

Erich Przywara, “Christian Philosophy,” and a Debate in Prague

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Introduction

Philosophy and Christian theology have always had a complicated relationship. In trying to articulate the relationship between them, there has always been the risk of either conflating the two or introducing an abyss between them. This difficulty set the stage for many debates, including the 1930s debate about the notion of “Christian philosophy.” This debate, spread over several colloquia and publications, was primarily a French affair, but not exclusively. Other voices from outside of France and the Francosphere were involved.¹ These included Erich Przywara.²

¹ A good overview of the debate in France is provided in Gregory B. Sadler’s *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011). Sadler limits the scope of his investigation to France and the French-speaking world. He does not consider the ways in which the 1930s debate developed beyond the Francosphere. This reinforces the impression that the debate about Christian philosophy was exclusively a French-speaking debate. In his contribution to an edited volume on Christian philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Heinrich M. Schmidinger does refer, albeit briefly, to the interest of German phenomenology in the question of Christian philosophy (“Der Streit um die christliche Philosophie in seinem Zusammenhang,” in *Christliche Philosophie im katholischen Denken des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Emerich Coreth [Graz: Styria, 1988]). Similarly, in his book on phenomenology and Neo-Scholasticism, Edward Baring alludes to a discussion about Christian philosophy outside the Francosphere (*Converts to the Real* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019]). However, neither Schmidinger nor Baring explain if, and how, this is connected to the 1930s debate in France.

² Grant Kaplan, in his recent work on faith and reason, mentions both the French debate

Przywara is not normally associated with the 1930s debate about Christian philosophy. Unbeknownst to many, however, in 1934 he faced off against Léon Brunschvicg—one of the harshest critics of Christian philosophy—at a conference in Prague, debating the relationship between philosophy and religion. Przywara’s response to the question was different from that of his French counterparts. He moved the debate away from strictly epistemological considerations and adopted a more holistic view of the relationship between philosophy and theology. For him, they were *two* stages in *one* broader movement. This is something which we will term the “catholicity” of philosophy and theology, and it constitutes Przywara’s contribution to the debate.

In what follows, we will first consider the main events in the French debate about Christian philosophy, and then move to consider German contributions, including that of Przywara. Building on his understanding of the relationship between theology and philosophy—as discussed mainly in his *Analogia Entis*—we will then consider his engagement with Brunschvicg in Prague. In the final part of our exploration, we will discuss the originality of Przywara’s contribution to the debate about Christian philosophy.

The “Christian Philosophy” Debate

The possibility of a “Christian philosophy”—that is, a philosophy that, *as* philosophy, is specifically and intrinsically Christian—might sound like an anodyne issue today. This was not the case in the early 1930s, however. At that time, the notion of “Christian philosophy” catalyzed an important debate in France, which was constructed around the distinction between a Christian philosophy *de facto* (*dans le fait*) and a Christian philosophy *de iure* (*dans le droit*).³ The first refers to the *factual historical* existence of particular philosophers who also happen to be Christian and are influenced by Christian doctrine. The second, on the contrary, refers to philosophy *itself* and to what constitutes philosophy *qua* philosophy. This debate was inaugurated by a colloquium organized by the Société Française

and Przywara (*Faith and Reason Through Christian History* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022]). However, he considers them separately and does not mention Przywara’s involvement in the debate.

³ See Émile Bréhier, “Y a-t-il une Philosophie Chrétienne?,” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 38, no. 2 (1931): 133.

de Philosophie at the Sorbonne on March 21, 1931, which was followed by several other colloquia on the same theme.⁴

At the 1931 colloquium, Étienne Gilson made a case for the existence of a Christian philosophy by arguing that the *de facto* and *de iure* aspects cannot be separated. Christian philosophy is a *fact of history*, and there are several concepts that philosophy borrowed from theology. This, however, reveals something about philosophy itself: "If there exist philosophical systems, purely rational in their principles and their methods, whose existence could not be explained without the existence of the Christian religion, the philosophies which they define deserve the name of Christian philosophies."⁵ This is not an accidental overlap. Rather, it is a case of revelation generating reason.⁶

Jacques Maritain, also present that day, agreed with Gilson. He complemented the distinction between *de facto* and *de iure* with another: that between nature and state. According to Maritain, "nature" refers to what a thing is in itself, while "state" refers to the way in which something unfolds in the historical human subject. For Maritain, philosophy as such has nothing to do with Christianity, "neither in its object, nor in its principles, nor in its methods."⁷ However, it is not enough to consider the nature of philosophy. One also has to consider the different states of philosophy, the way in which its nature unfolds historically. When these historical states are taken into account, it becomes clear that, in several instances, Christian revelation has helped reason discover things which it would not have reached on its own: "Revelation teaches [philosophy] certain truths, even philosophical truths."⁸ This is the "*Christian state* of philosophy."⁹

The main opponents of the notion of "Christian philosophy" were Brunschvicg and Émile Bréhier. They were both present at the 1931 colloquium and represented the "rationalist position."¹⁰ Bréhier, in his response, as well as in his important article "Y a-t-il une Philosophie Chrétienne?,"

⁴ See Sadler, *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation*, 1–98; Emilio Brito, "La philosophie Chrétienne' a-t-elle un avenir?," *Revue théologique de Louvain* 36 (2005): 508–38.

⁵ Étienne Gilson et al., "La notion de philosophie Chrétienne: Séance du 21 Mars 1931," *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* 31 (1931): 39. All translations from French and German are my own unless otherwise stated.

⁶ See Gilson et al., "La notion," 39; Société Thomiste, *La philosophie Chrétienne: Juvisy, 11 septembre 1933*, II (Juvisy-sur-Orge, France: Cerf, 1933), 64.

⁷ Gilson et al., "La notion," 62.

⁸ Gilson et al., "La notion," 69.

⁹ Gilson et al., "La notion," 63. See Jacques Maritain, *De la philosophie Chrétienne* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1933), 44–61.

¹⁰ Sadler, *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation*, 8.

did not question the *de facto* aspect of Christian philosophy.¹¹ It was the *de iure* aspect that he considered problematic. He believed that philosophy, in its essence as a rational discipline, cannot contemplate the possibility of philosophizing on the basis of revealed ideas.¹² Philosophy does not have “the least affinity” with Christianity, and the fact that there are Christian philosophers does not mean that there is a Christian way of doing philosophy.¹³ For this reason, “one can no more speak of a Christian philosophy than of a Christian mathematics or a Christian physics.”¹⁴

Brunschvicg, Gilson’s former professor at the Sorbonne and one of France’s foremost idealist philosophers, argued along the same lines. He too highlighted the accidentality of a philosopher’s Christian background with respect to his or her philosophy. The philosopher’s religious belief does not make any difference to their philosophy *qua* philosophy, for “it is impossible to rely on reason for what is beyond reason.”¹⁵ Indeed, for Brunschvicg, the notion of “Christian philosophy” is itself an oxymoron, because “the adjective radically negates the substantive.”¹⁶

The crux of the matter lies in the distinction between the *de facto* and *de iure* possibility of a Christian philosophy. While no one was contesting the existence of Christian philosophers, it was the consequences of their *de facto* existence for the nature of philosophy that became the object of contention. As Marie-Dominique Chenu asked in his opening discourse at a similar colloquium in Juvisy-sur-Orge in 1933: “What are the conditions for the existence, *de iure* and in principle, of this Christian ‘state’ of philosophy which we observe *de facto*?”¹⁷ It is the nature, object, and method of philosophy itself, in its relation to theology, that were at stake. For those affirming the coherency of the notion of “Christian philosophy,”

¹¹ See Gilson et al., “La notion,” 49–52; Bréhier, “Y a-t-il une philosophie Chrétienne?” The article had been written but not yet published at the time of the colloquium; see Gilson et al., “La notion,” 40; 49.

¹² See Gilson et al., “La notion,” 52.

¹³ Bréhier, “Y a-t-il une philosophie Chrétienne?” 162.

¹⁴ Bréhier, “Y a-t-il une philosophie Chrétienne?” 162.

¹⁵ Gilson et al., “La notion,” 75. Brunschvicg concedes that there is one circumstance in which one could speak of a Christian philosophy. This happens when a metaphysician, such as Malebranche, aware of the problems of philosophy, convinces himself “that only the solutions proper to Christianity satisfy philosophical problems” (76). Brunschvicg is merely acknowledging the *de facto* existence of Christian philosophies, but this does not warrant their *de iure* existence.

¹⁶ Bréhier, “Y a-t-il une philosophie Chrétienne?” 76.

¹⁷ Marie-Dominique Chenu, “Allocution d’ouverture,” in Société Thomiste, *La philosophie Chrétienne*, 16.

philosophy could behave as a subaltern science.¹⁸ This subalternation means that, while philosophy is a separate science, it can borrow revealed principles from theology and employ them in philosophical discourse. In such a scenario, theology and philosophy would no longer be on a par. Philosophy would become the subaltern, or inferior, science that borrows its principles from a superior science, in this case, theology. The opposing camp knew exactly what was implied in these arguments, and this is the reason they opposed conflating the *de facto* and *de iure* aspects. Philosophy cannot play second fiddle to theology.

It is important to consider the position of Maurice Blondel in this debate. Contrary to the other supporters of the notion of "Christian philosophy," Blondel argued that it is not enough to prove historically that Christianity influenced philosophy. Nothing would eliminate the suspicion that this might have been an accidental connection, as Bréhier and Brunschvicg had argued. Any answer that relied entirely on history was doomed to remain equivocal: "History, in the technical sense of the word, is not apt by itself to discern the supreme reality which the facts and ideas captured in time and space convey."¹⁹ The question about Christian philosophy was, in Blondel's view, essentially doctrinal and not historical.²⁰ Or, *de iure* and not *de facto*. Blondel, however, took a different approach to the *de iure* question. He wanted to go beyond the question of whether revelation, the object of theology, could become the object of philosophy.²¹ He was, rather, interested in a more fundamental dimension: the relationship between the immanent and the supernatural (*le surnaturel*), and in what makes this relationship possible.²² In his view, this is not a relationship of subordination, but of openness. To make his argument, he employed his "immanent method," which investigates what human beings think, will, and do within the immanence of their consciousness. Even the question of transcendence must be considered from the standpoint of immanence,

¹⁸ A subaltern science is a science that proceeds from principles known through the light of a superior science. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 1, a. 2, trans. Laurence Shapcote (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012), 5.

¹⁹ Gilson et al., "La notion," 89. See Maurice Blondel, *Le problème de la philosophie catholique* (Paris: Bloud and Gay, 1932), 134–35.

²⁰ See Gilson et al., "La notion," 87.

²¹ Blondel writes: "In the ordinary sense of the word, 'Christian philosophy' does not exist any more than Christian physics" (*Lettre sur les exigences de la pensée contemporaine en matière d'apologétique* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1956], 47).

²² See Gilson et al., "La notion," 90; Maurice Blondel et al., "Séance du 26 Novembre 1932: Le problème de la philosophie catholique," *Les études philosophiques* 7, no. 1/2 (1933): 16–17.

for “our idea of transcendent truths or requirements, whether real or not, remains immanent insofar as it is our idea.”²³ What Blondel is able to show through his method is that the immanent is intrinsically and universally open for the transcendent. This openness does not compromise the transcendent *qua* transcendent. It is not reduced to the immanent and remains “outside our human grasp.”²⁴ The supernatural, rather, is the fullness which, precisely because it transcends the immanent, can fill the emptiness and insufficiencies of the immanent.²⁵ The immanent *needs* and *seeks* a fullness, but this fullness can come only from elsewhere: the supernatural.

Blondel’s argument also applies to the relationship between faith (or theology) and reason (or philosophy), for this relationship is included within the broader relationship between the immanent and the supernatural. In the case of faith and reason, there is an intrinsic openness of reason for the supernatural. As Blondel would reaffirm at another colloquium about Christian philosophy, “what essentially raises questions is not the partial coincidence of reason and faith, but the possibility and the obligation of opening philosophy to an order which is incommensurable with it.”²⁶ When, as a result of this openness, the encounter between reason and the supernatural takes place, there is not simply the introduction of new ideas but the renewal of human thinking at its core.

In light of what has been said so far, two distinctive realities become clear. First, the philosophers engaged in the pro-Christian philosophy camp were all confessionally Catholic.²⁷ In general, Protestant theology, influenced as it was by Karl Barth’s resistance to philosophy, stayed out of the debate.²⁸ Second, this was an *almost entirely* French debate. As we have

²³ Blondel, *Lettre sur les exigences*, 39.

²⁴ Blondel, *Lettre sur les exigences*, 159.

²⁵ See Blondel, *Lettre sur les exigences*, 160; Blondel, *Le problème*, 135.

²⁶ Blondel et al., “Séance du 26 Novembre 1932,” 32.

²⁷ Blondel prefers to speak of catholic, rather than Christian, philosophy: “The term *catholic* is both more comprehensive and more restrictive, since, on the one hand, it applies to the universality of humans of good faith, . . . and since, on the other hand, Catholicism . . . alone succeeds in specifying what is supernaturally Christian” (*Le problème*, 172n1).

²⁸ Barth argues that “*Philosophia Christiana* has factually never been a reality: if it was *philosophia* it was not *Christiana*, if it was *Christiana*, it was not *philosophia*” (Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics*, vol. I/1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 1*, §1, trans. Geoffrey W Bromiley and G. T. Thomson [London: T & T Clark, 2009], 4). There are exceptions in Protestant theology. Emil Brunner, for example, uses the expression “Christian philosophy” in his work on revelation and reason (*Offenbarung und Vernunft: Die Lehre von der christlichen Glaubenserkenntnis* [Zürich: Zwingli, 1941]). Moreover, the generation of theologians that came after Barth was heavily

seen, some of the most important Francophone philosophers and theologians of the time were involved. This does not mean, however, that it was an *exclusively* French debate. The debate about Christian philosophy did overflow into one of France's neighboring countries: Germany.

The Debate in Germany

In Germany, the debate about Christian philosophy was not as active as in France. One of the best-known critiques of the notion is Martin Heidegger's condemnation of Christian philosophy as "a square circle and a misunderstanding."²⁹ But other voices were also interested in the relationship between philosophy and theology. Contrary to Heidegger, they contributed a positive articulation of their relationship. Perhaps most notable were Edith Stein and Przywara.

Stein was aware of the French debate about Christian philosophy. In her book *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, she weighs in on the issue and refers to the Juvisy colloquium of 1933.³⁰ She is of the view that Christian philosophy is not simply a historical *fact*. It has something to do with the *nature* of philosophy: it exists *de iure* and not simply *de facto*. When philosophy "appropriates the answers that it finds in the teaching of faith in order to reach a comprehensive knowledge of being, then we have a Christian philosophy that uses faith as a source of knowledge."³¹ Even more explicitly than her French counterparts, Stein concedes that philosophy is in a subaltern position with respect to theology. In the case of philosophy, "another science must be called upon"—that is, theology—"in order to progress in one's own."³²

invested in the dialogue with philosophy. A case in point is Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysik und Gottesgedanke* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988). See also Erich Przywara, "Die Dialektische Theologie," *Schweizerische Rundschau* 27, no. 12 (1928): 1089–97.

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, ed. Petra Jaeger (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983), 9.

³⁰ Stein had attended the previous edition of the Juvisy colloquium on the theme of phenomenology; see Société Thomiste, *La phénoménologie: Juvisy, 12 septembre 1932*, Journées d'études (Juvisy-sur-Orge: Cerf, 1932). An excerpt of the proceedings can be found in the Stein archive. See also Thomas Bahne, *Person und Kommunikation: Anstöße zur Erneuerung einer christlichen Tugendethik bei Edith Stein* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014), 471–79.

³¹ Edith Stein, *Endliches und Ewiges Sein: Versuch eines Aufstiegs zum Sinn des Seins*, ed. Andreas Uwe Müller (Freiburg: Herder, 2006), 31–32.

³² Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, 32.

It is in this context that Stein mentions the work of her friend and mentor Przywara. While, in his work, he does not refer directly to the debate about Christian philosophy, this lack of interest is only apparent. Przywara was, in fact, aware of the debate going on in France and was sensitive to the question. In his 1932 article “Sein im Scheitern—Sein im Aufgang,” he refers to Blondel’s 1932 *Le Problème de la Philosophie Catholique*, which he describes as a “fundamental work.”³³ Moreover, that same year, Przywara published *Analogia Entis*, in which there is a whole chapter dedicated to philosophy and theology. This indicates that Przywara was evidently interested in the relationship between philosophy and theology. Nevertheless, his approach was clearly different from that of Stein and the French philosophers. This merits further exploration.

The originality of Przywara’s position lies in its approach to the relationship between philosophy *and* theology from the standpoint of metaphysics. This is not simply the science of the *ens qua ens*. For Przywara, metaphysics signifies a dynamic movement going *behind* and *beyond* the physical realm. It is the *meta* of *physis*, the “‘going behind’ into the ‘backgrounds’ of *physis*” in search for the ground and goal and meaning of reality.³⁴ Understood in this way, metaphysics is not a sub-discipline within philosophy, but the other way round. It is philosophy, as the love and search of wisdom, that is part of metaphysics, understood as a *meta*-movement. While this term (“meta-movement”) is not Przywara’s, it succinctly describes the way in which he understands metaphysics as an all-englobing movement of “in-and-beyond.” Indeed, the “in-and-beyond movement”—the meta-movement—is “the formal fundamental relation within [the] principle of metaphysics in general.”³⁵ It includes philosophy without being simply a philosophy, for theology is also included in this meta-movement.³⁶

³³ Erich Przywara, “Sein im Scheitern—Sein im Aufgang,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 123, no. 9 (1932): 159. Blondel refers extensively to the debate about the notion of “Christian philosophy” and also makes reference to Brunschvicg (*Le problème*, 127–77, esp. 156).

³⁴ Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1962), 72; a published English translation can be found as *Analogia Entis*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 167; page numbers from this trans. edition will be given parenthetically after the German page numbers in subsequent citations and labeled with “E.” for English. See also Erich Przywara, “Metaphysik, Religion, Analogie,” in *Analogia Entis*, 313–17 (E. 409–13); Philip Gonzales, *Reimagining the Analogia Entis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019).

³⁵ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 97 (E. 190).

³⁶ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 97 (E. 190).

When speaking of theology *within* metaphysics, Przywara does not intend theology "in its proper sense . . . [as] the positivity of God's revealed word."³⁷ For him, "theology"—the science that has God as its subject and object—"even if it exists, is not a possibility which belongs essentially to the inner breadth of the possibilities of metaphysics."³⁸ Therefore, when referring to theology *within* metaphysics, Przywara has something else in mind. He is referring to the end of the meta-movement. It signifies the *definitive* ground, goal, and meaning of the *meta*-process, which is nothing other than God's own mystery. This is why he calls it theology.³⁹

A clarification is needed here. If this discovery of the divine is thematized, it is thin in content. Often, it is simply unthematic. To have content, it needs to be complemented by revealed theology.⁴⁰ What is most interesting, however, is the fact that, in his argument, Przywara has moved away from a purely rational understanding of philosophy and theology. He considers them as *two* distinct phases within the *one* meta-movement, which encompasses the entire creaturely existence. In this meta-movement, "as sharply as theology and philosophy are separated, they just as completely interpenetrate."⁴¹ Philosophy represents the provisional search for the ground, goal, and meaning of reality, while theology amounts to their definitive discovery. Certainly, philosophy can ignore the theological. However, if, in its search for the definite ground, goal, and meaning, it pushes its search to its ultimate possibilities, then philosophy ends up venturing into the theological. It is for this reason that Przywara considers theology to be the "inner *telos*" of philosophy.⁴² In this one meta-movement, philosophy represents the beginning of the quest for meaning, and theology its accomplishment: philosophy becomes "'definitive' only

³⁷ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 76 (E. 171). Elsewhere, Przywara similarly defines theology "as 'knowledge of God through God in the strict sense (that is, as 'knowledge from God's authority')'" ("Neue Theologie?," in *Ringten der Gegenwart*, 2 vols. [Augsburg: Filser, 1929], 2:696).

³⁸ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 73 (E. 168).

³⁹ See Erich Przywara, "Metaphysik und Religion," in *Ringten der Gegenwart*, 1:409; 1:413; Przywara, "Katholizismus und Philosophie," in *Der Katholizismus als Lösung großer Menschheitsfragen*, ed. Akademische Verein "Logos" (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1925), 15–16; 20–24.

⁴⁰ See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 77 (E. 172).

⁴¹ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 93 (E.187). Przywara adds here: "But they interpenetrate in such a way that each reaches toward the root of the other; and the reciprocity of this intervention not only does not touch the mutual independence of theology and philosophy, but actually justifies it."

⁴² Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 80 (E. 174).

through theology, . . . ‘through’ theology and not ‘as’ theology.”⁴³ To better explain this, Przywara uses the metaphor of the estuary (*Mündung*) flowing into the sea.⁴⁴ Philosophy is like the river heading towards the sea, and at the very end of this process, there is not some theological concept, but God’s own mystery.⁴⁵

When he was writing this, Przywara was aware of the debate going on in France, yet he chose not to weigh in on the matter. He preferred to observe the French debate from a distance. Things, however, changed in 1934. In September of that year, Przywara participated in the International Philosophical Congress in Prague.⁴⁶ There, he debated none other than Brunschvicg, whom he had already met at the 1929 *Hochschulkurse* (university courses) in Davos.⁴⁷ In 1929, the explicit debate about the notion of “Christian philosophy” had not yet begun. Five years had passed since then, however. This time, Przywara was not simply engaging with his old acquaintance from Davos, but was facing off against the philosopher who represented “the clearest negation of Christian philosophy that one could conceive, in the name of the principles of rationalism.”⁴⁸ The theme chosen for the debate was “Philosophy and Religion.” This gave Przywara the opportunity to further clarify his original understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology, and most importantly, to confront it with the position of the anti-Christian-philosophy camp. By agreeing to debate Brunschvicg, Przywara entered, at last, into the debate about Christian philosophy.

⁴³ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 75 (E. 170). This is precisely what Przywara means when he says that the “formal philosophical undertaking carries in itself a formal primacy of the theological because, and insofar as, this theological as such super-forms [*überformt*] the entire creaturely realm” (79 [E. 174]).

⁴⁴ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 85 (E. 179).

⁴⁵ See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 78 (E. 172).

⁴⁶ For the list of those present, see *Actes du Huitième Congrès International de Philosophie à Prague 2–7 Sept. 1934* (Prague: Orbis, 1936), 1097–103. There Przywara also met Roman Ingarden, the great Polish phenomenologist; see Anton Sowa, letter to Erich Przywara, April 6, 1957, Przywara Archive 47-182-449.

⁴⁷ See Peter Gordon, *Continental Divide* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 98.

⁴⁸ Aimé Forest, “Le problème historique de la philosophie Chrétienne,” in Société Thomiste, *La philosophie Chrétienne*, 35.

The Prague Debate

The debate between Przywara and Brunschvicg took place on September 5, 1934, at the height of the debate about Christian philosophy in France.⁴⁹ This meeting between the two happened only because of an unexpected turn of events. Originally, Przywara was supposed to debate Anatoly Lunatscharsky, the Soviet minister of education, who had died earlier in the year. Only then was Brunschvicg roped in, and although the theme of the debate seems to have remained the same, Przywara's new interlocutor gave the debate a new meaning. Przywara was no longer confronting the "anti-theism" of communism, but the philosophical "atheism" of the Sorbonne professor, who wanted a completely secularized philosophy.⁵⁰

The conference proceedings contain the whole text of Brunschvicg's lecture, but only a short summary of Przywara's. The Jesuit did some more work on his lecture before eventually publishing it—in its entirety—in 1940, in the journal *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, and subsequently in his 1964 work *Logos*.⁵¹ In what follows, we will first focus on Brunschvicg's lecture, and then, mainly using the article-version, move to Przywara's lecture.

Brunschvicg's Lecture

Brunschvicg started by pointing out that the relationship between philosophy and religion is one of those "contradictory legacies" that philosophy has inherited.⁵² When it comes to religion, one faces two mutually exclusive options. One could accept religions for what they are, that is, a supposedly true knowledge that avoids any method of verification. Alternatively, one could choose to deal with religion in the same way that one deals with science and morality. One thus dismisses the possibility "of a domain where the spirit could escape the norm of an ever more scrupulous and

⁴⁹ Przywara and Brunschvicg spoke in the plenary session. There were two other smaller sessions on the subject of "Religion and Philosophy." According to Johannes Baptist Lotz, all the sessions "were attended by a large number of people, [and] these lectures and discussions were followed with true inner participation. . . . Tense attention and solemn silence filled the hall like never before" ("Vom Kampf um Gott," *Stimmen der Zeit* 128 [1935]: 197).

⁵⁰ Erich Przywara, *Logos* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1964), 167.

⁵¹ There are some slight differences between the journal version and the *Logos* one, but the two works are essentially identical. Przywara later turned the article into a radio lecture for the Südwestfunk. It was broadcasted on December, 29, 1963 ("Liste der gesamte Südwestfunk-Vorträge," Przywara Archive 47-182-1443).

⁵² Léon Brunschvicg, "Religion et philosophie," in *Actes du Huitième Congrès International de Philosophie*, 375.

delicate search that it had prescribed for itself.”⁵³ This either—or is unavoidable: either one accepts that religion is a super-rationality beyond the reach of human rationality, or one relegates religion to the limits of rationality.

The French philosopher, as expected, favored the second option. For him, there is only one truth. It is rational, and not dependent on some kind of superior wisdom. Indeed, a philosopher cannot allow for the possibility that, “by attaching an epithet to a substantive, the mind is to release something from the rigorous method of verification that remains its inflexible requirement.”⁵⁴ This echoes a similar argument that he had made at the 1931 colloquium.⁵⁵ Once more, Brunschvicg makes it clear that religion does not add anything to truth and philosophy’s search for it. The addition of an adjective—such as religious or Christian—to philosophy in no way alters it: “Religious truth must therefore be the truth *tout court*,” as totally subject to rationality.⁵⁶

Brunschvicg’s argument is not an argument *against* religion, however. It is, rather, the opposite. He believes that there is a place for religion in human discourse, but that religions cannot aspire to be rational or to contain a superior wisdom. Indeed, he argues that “the cause of religion, if it is not to be compromised, must not, therefore, be defended on the ground of secular thought.”⁵⁷ Taking St. Paul, St. Augustine, Martin Luther, Blaise Pascal, Søren Kierkegaard, and Barth as examples, he points out that “religion must radically build itself by itself without asking anything from the wisdom of the world.”⁵⁸ Brunschvicg seems to be arguing that religion is a completely self-contained discipline, having nothing to do with philosophy. This is neither new—and the voices that he mentions are good examples of this from within the tradition—nor unexpected of him. Yet, Brunschvicg does not stop here. He goes a step further.

As an idealist philosopher, he goes beyond a simplistic binary between religion and reason. He attempts a synthesis of the two. He wants to integrate religion into reason. But the fulfilled religion which he has in mind is not just *any* religion. It is *reason itself as religion*. Brunschvicg believes that there is an “inner light, illuminating every human being coming into this world, of which . . . he experiences both the beneficent universality

⁵³ Brunschvicg, “Religion et philosophie,” 375.

⁵⁴ Brunschvicg, “Religion et philosophie,” 379.

⁵⁵ See Gilson et al., “La notion,” 73; 75.

⁵⁶ Brunschvicg, “Religion et Philosophie,” 379.

⁵⁷ Brunschvicg, “Religion et philosophie,” 377.

⁵⁸ Brunschvicg, “Religion et philosophie,” 378.

and the unlimited fruitfulness."⁵⁹ This light is reason itself, which is the fulfillment of all religions. It has moved from Egypt, to Greece, into the Judeo-Christian tradition, and is still moving—beyond and above world religions, in the ultimate *translatio studiorum*—towards its accomplishment: the *one true* religion of the *one true* reason.⁶⁰

This is the only possibility of religion that is entertained by Brunschvicg. In light of this, it is clear why he refuses to speak of "Christian" or "religious" philosophy. For him, there is only one philosophy, one reason, one truth, and it cannot be Christian. However, he has no difficulty speaking of a "rational religion."⁶¹ Religion can be understood in many ways. Yet only one religion has a place in Brunschvicg's system, and that is reason itself. This religion *as* reason is diametrically opposed to Przywara's position. The Jesuit speaks of a reason that is *open* to religion without becoming itself *another* religion.

Przywara's Lecture

Przywara's lecture is centered around the question of whether, out of its formal ground, philosophy has any meaningful relationship with religion.⁶² Drawing on Augustine, Aquinas, and Ignatius of Loyola, he argues for the structural openness of finite reasoning—that is philosophy—for the infinite, or the religious.⁶³ Przywara uses the term "religion" in place of "theology." This is because his concern here is not with theology as the "scientific treatment of questions of religion, particularly of a strict religion of revelation."⁶⁴ His interest lies elsewhere, in that which is "most original, which factually is prior to both revelation and theology: religion as the fundamental relationship between the human being and God."⁶⁵ This distinction avoids any confusion between "theology," understood as a discipline based on God's revelation, and the more existential understanding of "theology" proposed in *Analogia Entis*, and now referred to as "religion."

Przywara chooses to give greater depth to the term "religion." Playing on the Latin word *religio*, he points out that the term "religion" could be employed to mean a *re-ligatio*, a re-connection (*Rück-bindung*). He uses

⁵⁹ Brunschvicg, "Religion et philosophie," 379.

⁶⁰ See Léon Brunschvicg, *La raison et la religion* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1939), 1.

⁶¹ Brunschvicg, *La raison et la religion*, 14.

⁶² Erich Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 7 (1940): 100.

⁶³ See Erich Przywara, "Die Problematik der Neuscholastik," *Kant-Studien* 33, no. 1–2 (1928): 94.

⁶⁴ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 100.

⁶⁵ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 100.

this second meaning to underscore the possibility of reconnecting philosophy and religion. It is this *religatio* that constitutes the cornerstone of Przywara's argument in Prague.⁶⁶

When it comes to philosophy and religion, this reconnection happens at three different levels: object, method, and location. Przywara starts with the first. Religion has a personal God as its object. He is the almighty and the most sublime. Philosophy, on the other hand, is interested in an "impersonal" (*es-hafte*) first, necessary, and ultimate principle of the world. This means that philosophy is not interested in God per se, but in "the connections and the meaning of things."⁶⁷ Nevertheless, despite this difference in approach—the *Unterscheidung*—between religion and philosophy, there is a reconnection—a *Rückbindung*—between the two. In going back to what is first, ultimate, and necessary, philosophy attempts "to lead back all pure facts to specifiable [angebbare] necessary connections and essential reasons."⁶⁸ If, in doing this, it pushes the facts which it questions beyond the finite boundaries of the world, philosophy ends up leading reality back "to a 'sense of God,' or a 'divine *logos*,' or a 'divine idea,' or an 'absolute concept.'"⁶⁹ This is the same meta-movement described in *Analogia Entis*, which includes a "movement out from the physical, and within the interpretative range of the physical, towards the *meta*, that is, the origin and the meaningful goal."⁷⁰ Although formulated in a different conceptual language—an "impersonal" (*es-hafte*) one—philosophy's search for a meaningful goal ultimately leads to the same object as that of religion.⁷¹ This shows that, though distinct, there is a "re-connection" (*re-ligo*) of philosophy to religion.⁷²

Przywara explains this further when he considers the relationship between philosophy and religion at the level of method. From a methodological standpoint, religion is essentially an act of obedience: "The absoluteness of the divine will, before which religion immediately stands, corresponds, in the act of religion, to a derived absoluteness of dedication

⁶⁶ See Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 102; Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, LV 113, ed. Klaus-D. Daur and Josef Martin, CCL 32 (Turnholt: Typographi Brepols, 1962), 259–60.

⁶⁷ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 102 (see 100).

⁶⁸ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 102.

⁶⁹ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 102.

⁷⁰ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 101.

⁷¹ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 102.

⁷² Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," in *Actes du Huitième Congrès International de Philosophie*, 373.

and surrender."⁷³ For philosophy, the methodological situation is different. Whatever its methodological choice, philosophy is essentially interested in gaining insight (*Einsicht*) into what is ultimate and necessary.⁷⁴ The acquisition of this insight is never a simple endeavor, however. Philosophy finds itself facing an either-or question. On the one hand, in its consideration of reality, it could limit itself to the "fixed limits" and "fixed frames" of its terms and concepts, and thus refrains from going further with its questions.⁷⁵ On the other, it might choose to go beyond the limits of its categories and opens itself to a dimension that lies beyond. Philosophy realizes "how incomprehensible, that which humanity seeks, is," and becomes itself a "surrender into the limitless."⁷⁶ It thus gives up its anxiety for conceptualization and lets itself be carried into something immeasurable. It becomes a discovering search (*findendes Suchen*) into hiddenness, and a searching discovery (*suchendes Finden*) of immeasurability.⁷⁷ In doing this, philosophy ventures into the realm of religion, for a philosophy which lets itself be carried into something immeasurable "necessarily carries in itself the attitude of religion."⁷⁸ What Przywara had pointed out in terms of the formal objects of religion and philosophy is, therefore, also observable at the methodological level. There is a similar reconnection (*religatio*) between philosophy and religion.

Przywara moves on to investigate the respective locations in which religion and philosophy take place. What Przywara terms "location" (*Standort*) is not to be understood spatially. He is referring to the conditions under which philosophy and religion originate (which he also calls *principium*). He notes that neither religion nor philosophy is concerned with the abstract and ideal. Rather, they both are related to existence—two different kinds of existence, for that matter. When it comes to philosophy, only the concrete, living human subject can philosophize. Philosophy "starts from the human being who is questioning [and] wondering (in *thaumazein*) or searching for a way out (in [the case of] an *aporia*), or doubtfully demanding certainty; . . . this human being, in this situation, is

⁷³ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 103.

⁷⁴ See Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 103, and "Religion und Philosophie," in *Actes du Huitième Congrès International de Philosophie*, 373.

⁷⁵ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 103.

⁷⁶ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 104; 103.

⁷⁷ See Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 104. Przywara borrows this idea from Augustine, in *Johannis Evangelium Tractatus*, tract. 43 [John 8:31–32], no. 1 (*Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* [CCSL] 36:485–86).

⁷⁸ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 103–4.

the existential formal location of philosophy.”⁷⁹ Given its concrete historical grounding, the situation in which the philosophical enquiry occurs is a constantly developing one. Indeed, it is the human being himself that is a dynamic being, existing as a continuous “springing forth” (*Entsprung*) caught between the “no longer” of the past and the “still not” of the future.⁸⁰ This is what makes the human being ungraspable (*Unfaßlich*) and unfinished.⁸¹ He is constitutively a being *in potency*, and philosophy is essentially a reflecting-back or recollection (*Rückbesinnung*) on this elusive situation.

Religion, on the contrary, is related to another form of existence, or springing-forth: that of God. It makes manifest God’s dynamic way of existing as *pure actuality* and his “ever new existential intervening” in the world.⁸² Compared to philosophy, religion includes a different reflecting-back. It is “a reflecting-back on the ‘one and almighty’ as the existing location of the ‘ever new springing forth.’”⁸³ This does not mean that religion does not have anything to do with human existence. The issue here is the starting point. Religion starts with God’s infinite existence and his presence in finite creation, whereas philosophy starts with humanity’s questioning, its sense of finitude, and its search for the infinite.⁸⁴

Przywara goes on to argue that what is *potential* should be understood in light of what is *actual*. If philosophy—that is, the reflection starting from the dynamic *potentiality* of human existence—is to make sense, it has to be considered in reference to what is *actual*, and the highest form of actuality is God himself. It is for this reason that Przywara maintains that philosophy can unfold in its full potential—be “really-existing” (*real-existent*)—only if considered in relation to “the divine *actus purus*, in its ‘ever springing forth’ in creation.”⁸⁵ As in the case of both object and method, the same relation between philosophy and religion is noticeable here. Philosophy leads to religion, for only when it reconnects with the divine can it provide the ultimate answer to humanity’s questioning. Without this reconnection, philosophy would remain closed within the negative and ultimately nihilistic framework constituted by the *no* longer and the *not* yet of human existence.

⁷⁹ Przywara, “Religion und Philosophie,” *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 104.

⁸⁰ Przywara, “Religion und Philosophie,” *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 105.

⁸¹ See Przywara, “Religion und Philosophie,” *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 105.

⁸² Przywara, “Religion und Philosophie,” *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 105.

⁸³ Przywara, “Religion und Philosophie,” *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 105.

⁸⁴ See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 68 (E. 162–63); Przywara, “Neue Theologie?,” 2:706.

⁸⁵ Przywara, “Religion und Philosophie,” *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 106.

Przywara's argument is now clear. There is in philosophy an "inescapable reconnection" (*religare*, *Rückbindung*) to the "all-binding God."⁸⁶ Given the double meaning of *legere*, as *to read* and *to choose*, it makes sense to consider this reconnection both a re-reading (*re-legere*) of the fundamental meaning of reality and also a decision about the divine, the "choosing again" (*Rück-erlesen*) of God.⁸⁷ Unsurprisingly, Przywara concludes that, considered in light of this reconnection, the relationship between philosophy and religion (*religio*) is analogical. Between the two there is both similarity and dissimilarity: "Similarity, proximity, and unity mean, for the relationship between religion and philosophy, reconnection. Dissimilarity, distance, and separation mean, for the same relationship, distinction."⁸⁸ This tension between similarity and dissimilarity could be articulated as a "three-beat movement" (*Dreiakt*).⁸⁹ Philosophy springs out of religion, in the same way that "creation, which is ever springing forth, has immediate similarity, and proximity, and unity with the creator."⁹⁰ But philosophy is also independent from religion. It "differentiates itself, to the greatest possible independence" from the religious.⁹¹ This is the independent *cogito ergo sum* without the *credo ut intelligam*. There is also, however, a third part. Here, "philosophy awakens again to the consciousness of its origins (*cogit-or ergo sum*): [to] how the dissimilarity, distance, and separation signify, more deeply, the positivity"—as opposed to the absolute negativity of distance and absence—"of the all-encompassing infinity of the creator, who rises above and beyond."⁹²

Przywara's lecture had a mixed reception. It was praised for being "astute" and for clearly indicating "the common source of religion and philosophy."⁹³ However, the lecture was also met with criticism. Some critiqued him for not pushing his analysis further, and limiting himself to an argument that "seemed too thin," while others objected that Przywara's lecture was too anchored in one particular religion and one particular view of philosophy as *ancilla theologiae*.⁹⁴ This second critique is not entirely warranted.

⁸⁶ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 102.

⁸⁷ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 102.

⁸⁸ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 106.

⁸⁹ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 106.

⁹⁰ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 106.

⁹¹ Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 106.

⁹² Przywara, "Religion und Philosophie," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 106.

⁹³ *Actes du Huitième Congrès International de Philosophie*, 388–90. These words of appreciation came from Leo Polak and A. Zoltowski.

⁹⁴ *Actes du Huitième Congrès International de Philosophie*, 390. This criticism came from the same people who praised Przywara's lecture.

Przywara does not understand philosophy as theology's subordinate or servant.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, this critique is understandable, for Przywara is presupposing a certain understanding of philosophy that, normally, not everyone would agree with. He makes a normative claim that philosophy, in all its shapes and forms, is concerned with what is first, ultimate, and necessary—ultimately with the divine. This is a monolithic and controversial reading of philosophy. It is, therefore, unsurprising that certain people in the audience disagreed with Przywara.

Przywara's presuppositions make sense only if considered in light of the question that he was answering. In a letter written to Johann Plenge many years later, he returned on the question of Christian philosophy and added the following: "When my book *Abendland* comes out, the first chapter in it is expressly dedicated to the question [of Christian philosophy] (it was my great confrontation with Brunschvicg at the Prague International Philosophers' Congress in 1936 [*sic*])."⁹⁶ Przywara thus confirmed that his debate with Brunschvicg had to be understood as a debate on the question of Christian philosophy. This question did not first arise in Prague, but was already the subject of the ongoing debate in France. As we saw, Brunschvicg was not just *any* philosopher, but one of the most important voices in the French debate, and in debating him precisely about the subject of Christian philosophy, Przywara was weighing in on a debate that had already started. The parameter of the question had already been set, and this is something which Przywara's critics—perhaps unaware of this hinterland—overlooked. They failed to consider that he was not starting from a presuppositionless position. Indeed, to be understood correctly, the Prague lecture has to be read as a response to a bigger debate, rather than as an original contribution. This is what we will now examine.

Przywara and "Christian Philosophy"

When the Prague lecture is read in light of the debate on Christian philosophy, it becomes clear that, though answering the same question, Przywara refused to align himself with a particular side. His objective was to avoid

⁹⁵ Przywara disagrees with the notion of philosophy as *ancilla philosophiae*. See Przywara, "Die Problematik der Neuscholastik," 90; Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 91–93 (E. 185–86).

⁹⁶ Erich Przywara, letter to Johann Plenge, May 1, 1953, Przywara Archive 47-182-1192. *Abendland* was the original title of the manuscript that eventually was published as *Logos* in 1964. Lotz confirms that the subject of Christian Philosophy came up more than once during the Prague conference ("Vom Kampf um Gott," 200).

the complete disjunction of philosophy and theology (or religion), as was the position of the anti-Christian-philosophy camp.⁹⁷ He likewise wanted to evade the conflation of philosophy with theology, which he feared that the notion of "Christian philosophy" could lead to. Indeed, wary of this potential conflation, in the aforementioned letter to Plenge, he goes as far as to declare that "formally speaking, there can be no Christian philosophy."⁹⁸

As was typical of him, Przywara was trying to navigate the middle way between the two sides. His intention was perfectly captured by Johannes Lotz in an article about the debate in Prague:

[The lecture] paves the harmonious middle way between two extremes. On the one hand, it avoids the radical separation of religion and philosophy that has been pursued in recent years in the wake of Kant and Schleiermacher. . . . On the other hand, this analysis avoids the unjustified approximation, indeed almost equation, of religion and philosophy that has led to the excessive rationalisation of the religious.⁹⁹

What was clear to Lotz does not seem to have been as clear to others, however. In fact, Przywara's approach to the question of philosophy and religion in his Prague lecture was the object of two important misunderstandings. Both, being evidently misrepresentative, make clear what Przywara *did not mean*.

The first misunderstanding, also the most controversial, was that of Nazi grandee Otto Dietrich. In a book published a year after the Prague conference, entitled *Die philosophischen Grundlagen des Nationalsozialismus*, he declares: "I would like to once again particularly emphasise this fact: . . . National Socialism, in its total essence, is far removed from the religious question."¹⁰⁰ It is at this point that Dietrich mentions Przywara and

⁹⁷ Theology and religion are understood synonymously here.

⁹⁸ Przywara, letter to Johann Plenge. This letter shows that, over the years, Przywara's skepticism about Christian Philosophy had grown stronger. In a review written in 1930, he was still contemplating the possibility of a Christian philosophy, which, however, had to be "open" for something that is beyond philosophy. He underscored the "openness" (*Aufgebrochenheit*) of Christian philosophy; see Przywara, "Philosophisches Werden" (review), *Stimmen der Zeit* 118, no. 6 (1930): 463.

⁹⁹ Lotz, "Vom Kampf um Gott," 199.

¹⁰⁰ Otto Dietrich, *Die philosophischen Grundlagen des Nationalsozialismus* (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1935), 38. Paul Silas Peterson used Dietrich's reference to Przywara to claim that Przywara was a Nazi sympathizer ("Erich Przywara on Sieg-Katholizismus,

his lecture in Prague. He notes that “it arouses particular interest that at the Prague Philosophers’ Congress, the Munich Jesuit priest Przywara, in his highly regarded lecture on the relationship between religion and philosophy, draws the same dividing line. He answers the question by saying that religion aims solely at God, while philosophy aims at the world.”¹⁰¹ Dietrich then endorses the position supposedly adopted by Przywara by declaring that this was also the basis of his own argument.

The word “supposedly” is appropriate here, for Dietrich was being very selective in what he quoted. While it is true that Przywara did speak of a distinction between philosophy and religion—the *Unterscheidung*—he equally highlighted the reconnection—the *Rückbindung*. Philosophy and religion are distinct-yet-connected, and this is something that Dietrich conveniently left out. As a review of Dietrich’s book observed in no uncertain terms,

Dietrich’s interpretation of Przywara’s Prague lecture, according to which Przywara would have presented philosophy and religion as completely separate areas, is based on a misunderstanding . . . that hardly needs to be noted; the emphasis in Przywara’s remarks was precisely on the “reconnection” of philosophy to religion.¹⁰²

Bolshevism, the Jews, Volk, Reich and the Analogia Entis in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Journal for the History of Modern Theology/Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte* [JHMT/ZNTG] 19, no. 1 [2012]: 104–40; “Once Again, Erich Przywara and the Jews: A Response to John Betz,” JHMT/ZNTG 21, no. 1–2 [2014]: 148–63; “A Third Time, Erich Przywara, the Jews and ‘Stimmen der Zeit,’” JHMT/ZNTG 24, no. 2 [2017]: 202–39). This claim was shot down by John R. Betz and Aaron Pidel in their respective responses to his articles (Pidel, “Erich Przywara, S.J., and ‘Catholic Fascism’: A Response to Paul Silas Peterson,” JHMT/ZNTG 23, no. 1 [2016]: 27–55; Betz, “A Study of Erich Przywara’s Engagement with National Socialism: A Critical Response to ‘Historical Criticism,’” *Modern Theology* 37, no. 3 [2021]: 564–94).

¹⁰¹ Dietrich, *Die philosophischen Grundlagen*, 39. It seems that the Nazi regime had green-lighted Przywara’s presence at the conference in Prague. In the words of Sigrid Müller (writing as Gustav Wilhelmy), “the Nazi regime officially sent Przywara [to the Prague conference], although the lexica of the Nazi era already characterised him as the most dangerous exponent of militant Catholicism (for the regime, the international importance still outweighed internal reservations)” (Wilhelmy, “Vita Erich Przywara,” in *Erich Przywara 1889–1969: Eine Festgabe*, ed. Wilhelmy [Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1969], 18).

¹⁰² De Vries, “Aufsätze und Bücher: Erkenntnislehre, Metaphysik, Kulturphilosophie,” *Scholastik* 10, no. 3 (1935): 464. Przywara’s Prague lecture is not devoid of political implications. In *Logos*, looking back at his 1934 lecture, Przywara notes that it was no accident that this lecture was given “in the Prague of the looming pan-Nazi rule” (168). He implies that the lecture is to be read as a critique of Nazism. Indeed, Nazism

The second, diametrically opposed, misunderstanding may be found in Brunschvicg himself. During the discussion that immediately followed their lecture, Brunschvicg had words of appreciation for Przywara's lecture and noted that he "had the feeling, listening to [Przywara], that the debate was beginning, that the necessary thing was to go further than the letter and the symbol to discover what unites us beyond what separates us."¹⁰³ There is, however, very little in common between the respective understandings of Brunschvicg and Przywara. In his own lecture, Brunschvicg suggested a worldview that culminated in the *identification* of a completely secularized religion with reason. Przywara, on the contrary, was suspicious of any form of identification: whether it was a rational religion or a Christian philosophy is beside the point. In his view, there is never a *Rückbindung* without an *Unterscheidung*. While Brunschvicg dreamt of the ultimate identification of philosophy and religion within reason, for Przywara they were connected-yet-*distinct*.

Between identification and disjunction, Przywara chose the way of relationality within difference. This is the harmonious middle way that he was looking for. As interesting as this sounds, however, it would be reductive to limit Przywara's contribution to simply this point. He was saying much more.

Looking at the debate as it happened in France, it is apparent that it developed along strict epistemological lines. Those participating in the debate considered the relation between philosophy and theology from the strict standpoint of the division of sciences. Their concern was whether or not revelation could provide philosophy with a principle and an object. Przywara took a different angle, however. Philosophy and theology represented much more than scholarly disciplines for him. As it clearly transpired both in *Analogia Entis* and also in Prague, philosophy and theology both include an existential aspect. Only the *real-existing* human being can *philosophically* interrogate the meaning of his or her finite springing-forth and find the *theological* answer in the *real-existing* God who springs forth into creation.¹⁰⁴ This is why the meta-movement is not simply rational.

did try to build an entire political system on one irreducible principle—the *Reich* and its *Führer*—and Przywara's insistence on catholicity, is also a critique of any system that tries to reduce reality to one principle; see Betz, "Study of Erich Przywara's Engagement."

¹⁰³ *Actes du Huitième Congrès International de Philosophie*, 391.

¹⁰⁴ Elsewhere, Przywara is very explicit about this existential aspect: "This relationship to God does not only happen 'in' the being and consciousness of the creature, but 'is' this being and consciousness" (*Crucis Mysterium: Das Christliche Heute* [Paderborn: F.

It comprehends humanity's *whole* existence. Philosophy and theology are part of a movement that goes from finite existence in the world towards the divine mystery.¹⁰⁵ They are not just two modes of thinking.

Important for our consideration of this movement is a remark by Przywara in *Analogia Entis*. He notes that the relationship between philosophy and theology “develops on catholic ground.”¹⁰⁶ Here, the term “catholic” is used in a polysemic way. It refers both to the theology of the Catholic Church, which holds that there is a continuity between philosophy and theology, and also to a pre-confessional property of the meta-movement. Although in a different context, the meaning of this pre-confessional trait comes out clearly in something that Przywara wrote some years later. He speaks of the “catholicism of the *kath'holon*, that is, of the all-encompassing wholeness.”¹⁰⁷ This kind of catholicity, understood as all-encompassing and all-connecting wholeness, is what determines Przywara's understanding of the relationship between philosophy *and* theology.

Schöningh, 1939], 373).

¹⁰⁵ He speaks of the *reductio in mysterium* in *Analogia Entis* (88–89 [E. 182–83]) and the “bright darkness” of the “inaccessible light” in the Prague lecture (“Religion and Philosophie,” *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 104). In his typically poetical style, Przywara writes that, in the meeting with the mystery of the creator, there is the “flaming up, into, under, and with [Aufflammen und Einflammen und Unterflammen und Eins-Flammen] of the *lumen intelligibile* and the ‘inaccessible light’” (106).

¹⁰⁶ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 74 (E. 169). Przywara made this argument at the height of his debate with Barth on natural theology. This must have influenced, to some extent, Przywara's understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology. See Keith L. Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); Amy Marga, *Karl Barth's Dialogue with Catholicism in Göttingen and Münster* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); Benjamin Dahlke, *Die katholische Rezeption Karl Barths: Theologische Erneuerung im Vorfeld des zweiten vatikanischen Konzils*, Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie 152 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); John R. Betz, “Translator's Introduction,” in Przywara, *Analogia Entis*; Betz, “After Barth: A New Introduction to Erich Przywara's *Analogia Entis*,” in *The Analogy of Being*, ed. Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 35–87; Betz, *Christ, the Logos of Creation: An Essay in Analogical Metaphysics* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2023).

¹⁰⁷ Erich Przywara, “Alter und neuer Katholizismus,” in *Katholische Krise* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1967), 181. This pre-confessional aspect of wholeness is implied in Przywara's definition of “catholicity” in *Religionsphilosophie Schriften*: “Catholicity [is understood] primarily as the ‘catholicity’ of ‘God all in all,’ but for that reason (because everything creaturely comes from God), also as catholicity in the human sense of ‘all in all towards God’” (“Religionsphilosophie katholischer Theologie,” in *Religionsphilosophische Schriften* [Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1962], 511; see Przywara, “Katholizität,” in *Katholische Krise*, 29–32).

They are two related and porous stages held together in the catholicity of one all-englobing movement—which he terms, as we saw, metaphysics. Indeed, one could speak of “the catholicity of philosophy and theology.” No particular Christian denomination is intended here. What is meant, rather, is the “internal *relationship* between philosophy and theology within the *one* metaphysics.”¹⁰⁸

Two things should be noted about this catholicity. Firstly, the relation-ality implied in the notion of catholicity is synonymous with analogy, understood by Przywara as a relationship, or relationships, between different poles (*allo pros allo*). It is also for this reason that, according to him, “‘analogy’ results to be, in the fullest sense of the word, a fundamental catholic form.”¹⁰⁹ It is this analogy, understood as a web of relations, that constitutes the wholeness, or catholicity, in which philosophy and theology both participate.¹¹⁰ In Prague, Przywara did, in fact, speak of the relationship between the two in terms of analogy. Secondly, as already implied in the etymology of the word “catholic,” that this wholeness is never inert. It is rather a movement towards (*kata*) wholeness. A certain dynamicity is necessarily implied. This also applies to the relationship between philosophy and theology.

In light of what we have said, we can conclude that, while his French counterparts adopted a *narrow* approach and focused exclusively on the exchange of objects and principles between theology and philosophy as two separate disciplines, Przywara took the *broader* approach. He transposed these two disciplines into a more fundamental register. He considered the relationship between philosophy and theology against the backdrop of the all-encompassing catholicity of the created order, showing how there is continuity—but not identification—between humanity’s search for meaning (philosophy) and God as the ultimate end of this search (theology). This is what makes Przywara’s approach so distinctive and shows that, strictly speaking, he cannot be included within the pro-Christian-philosophy group. Although, in entering the debate about Christian philosophy, Przywara was adapting to parameters that had already been set, in reality, he did end up modifying the terms of reference of the whole debate.

Among his French counterparts, the most compatible account is that offered by Blondel. In broadening the scope of the question about the

¹⁰⁸ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 75–76 (E. 170; emphasis mine).

¹⁰⁹ Erich Przywara, “Die Reichweite der Analogie als katholischer Grundform,” in *Analogia Entis*, 262 (E. 364). “Catholic” is understood here in its two senses.

¹¹⁰ See Przywara, “Metaphysik, Religion, Analogie,” 317–34 (E. 413–29).

relationship between philosophy and religion and refusing to limit himself to the rational dimension, Przywara was placing himself in the same trajectory adopted by Blondel. The two shared the same basic intuition: the relationship between philosophy and theology had to be understood in terms of the more important “symbiosis,” or “alliance,” between the finite and the infinite.¹¹¹ The fact that Przywara was aware of Blondel’s work on philosophy and religion, and that through his Prague lecture, he consciously ventured into a debate in which Blondel was one of the main voices, strengthens the argument that there is a connection between their respective positions.

This similarity between the two also includes a certain dissimilarity. Przywara was wary of Blondel’s insistence on immanence. As he points out, “the dangerous temptation of this philosophy is its starting point in the ‘inside.’”¹¹² Przywara feared that such an insistence on the immanent would lead to what he himself was trying to avoid, namely the collapse of the transcendent into the immanent.¹¹³ In fairness, this was not really Blondel’s position. He denied any “*real* continuity” between the two spheres, but perhaps not as clearly as Przywara would have wanted him to.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, despite this difference, Przywara’s overall attitude towards Blondel remained positive. Years later, he would call Blondel “the greatest Catholic philosopher and theologian from the turn of the century to the present day.”¹¹⁵ He did not agree with everything that Blondel said, but despite their dissimilarity, he was aware that in many respects, they were actually quite similar.

Conclusion

This article has exposed two important aspects of the 1930s debate over Christian philosophy. First, this debate was not simply a French affair and other voices from outside the Francosphere—including Stein and

¹¹¹ Blondel, *Le problème*, 168–69.

¹¹² Przywara, “Sein im Scheitern,” 160. He calls Blondel’s philosophy an “apologetic of immanence” (*Einführung in Newmans Wesen und Werk* [Freiburg: Herder, 1922], 68). Regarding the differences between the two, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Die Metaphysik Erich Przywaras,” *Schweizerische Rundschau* 33, no. 6 (1933): 489–99; Aaron Pidel, “Erich Przywara on Nature–Grace Extrinsicism: A Parallax View,” *Modern Theology* 37, no. 4 (2021): 865–87; Betz, *Christ*, 319–59.

¹¹³ See Erich Przywara, “Der Grundsatz ‘Gratia Non Destruit Sed Supponit et Perficit Naturam,’” *Scholastik* 17, no. 1 (1942): 178–86.

¹¹⁴ Blondel, *Lettre sur les exigences*, 44.

¹¹⁵ Erich Przywara, “Möglichkeit Mensch,” *Besinnung* 11, no. 1 (1956): 38.

Przywara—were involved. Second, it has shown that there is a plurality of approaches to the same question. A binary reading of the debate is too simplistic. Neither the pro-Christian-philosophy side nor the opposite side were monolithic, and some voices resist the facile pigeonholing into one of the two categories. Przywara is a case in point. With the exception of Blondel, his approach had little precedent.

In conclusion, we can say that the strict epistemological framework of the French debate is probably one of the reasons why the debate ended up in an impasse and eventually lost much of its importance. The epistemological presuppositions of those arguing in favor or against Christian philosophy were irreconcilable, and the two sides were destined to remain in a perpetual deadlock. Przywara contributed to this debate by changing its framework. The epistemological questions had to be considered in light of the catholicity of the whole created order. While clearly in favor of the independence of philosophy, for him this was always a *participatory* independence. Philosophy, just as any other discipline, is always *catholic*, or *in relation*. It participates in the broader network of relations with theology and the rest of creation. Strictly speaking, there is no Christian philosophy. There is only a philosophy leading to theology. It is this relationality and its articulation that, either by going too far or by not even entertaining its possibility, the debate in France failed to consider sufficiently, and this is Przywara's own contribution to the debate and beyond.

Unfortunately, because Przywara has been identified exclusively with the issue of the *analogia entis*, his contribution to the Christian philosophy question has been overlooked. It would be important to include his contribution when, finally, a full historical account of the twentieth-century debate around Christian philosophy, in France and beyond, is developed.