



Gilson's Christian Philosophy: A Change in "Tone"

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Abstract

Although Étienne Gilson did not change his position on Christian philosophy as defined in his 1931 Gifford Lectures, interesting modifications occur in his later formulations. Whereas Gilson's earlier formulations emphasized philosophy searching within the faith for what can become rational, his later formulations during the 1960s placed more emphasis on its Christian aspect, i.e., faith guiding reason. In the 1960s, Gilson emphasized faith and the Church as the guardians of Christian philosophy, expressed a relative indifference to the validity of rational proofs for the existence of God, and empathized with those accepting questionable philosophical approaches to understand the faith. Post-modernism with its rejection of a "pure" or "scientific" methodology in philosophy serves as an appropriate context in which to situate Gilson's later formulation of Christian philosophy.

Keywords

Gilson, Gouhier, Thomism, Christian Philosophy, post-modernism

Henri Gouhier, one of Gilson's famous students, his lifelong friend and his immediate successor at the French Academy, possessed a remarkable ability. He was able to detect in each of the philosophers he analyzed whether it be Descartes, Malebranche, Rousseau, or Comte that "quelque chose de différent" by which he gave his readers the ability to see them differently.

One year before his death in 1994 Gouhier published his last book, *Etienne Gilson: Trois Essais*.¹ In it he devoted one, long essay

¹ See Henri Gouhier, "Étienne Gilson et la notion de philosophie chrétienne," *Étienne Gilson, Trois Essais: Bergson, La philosophie chrétienne, L'art* (Paris: Vrin, 1993), pp. 37–73.

to Gilson's notion of Christian philosophy. The main points of the essay are worth considering because they allow us to view Gilson's notion of Christian philosophy in a different light.

I. Christian Philosophy: Émile Bréhier, Le Thomisme, and the Gifford Lectures

I will not go into detail about the notion of Christian philosophy as it appeared and developed in the first quarter of the last century — the publication in 1927 of Émile Bréhier's *History of Philosophy*, the Bréhier—Gilson debate, etc. For Bréhier, who substituted a logical instead of an empirical approach to the question, the notion of Christian philosophy was contradictory in itself: either it is Christian and not philosophy, or it is philosophy and not Christian.²

About the same time, but independently of Bréhier, Gilson, in the Preface (dated 12 June 1925) to the third (English) edition of his work, *Le Thomisme*, began using the notion of Christian philosophy and understanding its problems. Gilson spoke of the *philosophy* of St. Thomas Aquinas, a philosophy never practiced or viewed by St. Thomas, except in the hierarchical structure of Christian wisdom interior to a theology — which was why he undoubtedly never dreamed of detaching it and giving it a name. Because there is a domain common to both philosophy and theology, reason guided by faith can explore the saving truth revealed by God and accessible to the light of human natural reason. Gilson defined this use of reason as “Christian philosophy” — a “philosophy which wishes to be a rational interpretation of the given but for which the essential element of the given is Christian Revelation which defines the object.” And since Christian philosophy is *philosophy*, it is purely rational while in accord with the faith.³

² See Émile Bréhier's *Histoire de la philosophie* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1927), I, part 2, pp. 486ff. and his article “Y a-t-il une philosophie chrétienne,” *La revue de métaphysique*, vol. 38, n. 2 (avril-juin 1931), p. 162f. For the Gilson—Bréhier debate see, “La notion de philosophie chrétienne,” *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, 31 (1931), pp. 37–93. According to Bréhier, Greek philosophy reached our era as a universe completely penetrated by reason devoid of mystery. Its practical wisdom was ordered by a rationalism. What was philosophical in thinkers of the Middle Ages was Greek and that remained true of more modern thinkers such as Descartes and Hegel. Bréhier considered contemporary thinkers like Maurice Blondel more as apologists for the faith than philosophers.

³ Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme* (Paris: Vrin, 1927), p. 40. See Étienne Gilson, *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale* (Paris: Vrin, 1932), p.4f.; *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 5. “A true philosophy taken absolutely and in itself, owes all its truth to its rationality and to nothing other than its rationality” (*ibid.*, p. 37).

In his 1931 Gifford Lectures published as *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* and in his *Christianisme et philosophie* (1936) Gilson refined his definition of Christian philosophy as “every philosophy which, although keeping the two orders formally distinct, nevertheless considers the Christian revelation as an indispensable auxiliary to reason.”⁴ The permanent presence of the Credo in the consciousness of the Christian is the indispensable condition and the non-philosophical source of this philosophy.⁵

II. Editions of *Le Thomisme*

In his fifth edition of *Le thomisme* (1944) subtitled “Introduction to the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas,” when again addressing the thorny question of what is the philosophy of Aquinas, Gilson reproduced the text of his 1927 third edition (French) up until it classified St. Thomas’ philosophy as “Christian philosophy.” Then, Gilson stated that since the expression was not that of Aquinas and also generated interminable controversies, he preferred not to use it in a purely historical exposition of Thomism.⁶

Gilson’s decision governing the fifth edition of *Le thomisme* in 1944 seemed definitive; the sixth and final edition which appeared in 1965 repeated that decision.⁷

III. “Christian Philosophy” in the late 1950s

In 1957, Gilson published a key text on Christian philosophy entitled “What is Christian philosophy?”⁸ Gilson answered the question this

⁴ Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, p. 37.

⁵ Étienne Gilson, *Christianisme et philosophie* (Paris: Vrin, 1936), p. 100. The book was published in English as *Christianity and Philosophy*, trans. Ralph MacDonald, C.S.B. (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1939); see p. 71.

⁶ Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme* (Paris: Vrin, 1947) pp. 1, 4. Although Gilson did not use the expression in his historical expositions of Aquinas’ philosophy, he did discuss it. It appeared, for example, in his major work on Scotus (*Jean Duns Scot, introduction à ses positions fondamentales* (Paris: Vrin, 1952) and in his *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955).

⁷ Étienne Gilson, *Thomism: The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Laurence K. Shook and Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002), pp. x, 6.

⁸ Étienne Gilson, “What is Christian philosophy,” *A Gilson Reader*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Doubleday, 1957), pp. 177–192. A fifty page section of the *Reader* entitled “The Disciple of Christian Philosophy” contained two chapters on Christian philosophy from previously published works, but Gilson seems not to have found in his published works a text completely satisfactory so he wrote one.

way: "if you read Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, you will find the most highly authorized response to your question."⁹ For Gilson, the encyclical defined Christian philosophy as philosophy and did so with exceptional papal authority as guardian of the faith.¹⁰ The object of *Aeterni Patris* was "to show that, the best possible way of philosophizing combined the religious obedience to faith with the exercise of philosophical reason."¹¹

⁹ Ibid., p. 186. *Aeterni Patris* (also known by its subtitle, "On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy") was issued on 4 August 1879. For Gilson's "incredible" history of the encyclical and developing his own notion of Christian philosophy in his Gifford Lectures, see Gilson, *Christianisme et philosophie*, p. 129f.; *Christianity and Philosophy*, p. 93f. In all humility, Gilson confessed that "when studying... documents relative to this notion [Christian philosophy] and coming across the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* which I had completely forgotten, I understood that the very idea I was trying to justify in two volumes, twenty lectures, and I don't know how many notes, was exactly what the encyclical would have sufficed to teach me, implying as it does the very interpretation of medieval philosophy that I was proposing... The notion of Christian philosophy, which had cost me so much trouble to justify from the facts and E. Bréhier's denying its existence had been imposed on me at the end of long research, from which a little attention to the teaching of the church could have spared me." Had Gilson read the encyclical and forgotten its contents or had he forgotten that there was such an encyclical and not read it? Years later, Gilson cleared up the ambiguity: he had not read it before preparing his lectures. See Étienne Gilson *The Philosopher and Theology*, trans. Cécile Gilson (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 180.

¹⁰ See, for example, Étienne Gilson, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 5. "The words "Christian philosophy" do not belong to the language of St. Thomas Aquinas, but they are the name under which, in his Encyclical Letter *Aeterni Patris*, Pope Leo XIII designated the doctrine of the Common Doctor of the church in 1879. Such as it is described in the epoch-making document, Christian philosophy is that way of philosophizing in which the Christian faith and the human intellect join forces in a common investigation of philosophical truth." Owens makes the important point that "Christian philosophy... as envisaged by *Aeterni Patris*, remains altogether theology-free... As a philosophy it is specified only by naturally knowable aspects of the topics with which it deals... It could hardly be fair to attribute naively to Pope Leo the self-refuting project of calling upon theological content or theological method to offer *philosophic* support to the faith... *Aeterni Patris* does not seek a basis for its philosophical program in aspects such as holiness or awe or dread, even though it is well aware of the all-pervading order of grace..." See Joseph Owens, "The Christian Philosophy of *Aeterni Patris*," *Towards a Christian Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990) p. 74

¹¹ Étienne Gilson, Thomas Langan & Armand Maurer, *Recent Philosophy: Hegel to the Present* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 339f.; Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology*, pp. 218, 338, 185–186, 192. As for non-believers, Gilson noted that one "would look in vain for instruction concerning the manner of philosophizing proper to minds without faith in a supernatural revelation" but this does not justify the refusal of some philosophers "to take into consideration philosophical teaching conceived in a Christian spirit. When conclusions are offered as philosophical, they should be examined as such" (ibid., p. 182). See also, Gilson's introductory remarks on the encyclical in Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Meridian, 1960), pp. 179–181 and Armand A. Maurer, "Gilson and *Aeterni Patris*," *Thomistic Papers: VI*, ed. John F.X. Knasas (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1994), pp. 91–105.

IV. The role of *Aeterni Patris*

With his essay of 1957 and his subsequent publications in the 1960s (*The Elements of Christian Philosophy*, *Introduction à la philosophie Chrétienne*, *The Philosopher and Theology*), Gilson situated his notion of Christian philosophy firmly within the context of Pope Leo's encyclical.¹² Gouhier hypothesized that Gilson did so because *Aeterni Patris* carried the prestige of pontifical authority; it prescribed that Christian philosophy, as contained in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, should be taught in schools in conformity with the teaching of the Church; and it enabled Gilson to avoid long expositions such as the opening chapters in *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* which provoked disputes. What seemed new to Gouhier in the Gilson of the 1960s was his emphasis on Pope Leo's encyclical, as well as Gilson's great intellectual magnanimity.¹³

V. Gilson: A Magnanimous Christian Philosopher

Consistency governed not only Gilson's notion of Christian philosophy but also Gilson the man. Gilson could not understand how after being exposed to Christian revelation one could "possibly philosophize as though you have never heard of it."¹⁴ In his own case, Gilson told us that "[t]he Creed of the catechism of Paris has held all the key positions that have dominated, since early childhood, my interpretation of the world. What I then believed I still believe." Furthermore, "without in any way confusing it with my faith, whose essence must be kept pure, I know that the philosophy I have today is wholly encompassed within the sphere of my religious belief."¹⁵

In the Christian philosophy Gilson lived, the essential was fidelity to Yahweh. "Yes," declared Gilson in his *L'introduction à*

¹² Gilson cited *Aeterni Patris* in the opening lines of his book, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy* and in the opening sentence of his *Introduction à la philosophie Chrétienne* (Paris: Vrin, 1960). Gilson's important work, Étienne Gilson, *Le philosophe et la théologie* (Paris: Fayard, 1960) contained an entire chapter on "Christian Philosophy" and a chapter on "The Future of Christian Philosophy."

¹³ Henri Gouhier, "Étienne Gilson et la notion de philosophie chrétienne," pp. 63–67. "That which characterized Gilson was a great sense of the 'other', which manifested itself by the freedom with which he directly voiced his disagreement with his interlocutor, without rhetorical precautions, while at the same time not holding anything against those whose disagreed with him nor attributing to them any inferiority or superiority whatsoever." See Henri Gouhier, "Deux Maîtres: Bergson et Gilson," *Henri Gouhier se souvient... ou comment on devient historien des idées*, eds. Louise Gouhier et Giulia Belgioioso (Paris: Vrin, 2005), p. 116 (my translation).

¹⁴ Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology*, p. 11.

la philosophie Chrétienne, “it is true that if the God of revelation exists, he is the Prime Mover, the First Efficient Cause, the First Necessary Being, and everything reason can prove about the First Cause of the universe. But if Yahweh is the Prime Mover, the Prime Mover is not Yahweh.” Let us emphasize these words: reason guided by Aristotle can demonstrate the existence of a First Mover, but, continued Gilson, “the First Efficient Cause never spoke to me by his prophets and I do not expect my salvation to come from him.”¹⁶ As Gilson lived his own *philosophie Chrétienne*, the fundamental certitude was that of faith which was prior and superior to all demonstration.¹⁷

In the 1960s, Gilson also expressed an indifference towards proofs for the existence of God: “I am so certain of a reality transcendental to the world and to myself that corresponds to God that the prospect of searching for proofs for what I am already so sure of seems of absolutely no interest.”¹⁸ Instead, Gilson was curious about the reasons invoked in favor of atheism. “For me,” he said, “it is the non existence of God that is the question.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Étienne Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, trans. Armand Maurer (Winnipeg: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993), p. 11.

¹⁷ Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology*, p. 99f. “However far we can go in the footsteps of Aristotle, and even prolonging our explorations of the divine by means of the speculations of Plato, Plotinus and Proclus, we shall never reach the gates of sacred theology. It is not to be found at the term of metaphysics, nor above metaphysics, but outside of it; it is, so to speak, somewhere else. To enter it one should first establish oneself in faith...” (ibid., p. 213). See also, Étienne Gilson, “Wisdom and Time,” *The Gilson Reader*, p. 329. “Twenty centuries of philosophy, of science, and even of theology have not added or taken away an iota from the substance of hope and faith that all Christians have in the word of God.” “Faith in God precedes the acquiescence of the Christian to the truth of Scripture. Inversely neither Plato nor Aristotle nor Plotinus who created philosophy, owes anything to the Judeo-Christian revelation” (ibid., p. 333). On 21 Nov 1959, Gilson chaired a session of *La semaine des intellectuels catholique* at which he briefly argued that Christian mystery “does not follow reason, it precedes it, accompanies it as it proceeds; it in a way envelopes and eventually shows it beneficial perspectives which reason left to itself would never suspect possible. Theology transcends philosophy because it is founded in faith.” See *Le mystère: Semaine des intellectuels Catholiques* (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1960), p. 172 (my translation). According to Shook, in this summation Gilson presented his last, refined judgment on theology’s relation to philosophy. Gilson “came near to saying that, for the believer, philosophy in the generally accepted sense of the word is an impossibility.” See Laurence K. Shook, *Etienne Gilson* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), p. 349.

¹⁸ Étienne Gilson, *L’athéisme difficile* (Paris: Vrin, 1979), p. 11 (my translation).

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 12 (my translation). Gilson maintained that atheism stood in need of rational justification much more so than the spontaneous belief that there is a God—in trying to answer the main question for a philosopher: “How, without some preexisting notion, or feeling, of the divinity, did men form the concept of a cause so utterly different in nature from its observable effects... so utterly different from that of man?” Here we reach a point which Gilson considers mysterious. The idea of God is found in the minds of many men for which there is no known model in experience. This leaves us with the issue of the reality of the notion, whether or not it really exists. Even Aquinas’ “proofs” conclude with the existence of a being in a certain order of reality that “all understand is God.” So we have

VI. "On Behalf of the Handmaid"

Before discussing any possible contradictions, let us try rather, to see what realities were before Gilson's eyes when he confronted these questions by considering an important article he wrote in 1967 about the demonstration of the existence of God, entitled "On Behalf of the Handmaid," i.e., philosophy.²⁰

First, Gilson cited Pope Paul VI's plea for help in combating atheistic and Marxist science by finding "a new affirmation of the supreme God at the level of metaphysics as well of logic?" Gilson naturally turned towards the handmaid who had not yet furnished conclusive, universally agreed upon demonstrations of the existence of God. But before having philosophy plead guilty, this French lawyer for the handmaid had more to say.

According to Gilson, if one really looked at reality, one saw that "visibly, the notion of God is anterior to the proofs of its existence; it has been there all the time while the philosophers and theologians were striving to prove God's existence on the strength of their demonstrations." For Gilson, "the certitude of the existence of God is in large measure independent of philosophical demonstrations that one gives of it."²¹

For a Christian this notion of God and its certitude are present in the faith. For a non-Christian, "[t]he only way toward God outside of faith in a supernatural Revelation lies in the fact that man is a religious animal. His reason naturally produces the notion of divinity."²² Thus, according to Gilson, a type of natural religion allows the servant to communicate with non-Christians. Reason naturally produces the notion of divinity so, logically, such a possibility belongs to each being endowed with reason.

a notion prior to our demonstrating its existence. In his *Treatise on Separate Substances*, St. Thomas spoke of an innate knowledge of God, at least in the sense that whenever we have reached the notion of a first principle of all things it is natural for men to call it God. Gilson spoke of this spontaneous common notion of God as the confusedly perceived presence of God in nature and in himself in terms of the truth hidden in the notion of an *anima naturaliter Christiana* (ibid., pp. 53–58). Gilson located the source of the idea in the mystery of induction as set out by Aristotle in his *Posterior Analytics* (ibid., 64–66). See also Gilson's earlier, slightly different, English version of *L'athéisme difficile* published as "The Idea of God and the Difficulties of Atheism," *The Great Ideas Today* (Chicago, Illinois: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1969), pp. 254–257, 264–268, and his *God and Philosophy*, p. 117f.

²⁰ For St. Thomas, who cited *Proverbs* IX, 3, sacred doctrine (*sacra doctrina*) considered the other sciences such as philosophy as handmaids or servants. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.1, art. 5.

²¹ Gilson, "Plaidoyer pour la servante," *L'athéisme difficile*, pp. 76, 80–81 (my translation).

²² Étienne Gilson, "On Behalf of the Handmaid," *Theology of Renewal*, ed. Laurence K. Shook (Montréal: Palm, 1968), I, p. 249.

But logic is not necessarily reality and Gilson maintained that philosophy frequently speaks to the deaf because it cannot “convince unmetaphysical minds of the cogency of metaphysical demonstrations.” How, Gilson asked, can the handmaid demonstrate the existence of God to minds which not only are “strangers to metaphysical thought,” but which also “suffer from a type of congenital metaphysical blindness and whose antimetaphysicism is incurable?”²³

Then, Gilson turned to those who “did not see why Nominalism, Kantian and Hegelian idealism, even positivism, could not contribute to a certain understanding of the faith.” Somewhat surprisingly, but in accord with his great respect for the liberty of others, Gilson continued: “I should go so far as to say that, if it helps them to believe, and no better philosophy is intelligible to them, those who find satisfaction in such doctrines should not be disturbed in their peace of mind.”

Gilson's point was that “a Thomist is willing to let every man go to God as best he can even though many are unwilling to let anyone go to God the way St. Thomas recommends and the Church prefers Were it not that the issues at stake were so all important, one might find more than one comical side to the situation.” In brief, when confronting the problem of the existence of God, don't be too hard on the handmaid; she usually does what she can.²⁴

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 245, 247. As Gilson succinctly put it, “It is not in our power to make metaphysics easily accessible to the millions” (p. 249). See also Gilson, “What is Christian Philosophy?” p. 181. “. . . Thomas Aquinas himself placed more hope in philosophers than we do. The reason probably is that he had not seen anything like the condition of metaphysics in our own time . . . [W]e seem to consider anybody as qualified to become a metaphysician There is no reason to wonder what would happen to our knowledge of God if it had been entrusted to the sole care of philosophy and the philosophers. We know it, we see it, and the answer is that philosophers have simply brought the problem to a chaotic condition.” Owens acknowledged that “[t]he role of existence in demonstrating the existence of God and its role in individuating creatures still call for much probing.” But on the larger issue of the Neo-Thomistic philosophical movement, Owens expressed optimism: “Aquinas has continually had his ups and downs, with euphoria in the early fourteenth century at the time of his canonization, and later at the use made of him in the sixteenth century at the Council of Trent, and then through the Leonine encyclical in the nineteenth century. After each of these bursts of attention he receded to a much lower level of notice. There is no reason to think that this alternating history will not be continued.” See Joseph Owens, “Neo-Thomism and Christian Philosophy,” *Thomistic Papers VI*, ed. John F.X. Knasas (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1994), p. 51.

²⁴ Gilson, “On Behalf of the Handmaid,” pp. 242, 247 n. 6. Gilson described the greatest lesson he learned from St Thomas Aquinas, “often confirmed . . . by personal experience,” as follows: “I have known many more cases of philosophers converted to scholastic philosophy by the Catholic faith than of philosophers converted to the Catholic faith by scholastic philosophy. I know this is how it is; I feel infinitely grateful to St. Thomas Aquinas for having made me understand that this is how it should be. We cannot equal him in genius, and still less in holiness, but there is at least one way for us to prove his true disciples. It is, while exerting to their full limit the power of our intellects, to put our ultimate trust, for others as well as for ourselves, in Him in Whose light alone we shall see the Light.” See Gilson, “Science, Philosophy, and Religious Wisdom,” *The Gilson Reader*, p. 221.

Gouhier detected no major change in Gilson's position on Christian philosophy as it was defined and justified in his 1931 Gifford Lectures and later developed in the 1960s. Gilson continually recalled the essential — the God of faith is the God of salvation. That God “which the faithful believe exists transcends infinitely the one which the philosophers prove the existence of; often it is a God that the philosopher has no idea of.” Certainly, Gilson showed the role and limits of reason in the theology and in the philosophy he called Christian. But his *tone* changed when he spoke as a philosopher about philosophy and the consequences of these views in his personal life.²⁵ Such was, for example, Gilson's warm admiration for Leo XIII; his relative indifference to demonstrations of the existence of God; and, his empathy with those accepting philosophical approaches that he considered spurious as contributing to a certain understanding of the faith.

For Gouhier, the Gilson of the 1960s focused on the adjective in Christian philosophy. Then it became a question not only of a *philosopher* whose reason searched within the faith for what can become rational; it was more a *Christian* whose *faith* never ceased to be present in his thought to guide his reason, to discover the possibilities of its understanding to keep it on the right path. But with the faith Gilson acknowledged the Church as its guardian and unceasingly cited Pope Leo's encyclical. At the other extreme, he expressed his relative indifference to the validity of rational proofs for the existence of God and the fundamental certitude of faith, prior, and superior, to philosophy.²⁶

VII. Postmodernism and the Change in Tone

Gouhier's choice of the word “tone” to describe the change in Gilson's works of the 1960s is intriguing since the same word was used to characterize the arrival in the 1950s of postmodern philosophy with its “distinctive atmosphere and *tonality*.”²⁷ Did Gouhier detect a postmodern quality within Gilson's thought during the 1960s? Maybe so,²⁸ but much more than Gouhier's use of a single word would be needed to determine accurately his intentions.

²⁵ Gouhier, “Étienne Gilson et la notion de philosophie chrétienne,” p. 72f.

²⁶ Gouhier, “Deux Maîtres: Bergson et Gilson,” *Henri Gouhier se souvient*, p. 83f.

²⁷ Kenneth L. Schmitz, “Postmodernism and the Catholic Tradition,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 73, no.2 spring 1999, p. 233f.

²⁸ Given Gouhier's passion for the theater and his impressive work as its critic, this possibility may merit further investigation. See Henri Gouhier, *L'essence du théâtre* (Paris: Plon, 1943, 2nd ed. Aubier, 1968), *L'œuvre théâtrale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1958), and *Le théâtre et les arts à deux temps* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989). See also, Giulia Belgioioso, “Bibliographie générale des œuvres d'Henri Gouhier,” *Henri Gouhier se souvient*, pp. 157–232. While not considering himself a creator in philosophy or in the theater Gouhier

On the other hand, no ambiguity characterized Joseph Owens' position on this matter. Owens, another of Gilson's students who went on to teach at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto for almost half a century, clearly viewed postmodernism, with its rejection of a "pure" or "scientific" methodology in philosophy, as an appropriate context in which to situate Gilson's Christian philosophy of the 1960s. Owens thought that a Christian philosophy "quickened by a genuinely Christian spirit" fit into the postmodern framework "where each philosophy is specified in accord with the individual thinker's cultural formation" and where "conceptions of philosophical thinking are as distinctive as one's fingerprints and DNA."

As Owens made explicit:

"A person's habituation in Christian culture is what makes Christian philosophy a distinct philosophic species, and sacred theology has played a notable part in the shaping of that culture. In this way sacred theology exercises a guiding role without entering into the principles of Christian philosophy itself. It merely leads up to the starting points in things, thought or language as the Aristotelian dialectic does in regard to philosophy. This is quite understandable in the postmodern setting. Accordingly in the works of the early sixties Gilson stressed the influence of theology upon Christian philosophy. But this in no way changed the stand expressed by him in the thirties, that *qua* philosophy Christian philosophy is responsible solely to the court of human reason...it is still 'truly rational' though 'quickened by a genuinely Christian spirit'...[This is] the kind of philosophy desired by *Aeterni Patris*...and the type of Christian philosophy that needs to be promoted strongly for the future...one that stands on its own feet as a type of philosophy in the postmodern age.²⁹

recognized his talent in presenting the creations of others; he felt a certain link between the role of a director and his work as a historian of philosophy (*ibid.*, p. 87, n. 1).

²⁹ Owens, "Neo-Thomism and Christian Philosophy," pp. 43–44, n. 22; 49–52. Anton Pegis, one of Gilson's early students in North America, thought that the Christian philosophy of the Middle Ages lacked the autonomous state of expression proper to a philosophy and, as a religious tool, was not a philosophy but a theology. He thought that a Christian philosophy today is possible not as the work of theologians but of philosophers closely engaged with the Christian faith and theology. According to Fr. Maurer, Gilson never disagreed with Pegis' position. "Since Christian philosophy is not a philosophy but a way of philosophizing, Gilson thought it could take many forms. He praised Jacques Maritain and Gabriel Marcel, whose Christian existentialisms were not developed as handmaids of theology but nevertheless had close ties with faith and, at least in Maritain's case, with theology." Maurer also indicated that Gilson's own philosophical works such as *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999) and *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1949) were works of a Christian philosopher in which philosophy is not placed at the service of theology though it remained open to the influence of Christian revelation and to the guidance of theology. See Maurer, *Christian Philosophy*, pp. xix–xx; see, also, Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Conversation of Faith and Reason: Modern Catholic Thought from Hermes to Benedict XVI* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2009), p. 132. Collins also regarded Gilson's historical interpretation of Thomism as allowing it to remain open to a theological and philosophical

While we are the poorer for not having Gilson's own position on Christian philosophy vis-a-vis postmodernism, we are the richer because of the insightful analyses of M. Henri Gouhier and Fr. Joseph Owens. These warrant the serious evaluation and refinement not only of Gilson's disciples but also of all scholars interested in the notion of Christian philosophy.³⁰

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reconstruction. Collins denied that a philosophy which takes advantage of every source of truth to include revelation means that while proceeding from sensible beings to God it must philosophize according to the theological order. Like Gilson, (*God and Philosophy*, pp. 91ff.), Collins advised contemporary Thomists not to take their guidance from Christian philosophers such as Malebranche who “assign to reasons drawn from revelation the decisive role of determining their assent to the basic propositions in philosophy.” See James Collins, “Toward a Philosophically Ordered Thomism,” *Crossroads in Philosophy*, pp. 294–97. Fr. Nichols has interpreted Gilson's Christian philosophy as embodying a “Chalcedonian” concept of the philosophy-theology—and hence, reason-faith relationship that “stresses the essential distinctness as well as the inseparability of the two disciplines.” According to Nichols, Pope John Paul II in *Fides et ratio* espoused Gilson's notion of Christian philosophy, and Pope Benedict XVI in his famous Regensburg lecture of 2008 “adopted a fully Gilsonian picture of how philosophy and theology interrelate, appealing explicitly, in fact, to Gilson's comparison with Chalcedon. They should be united ‘without confusion and without separation’.” See Aidan Nichols, *Conversation of Faith and Reason*, pp. 129, 188f., 204f.

³⁰ See, for example, John F.X. Knasas, “A Heideggerian Critique of Aquinas and a Gilsonian Reply,” *Post-Modernism and Christian Philosophy*, ed. Roman T. Ciapalo (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press/American Maritain Society, 1997), pp. 128–140.

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