question time and again: “What, finally, is love?” (Plato 1996, 180c-193e). Through this question, Christian philosophy is assisted in opening itself up for renewal from within which is to cognize and acknowledge that philosophy is not just about being moral, knowledgeable, or reflective; rather, it is about being concerned about the human person and the world as a whole. What we can get from Plato is that the essence of philosophizing lies in aiming at a wisdom that can never be possessed by the philosopher (Plato 1996, 210a-212a).

20 “The relation between faith and reason, and between theology and philosophy, is analogous to the relationship between man and woman. ... They are designed to be different but also to be married. They are like head and heart, like body and soul, and like individuality and sociality: each perfects the other and fights with the other only when the relationship is wrong” (Pieper 2006, 18).

Wisdom is a vision that things are as they really are, “about the cosmos as it is in the light of reason, and about a mode of living and being according to this vision” (Hadot 1995, 266). Christian philosophy’s search for wisdom is a personally lived process of transformation to change one’s way of looking at the world, leading to a new and different way of being.

Prompted by Plato’s question, the personal reflection on Christian philosophy as love and for love of wisdom furthers the thinker to a reflection on the centrality of the lived experience of the human person and the splendor of truth which does not impose itself on others. For love of wisdom, the Christian as a *philosophos* (on his way toward wisdom) and as a result of his *pondering*, however, has the responsibility and commitment to bring others to the true light and happiness. Since philosophy is inseparable from life and from the human person, he seeks and experiences truth as a shared human endeavor. Christian and non-Christian philosophers alike head in the same direction. Both lead the others, through philosophizing, by the hand to also experience truth’s²¹ splendor. In order to do this, the exposition of the truth based on God – Truth Himself – must not result in an imposition. For truth, as it is, does not impose itself. Rather, it opens the human person to it by attracting and providing him with an invitational space for him to freely walk into. One way for a philosopher to embody this is by living a life in, with, of the truth because it is his vocation. As a result, it will facilitate others in opening themselves up to it. And once they have acquainted themselves with the truth, it will be easier to lead them to its depths and partake in the Christian’s grounded worldview in a world where relativism challenges one’s beliefs. Only thus do Christians become capable of a genuine dialogue of cultures. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “a reason which is deaf to the divine and which relegates religion

21 Truth Himself.

into the realm of subcultures is incapable of entering into dialogue of cultures” (Benedict XVI 2006).

In fact, Aristotle opens the *Metaphysics* asserting that all men, by nature, desire to know (Aristotle 1923, 980a 21). We all desire to know but not simply to know something. It is much more profound and intense, especially for a Christian, because, fundamentally, it is a desire to know the truth. We say that the philosopher, in his plea for truth, is a profound reality proper to him since such knowledge penetrates to the depths of his being. He is this being who possesses a spiritual faculty whose object is the truth. It is intense, on the other hand, because to know the truth is to be enlightened (Hadot 1995). The Christian philosopher’s and all men’s, in general, experience of the truth in Christ has an illuminating effect,²² as blinded by its splendor. Grasping the truth opens the mind to see reality as it is not just its apparent appearance.

4. THE UNION BETWEEN THEORY AND A VIRTUOUS LIFE

Christian philosophy is not purely theoretical, whether one is learning it or transmitting it. Because of the need for more witnesses to the truth, it is high time that we recognize and make our own this reality, to transmit our living experience of truth. The Christian philosopher, having a deep-seated faithful attitude toward the truth, naturally translates theory into a lived life of virtue. This is because Christian philosophy is a way of life. He who carries it out is not simply content with approving its theoretical assumptions; rather, the philosopher puts them into practice. This is what Christian philosophy offers: a stark map toward an examined life.

Philosophy is essential for understanding the world’s mysterious character. However, depth and mystery are not synonymous with philosophy as completely impractical. This is true if we understand

²² Truth clarifies.

“practical” here as “praxis” in Aristotle: a goal-directed action.²³ Christian philosophy, therefore, entails a union between theory and a life of virtue. Philosophy as wisdom-oriented “also has practical aspects; it creates the ability to apply knowledge in life-related attitudes. It arouses the axiological attitude and evokes engagement on the side of values: »truths become a good (a value) to be realized«” (Wolsza 2019, 180). It, therefore, guides the human person at a crossroads. A prominent Christian writer, C.S. Lewis, reminds us that “We are not living in a world where all roads are radii of a circle and where all, if followed long enough, will therefore draw gradually nearer and finally meet at the centre; rather in a world where every road, after a few miles, forks into two, and each of those into two again, and at each fork you must make a decision. ... I do not think that all who choose wrong roads perish; but their rescue consists in being put back on the right road” (Lewis 1952, 9).

A Christian philosopher is not afraid to philosophize looking to human nature and, thus, to human needs. He teaches others how to incarnate every truth and virtue. In other words, a Christian philosopher makes philosophy *personal*: centering on the person and his needs. Moreover, he is aware that both natural and supernatural virtues are based on human needs, rooted in human nature (Aquinas 1911-1925, I-II, q.63, a.2.), as well as in its relation to other human beings and to God (Kreeft 2021, 48.). As a consequence, his way of philosophizing is a living experience of Christian faith as a *reality*. Doing philosophy in a Christian way bears practical fruits. This is owed to the fact that a Christian philosopher does not only subject the intellect to laborious training in philosophizing. He also works

23 This is our nuanced interpretation of what wisdom is for Aristotle, that is, to a certain extent philosophy as wisdom-oriented has practical aspects. For Aristotle, wisdom (*σοφία*) is not supposed to be practical. Contemplation (*θεωρία*) is not practical either, in the strict sense of the term. Thus, the good life according to Aristotle includes *theoria* (contemplation) and *praxis*, but each good action has a different sort of wisdom (*sophia*, *phronesis*).

out to build a solid yet flexible will and affectivity enlightened by the intellect.

The grounded experience of truth in Christian philosophy is concretized in the understanding and developing of certain traits and virtues such as prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. We see in this kind of philosophy a union between metaphysics and ethics, which is a union between the truth and the good. Both kinds of knowledge, speculative and practical, are not separate from one another. They are two dimensions of one and the same reason.

Let us consider briefly how Christian philosophy facilitates the human person's development and growth in the cardinal virtues,²⁴ the four hinges on which swing the doorway to the truth. First, the virtue of prudence. Aquinas' idea of prudence, grounded in Aristotle, is worthy of consideration. Prudence, *prudentia*, is a practical knowledge that rectifies human action (Aquinas 1911-1925, II-II, 57.4c; 47.2, ad.1).

As a practical knowledge, it concerns living well as a whole. It operates in the realm of the contingent and indefinite in which there is no uniform nor stationary way of attaining the end. Christian philosophy anchored on the Truth – God – “counsels us well about what pertains to the whole life of a human, and to the ultimate end of human life” (Aquinas 1911-1925, II-II, 57.4, ad.3; 21.2, ad.2). He learns and teaches others how to embody practical wisdom in all facets of his life. Therefore, by helping us understand and practice the virtue of prudence, Christian philosophy revives the human person's loving search for the love of wisdom's teleological character (Aristotle 1976, VI.12.). As a virtue that entails knowledge of the universals to apply it to the particular in the here and now, it requires study of the nature of things and a deeper understanding of the human person's capacity for learning and his needs. Prudence helps one be more creative and innovative, to have an open mind to consider various

24 Suggested reading: Aquinas 1911-1925, I-II, 49,1-4, 55.1-2.

possibilities and challenges and to love learning so that when others need the philosopher's advice, he can offer well-founded reasons for decisions related to self-direction. An example would be engaging with others who may have different perspectives. Philosophers may need to exercise prudence in such interactions, both in the academic and everyday life setting, and approach the different perspectives of their interlocutors with an open mind. A prudent philosopher seeks and knows how to understand and appreciate a wide range of perspectives within the discipline. He shows respect and courtesy in the conversations by listening to the others attentively and avoiding making hasty judgments.

Second, the virtue of justice. "Justice is a habit (*habitus*), whereby a man renders to each one his due with constant and perpetual will" (Aquinas 1911-1925, II-II, 58,1). In what sense does the Christian philosopher help others cultivate justice and justice in relation to what or whom? It is proper to justice to direct man in his relations with others. In the case of Christian philosophy and its stakeholders, justice is exercised between the philosopher and his recipient of philosophical formation, and, ultimately, between the philosopher's desire and search for truth and God. This is based on the fact that being just means recognizing the other as *other*, as another person who has his own peculiar due. What is this peculiar due that a Christian philosopher owes to the other? It is the other's right to arrive at the knowledge of the truth, "which presupposes the act of prudence, which means that the truth of real things is transposed into a decision" (Pieper 1990, 88.). We say, therefore, this kind of Christian philosophy revives its obligations proper to justice, which, regardless of the other's status – as a seeker of truth – imply that there is a *debitum*. This *debitum* is fulfilled when the philosopher carries it out diligently and seasons it with a commitment to the person to whom he is under an obligation. A just philosopher upholds moral values like integrity, honesty, and respect for others in the pursuit of the truth. The theoretical knowledge of justice becomes a reality when the philosopher applies

these ideas at and outside work to the highest ethical standards. Moreover, a Christian philosopher takes great care in avoiding language or arguments that could be oppressive to others. He is aware and mindful of the potential impact of his ideas to others and even on the common good of others.

Third, fortitude. “It is for the sake of the good that the brave man exposes himself to the danger of death” (Aquinas 1911-1925, II-II, 125, 2, ad.2), articulates Aquinas. Christian philosophy teaches us to grow in fortitude by helping us be brave in the fight for the realization of the good. But which good? This so-called good is the human person’s union with wisdom. However, such a battle for the attainment of that good exposes the person to danger. It could be the danger of absolute autonomy: that he only trusts himself (Ambrose 1896, 1,35: “Fortitude must not trust itself”); or the danger of aiming for the apparent good instead of the real one (Aquinas 1911-1925, II-II, 123, 12, ad.2).²⁵ It is important to take note here that the virtue of fortitude is preceded by prudence and justice. Without the latter, a person cannot have fortitude (Pieper 1992). Yet what we want to emphasize here is how Christian philosophy can breed a virtuous endurance in its search for love of wisdom. Put in another way, the person is molded into someone who possesses fortitude which admits, accepts, and preserves the natural order of things by not devaluing reality’s truth. For example, when a philosopher is tasked to examine Aquinas’ thoughts in his Commentary on the Sentences for the first time, he would painstakingly go back to the original text and take it from there instead of simply “collecting” and “selecting” from what other authors have to say about it.

Finally, the virtue of temperance. We must understand temperance here not only as moderation, of which it is only a part of. Josef Pieper comments: “A study of the linguistic meaning of the Greek term, *sophrosyne*, and the Latin *temperantia* reveal a much wider

²⁵ “For neither the difficulty nor effort causes virtue, but the good alone.”

range of significance. The original meaning of the Greek word embraces »directing reason«²⁶ in the widest sense. And the Latin stays close to this far-ranging significance” (Pieper 2006, 219). For this approach in Christian philosophy, we must remember that temperance’s resolve and goal is the order within oneself. Therefore, this virtue aims at the human person himself, the philosopher, or the one receiving the philosophical formation. Nevertheless, learning and living the virtue of temperance does not imply being selfish: an inordinate want to focus on oneself. So, what is being ordered in the person’s inner life by virtue of temperance? It is when the philosopher and the stakeholders of Christian philosophy defend themselves against any selfish distortion of the inner order. Let us take, for example, the urge to immediately and furiously debate on perspectives that may seem contrary to what Christian philosophy upholds. If a person gives in to this sudden explosion, it destroys that which can be preserved and sustained only by gentleness and humility. “Without rational self-restraint even the natural hunger for sense perception or for knowledge can degenerate into a destructive and pathological compulsive greed; this degradation Aquinas calls *curiositas*, the disciplined mode *studiositas*” (Pieper 2006, 227).²⁷

To sum up, Christian philosophy opens us to the path of walking the talk: incarnating in a life of virtue through its rigorous theoretical training. It is a reflective exercise of practical reason (Lunio 2006, 5). Growth in the cardinal virtues – prudence, justice,

26 Aristotle’s account of temperance is worth mentioning: “Hence, we call temperance by the name of *sophrosyne*, as it were, a thing preserving prudence. Prudence does preserve an estimation of the kind mentioned, for while pleasure and pain do not distort or pervert all judgments. They do affect those dealing with the practicable. The principles of practicable things are the ends for which they are done. But the principle is not clear to a man corrupted by pleasure or pain, nor does he see the obligation to choose and do everything for the sake of it and on account of it, for vice is corruptive of principle. Consequently, prudence is of necessity a habit concerned with action, under the direction of correct reason, regarding things good for man” (see: Aristotle 1976, 1140b,11-21).

27 See also Aquinas 1911-1925, II-II, 166; 167.

fortitude, and temperance – will lead us to the exercise of authentic freedom. By authentic freedom we mean the virtuous exercise, in view of the ultimate truth and the good, of our faculties: the will, the intellect, and affectivity. This freedom opens the human person to the rejection of any kind of materialization of material things (Lunio 2006), human activities, history, and the sciences. Christianity, and thus Christian philosophy, moves on the plane of the absolute, immutable, and universal truth. If Christian philosophy is love, and specifically love of wisdom, then the truth sought after changes the person. This is because love makes one act in accordance with that truth.²⁸ The shaping and molding of these good habits within each one is important to maintain a Christian worldview which will keep one grounded while being immersed in the world and its realities, such that it will allow the Christian to become a *reality*²⁹ within oneself and for others. Hence, a union between theory and a virtuous life.

5. CONCLUSION

The centrality of the human person, going back to the basics – love of wisdom and love for wisdom – and the union between theory and a virtuous life serve as hallmarks of a Christian philosophy grounded in the experience of truth. The intrinsic value of this kind of Christian philosophy is a point for every philosopher to decide in the light of his own judgment, aware, though, that this tradition of philosophizing is not a dead endeavor. Christian philosophy, which is not received without any disagreements, is still alive and the call

28 We understand love here as that which is to be found in the appetite, and the appetite makes one move or act, as it is the tendency to what one knows. Most of all, love seeks union, and when the person is united with what he loves (in this case, wisdom), there is joy. This could be why the proposal that philosophy as love of wisdom is incomplete if there is no acting towards the truth and praxis in accordance with it.

29 Not just a name or a title but a lived Christian life.

of the times, of our times, bears witness to its lasting fecundity. And there is no reason why this fecundity should stop. We have seen that the Christian philosophy that we are proposing can be summed up in one's grounded experience of the truth. Having this as a guide, we can expect that Christian philosophy will exhibit a new vitality every time it will re-establish contact with its trusted methods and its real principles, whose permanent truth is independent of time and people.

What we have attempted to present in this work was dominated by the recognition and awareness of Christian philosophy's two wings: faith and reason. When a philosopher, Christian or non-Christian, comes in contact with the search for the love of wisdom, and the search for truth, there is a budding of philosophical speculation. Nonetheless, in a special way, the Christian philosopher welcomes all philosophical speculation, including the study and transmission of philosophy, reinforced by the Christian faith. We venture to say that the only object of this kind of approach in Christian philosophy, apart from being a speculative science like all the others, is to facilitate access to the enduring sources of Christian tradition which help reason to soar high toward the truth.

Christian philosophy, with all its challenges, has a great wealth of still incompletely forged ideas and partly discovered realities. But this is the sense of mystery of philosophical knowledge: in the loving search for the love of wisdom, one finds himself in a sea of unfathomable truths waiting to satisfy his thirst. This should convey to both philosophers and their stakeholders an invitation to establish personal contact with the three key elements that we have laid out here, which no one can afford to ignore. The centrality of the human person will re-introduce Christian philosophy to a personal causal experience approach based upon the reflection on the *subject* involved in doing philosophy. A return to a radical vision of philosophy as love of wisdom and love for wisdom sets the seeker to what Christian philosophy has to offer: Wisdom Himself. Last but not least, the novelty of Christian philosophy – the union between theory and

a life of virtue – will tell him that the grounded experience in, of, and with the truth is concretized in a life lived to the full: a virtuous life. Had Christian philosophy bequeathed to us nothing more than these three philosophical elements, this kind of philosophizing would still remain for all Christian and non-Christian philosophers the securest guides in the quest for a truth-filled, rationally valid interpretation of man, the world, and God.

But how can a speculative science be rational and philosophical if it is tied up with the Christian faith and its beliefs? The Christian philosopher knows that far from neutralizing philosophical speculation, the affinity between faith and reason has given philosophy a new and vibrant life and brought about constructive philosophical results. Christian philosophy and those who carry it out grasp the authentic freedom experienced in philosophizing when done in view of the range of intelligibility which is incomparably wider than that of reason. This is what true philosophical masterminds such as Augustine, Boethius, Bonaventure, and Aquinas, to name a few, have taught us. Why should we feel afraid of living in the company of those who have philosophized in and with faith? If we go back to the history of Christian philosophy, we realize that the philosophers did not invite humanity to listen to them, but to the truth of what they said. In doing philosophy, therefore, nothing can replace personal experience. Withal, nothing can be more exquisite than this experience if it is true to the ultimate happiness found in seeking the knowledge of the truth, the Truth Himself.

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