



ON BEING A THOMIST:

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE LIVES AND WORKS OF TWO THOMISTS

By

Victor Brezik, C.S.B.

Center for Thomistic Studies

2009

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

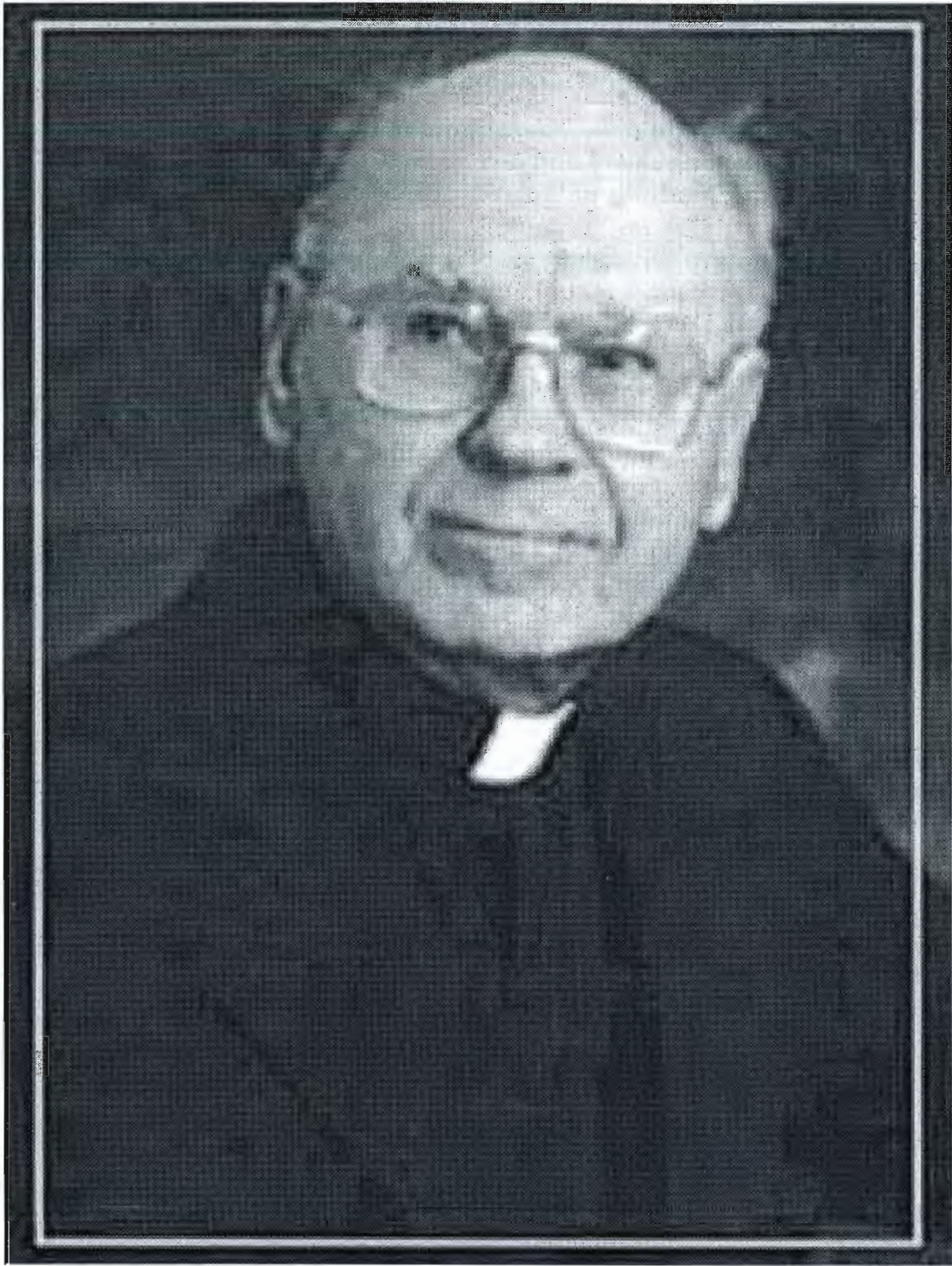
PREFACE.....	3
REV VICTOR BREZIK C.S.B. (1913-2009)	4
MY REMEMBRANCE OF MARITAIN	5
THE CONVERSION OF JACQUES AND RAISSA MARITAIN	9
MEMORIAL TO MARITAIN.....	18
HUMILITY AND THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER	20
ETIENNE GILSON.....	24
MARITAIN AND GILSON ON THE QUESTION OF A LIVING THOMISM.....	26
ON BEING A THOMIST	43
JACQUES MARITAIN AS AN HONORARY MEMBER OF THE FACULTY OF THE CENTER FOR THOMISTIC STUDIES, 1966	47

PREFACE

These essays by Rev. Victor Brezik, C.S.B. are published as a commemoration of his dedication to the thought of St. Thomas and to the University of St. Thomas. Philosopher, theologian, visionary and cornerstone of the institution, Rev. Victor Brezik, CSB died the morning of Tuesday, June 16, 2009 at the age of 96.

Fr. Brezik, who joined the UST faculty in 1954, was the University's oldest living scholar. Adopting the personal motto, "Dare to do whatever you can," from his favorite philosopher, St. Thomas Aquinas, Fr. Brezik's philosophical attitude and vision stretched the imaginations and inspired generations of students and colleagues. In addition to his many contributions to the University, Fr. Brezik co-founded the University of St. Thomas' Center for Thomistic Studies. In 1975 Fr. Brezik teamed up with Houston Philanthropist Hugh Roy Marshall, '74, to renew interest in the teachings of the medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas. In creating the Center for Thomistic Studies, Fr. Brezik and Marshall, who earned a degree in philosophy, established the only doctoral program at the University and the only graduate philosophy program in the United States uniquely focused on the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. The Center for Thomistic Studies, where the wisdom of Thomas Aquinas could be brought to bear on the problems of the contemporary world, was Fr. Brezik's great dream and he never stopped working for it. He taught the Center's first graduate students and, when he retired, continued to write on philosophical and theological issues into the last year of his life. He met each new class of graduate students and attended colloquia and departmental parties up until a few months before his death.

Born in Hallettsville, Texas on May 2, 1913, Fr. Brezik attended St. Thomas High School in Houston, and graduated in the class of 1931. He went on to join the Basilian order in 1932, and was ordained as a priest in 1940. He studied in Toronto and received his Licentiate in Mediaeval Studies in 1943 at the Pontifical Institute, center of the North American Renaissance in Thomistic philosophy, and his doctorate in 1944. Fr. Brezik returned to Houston in 1954 to join the faculty at the University of St. Thomas. He was named Basilian Superior in 1955. At UST, he served as a professor of philosophy from 1954 to 1986, and his service to the University continued until his resignation from the board of directors in 2005. He served on the board of directors for a total of 24 years, from 1969-1979, and from 1992 to 2005. The University bestowed on Fr. Brezik an honorary doctorate at the 1989 Commencement Ceremony. Fr. Brezik and Marshall were honored with the Order of St. Thomas Award at the 2008 St. Thomas Aquinas Lecture, held on Jan. 31. The award is presented each year to persons who have testified to the value of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas in their writings, teachings philanthropy and way of life. The Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies recently honored him at a ceremony celebrating their 80th year of existence.



REV VICTOR BREZIK C.S.B. (1913-2009)

MY REMEMBRANCE OF MARITAIN

I was a young Basilian scholastic when Jacques Maritain, the eminent Catholic philosopher, first came to Toronto on his initial visit to America. This was in the year 1933 He was about fifty years old. It was my privilege to attend his first lecture in the old study hall at St. Michael's College. Sitting at the customary school desks of that time, awaiting with rather awesome expectancy, a motley assembly of priests, scholastics, students and other laymen comprised the audience. After the introduction, Maritain delivered his address. A few in the audience, like Father Bondy and Dr. Phelan, probably followed the lecture with full understanding. I kept my ears wide open to sounds that were completely unknown to me. Maritain spoke in French.

My recollection of Maritain is of a man of average height, with a shock of greyish hair parted on the right side, a mustache on his upper lip, a tuft of beard on his chin, a face of soft sensitive skin, a scarf around his neck, and a mellow voice accompanied by diagrams on the blackboard at subsequent lectures. The usual scarf impressed one almost as his signature.

I still have in my possession somewhere a mimeographed copy of this first lecture in the old study hall on Bay street. It covered the content of the first chapter of his book *Sept Lecons sur L'Etre*. Looking back over the cultural turmoils of the succeeding years since that time, it is interesting to recall the prophetic note Maritain struck in his opening remarks. He came across the Atlantic ocean to America by boat. "Why did I brave the storm on the ocean to come to America?" he asked. He explained that Europe had years ago brought the Christian faith to America. He foresaw the time, he remarked, when America will have to bring the faith back to Europe. If that should ever happen, it seems at present to be in the still distant future, considering the secularism that has now overtaken America.

When I was a scholastic living at St. Basil's Scholasticate at 21 St. Mary Street, rather Bondy one day brought Maritain to the Scholasticate for a questioning session. Maritain did not lecture on that occasion. The purpose was to acquaint the scholastics with Maritain and have him respond to our questions. Father Bondy played the role of translator. He translated our questions into French for Maritain and translated Maritain's answers into English for us. I recall that some of Maritain's long answers were abbreviated in English for us. Once or twice, Maritain's lengthy reply was relayed to us by Father Bondy in the words: "Mr. Maritain wishes to say "no". The meeting succeeded in providing us with a memorable exposure to Maritain who impressed us with his geniality and unpretentiousness as well as his learning.

Gradually, over the years, Maritain acquired some fluency in the English language and began to deliver lectures in English. His command of English probably never came to equal that of Gilson. I attended some of his lectures given in English and was able to follow them. My brother Jerome, a Holy Cross Brother, when he was at the University of Notre Dame, attended one of

Maritain's public lectures there and had this story to tell. The lecture was given in English. At the close of the lecture, as my brother was making his exit from the lecture hall, an elderly lady walking beside him voiced her extreme delight at hearing the lecture. She exclaimed: "Wasn't it wonderful to hear such a learned professor" She then paused momentarily and added: "But it was a great pity that he spoke in French."

Whenever Maritain visited Toronto he was visible on campus at St. Michael's College and was observed to spend considerable time in prayer in St. Basil's Church. On one of his early visits, he resided in Number 5 Elmsley Place where previously Sir Bertram Windle had stayed while at St. Michael's College. The story was told jokingly that Maritain could not master the problem of turning off the radiator in his room, implying that the perfection of the speculative intellect is not always matched by equal perfection of the practical intellect.

On one of his visits to Toronto, Maritain brought his wife Raissa with him. She resided at St. Joseph's College with the Sisters of St. Joseph. I was only a scholastic at this time and never had the pleasure of meeting Raissa who was very dear to Jacques. It was a current saying that nothing worse could happen to prevent Maritain from keeping a scheduled appointment than for Raissa to catch a cold.

There were occasions when Gilson and Maritain were both in Toronto at the same time. I remember a group discussion held in the common room of Brennan Hall with both philosophers replying to questions. It provided an opportunity to study characteristics of the two men. I noticed that whenever a question was addressed to both of them, Maritain invariably deferred to Gilson to give the first reply. The two philosophers obviously respected one another's views.

On one occasion when Maritain was arriving in Toronto by train from New York, I was assigned the task of meeting him at the Union Station and bringing him by taxi to the College. We chatted the best we could on the way. When the taxi arrived at the entrance up Elmsley Place to Brennan Hall where Maritain was to stay, he asked me whether there was still time for him to receive Holy Communion. My watch showed 8:30 am. I told him there was an 8:30 Mass in St. Basil's Church. He immediately got out of the car and hurried to the Church, leaving his baggage for me to deliver to his room.

By this time, I was already ordained as a priest. My studies had progressed to the point of writing my doctoral dissertation. I was interested in exploring in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas the relationship of friendship and society. Dr. Gerald B. Phelan, my thesis director, arranged an interview for me with Jacques Maritain to discuss the topic of my thesis. Maritain received me graciously, showed an interest in my proposed topic and encouraged me to pursue my proposal. I left the meeting strengthened in my determination.

After I had become a young professor at St. Michael's College, on one of Maritain's visits to Toronto, we spoke together in Brennan Hall one day when he

asked me what I was teaching. I mentioned Metaphysics. At that particular time, Maritain himself was teaching at Princeton University. At the mention of Metaphysics, Maritain smiled and jestingly inquired: "Oh, are there some students here interested in Metaphysics"? I inferred from his remark that he experienced a lack of interest in that subject at Princeton.

As a young professor, I was privileged to attend a social gathering of teachers at the Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Father Flahiff's large President's Office with both Maritain and Gilson present. What amazed me was the range of topics in the conversations. Not all of them were confined to philosophy. Literature, art, politics and sundry things were discussed with great familiarity. Notable about the discussions was that when they spoke of renowned scholars I had heard of, some of whose books I had read, they spoke of them as personal acquaintances and quoted conversations they had with them. Everything talked about was not of a serious nature. One of the jokes I heard was Maritain's story about Einstein, which still brings me laughter every time I think of it. Einstein and Maritain were both at Princeton at the same time.

As I remember the story, it goes like this. On one of Einstein's many train trips to New York City from Princeton, when the conductor on the train came down the aisle collecting tickets and approached Einstein, the old professor searched in one of his pockets for his ticket, then into another pocket, and repeatedly kept going through his pockets in vain. The conductor, who recognized the noted professor, and becoming embarrassed by the situation, assured the old man; "That is all right, Professor. I know that you have a ticket." But Einstein continued to search for his ticket. When the conductor reassured him that he did not need to show his ticket, Einstein replied bewilderingly: "Yes, but I want my ticket. I want to know where I am going."

On one of his visits to Toronto, several University of Toronto professors teaching sociology and anthropology arranged to meet with Maritain in Brennan Hall to discuss some of Maritain's views on man. I was surprised when Maritain insisted that I accompany him to the meeting just in case he may have difficulty understanding their questions. It was a friendly meeting and Maritain fielded their questions to their apparent satisfaction. I did not have to intervene with any clarification of the questions, which Maritain seemed to understand better than I.

Several years after my coming to the University of St. Thomas in the fall of 1954, Maritain suffered a much publicized criticism by a priest chaplain at Princeton for a speech Maritain gave to a gathering of Catholics, I believe at the Newman Club, on the topic "Who Is My Neighbor?". I read the lecture when it was published and could find nothing objectionable in it whatsoever. I wrote to Maritain on that occasion and received a note of gratitude from him in reply.

In 1966, the French version of Maritain's *The Peasant Of The Garonne* was published by Desclee De Brouwer in France. Soon after he had finished writing this post Vatican Council II emotional critique, we heard that he was coming to America for a visit and would be a guest of John Howard Griffin in Fort Worth, Texas. We contacted him in Fort Worth by phone and invited him to come to

Houston. He apparently was drained of energy in writing the "Peasant" and explained that because of his age it would be much easier on him if we came to see him in Fort Worth. Accordingly, Dominique De Menil chartered a small airplane to convey several of us there for a short visit. There must have been five or six of us, including Fr. Ed Sullivan, Fr. Keon, Fr. Femiano, Fr. Lamb and myself. We spent about two hours with him at the home of John Howard Griffin whom I had first met a few years previously when he walked into my office one day in the Link-Lee Mansion. Griffin, who gained publicity through his book *Black Like Me*, was a good friend of Fr. Ed Lee and Fr. Stan Murphy whom he knew at Assumption College in Windsor.

It was on our visit with him in Fort Worth that I got Maritain to sign a short greeting I had written and brought with me, naming him as an Honorary Faculty Member of the University of St. Thomas. Maritain gladly transcribed the greeting in his own handwriting, adding to it "from an old professor who loves America and the American people."

The *Peasant Of The Garonne* was to be published in France in November. Our visit with Maritain was in the preceding October. I could see that Maritain felt some anxiety at the prospect the public exposure his book would give to his emotional anger over the misinterpretations of the intentions of Vatican Council II that were current following the Council. After all, a peasant of the Garonne speaks with the same plain bluntness as the peasant of the Danube.

With a kind of sigh of relief, Maritain said to us: "This is my last book." Unbelieving, I replied: "Until the next one." As it turned out, it was not his last book.

Following the exchange of some pleasantries in conversation, at the expiration of approximately two hours, we bade a-dieu and headed to the airport to board our small plane. Shortly after our visit, Maritain and Griffin traveled to the trappist monastery at Gethsemane, Kentucky, to visit Thomas Merton.

John Howard Griffin subsequently wrote to Father John Murphy stating that Maritain was extremely gratified with the visit of the group of Basilians from the University of St. Thomas and mentioned our visit in his book on Maritain.

The greeting from Maritain as an Honorary Member of the Faculty of the University of St. Thomas was later framed by Mrs. John De Menil and given back to me. I have recently donated it to the Center for Thomistic Studies.

THE CONVERSION OF JACQUES AND RAISSA MARITAIN

Maritain a Representative of Catholic Intellectuals

The formal closing of The Second Vatican Council took place on December 8, 1965 in front of the great central door of St. Peter's in Rome in the presence of a vast throng of cardinals, bishops, abbots, priests, nuns, laymen. They filled Saint Peter's Square between the embracing arms of Bernini's colonnade. Pope Paul VI was there on the spacious platform built for the occasion. The climax of the ceremonies came after the celebration of Mass when seven conciliar messages were read, addressed to seven groups intended to represent all the various groups of the human family whom the Council sought to reach.

Taken in order, these messages were: to heads of government; to intellectuals; to artists; to women; to the sick and the poor; to workers; to the young. Each message was read aloud "to the city and to the world" by a different cardinal who then handed the document to the Pope to be presented personally by him to a representative of each of the seven groups. Cardinal Lienart of Lille, France, was chosen for reading the message to intellectuals. The modest layman selected to receive the document from the head of the Church was the man whose conversion to the Catholic faith I wish to relate to you, the French Catholic Thomist philosopher, Jacques Maritain. Amid the colorful ecclesiastical vestments surrounding him, there Maritain stood near the Pope, wearing the humble gray habit of the Little Brothers of Jesus. As Pope Paul leaned forward to receive him and to place the document in his hands, it was evident to all that the Pope was moved with emotion. This is the scholar of whom the Pope had previously declared himself a disciple and for whom later in his encyclical *Populorum progressio* the Pope was to show high respect by citing Maritain along with the Fathers of the Church. Interestingly, in describing Pope Paul's daily routine, the Roman correspondent of the Paris newspaper *Le Monde* wrote: "Before going to sleep, the Pope reads a few pages of the Gospels, or of Saint Augustine, or of Jacques Maritain."¹

Two Young Students at the Edge of Despair

Let us turn our minds back in time over 60 years prior to the close of the Second Vatican Council. This places us in the early years of the 1900s. In our imagination we are in Paris, France, standing at the edge of the *Jardin des Plantes*, a garden-park on the Left Bank of the river Seine. Our eyes are focused a short distance from us on a young couple who appear to be scarcely 20 years of age. They are obviously in an earnest and concerned conversation. What could be the subject of their seemingly troubled discussion? It is impossible for us, even

¹ (cf. the description of the event in Julie Kernan, *Our Friend Jacques Maritain*, pp. 174,175.)

though the distance is not far, to overhear their anguished dialogue. Even less possible, strangers as we are, to guess their inner thoughts. But we need not try. One member of the couple has fortunately written down for friends and posterity what the two of them were thinking and saying. We can read the graphic description of the event in Raissa Maritain's memoirs entitled *We Have Been Friends Together* and its sequel *Adventures in Grace*. As her book reveals, their thoughts were desperately serious, turning about the very question of doing away with their young lives. Why go on living, if life has no meaning, if existence is absurd? The one thing they shared in common was their deep desire to know the basic truths: the truth of existence, the truth of human destiny, the truth about God.

For a time, they had lived in hope. They had expected and awaited answers from the science courses they were taking. With their "immense reverence for men of science," using a phrase of the memoirs, this was a reasonable anticipation. But to their disappointment, it did not, as the memoirs say, take long "to learn that scientists hold the supreme principles of the intelligence in little esteem," that scientists "generally restrict themselves to a simple empirical common sense," and further that insofar as scientists are philosophical at all, they are, in the words of the memoirs, "generally partisans of such philosophical theories as mechanism, epiphenomenism, absolute determinism, evolutionary monism - doctrines which deny the reality of the spirit and the objectivity of all knowledge which goes beyond the cognition of sensible phenomena; in other words, all knowledge is limited to what we can see and hear and touch." The basis for all such theories is plainly materialism. How then can one be satisfied with the answers of science? Besides science, they were also studying philosophy.

In their philosophy courses their expectations did not fare much better than the frustrations they experienced from their science courses. The philosophers whose courses they took, though "personally men of great merit," as stated in the memoirs, "bent their energies, as to their main task, to the endless analysis of the detail of historical matters." At their hands the study of wisdom, i.e. the ultimate explanation of life and thought, was reduced simply to historical facts studied according to methods used in the physical sciences. All in all, the only practical lesson one could take from such instruction was "a lesson in integral relativism, intellectual skepticism, and - if one is logical - in moral nihilism."

Thus were the young couple in the garden reviewing the results of their two or three years of study at the Sorbonne. They garnered there at the Sorbonne a rather considerable amount of specialized scientific and philosophical knowledge. But what did this knowledge amount to, since, as the memoirs state, it "was undermined by the relativism of the scientists, by the skepticism of the philosophers." This was not enough to alleviate the deep distress of their hearts, "fainting with hunger and thirst after truth." "I want to know," Raissa wrote, "whether existence is an accident, a blessing or a misfortune?" "Already," she

added, "I had come to believe myself an atheist." In the absence of God, as an explanation, what is left? "If we must also give up the hope," she said, "of finding any meaning whatever for the word truth, for the distinction of good from evil, of just from unjust, it is no longer possible to live humanly." "In no case," she adds, "is the state of things acceptable without some true light on existence. If such a light is impossible, existence also is impossible and life is not worth living."

So they went on, the two of them conversing in the garden, adding dark stanza after dark stanza to the dirge of their distress.

What should they do? Though at the very edge of despair, their despair was not yet total, not yet absolute. They toyed with the idea of condition as a ray of hope. . .What if, what if...this conditional mood left the door half open on the road to daylight.

Before leaving the *Jardin des Plantes*, they reached a decision that brought them some small peace. They decided for some time longer to have confidence in the unknown, to extend credit to existence and to look upon it as an experiment to be made, in the hope that to their ardent plea, the meaning of life would reveal itself, that new values would stand forth so clearly that they could give their total allegiance to them, and thus be delivered from the nightmare of what appeared to be a sinister and useless world.

Such would be their experiment. But what if it failed? What if truth did not offer itself along the road? The solution then would be a drastic one. It would be suicide. "We wanted to die by a free act," the memoirs say, "if it were impossible to live according to the truth."

Who are They?

Let us get better acquainted with these two young students. Who were they and what is their family background? The young man is the same Jacques Maritain who much later in life will stand, as we saw before Pope Paul VI at the closing of the second Vatican Council to receive from the Pope's hands the message of the Council addressed to the the Intellectuals of the world. The young woman, whose memoirs I have been quoting, bore the name of Raissa Oumansoff.

The name Oumansoff is obviously not French. Raissa was born Sept. 12, 1883 at Rostoff-on-the-Don in Russia. Her sister, Vera, was born July 2, 1886 at Marioupol, a small seaport town of Russia, where the family had settled after Raissa's birth. The parents were Jewish. When the two daughters were aged ten and seven, the parents emigrated to France to give their daughters better educational opportunities. Raissa, the elder, was especially gifted intellectually and in France, at age 15, she was ready to prepare for entrance to the University of Paris. Since she was too young by two years for entrance, she spent the time with the help of tutors getting ready for the examinations in literature and the history of philosophy. She passed the Sorbonne entrance examinations after only

one year of preparation and was dispensed from the usual age requirement. She was only 16. She enrolled in the faculty of sciences at the Sorbonne thinking that the physical sciences would best serve her interests.

Her companion in the *Jardin des Plantes* that day was Jacques Maritain. She describes him as "a young man with a gentle face, a heavy shock of blond hair, a light beard and a slightly stoop-shouldered carriage." Jacques was born in Paris, November 18, 1882, a year prior to Raissa. He came from a relatively prominent French family. His mother, Genevieve, was the daughter of Jules Favre (1809 - 80). Jules Favre was a French statesman, a leader in the provisional government of the short-lasting Second Republic, a prominent member of the constitutional opposition against Napoleon III, later vice-president and minister of foreign affairs of the Third Republic, an eloquent speaker and writer and member of the French Academy, an agnostic Freemason who, influenced by his second wife, became a Protestant.

Jacques' mother, Genevieve was the daughter of Favre's first wife. She followed her father into the Protestant Church and had her son, Jacques, baptized Protestant. Though brought up Protestant, Jacques did not have strong religious ties.

Jacques' father, Paul Maritain, was a non - practicing Catholic, a lawyer, who worked as Jules Favre's secretary. When the marriage of their parents ended in separation, Jacques and his sister Jeanne, came entirely under the influence of their mother. As a boy, his parents' home was a sort of mecca for friends coming and going, where political, social and cultural activities were the discussion of the day. When this grew tiresome for young Jacques, he often escaped to the kitchen to talk to the cook and her husband who was a socialist. It was in the year 1900 that Jacques and Raissa first met. Jacques had by this time already earned his baccalaureate in philosophy and was studying for another in science. Raissa was enrolled in the same science courses as Jacques. Somewhat reserved and quiet in manner but burning with inner intensity, Raissa kept to herself and did not mix with the other students. One day after science class, Jacques approached her and solicited her help. He had heard news of recent ill-treatment of Russian socialist students by the tsarist police. Disturbed in his sense of justice, Jacques explained to Raissa that he was seeking signatures of French intellectuals for a message of protest to the Russian government. Touched by the request, Raissa consented to accompany him in calling upon prospective signers of a letter of protest to be delivered to the Russian Embassy.

Although of quite different personality, temperament and background, kindred desires and hopes for a better world melded their two hearts and drew Jacques and Raissa in a growing friendship. They began seeing one another with some frequency and came to meet one another's parents. Both being exceptionally gifted with intelligence they could not by natural disposition consider the profound problems of human existence frivolously. We have seen to what an extreme decision regarding their lives their feeling for these problems moved them as they concluded their discussion in the *Jardin des Plantes*. What

were the providential events transpiring afterwards that eventually brought them safely out of their dilemma?

The Dawn of Renewed Hope: Henri Bergson

The dawn of renewed hope came when Charles Peguy, a socialist acquaintance of Jacques and his mother, in whose heart the hopes of a universal socialist republic had faded, seeking a new direction for his thought, took Jacques and Raissa to a lecture by the renowned philosopher, Henri Bergson, at the *College de France*. Following the crowd to hear this "magnetic thinker," Jacques and Raissa began regularly to attend his lectures. Enthralled to hear him speak of a spiritual faculty of knowing which they tended to identify with intelligence but which Bergson himself, in opposition to intelligence, called *intuition*, their minds were opened up to possible vistas of reality unexplainable in purely quantitative terms. The benefits of the new horizons Bergson's lectures introduced them to were, in Raissa's explanation, "away from the empty and colourless world of universal mechanism and toward the universe of qualities, toward spiritual certainty, toward personal liberty."

Another course of Bergson's, this one expounding the doctrine of the Greek thinker, Plotinus, whose writings long ago influenced the thought of Saint Augustine, raised the outlook of Jacques and Raissa far beyond the scientific positivism and materialism that characterized their courses at the Sorbonne. Bergson's lectures on Plotinus, in Raissa's words, "were an introduction into those regions to which it seems we naturally aspire, where we can breathe freely, where our hearts burn within us, and where we begin to foresee that there exists a spiritual realm from which descend all perfect gifts." Plotinus spoke to them of the soul and of God.

After Plotinus, Pascal. Jacques presented Raissa with a copy of Pascal's *Pensees* or *Thoughts*. What drew her to Pascal was his "sense of the abyss," the fact, as she says, that "he had experienced to the point of anguish the need for the truth if he was to live, the necessity of the absolute to which his soul might cling."

After Marriage, a Meeting with Leon Bloy, Pilgrim of the Absolute

In 1902 Jacques and Raissa became engaged to be married. They intended to postpone their wedding until after Jacques had completed his studies, which would assure him of a teaching post in a State University. Instead, after Raissa had recovered from a very serious illness, they decided against waiting and got married, November 26, 1904. They found a small apartment near the *Jardin des Plantes* and there Jacques continued studying for his *agregation*.

A ray of light and a modicum of hope came to these young searchers for the truth from the lectures of Bergson. But the quest was not finished. Some truth is not *the* Truth itself and only Truth pure and simple can satisfy hunger and thirst for the Absolute. This hunger, however, was soon to be filled and this

thirst about to be slaked in their strange meeting with a poverty-stricken French writer who proclaimed the Christian message with unshakable conviction and missionary zeal and characterized himself as a pilgrim of the Absolute. This man was Leon Bloy.

Divine Providence sometimes uses the most casual incidents to initiate a series of events that ultimately carry out its purposes. One day in 1905, Jacques and Raissa read by chance in the literary column of a daily paper a tribute paid to a French writer, unknown to them, for his novel entitled *The Woman Who Was Poor - La Femme Pauvre*. They at once read this strange novel, which seemed to them to be "unlike any other." For the first time they found themselves confronted with the reality of Christianity. Through the novel they discerned the author himself, in Raissa's own words, as a "man of faith illumined by rays of that strange thing, so unknown to us - Catholicism - and so to speak identified with it." His greatness of soul, his ardent zeal for justice, his faith, his poverty, all finding an echo in the memorable saying toward the end of the novel: "There is only one sadness, not to be a saint." These things impressed Jacques and Raissa.

Wanting to know more about this writer, they went on to read one volume of his published journals. It disclosed to them the dire circumstances of his life. Scarce income came to him from his books. Married with two children living, two deceased, he obviously needed help.

Jacques and Raissa had little with which to relieve the poverty revealed to them in the diary. They sent him a modest amount, nevertheless, acknowledging that they admired his work even though they did not share his religious faith. To show his appreciation, Bloy sent them a letter and two earlier volumes of his journal. In his letter to them, Bloy wrote: "In a month I will be fifty-nine years old and I am still searching for my bread, it is true; but I have nevertheless helped and consoled souls and that makes a paradise in my heart. Yours, Leon Bloy."

This letter was followed by an invitation to visit him, which the Maritains accepted with some apprehension, some hesitation.

Writing in the third person about his and Raissa's visit to the humble house on Montmarte, Jacques described the event as follows: "They were going toward a strange beggar who, distrusting all philosophy, cried divine truth from the housetops, and who while being a Catholic integrally obedient, condemned his times and those who have their consolation here below with far more liberty than all the revolutionaries in the world. They were terribly afraid of what they would meet - they had not yet become used to literary men of genius."

On entering the house, their fears simply dissolved. Madame Bloy, her two little daughters, Veronique and Madeleine, and Leon Bloy himself welcomed them with utter kindness. Jacques and Raissa felt within themselves a certain exaltation at the affection and interest shown to them. Of this first meeting with the Bloys, Jacques later wrote: "Once the threshold of this house was crossed all values were dislocated, as though by an invisible switch. One knew, or one guessed, that only one sorrow existed here not to be of the saints. And all the

rest receded into the twilight." They went down from the Bloys, Raissa wrote, "enriched by a unique friendship, so gentle on the part of this violent man that all fear had left us from the day of our first meeting, and our respect became daring and familiar, like that of children who feel that they are loved."

Readings and Reflections on Catholicism and Sanctity Altered Their State of Mind

This first visit with Leon Bloy left the Maritains wondering about the basic principles and the motives of such a life, and their pondering brought them face to face with the question of God.

They read Bloy's book, *Salvation Is From the Jews*. Bloy's ideas about the historic mission of the chosen race, the continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and their union in the Person of Christ came as a revelation to them. This led them to reading the Sacred Scriptures and books on the Christian saints and mystics that Bloy recommended to them. On their own initiative they undertook a study of the history, sources and doctrine of the Catholic Church. Then they read Father Surin's *Spiritual Catechism*. Jacques even began to pray: "My God, if you exist and if you are the truth, make me know it." Following this plea to God, he knelt down and said The Lord's Prayer.

The end of the road was not yet in sight, although little by little the light of truth was filtering through the dark recesses of their souls. Plotinus, Pascal, Peguy, Bergson, Leon Bloy, a visit to Chartres Cathedral - these served as actual graces moving them quietly and peacefully toward the climax of a decision.

But difficulties still remained. How could they adhere to the dogmas of the Church whose content, they were told, being above reason, yet supremely reasonable, can be adhered to only by faith, when this adhesion by faith was a unique form of adhesion unfamiliar to them?

Fortunately, Leon Bloy did not attempt to use apologetical arguments to offset their difficulties. This would not have been successful, considering that their confidence in human reason was still badly shaken. Instead, he simply "placed before them the fact of sanctity." He brought them to know the saints and the mystics. The books on the saints that he bade them to read would not have received a high rating at the Sorbonne. The Maritains humbly agreed to read them, nevertheless, trusting in the good judgment of this holy man.

The Climax of Decision and Baptism: Why Keep God Waiting?

All the foreground of events - Bergson's lectures, the meeting and friendship with Leon Bloy, their reading and reflections - had the cumulative effect of producing in them an altered state of mind. They were now agreed that "none of the objections to Catholicism was decisive," and they were, moreover experiencing "a burning desire for the happiness and holiness of the saints."

In February, 1906, Raissa fell critically ill. Her sickness and convalescence

lasted several weeks. For Jacques the anguish of these weeks provided the occasion for decisive reflection, culminating in the urge to take action. He could no longer resist the voice of his conscience. He now felt ready to accept Catholicism. At first, Raissa did not feel the same urgency. Finally, however, on April 5, they disclosed to Leon Bloy their desire to become Catholics. Raissa's sister, Vera, said she, too, was ready.

A decision of this magnitude for most people represents the overcoming of numerous causes for hesitation. It was no different for the Maritains. They loved the Church in her mystical and saintly life and to that extent were ready to accept her. Certain other aspects, however, at least as they appeared to them, in their yet immature experience of things Catholic, produced in them some repugnances. They were concerned about the apparent mediocrity of the Catholic world, the seeming identity of the Church with the forces of reaction and oppression, her seeming alliance with the rich and the powerful, her remoteness from the people. To enter the Church, they thought, meant separation from the world familiar to them, separation, too from their parents and friends, even rejection by them; it meant giving up some of the common liberties of the world in favor of the spiritual liberty of the saints; it meant even being hated with the hatred of the world for Christ. Besides, Jacques was persuaded that becoming Catholic meant foregoing the intellectual life and the abandonment of philosophy forever. Were such sacrifices warranted? If that is the price to be paid for the sake of truth, so be it! Raissa quotes Jacques as saying, with a kind of harsh determination, "If it has pleased God to hide His truth in a dunghill, that is where we shall go to find it."

Consideration of these drawbacks caused them some agony of soul, lasting about two months. At the end, resigning themselves to God's love, they concluded that God is waiting for them. Why keep Him waiting any longer?

When they notified Leon Bloy that they were ready, he sent the three of them to Father Durantel, a priest stationed at the Basilica of Sacre-Coeur, for instruction. On June 11, 1906, all three were received into the Catholic Church at the Church of Saint John the Evangelist, on Montmartre. Leon Bloy, his wife and their daughter, Veronique, served as godparents. The time of the baptisms was eleven o'clock in the morning. The priest put the question to them: "What do you ask of the Church of God?" They answered: "Faith." Raissa wrote in her memoirs: "An immense peace descended upon us, bringing with it the treasures of Faith. There were no more questions, no more anguish, no more trials - there was only the infinite answer of God."

All three made their First Communion at the Basilica of Sacre-Coeur, August 3rd, the feast of the finding of the relics of Saint Stephen.

A long fruitful and saintly life ensued, during which, following the example of their godfather, Leon Bloy, they brought numerous converts to the peace of the Catholic Faith.

Postscript

A former Jewish college teacher of mine, Emmanuel Chapman, is said to have been averted from jumping off a bridge in Paris, France, in despair of the truth, by the story of the Maritains. Although childless, during their married life, the Maritains, through God's grace, produced a progeny of converts hopefully now sharing with them the heavenly reward of a virtuous life on earth. May God be praised.

Dates

Jacques Maritain: Nov. 18, 1882 - April 28, 1973

Raissa Maritain : Sept. 12, 1883 - Nov. 4, 1960.

Vera Oumansoff (Raissa's sister) : July 2, 1886 - December 31, 1959

MEMORIAL TO MARITAIN²

Jacques Maritain, the world renown philosopher and pre-eminent exponent in our times of a living Thomism, died April 28, 1973 at the mature age of 91. His passing deserves notice on the University of St. Thomas campus for several reasons. In the first place, he became in 1966 an honorary member of the St. Thomas faculty. He was moreover a teacher and personal acquaintance of several faculty members. Thirdly, for many years, students at this school have been made acquainted with many of his ideas through their philosophy courses.

Born in Paris of a Protestant family, November 18, 1882, he was educated at the Lycee Henri IV and at the Sorbonne, where he met Raissa Oumansoff, a young Jewish student, whom he married, and who shared his intellectual interests until her death in 1960. After taking a degree in philosophy in 1905, he went to Heidelberg to study biology under Hans Driesch. Meanwhile, lifted out of their scientific materialism and their despair of the possibility of truth by the lectures of Henri Bergson at the College de France, both Jacques and Raissa converted to Catholicism through their friendship with the French novelist, Leon Bloy.

On his return to France from Germany, Maritain accepted a lectureship in philosophy, first at the College Stanislas, then at the Institute Catholique in Paris. By this time, he had steeped his mind in the writings and thought of St. Thomas Aquinas and was rapidly developing into a philosopher in his own right.

In 1933 Maritain came to Canada to lecture at the Basilian founded Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto. He continued to lecture there periodically in between lecturing engagements at a number of American Universities such as Chicago, Notre Dame, Columbia and Princeton. From 1945 to 1948 Maritain served as French Ambassador to the Vatican. Following the death of his wife, he went in 1961 to live with the Little Brothers of Jesus in Toulouse, France. There he died having himself become a Little Brother in October, 1970.

In his many books and articles, Maritain treated of most of the principle problems of philosophy related to contemporary issues. He never regarded philosophy as a finished work. For him philosophy was a living and growing body of knowledge rooted in truths discovered in the past but concerned chiefly with the present and reaching out even into the future. Philosophy for him, that is to say, must be at one and the same time progressive and inventive and traditional and permanent. Only in this way will it retain its perennial character. Only in this way, too, will it have a substance to which new insights may be assimilated in the course of time. Abstract by its very nature, philosophy must nevertheless keep in constant touch with existent reality and always respect the natural and spontaneous convictions of common sense.

² "Memorial to Maritain." Brezik, Victor C.S.B. *The Cauldron*, vol. 3, no. 18, May 8, 1973.

For Maritain, reality is a many splendored thing. Although a totality in itself, it has many aspects and must be approached by the human mind from various levels of knowledge, extending from the pre-scientific level to the scientific, the philosophical, the theological, right up to the mystical level of knowledge proper to saints. One of Maritain's major achievements was to analyze these various viewpoints in a book entitled: *The Degrees of Knowledge*. The subtitle of this book in the French edition is *Distinguer pour unir* – distinguish in order to unite. This subtitle enunciated a primary aim of Maritain, which was to show how all levels of human knowledge, rational and supra-rational, when properly distinguished, evidently form a unity and a continuity.

It is because of this unity and continuity of human knowledge that Maritain recognized the necessity of joining the life of the intelligence to a life of prayer. The intellectual life soon dries up and proves barren unless it becomes vivified by love, especially the love that is the fruit of prayer.

Knowledge by itself is not enough for man in this life. It consists in drawing essences into the mind where they are separated from their real existence and where consequently essences clamor, as it were to rejoin their existence in things. This incompleteness of our knowledge inevitably arouses love, which impels toward a real union, toward union in the order of existence. Sooner or later, the intellectual life thus avows its poverty and pours itself out in desire. Is not this the well-known experience of Faust, repeated time and again in the life of intellectuals? Man's learning either spills over into the love of God or it falls downward towards Marguerite. Only when the intellectual life goes hand in hand with prayer can it come to fruition in divine love and through love serving as an objective means of knowing in place of concepts reach the heights of mystical wisdom.

Those of us who used to observe Jacques Maritain for an hour's length wrapped in deep prayer before the Blessed Sacrament in the College Church in Toronto can only surmise that this giant among intellectuals was evidently striving to drink in the knowledge at its main source. St. Thomas Aquinas, whom Maritain adopted as his master, is said by his biographer to have acknowledged that he learned more through prayer than through study. Whether Maritain could have said the same about himself is mere speculation.

But whether Maritain achieved deep insights into the nature of things is not mere speculation. His prolific writings on metaphysics, on epistemology, on logic, on moral and social and political philosophy, on the philosophy of history, on art and poetry, on education, and on theology are replete with penetrating intuitions and illuminating perspectives. He did not set his mind to a single problem without leaving the world enriched in knowledge as a result.

How can one take a measure of this great man? Only time will tell. Etienne Gilson who knew him well once remarked that it would take a hundred years to realize what he has accomplished.

HUMILITY AND THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER (A Tribute To Etienne Gilson)

Most people who have heard of Gilson and have read Gilson respect him as the eminent historian of the philosophy of the Middle Ages. Many persons know him even better as an outstanding philosopher in his own right. Still others remember him as the walking example and living proof of the thesis he and Jacques Maritain so ably defended of both the historical fact and the doctrinal validity of Christian Philosophy. Gilson had many times in his studies observed the men of the Middle Ages quote the text from St. Matthew: *unus est enim Magister vester, Christus* and noticed that their submission to its truth somehow influenced their whole philosophical perspective. Not only was Gilson a Christian Philosopher; he was truly a *great* one whose insights were powerful enough to illumine the academic world for generations to come.

There have been and there are today many philosophers, even outstanding philosophers by university standards, who could not justifiably be called Christian Philosophers. Why not? What particular quality of mind or disposition of heart is prerequisite for being a Christian Philosopher? Evidently, philosophy may be denominated Christian only in relation to the Christian faith which admittedly does not enter intrinsically into the definition of philosophy itself, let us say, is not of the essence of philosophy, yet may in some way affect the thinking of the Christian Philosopher when he philosophizes. In other words, Christian Philosophy presupposes that the Christian who philosophizes has already as a Christian accepted the *Magisterium* of Christ.

What this amounts to is an admission on the part of the Christian Philosopher, first, that philosophy itself is not the highest wisdom in the range of human knowledge, and, secondly, that the philosopher as a Christian is subject to a higher teacher. Such submission on the part of the philosopher, who indeed as such represents the ultimate in the order of strictly rational disciplines, demands deference to the intellect of another; it presupposes the exercise of that truly Christian virtue whose name is *humility*.

If what I have said is correct, it reveals a quality of mind and heart that is not usually associated with the character of Etienne Gilson. Gilson may be mainly remembered as the tough and demanding professor, intolerant of opposite opinions, self-righteous and decisive in his views, impatient with mediocrity. I must confess that at times, he impressed me as somewhat forward, even aggressive, in the expression of his views. On occasions, at joint meetings with them, when we, students and faculty in Toronto, addressed questions to Gilson and Maritain together, Gilson was always the first to come forth with an answer while Maritain always quietly deferred to Gilson. In the course of a lecture, Gilson could demolish the merits of a book in question with a kind of sledgehammer humor. He was somewhat critical of text-books. I remember him in one

lecture dismiss one of the old Scholastic text-books with the curt remark: "Reinstadler. That's a crime committed in two volumes."

But is this representative of the true character of Gilson? Undoubtedly, such were sometimes one's first impressions. Nevertheless, hidden beneath the rugged external features and formidable bearing, there was a quality which, to me, defined the authentic nature of this great man. Gilson in my eyes was a genuinely *humble* man, and this reminds me of the inscription he wrote in my copy of his *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. He referred to himself in that inscription as "an old friend." How old was the friendship? I would say that his use of the word "old" in 1955 represented some twenty *years*. In the early thirties, when Gilson was regularly coming to Toronto each year, I was a young Basilian scholastic recently out of the novitiate. One day at that time, when passing on campus a professor of seemingly proud men, I greeted him in sophomoric friendliness with a "good morning," to which I received the joltingly gruff response: "Get off the earth"! In contrast, I am glad to say, such a reply, despite his acknowledged eminence at the school, was never in character with Professor Gilson. Not only would he greet a young seminarian like myself with kindness; he would even entertain questions and render advice. This was his humility showing through in a concrete fashion.

Was Gilson himself conscious of the appropriateness of humility in the face of truth? A passage in his *Unity of Philosophical Experience*,³ which still lingers in my memory, compels me to think so. He wrote: "There is an ethical problem at the root of our philosophical difficulties; for men are most anxious to find truth, but very reluctant to accept it." "Even when truth is there," he continued, "our greatest difficulty still remains; it is for me to bow to it in spite of the fact that it is not exclusively mine, for you to accept it though it cannot be exclusively yours."

We know that the spirit of philosophers since the days of Descartes has been "originality." Every philosopher prides himself in having his own mind about what constitutes the real. The result of this, as Gilson remarked in his *Tercentenary Address at Harvard University*, is that there are now as many philosophies as there are minds. How many philosophers have there been in modern times who have openly identified themselves with a philosophical tradition? To acknowledge a master in philosophy, it seems to them, is to cease claiming to be original; it is, for them, to give up the attempt to rebuild philosophy by oneself on a new foundation in the spirit of Descartes and of Kant. But in actual fact, is it not rather to refuse to bow to already discovered truth that is "not exclusively mine" and that "cannot be exclusively yours"?

No one understood this and experienced it more poignantly than Gilson. At age seventy-five, he published his book *The Philosopher and Theology* in which he reflected somewhat on his own philosophical career. With no desire to undo what he had done, he nevertheless disclosed his interior state of mind. For years Gilson had been recognized in the academic world as a Christian Philosopher, as

³ Chap. 3, p. 61.

an adherent to a philosophical tradition, which goes under the name of Thomism. What does such identification cost a philosopher in terms of public acceptance? There is the typical solitude of a personal and deeper life of the mind, which is the common lot of philosophers. The Christian Philosopher, to be sure, experiences this solitude together with other philosophers. But for him there is something more. As Gilson wrote: "he who philosophizes as a Christian feels himself still more hopelessly isolated, especially in the middle of this twentieth well understood that since a Christian cannot become "a philosopher like others," "other philosophers will agree to keep him out of their company." This exclusion can reasonably be expected from non-Christians. But the agony of solitude is deepened when one is ostracized even by other Christians who, as Gilson says, "prefer to keep their philosophical thinking free from all contact with religion." This latter attitude of mind Gilson found difficult to grasp, that is, "how a Christian can ever philosophize as if he were not a Christian."⁴

Seeing that Gilson well realized the price that must be paid to be identified as a Christian Philosopher and even a Thomist, why did he choose this way of philosophizing within an intellectual and religious tradition, mentally walking a fine line of distinction between philosophy and theology not recognized by all? Certainly, he must have thought that this is the truer and more fruitful way to philosophize. Truer, because philosophizing within the faith enjoys safeguards from error provided by faith itself; more fruitful, because, using a phrase of Gilson, "a mutual exchange of benefits" results for both reason and faith.⁵ That other ways of philosophizing lie open to those who so choose, as also to Christians, Gilson frankly admitted. But in accord with Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, he was convinced that the way of the Christian Philosopher is "a better one."⁶ The model of the Christian Philosopher for Gilson was Thomas Aquinas. Why did he favor St. Thomas? First, he says, because his teaching does not exclude the teaching of other Doctors of the Church but rather includes the truth of them all. Hence the Thomist, Gilson claimed, feels free to welcome all truth from whatever source it may come. His second reason was that "the Church has appointed him as her own Common Doctor and prescribes that he be followed wherever—his teaching coincides with her authentic doctrine."⁷

From the sheer rationalist perspective in philosophy which has been dominant in the western world for centuries now, such a view of philosophy and of philosophizing hardly satisfies the concept of philosophy as a pure work of reason impervious to any religious influence. Why would an eminent thinker like Etienne Gilson spurn the greater acclaim, which could probably have been his on the secular campuses of the academic world in favor of adopting and boldly defending the authenticity of Christian philosophy? Apart from the fact

⁴ *ibid.* p. 9.

⁵ *The Philosopher and Theology*, p. 190.

⁶ *ibid.* pp. 198 and 192.

⁷ *ibid.* p. 208.

that he thought he was right, the ultimate reason, it seems to me, is that his Christian faith was strong and his humility profound.

One last personal incident corroborates this conviction in my mind. I once asked Gilson to address an Adult Education group on a Sunday afternoon in Brennan Hall at St. Michael's in Toronto. The topic he chose was "The Breakdown of Morals and Christian Education." Prior to the lecture, he submitted the manuscript to me for examination. This gesture itself is typical of his humility. The lecture so impressed me that I asked Gilson to permit us to publish it. He readily consented to let me have it following the meeting. When I asked for the manuscript after the lecture, however, he bluntly refused to give it to me on the grounds that it could not be published without a preface which he did not have time to write. I was dealing here with the tough veneer by which Gilson was known. Glumly, I accepted his refusal. But Gilson's inner humility worked in my favor. Two days later, Gilson personally came and slipped the manuscript with the attached preface under my office door.

When I read the preface, my eyes were attracted to Gilson's brief definition of Christian education which, I think, is a gem and which seems to explain the motivation behind his own long and fruitful career. This is Gilson's definition: "By Christian education, we mean the kind of education which is given in schools in which the whole life of both teachers and pupils is informed by the love of Christ."

For Gilson, the Christian Philosopher, what would this definition precisely signify in terms of philosophy? Considered not in its essence but existentially in the concrete manner in which Gilson himself philosophized, I take it that for him philosophy became an exercise actually super-elevated into a love of that integral wisdom found incarnate in Christ; which means that philosophy as an object of interest for him could only be Christian Philosophy. In this existential state, however, and in this manner of philosophizing, philosophy presupposes faith on the part of the philosopher, no doubt also courage in these contentious times, and certainly humility, qualities which Gilson manifestly possessed.

ETIENNE GILSON

Upon his arrival in the United States in 1926 to deliver a course of lectures at the University of Virginia and afterwards to join the staff of Harvard University, little did Etienne Gilson realize or anticipate his future influence on higher learning in America. Today, scores of professors in American Colleges and Universities, including our own, are imparting to their students ideas which first came to them from the lectures or the writings of Gilson.

His lectures at Virginia and Harvard alone, however, do not fully account for his influence on this continent. It derives more directly from a happy combination of circumstances preceding and attending his lectureship at Harvard.

Long before coming to America, Gilson had been aroused to an interest in the thought of the Middle Ages. Strange to say, this interest was incited by a study of Descartes whom he read during the days of his military service in 1902. The reading of Descartes was little short of a revelation. But more than that, it provided a fertile field of study for a doctoral thesis.

The thesis finally presented to the Sorbonne in 1913 for the degree of *Docteur ès Lettres* bore the title: *La Libertè Chez Descartes Et La Thèologie*. In the course of his studies, Gilson soon realized, however, that Descartes could not be properly evaluated in isolation from his predecessors. It was necessary to estimate the influence of scholasticism in the formation of Cartesian thought. Accordingly, Gilson prepared in conjunction with his thesis an *Index scolastico - cartésien* which was presented as a *petit thèse*.

Thus Decartes became the door through which Gilson entered the Middle-Ages. At the time, despite the works of Renan on Averroism and of De Remusat on Abelard, plus the pioneering efforts of scholars like Baeumker, Mandonnet, Grabmann, Mercier and others, the middle ages still suffered the general discredit unjustly heaped upon it by the humanist Renaissance. Happily, Gilson was not discouraged at the threshold but with keen historical insight for which he is today acclaimed, penetrated into the intimate recesses of medieval thought and with a scholarly deftness has over the years succeeded in withdrawing considerably the veil which for centuries has kept the intense intellectual life of the schoolmen in darkness.

The study of medieval thought led Gilson to such thinkers as St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Augustine, Avicenna and Duns Scotus. By 1928, he had written books or articles on all these men, besides having published a short history of medieval philosophy. (A longer and even more scholarly history by Gilson has just appeared on the market).⁸ At the time, he had already held the Professorship in Medieval Philosophy at the Sorbonne for some years. In

⁸ I am assuming that by 1955, the date of this article, Gilson had published two histories of medieval philosophy: *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale?* in 1932 and I'm not sure to which other work Father Brezik is referring.

academic circles he was known also as the founder and director of *Archives d' Histoire Doctrinale et Lettraire du Moyen Âge* (with R. P. G. Thery), some 16 volumes of which have appeared since 1925, and of *Etudes de Philosophie Médiévale*, of which some 35 volumes have been published since 1921.

These are all indications of Gilson's ambition to obtain a complete picture of the life and thought and culture of the Middle Ages. Even for the sake of recorded history, this would be valuable. But more valuable still is the deeper understanding of present times, which would accrue from a knowledge of a medieval past where the roots of our Western Christian Culture lie buried.

A culture that has forgotten its origins, and the principles which inspired it, is a dying culture, if it is not already dead. Survival demands that the truths, which once vivified it be restored to the consciousness of the people. First, however, those truths must be rediscovered in the past when the culture enjoyed its maximum vitality. For our Christian culture, this period of vitality lies somewhere in the Middle-Ages.

When Gilson came to Toronto in the Spring of 1927 to deliver some special lectures at the invitation of St. Michael's College, one of the four federated colleges in the University of Toronto, he found there a group of men like Father Carr, McCorkell, Phelan and others who were more than sympathetic toward his interest in the Middle-Ages. By their prompting, St. Michael's College had already in previous years brought Msgr. Leon Noel and Professor Maurice de Wulf from Louvain as special lecturers. Through discussion, this mutual interest with Gilson heightened until out of it an idea was born. Why not establish on this continent an institute of higher learning dedicated to the study of the Middle-Ages in all the various aspects of the Christian culture which flourished in those times?

The idea took hold in the Fall of 1929, the Institute of Medieval Studies became an established fact, with the temporary quarters at 10 Elmsley Place on campus of St. Michael's College. From the outset, Gilson assumed the office of Director of Studies and occupied the chair in Medieval Philosophy, both of which positions he retains to the present day. Except during the war, he crossed the ocean from France each year to spend the Fall term at the Institute. Since 1952 he has taken up permanent residence in Toronto.

From this center of his activities, the influence of Etienne Gilson has become nation-wide and even world-wide. Here over the years, he has lectured to, held consultation with and guided the studies of a long succession of students, many of whom are today handing on to others the benefits of his teaching in lecture halls across America. On this continent, besides Toronto, he has also lectured on occasion at numerous other colleges and universities in the United States and Canada and from these lectures, too, his influence has been felt. Two years ago, he came to Houston to deliver a lecture under the auspices of our own University of St. Thomas.

MARITAIN AND GILSON ON THE QUESTION OF A LIVING THOMISM¹

On initial analysis, the phrase "Living Thomism" presents not one problem but two. How is one to understand the term "living" in this context? Does this imply some sort of continuity of doctrine as well as new additions, new applications to changing historical and cultural developments? The term "Thomism" is no less clear. Does the term refer to the writings of St. Thomas himself or only to a body of doctrine inspired by the writings of St. Thomas and held by those who profess to follow the teaching of St. Thomas? Add to this the question whether "Thomism" designates a philosophy standing apart from theology or simply the theology of St. Thomas together with its philosophical content?

I am going to explore these questions with particular reference to the views of Maritain and Gilson. Does "Living Thomism" have a common meaning for them both? This question is provoked by the charge that Gilson repudiates the Thomist tradition whereas Maritain drew his understanding of St. Thomas from the classical Thomist commentators. In his book *From Unity to Pluralism*,² Father Gerald McCool, S.J., distinguishes their teaching in terms of a systematic pluralism within Thomism, as though their approaches to the doctrine of St. Thomas divides them as representatives of opposed versions or interpretations of the teaching of Aquinas. I propose to consider their views with respect to the question of a living Thomism. The expression would seem to bear special significance for those who regard the teaching of the Angelic Doctor as having contemporary value beyond mere historical interest. I have made some references to myself simply to give the question a more familiar setting.

I

At the time I first enrolled as a student at the University of Toronto, Etienne Gilson was already the Director of Studies at the fledgling Institute of Mediaeval Studies founded in 1929 at St. Michael's College. Jacques Maritain came to lecture there at the end of 1932 at the recommendation of Gilson. The two philosophers were recognized even then as two outstanding Thomists of this century.

I take the word "Thomist" to refer to those who profess to follow the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas. Accordingly, I would not call St. Thomas himself a Thomist. His teaching is the doctrinal source of the school of Thomists. In this respect, however, as the original deposit of doctrine, the teaching of St.

¹ Brezik, Victor B., C.S.B. "Maritain and Gilson on the Question of a Living Thomism." *Thomistic Papers VI*. ed. John F. X. Knasas. (Houston, TX: Center For Thomistic Studies, 1994). pp. 1-28.

² Gerald A. McCool, S.J., *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992).

Thomas is usually included under the broad name of Thomism.

During the 1930's and 1940's, while I was a student and later a young teacher in Toronto, the faculty as well as the students were clearly perceptive of the different approaches and presentations of the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas in the lectures of these two Thomist professors. Each in his own characteristic way and style drew his teaching principally from the texts of the Angelic Doctor, astounding their listeners with the relevance and vitality this thirteenth-century teaching still possessed. It was evident that a doctrine that could spark the intellectual energy of two creative minds like those of Gilson and Maritain gave witness thereby to its own intelligible richness.

Differences between the Thomism of Maritain and the Thomism of Gilson were accounted for by some as differences between Gilson the historian and Maritain the metaphysician. At that date, Gilson was widely recognized for his outstanding contributions to the history of medieval philosophy. His metaphysical interests were not yet generally known. Maritain, on the other hand, early in his career was identified as a speculative thinker rather than as an historian.

Thus they represented two distinct approaches to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas.³ One of these has been called "the historical-textual approach." It consists of reading carefully the works of St. Thomas in the best critical editions, studying his teaching in its historical setting, and endeavoring to determine its precise meaning. This describes more or less accurately the method of approach taken by Gilson. The second approach to the thought of Aquinas consists in rethinking this rich body of doctrine in relation to constantly changing contemporary problems and thought-patterns and their solutions. Maritain seems to have adopted this second approach to a large extent. His writings and lectures were consistently addressed to working out present problems in the light of Thomistic thought.

Both of these approaches are indispensable for giving the teaching of St. Thomas a continuing value. For how could one re-think Aquinas' thought faithfully and authentically without the discipline of a prior historical-textual study? At the same time, how could one avoid reducing his doctrine to a museum-piece, without re-thinking it with reference to the vicissitudes of history and to cultural changes?

Despite the dissimilitude in their presentation of Thomism, emphasized not without some justice by Father McCool, these two Thomists were in accord in subscribing to the notion of a "Living Thomism" as they were in accord in their general understanding of the essential nature of Thomism. No more than Maritain, did Gilson regard the teaching of St. Thomas as dated by the thirteenth century. The whole effort of their teaching and writing careers was clearly aimed at making St. Thomas come alive for their contemporaries in the twentieth century.

³ See Vernon J. Bourke, "The New Center and The Intellectualism of St. Thomas," in *One Hundred Years of Thomism*, ed. Victor B. Brezik, C.S.B. (Houston: University of St. Thomas), 1981, p. 169.

II

This aim, on Maritain's part, already evident from his writings prior to his first visit to this continent, was reaffirmed during this initial visit to Toronto. Maritain was fifty years of age at this time. As a freshman at St. Michael's College, I was privileged to attend his very first lecture in Toronto, given in the old study hall on Bay Street, the largest classroom at the College at that time. I still have in my possession a mimeographed copy of the English translation of that first lecture. In presenting his views, I intend to draw upon this lecture.

In his introductory remarks, Maritain explained his reason for braving the storm at sea to come to America. Europe, he declared, had years ago brought the Christian faith to these shores. The time was approaching, he thought, when America would have to bring the faith back to Europe. The thinking of the new world, he said, will have a decisive influence on the future and on the culture of the mind. That is why he crossed the ocean, for the philosophy of St. Thomas offers salvation for the intelligence.

Shortly before his voyage to America, Maritain had written his little treatise *Sept lecons sur l'etre*, translated later into English under the title: *A Preface to Metaphysics*.⁴ The substance of this first lecture in Toronto was taken from the First Lecture of this small book.⁵ In his Toronto lecture, Maritain proclaimed his support for "a living Thomism, not an archaeological Thomism." We must, of course, study Thomism historically, he said, in order to know what it was and what it is now. Yet we must think of it not only historically but in connection with contemporary problems.

For this reason, Thomists, he observed, have a twofold obligation to fulfill. First, to defend the stability and permanence of traditional thought against the individualism of modern thought and the mistaken conception of progress, which places undue confidence in novelty simply because it is novelty. The second Thomist obligation is to defend the vitality and development of traditional thought against the immobilism and rigidity of some scholastics. The wisdom of St. Thomas, Maritain affirmed, is always young. It renews its youth, constantly renovates and rejuvenates itself. It is a growing body. In short, Thomism must be both traditionalist and progressive, innovative.

Maritain distinguishes between two types of progress. The first is by substitution or successive replacement and corresponds to progress in science⁶

⁴ Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1948). Reprinted as A Mentor Omega Book, (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, 1962).

⁵ In a subsequent work, Maritain recommended that the First Lecture of *Sept lecons sur L'etre* (*A Preface To Metaphysics*) and *The Degrees of Knowledge* be consulted "concerning the way in which I think we ought to conceive the effective progress of philosophy." Jacques Maritain, *Science and Wisdom* trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Scribner's, 1940), p. 81, note 1.

⁶ See an exemplification of the progress of science by substitution in Gilson's address to the 1952 Annual Meeting of The American Catholic Philosophical Association entitled: "Science, Philosophy, and Religious Wisdom," in Anton C. Pegis, ed., *A Gilson Reader* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Image Book,

where the "problem aspect" predominates. The second is progress by deepening insight and corresponds to wisdom where the "mystery aspect" predominates. This second type is meant to define and locate the kind of progress he envisioned for Thomism.

The work facing modern Thomists, according to Maritain, is similar to the task which confronted St. Thomas in the thirteenth century. St. Thomas had to purify the stream of Christian thought coming down from St. Augustine, scrape off, as it were, the rust of foreign accretions, so that it might flow on with pure waters. It was not easy. Rigid traditionalists stood in the way, charging him with "novelties." Gilson, Maritain remarked in his lecture, speaks of "hard-boiled theologians." Similar obstacles exist today. Thomists must overcome contemporary philosophical "standpatters," Maritain urged, who swear by their textbook learning and oppose all "innovation," that is, they oppose honest and enlightened efforts at improvement and development.

The growth of Thomism, for Maritain, must be organic, resembling that of a child which, growing into the adult state, undergoes change and develops, yet remains the same person throughout. The future here grows out of the past and is filled with all that the past has found good and true. "Real development," Chesterton wrote (quoted by Maritain in his lecture), "is not leaving things behind, as on a road, but drawing life from them as from a root."⁷ As an organism, Thomism can assimilate, as every living organism assimilates, the material of its environment. This entails full contact of Thomists with non-Thomists. Such progress, Maritain believed, does not involve change of substance but of mode. "Old truths in new dress, new forms of presentation, new perspectives on the same landscape." As Maritain conceived the changing *modes* of philosophizing, the concepts themselves do not change. The same, identical concept may be rediscovered by a different *mode*, a different approach, from a different angle or point of view. Such differences of *mode* inevitably involve differences of expression, language, and vocabulary.

III

What was Gilson's reaction to these views of Maritain? To my knowledge, there was no public response. In successive visits to Toronto, Gilson carried on his lectures in his usual manner. On occasions, during these years, when Maritain and Gilson were in Toronto at the same time, their relations were obviously cordial and their friendship warm. One could even detect in them a kind of mutual admiration. On one occasion, when addressing a group on campus, Gilson remarked that it would take a hundred years to measure the achievement of Jacques Maritain. At times when they jointly spoke to informal gatherings of faculty and students, Maritain was always deferential to Gilson.

1957), pp. 213-216.

⁷ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), Chap. 1, p. 10.

Much later, in 1964, Gilson's little book entitled *The Spirit of Thomism* appeared.⁸ It is of interest to note that Chapter IV of this book bears as its title the very phrase used by Maritain in his first lecture in Toronto, namely, "A Living Thomism."

In this chapter on a living Thomism, Gilson considered what there is to expect regarding the future of Thomism. He discerned a number of obstacles on its road to success. The primary obstacle is "its religious inspiration." This obstacle is so formidable as to have prompted some Thomists to attempt a complete separation of Thomistic philosophy from Thomistic theology. While it is true that St. Thomas himself established a clear-cut distinction between reason and faith, philosophy and theology, he did not keep them apart. How is one to overcome this obstacle and satisfy such rationalist-minded Thomists? Gilson offers a simple answer: teach Thomism just as it is. To remain faithful to Thomism, he claims, there is no other choice. We must observe the advice of Thomas Aquinas: follow the guidance of natural reason and leave the rest to God.

A more insurmountable obstacle, Gilson thinks, is a purely philosophical one. In an age in which systems of idealism prevail, many philosophers are likely to be turned against Thomism because it professes realism. The philosophy of St. Thomas is a philosophy of being, understood in terms of "the act in virtue of which being is, and is being, namely that of *esse*."⁹ Although it leads to no system, this principle inserts light and order into the manifold of reality. The first thing necessary, then, to rejuvenate Thomism is to restore the right interpretation of the first principle. Immediately following from this first characteristic of a living Thomism is a second: since in beings *to be* comes first and to be is an act, the real world is "not made up of static essences but of acting, operating and causing beings."¹⁰

The third and most serious obstacle to the survival of Thomism is, according to Gilson, the actual failure of most Thomists to provide proofs of its continuing vitality. Much has been done, he admits, to keep Thomism alive, the best thing, perhaps, being the effort of many to clarify the first principles of Thomism. But the knowledge of first principles, although its higher part, is not the whole of a philosophy. The brunt of the objection is that scholasticism has long tended to be but a more or less repetitious kind of school teaching, short on producing new ideas and backward in explaining rationally the modern world. Putting it bluntly, the real weakness of modern scholasticism has been its "sterility." It is not the principles themselves that are to blame. They are perfectly sound. The blame must be placed on the neglect of Thomists to put the principles to good use. As St. Thomas himself so successfully applied sound principles to the world in which he lived, Thomists today have only to turn their

⁸ Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Thomism* (New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1964). Reprinted, New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1966.

⁹ *The Spirit of Thomism*, Harper Torchbooks, p. 88.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

light on the world of things around them to find plenty to see and say. Briefly, Thomism needs to be creative, recognizing, however, that the present world: scientific, political, social and economical, has ceased to be the world familiar to St. Thomas. Accordingly, a living Thomism, says Gilson, should in the light of the permanently valid principles of the Thomistic metaphysics of being, devote itself to the urgent task of criticizing, interpreting and ordering the mountain of material that has been piling up since the time of St. Thomas.

As I read this, what Gilson seems to be proposing is that it is not enough merely to learn philosophy; it is necessary actively to philosophize and to do so in the context of the present world. Modern Thomists must be contemporary in their thinking after the manner in which St. Thomas, using principles drawn from Aristotle, was contemporary in his day.

I do not recognize anything in these views of Gilson, if properly understood, that is in open discord with the stated views of Maritain. In fact, as an example among Thomists who had already demonstrated the creative possibilities that lie open to Thomism, Gilson singled out his colleague, Jacques Maritain.

In the fields of the philosophy of nature, of political economy and the so-called 'human sciences,' the example of Jacques Maritain clearly shows how it is still possible today to renovate ancient concepts and to open new fields of investigation. The philosophy of art, illustrated by the same philosopher, clearly shows that in certain cases Thomism is bound to create if it is still to live. For indeed Thomas himself has said precious little, if anything, about the fine arts.¹¹

Incidentally, Father McCool states that Gilson "saw little value in Maritain's Thomistic philosophy of nature."¹² Can this statement be fully reconciled with the above quotation?

In a note to this same Chapter IV in *The Spirit of Thomism* (note 10, p. 124), Gilson adds:

Jacques Maritain's contribution to the development of a moral philosophy is authentically Thomist in its inspiration and yet resolutely modern in its way of handling problems. It represents a deeply original part of his work.

In connection with Gilson's approval here of Maritain's style of exemplifying a living Thomism, one should not forget Gilson's encomium of

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹² *From Unity to Pluralism*, p. 194.

Maritain in Gilson's *The Philosopher and Theology*.¹³ There he refers to Maritain as "the only Thomist in contemporary France whose thought was lofty, bold, and creative, capable of meeting the most urgent problems." Gilson adds: "It is not necessary to read many pages from Jacques Maritain to realize that one is dealing with one of the best French writers of our time."

For Gilson a right understanding of the meaning of *being* is the very key to Thomistic metaphysics.¹⁴ On this critical point, in his fifth edition of *Le Thomisme*, Gilson, after a series of quotations from Maritain's *A Preface to Metaphysics*, concludes with the following words of endorsement: "It could hardly be put better."¹⁵ In the same work (p. 463, note 37), Gilson refers to Maritain as "one of St. Thomas's most profound interpreters."

These tributes of Gilson to Maritain as a fellow Thomist do not read like the remarks one would make of an opponent whose conception of Christian philosophy, one thinks, "could not be," in the words of Father McCool, "an authentic interpretation of St. Thomas' own thought."¹⁶ Not only are these tributes an endorsement of the living Thomism of one whose thought is "lofty, bold, and creative"; they also indicate a congeniality of purpose between the two Thomist philosophers.

IV

Yet one must not rush hastily to conclusions. There are enough points of difference to cause one to question whether the *Living Thomism* of Gilson and the *Living Thomism* of Maritain are in full accord. As to the need for an historical study of Thomism, the revival of a correct interpretation of metaphysical principles, the affirmation of St. Thomas' realism, the stress on the primacy of *esse* in the Thomist concept of being, the urgency for innovation and creativity, the necessity of contact with contemporary thought, the recognition of a certain neglect among Thomists, these are points on which their views of a living Thomism agree or at least can be adjusted. But to harmonize their views on questions such as the relations of philosophy and theology, the autonomy of philosophy, the role of a Thomistic tradition and the way to teach Thomism may not be as easy.

Both Maritain and Gilson firmly adhered to the concept of Christian

¹³ Etienne Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology*, trans. by Cecile Gilson (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 201, 202. In his survey elsewhere of French and Italian philosophy, Gilson declared that "French neo-Thomism bore its most precious fruit in the work of Jacques Maritain." Etienne Gilson, Thomas Langan, Armand A. Maurer, C.S.B., *Recent Philosophy Hegel to the Present* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 352. On Gilson's account of Maritain, see pp. 352-354 and note 50, p. 789.

¹⁴ Etienne Gilson, "What Is Christian Philosophy?" in *A Gilson Reader*, Cf. Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by L. K. Shook, C.S.B. (New York: Random House, 1956), p. vii: "the notion of the act of being (*esse*) . . . is the very core of the Thomistic interpretation of reality."

¹⁵ *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 365.

¹⁶ *From Unity to Pluralism*, p. 194.

Philosophy and stood together in its defense during the controversy that developed around it and which in a subdued manner survives to this day. Much has been written on this question of Christian Philosophy, which excuses me from going into detail. My interest here is only to note that in the midst of the debate, Maritain and Gilson remained partners on the same side. Gilson thought he had adequately established the fact of Christian Philosophy as well as exemplified its variations in his Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen, published in English under the title of *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*.¹⁷

Already at that time in 1931 and 1932, Gilson pointed out that "the concept does not correspond to any simple essence susceptible of abstract definition." It corresponds "much rather to a concrete historical reality as something calling for description." Such a philosophy, he said, while keeping the two orders formally distinct, nevertheless regards Christian revelation "as an indispensable auxiliary to reason."¹⁸

Maritain, in his turn, explained the nature of Christian philosophy by distinguishing philosophy, considered abstractly in its essence and as specified by an object naturally knowable to reason, from philosophy taken concretely and considered in a certain state as it exists in the human soul, "under conditions of performance, of existence and of life."¹⁹ Philosophy, he contended, is Christian only in the latter sense, considered in the order of exercise, not in the order of specification (except practical philosophy), that is, not as an essence.

When Gilson says²⁰ that scholastic philosophy is not distinguished from other philosophies by its essence but rather as the best way of philosophizing, he is invoking much the same distinction between the order of specification and the order of exercise made by Maritain. What is this best way of philosophizing? It is the way recommended by Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, namely, the way of philosophizing of those "who to the study of philosophy unite obedience to the Christian faith."²¹ The result of such philosophizing turns out a product with identifiable differences from non-Christian philosophies, yet at the same time differing individually among those who use this method of philosophizing. Gilson made this clear in his individual studies of the Christian philosophies of St. Augustine, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas and Duns

¹⁷ Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (Gifford Lectures 1931-1932), trans. by A. H. C. Downes (New York: Scribner's, 1936).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37 (All three quotations).

¹⁹ *Science and Wisdom*, p. 81. For Maritain's views on Christian Philosophy, see also his *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, trans. by Edward H. Flannery (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955). In the second volume of the French edition (p. 290) of *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, in reference to Maritain's *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, Gilson wrote: "I may say, then, that Christian philosophy is an objectively observable reality for history alone, and that its existence is positively verifiable by history alone, but that once its existence has been thus established its notion may be analyzed in itself. This ought to be done as Mr. J. Maritain has done it; I am in fact in complete agreement with him." Quoted from *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, p. xi.

²⁰ Etienne Gilson, "Historical Research and the Future of Scholasticism," *The Modern Schoolman*, 29 (1957), 1-10. Reprinted in *A Gilson Reader*, p. 165.

²¹ "What Is Christian Philosophy?" in *A Gilson Reader*, p. 186.

Scotus.

Gilson and Maritain heartily concurred with Pope Leo's Encyclical that "among the Scholastic Doctors, the chief and master of all, towers Thomas Aquinas."²² Like Thomas, their common master in philosophy, Gilson and Maritain philosophized keeping their minds turned toward their Christian faith. That this way of philosophizing confuses philosophy with theology, they mutually disclaimed. At the same time, they equally rejected any complete separation of philosophy and theology. It is, nevertheless, precisely with regard to the relation of philosophy to theology that differences in their views of a living Thomism begin to show.

Gilson's historical studies of medieval thought led him to two conclusions about philosophy in the Middle Ages. The first is that "research in medieval thought, which began by being concerned with the philosophies of the middle ages, is tending more and more to restore these philosophies within the theologies which contain them"²³ A second conclusion taught by this historical research is that "the more we integrate the philosophies of the middle ages within their theological context, the more their originality becomes apparent."²⁴ Gilson conceives other ways of expressing this conclusion. For example, "it is while serving theology that philosophical thought became creative." Again, "the more a master was a great theologian, the more he was a great philosopher." In short, it is precisely to its role as an instrument of theology that medieval philosophy owes its "fecundity."²⁵

This second conclusion, in Gilson's view, applies to the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas as much, if not even more, as it applies to the philosophies of other medieval theologians. It is wrong to think that Aquinas, or any other medieval theologian for that matter, founded his theology on any philosophy, even the philosophy of Aristotle.²⁶ What he did was to make use of philosophy within the light of faith with the result that philosophy came forth transformed. The metaphysics of St. Thomas is his own metaphysics and to identify his metaphysics with the Aristotelian metaphysics of being is to have an improper understanding of it. His metaphysics is a new metaphysics, which shares in the permanence of the light of faith within which it was born.²⁷

What is most important about a metaphysics, Gilson thinks, is its conception of the first principles. This is precisely what gives the metaphysics of St. Thomas the right to be the doctrinal norm in Christian philosophy. His metaphysics is based on a conception of these principles that not only agrees

²² Etienne Gilson, ed., *The Church Speaks to the Modern World, The Social Teachings of Leo XIII* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1954), p. 43. Also Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas Aquinas, Angel of the Schools*, J. F. Scanlan (London: Sheed and Ward, 1942), p. 204.

²³ *A Gilson Reader*, p. 159, 160.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

perfectly with Sacred Scripture but at the same time "assigns to metaphysics the deepest interpretation of the notion of being ever offered by any philosophy."²⁸ A strong statement indeed. Does this mean that for Gilson the history of metaphysics stops at St. Thomas Aquinas? In other words, can there be any further deepening of the notion of being than that found in the doctrine of St. Thomas? Such a possibility is not entirely ruled out. Gilson himself simply does not pretend to see that far into the future.²⁹

What, then, can be said about the progress of Thomism as a Christian philosophy? Gilson allows that its progress may be unending, on the condition that it remains faithful to the truth of its principles. New discoveries made in any order of knowledge will provide occasions for its fecundity to show itself. "Every progress whatever can be for it an occasion of progress."³⁰ Long reflection on the truth of St. Thomas' metaphysics made Gilson see it as a light capable of absorbing every other light. The Thomistic notion of *esse* (to be), he claimed, is ultimate by its very nature." It lays the foundation of metaphysical knowledge for all time."³¹

Would Maritain himself concur with these views of Gilson? In his *Preface to Metaphysics*,³² writing of the relation between philosophy and theology, Maritain pointed out that, since it is based on the *Word* of God, theology must obviously be permanent. As a science rooted in the faith, theology does develop and progress, not however by successive substitutions, rather by more intimate penetration into its subject matter. What is more, in its development, theology uses philosophy as a means and instrument, with the result that philosophy, too, in its own fashion must also be permanent.

This permanence, Maritain thinks, has to be considered by Thomists in their work of renewing the doctrine of St. Thomas. The work must be carried on "without detriment to the fixity of principles," since the Thomistic philosophy is "securely based on true principles."³³ When Gilson described Christian philosophy as "the unfolding of a progress from a truth itself not susceptible of progress,"³⁴ was he saying something out for harmony with Maritain?

V

Maritain and Gilson both trace the attempt to separate philosophy from theology to the Averroist movement active at the time of St. Thomas.³⁵ Its revival

²⁸ *The Philosopher and Theology*, p. 234.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

³² *A Preface to Metaphysics*, p. 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁴ *The Philosopher and Theology*, p. 233.

³⁵ *Science and Wisdom*, p. 28; *A Gilson Reader*, p. 157. Gilson states that "philosophism lies at the bottom of Averroism, as indeed it lies at the bottom of the positions of Averroes himself." *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 408. See also his *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Scribner's, 1938), Chap. 2.

in the sixteenth century turned out to be a preparation for a more thorough seventeenth century revolution during which Descartes separated philosophical wisdom from theological wisdom. Henceforth, philosophy was no longer to play a ministerial role with respect to theology. It now declared its full autonomy as a separated discipline.

How did Gilson and Maritain respond to this historical development? It is here especially that there appears to be some parting of the ways. Insofar as the Cartesian revolution constituted an effort to effect a complete break between philosophy and theology, Gilson and Maritain were equally and staunchly opposed to it. Neither of them envisioned Thomism as a "separated philosophy"³⁶ or a "pure philosophy"³⁷ where philosophy and faith would be kept entirely apart in the Cartesian manner. They both agreed that St. Thomas did not develop philosophy as a distinct discipline standing outside theology. He developed it only within his theology and as an instrument of that theology. The difference is that Gilson defended this inseparable state of Thomistic philosophy as a permanent condition, since that is the state in which St. Thomas left it,³⁸ whereas Maritain did not. Maritain did not conceive its position of subservience to theology among medieval theologians as the normal and natural state for philosophy. In this respect, he viewed the autonomy of the sciences and of philosophy in post-Cartesian times as a "precious gain."³⁹

Gilson could not quite see it this way. To be a Thomist for Gilson and to learn Thomism, it is necessary to read the theology of St. Thomas and in doing so, imbibe the philosophy which it employs and contains. So intimate is the relationship of this philosophy to the theology which gave it birth and to which it owes its originality, that the deep meaning of its thought as entirely engaged in the service of the faith, will never be fully understood by someone who does not possess the Christian faith.⁴⁰ In fact, Gilson says, "the most original notions and

³⁶ *Science and Wisdom*, p. 82.

³⁷ *History Of Christian Philosophy In The Middle Ages*, p. 542; *A Gilson Reader*, p. 172.

³⁸ To the question: "In what sense may one speak of a philosophy of St. Thomas," Gilson offers two possibilities. First, Thomistic philosophy may be taken as a complete exposition of the philosophical notions found in the works of St. Thomas, including materials borrowed from his predecessors, and elaborated into a doctrinal synthesis. There have been instances of such expositions of Thomistic philosophy. Secondly, Thomistic philosophy may refer to a synthesis of notions present in St. Thomas' collected works which are truly his own notions, distinct from those of his predecessors. Gilson's interest was to show in what such an original Thomistic philosophy consists. And since, as Gilson thought, the most original aspects of St. Thomas' philosophy are in general lodged within his theological works, it would seem natural in setting forth his philosophy to observe the order of his theology. To extract these philosophical notions from their theological setting in an attempt to reconstruct them according to some sort of philosophical order would be to presume that perhaps St. Thomas himself meant to set up a philosophy with purely philosophical ends. Not only is there risk of altering the nature of his philosophy in such an attempt to set it free of its theological locus; the attempt is not in the least necessary. According to Gilson, it is not at all impossible to present the philosophy of St. Thomas in the order of his theology without thereby confusing reason with faith. The fact is that St. Thomas himself has done it and the difficulties of doing it after him disappear with a clear understanding of how he understood theology. See: *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 7-9.

³⁹ *Science and Wisdom*, p. 33.

⁴⁰ *The Philosopher and Theology*, p. 210.

the deepest, in the doctrine of Saint Thomas reveal themselves only to him who reads it as a theologian.⁴¹ Since this is the case, Gilson proposes some interesting, though unusual, suggestions regarding the teaching of Thomist philosophy to Catholic students. "If you want to teach your students both metaphysics and ethics, teach them straight theology."⁴² Why deceive oneself in thinking that by taking theology out of the *Summa* and putting in another book, one is setting things in order by thus sorting out what is philosophy and what is theology as if the *Summa* were a mixture of both? The result can only be an adulterated philosophy, on the one hand, and an adulterated theology, on the other. The truth is that the *Summa* is not a mixture of philosophy and theology; rather, by being put at the service of faith in the *Summa*, the water of philosophy is changed into the wine of theology.⁴³ A reasonable corollary to teaching philosophy through the study of theology would seem to be: all professors of philosophy should be theologians. Gilson cites without proposing as his own this recommendation of the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* of 1586.⁴⁴ I doubt not that in actual fact Gilson himself could well enough have met such a qualification for teaching philosophy, as Maritain could have also, even though Gilson referred to himself as a philosopher⁴⁵ and Maritain consistently protested that he was treating things only as a philosopher.

One last observation about Gilson's views on the relation of philosophy to

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 211. In an effort to clarify the nature of the philosophy of St. Thomas, Gilson uses the distinction St. Thomas makes between the *revelatum* and the *revelabilia* (*ST*, I, 1, 3). "The revealed," in Gilson's interpretation, refers to "all knowledge about God beyond the grasp of human reason." (*The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 11). It comprises all that knowledge which human beings can acquire only through divine revelation (*Ibid.* p. 12). Besides the essentially revealed truths, i.e., the *revelatum*, revelation itself includes many other truths which are accessible to human reason without the aid of revelation. This is the proper area of "the revealable," which contains the philosophical elements St. Thomas employed in his theology. These philosophical elements which the theologian uses remain truly philosophical in their essence and nature even though the theologian views them in a higher light for theological ends, "as a possible help in the great work of man's salvation." (See Etienne Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy* [Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960], pp. 34, 35. Reprinted as A Mentor-Omega Book [New York: New American Library of World Literature, 1963,] pp. 36, 37). This precisely is the perspective in which Gilson wishes to examine the philosophy of St. Thomas, since it is the perspective of St. Thomas himself (*The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 15). It can be examined, he acknowledges, from other points of view. For instance, some profess to reconstruct St. Thomas' teaching in the philosophical order going from things to God rather than following the theological order which proceeds from God to things. Gilson notes two dangers in such a procedure. The first is to end up substituting the philosophy of Aristotle for that of St. Thomas; the other is the contemporary error of flatly contradicting the philosophy one pretends to teach. Gilson looks upon the attempts to isolate St. Thomas' philosophy from his theology as having the result of presenting his philosophy in the Cartesian manner whereby everything is "considered by natural reason without the light of faith" (*Ibid.*, p. 442, note 33).

⁴² "Thomas Aquinas and Our Colleagues," Aquinas Lecture at the Aquinas Foundation at Princeton University, March 7, 1953. Printed in *A Gilson Reader*, p. 292.

⁴³ *Gilson Reader*, pp. 293, 294. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Boethii de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 5; *St. Thomas Aquinas, Faith, Reason and Theology*, Questions I-IV of his commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius, translated with Introduction and Notes by Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1987), p. 50.

⁴⁴ *A Gilson Reader*, p. 297, note 10.

⁴⁵ "The Eminence of Teaching" in *A Gilson Reader*, p. 300.

theology is that the philosophy of St. Thomas is best expounded by following the theological method according to which St. Thomas himself formulated it. Gilson practiced this method more or less closely himself in his six editions of *Le Thomisme* and the smaller volume entitled *The Elements of Christian Philosophy*. His many other writings in which he expounded Thomism do not observe this same method, which indicates that Gilson did not propose the theological order as the exclusive way of presenting Thomism.

VI

Maritain was in agreement with Gilson that the philosophy of St. Thomas played a ministerial and instrumental role in the theological works of St. Thomas and was integrated with his theology.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, one of St. Thomas' principal objectives, Maritain claimed, was not only to distinguish philosophy from theology but also thereby to establish the autonomy of philosophy.⁴⁷ St. Thomas actually achieved this objective in principle, Maritain says, distinguishing the two disciplines with clarity and firmness. This autonomy, however, has not yet been truly established in fact.⁴⁸ Unlike Gilson, Maritain stressed the need to fulfill in point of fact the autonomy fully recognized in point of doctrine.⁴⁹

This is a work cut out for the followers of St. Thomas. In Maritain's opinion, Thomists up to now have not been "very zealous in their effort fully to disengage the proper structure of their philosophy from the methods of approach and the problematics of their theology."⁵⁰ Thomist philosophy has too often been presented in the guise of a transposition into the domain proper to reason of a theology deprived of its own light which is faith. Distinct from those of theology, philosophy has its own specific object, its own light and its own mode of dealing with problems and correspondingly its own authentic task. It needs to handle its problems in an autonomous manner in terms of questions arising from experience, not from theology.⁵¹ The same applies to the order of its researches, verifications and judgments. St. Thomas' thought, Maritain admits, is cast in the order proper to theology. Since he wrote no philosophical *Summa*, we cannot say what order he would have followed had he done so.⁵² It certainly would have been different from the order of his theology, judging from our present knowledge of what constitutes a philosophical order. The challenge

⁴⁶ *Science and Wisdom*, p. 102.

⁴⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent* trans. by Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon, 1948), p. 136. Reprinted, Garden City, New York: Doubleday Image Book, pp. 141, 142.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 136; Image, p. 142.

⁴⁹ *Science and Wisdom*, p. 103.

⁵⁰ *Existence and the Existent*, p. 138; Image, p. 143.

⁵¹ *Science and Wisdom*, p. 103.

⁵² John Wippel suggests that St. Thomas' views regarding the nature, the subject-matter and the method of metaphysics are sufficiently indicated in his writings. See *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), p. 32.

facing present followers of St. Thomas is to give his philosophy a chance to live outside theology, removed from a theological framework.

It is important not to be misled into confusing Maritain's projections for an autonomous Thomist philosophy with the post-Cartesian rationalist concept of philosophy which demands absolute independence from theology and denies the "infraposition" of philosophy. Philosophy, for Maritain, that is to say, Thomist philosophy, cannot possibly be autonomous in that sense. It can claim only a relative autonomy. A hierarchy of wisdom exists, and rather than denying its subordination, philosophy must strive for self-awareness of its own nature and its special claims as well as its relations to theological and infused wisdom.

In Maritain's perspective, philosophy and culture have suffered great harm from Cartesian "separatism." Nonetheless, the birth of a philosophical or profane wisdom standing on its own feet with its own ends rather than being purely subservient to theology was in accord, he says, with deep historical needs. The differentiation began in the Middle Ages under the aegis of St. Thomas expounding its doctrinal principles was, unfortunately for modern history, "accomplished and realized under the banner of rationalism and division rather than of Christianity and unity." What should have been Christian philosophy, Maritain declared, "became *separated* philosophy. And we have learned our error by bitter and tragic experience."⁵³

This emphasis of Maritain on the need to develop the philosophy of St. Thomas as an autonomous discipline appears at first sight to run counter to Gilson's emphasis on studying and learning and teaching this same philosophy within the context of its use by St. Thomas in his theology. Indeed, after examining the work of these two eminent Thomists, it is necessary to ask oneself how far their differences are truly doctrinal and how far their differences are accountable to their diverse approaches to Thomism. If one asks whether Maritain proposed a development of the philosophical teaching of St. Thomas in complete separation from his theology, the answer is obviously negative. He always thought of Thomism in terms of a Christian philosophy. Maritain's writings, in fact, are redolent with theological references on almost every page. If one asks whether Gilson claimed that the philosophy of St. Thomas has no legitimate status as philosophy and can exist only as an instrument of theology, the answer, too, is negative. Otherwise, one would be obliged to characterize Gilson's expositions of that philosophy in his books as just so many volumes of theology using philosophy for its own purposes.

VII

Whatever differences exist (and they do exist) between the Thomism of Gilson and the Thomism of Maritain and whether they are differences of

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

emphasis or truly doctrinal differences, they tend to dissolve when considered in the perspective of a Christian philosophy which follows the method of philosophizing proposed by Pope Leo XIII and is exemplified in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Although Gilson, especially after experiencing the failure of the Thomist tradition to pass on the authentic meaning of *esse* in St. Thomas' doctrine of being, downgraded dependence on the great Thomist commentators, he did acknowledge a Thomist tradition and considered himself a part of it.⁵⁴ Maritain, in turn, while he drew inspiration and insight from some of the classical Thomist commentators such as John of St. Thomas and Cajetan, at the same time drank deeply of the original doctrinal springs found in the writings of St. Thomas.⁵⁵ Certainly, both Gilson and Maritain would agree that every explanation of Thomistic doctrine must be tested against the very words of the master and that the best interpreter of the writings of St. Thomas are the writings themselves.⁵⁶

Clearly, there are indisputable differences in the presentations of Thomism given by Gilson and Maritain. Father McCool has highlighted some of them in his *From Unity to Pluralism*. How deep a cleavage do these differences make? Do Gilson and Maritain represent pluralist interpretations of Thomism as diverse from one another as both their presentations of Thomism are definitely diverse from that of the Marechal school? Could Gilson, following his own criteria, "hardly deny," as Father McCool states, that neither Maritain's *The Degrees of Knowledge* nor *Science and Wisdom* "are authentic presentations of St. Thomas' philosophy"?⁵⁷ Was Maritain's Christian philosophy a perpetuation of

⁵⁴ "Life is short and the history of philosophy is growing longer every year. But if any Christian master felt the same indifference with respect to the history of scholasticism, he would be less easily excusable, because this is his own personal history or, at least, that of his own personal philosophical tradition. This tradition is not a dead thing; it is still alive and our times bear witness to its enduring fecundity. There is no reason why this fecundity should come to an end." *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, p. 174. Gilson's occasional sweeping criticisms of the Thomist tradition are subject to an overly strict understanding of his intentions. In general, it is true, he favored transcending the tradition to get to the texts themselves of St. Thomas. Nevertheless, he respected the true insights of other Thomists. To cite only one example, in his *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (p. 444, note 1), on the notion of being, he referred favorably to Banes, OR, Del Prado, O.P., Oligiati, Forest, Maritain, Pruche, as well as his own work *Being and Some Philosophers*. As to individual points of doctrine which in his eyes did not agree with the texts, he took issue, as, for instance, with Banes on the *esse* of accidents and with Maritain on several issues. Gilson's numerous citations of and references to other Thomists and their writings, sometimes by way of agreement, sometimes by way of criticism or by way of correction, reveal his vast acquaintance with the Thomist tradition which, far from spurning, he utilized in explaining the doctrine of St. Thomas.

⁵⁵ Evidence of Maritain's familiarity with the texts of St. Thomas is easily verifiable in his writings.

⁵⁶ Gilson's rule is: "*Thomas, his own interpreter*. In other words: Do not judge Saint Thomas by his commentators, judge his commentators (including yourself) by Saint Thomas." *The Philosopher and Theology*, p. 207.

⁵⁷ *From Unity to pluralism*, p. 194. Referring to their epistemological views on Thomistic realism, Maritain wrote: "Between M. Et. Gilson's position and ours there is no substantial difference," *The Degrees of Knowledge*, translated under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Scribner's, 1959), p. xvi. In turn, referring to the relation of reason and faith, Gilson advises: "On this general characteristic of Thomistic thought, see the basic work of Jacques Maritain *Distinguer pour unir, ou les degres du savoir*." *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 443, note 49.

the "separated" Thomistic philosophy created in the seventeenth century?⁵⁸ These questions taken simply as questions suggest strong differences. Admittedly, the division that Father McCool draws between Maritain and Gilson may serve well the thesis of his book; it nevertheless leaves one wondering in terms of their mutual commitment to a living Thomism whether McCool's division between them is not overdrawn.

When Father McCool goes on to extend the division beyond Maritain to a division between Gilson and other contemporary Thomists,⁵⁹ ascribing to their unacceptance of Gilson's conclusions the reason for Gilson's work "seriously undermining the NeoThomistic movement,"⁶⁰ one feels challenged by a statement not readily refutable for lack of ample statistics. If the statement is true, and granting that to some extent it may possibly be true, it is bound to be a disappointment to Gilson's numerous admirers to be faced with having to conceive of his tireless and devoted efforts to promote a living Thomism bearing such unintended and opposite results. Even so, should the Thomistic movement actually have reached a point of terminus (certainly it has slowed down), it would still be necessary to acknowledge that the end of the movement does not itself mean the end of Thomism.

In conclusion, I think we must return to the beginning. As Vernon Bourke pointed out,⁶¹ there are two basic approaches to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas: the so-called historical-textual approach and the approach of re-thinking the doctrine of St. Thomas in relation to contemporary problems and thought-patterns. A living Thomism requires both approaches. Gilson and Maritain were not alien to either of these approaches, although Gilson is more representative of the first approach, Maritain of the second. Both were faithful to the primary principles of St. Thomas in their interpretations of Thomism, although what they said about Thomism, as what anyone else says about it, must always be measured against the writings themselves of St. Thomas. Each of these Thomist scholars endeavored according to his own approach, his own manner of presentation, his own interest in contemporary problems, his own style of writing to make the teaching of St. Thomas vital and relevant in this twentieth century. Those who became Thomists under their tutelage will no doubt credit them with considerable success.

The teaching of St. Thomas which they so ably expounded is an intellectual heritage with ample resources to enrich humanity for ages to come. It may suffer temporary eclipse, as at intervals does the physical sun. Still, its light appears too brilliant and its wisdom too indispensable ever to be dimmed to extinction. In the succession of future Thomists, certainly all will not be as gifted as Gilson and Maritain, yet somehow or other, Thomism, it seems, in virtue of its

⁵⁸ Cf. *From Unity to pluralism*, p. 194.

⁵⁹ Father McCool attributes to Gilson the verdict that "none of the contemporary forms of 'Thomism' was genuine Thomism." *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁶¹ See note 2 above.

appeal to the sapiential instinct of the human mind, is destined to stay alive, at least in the halls of learning, if not equally so in the culture of the day.

ON BEING A THOMIST (According to Etienne Gilson)

I have excerpted and numbered the following quotations from the Chapter "On Being a Thomist" in Etienne Gilson's *The Philosopher and Theology* in order to highlight his portrayal of a Thomist. It provides some guidelines for a more profitable reading of St. Thomas. Gilson, a strong proponent of "Christian Philosophy", of which St. Thomas is, in his view, the primary representative, defends the position that the personal philosophy of St. Thomas is found, not in his commentaries on Aristotle, but in his theological writings, where St. Thomas uses philosophy in the service of theology. Accordingly, Gilson maintains that the full understanding of the philosophy of St. Thomas requires a genuinely Christian approach and that its most original notions and deepest doctrine reveal themselves only when read from the height of theology. Viewed from the height of theology, the philosophy of St. Thomas is seen to render an important and most noble service to the human mind in its effort to reach out for an earthly glimpse of God dwelling in inaccessible light.

These quotations will become more meaningful to someone who reads the entire chapter in *Philosopher and Theology*.

1. "A man becomes aware of being a Thomist on the day he realizes that from then in he will no longer be able to live without the company of St. Thomas Aquinas."
2. "Essentially a Thomist is a free mind. His freedom does not consist in having neither master nor God but rather having no master other than God."
3. "The happiness of the Thomist is the joy he experiences in feeling free to welcome all truth from whichever side it may come."
4. "The candidate to the office of a Thomist will be well-inspired to arm himself with patience and, as an experienced traveler, to be willing to put up with strange roommates." (i.e. with all who call themselves Thomists).
5. "When two philosophers do not agree on being, they agree on nothing." (Because in philosophy, everything else hangs upon the true meaning of the notion of being).
6. "The most commonly accepted way of being a Thomist, and perhaps the only possible one, is to reduce the doctrine of St. Thomas to what one understands of it. However, there is something upsetting in this experience." (Gilson cites as an example his reading and teaching the doctrine of St. Thomas without realizing the true meaning of its notion of

being. "How long I was able to circle around this notion without seeing it? Twenty years perhaps.")

7. "The safest remedy is to go back to the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* and to the advice that we draw the wisdom of Thomas Aquinas from its very source."
8. "The justly famous axiom should never be forgotten: Thomas is his own interpreter. In other words, do not judge Saint Thomas by his commentators, judge his commentators (including yourself) by Saint Thomas."
9. "The initiation of Thomism does not end there, for the work of Saint Thomas is a whole world, indeed, several worlds in one" – (Scripture, the Fathers – Saint Augustine – Aristotle, many other philosophers, finally the personal world of Saint Thomas, at the core of the others, opening up new vistas on them all).
10. (A sure sign of Saint Thomas' personal view is the word *esse* – to be – "of which he makes a very personal use"). "With him, particularly in metaphysics and theology, it is a light that clears up all difficulties."
11. "The light if *esse* should be followed everywhere it shines and sought for when it is hidden from sight; but it should be carefully used, not to dim the other lights, but to purify and intensify them."
12. "Why turn to Saint Thomas rather than to the other Doctors? First, because his teaching does not exclude theirs, but rather includes every one of them so far as they are true...Second, because the Church has appointed him her own Common Doctor and prescribes that he be followed wherever...his teaching coincides with her authentic doctrine."
13. "The faith of the Church is not enough for an understanding of the doctrine of Saint Thomas, but it is necessary."
14. "Saint Thomas is only a commentator in his writings on Aristotle. For his personal thinking one must at the two *Summae* and similar writings."
15. "The most original notions, and the deepest, in the doctrine of Saint Thomas reveal themselves only to him who reads it as a theologian. The very way to read him is thereby modified."
16. "In reading Thomas Aquinas it is often dangerous to understand quotations from Augustine and Boethius, Avicenna and even Aristotle, in

the sense the quoted sentences have in the works of these writers. The sense sometimes is their own sense, but it always is that of Saint Thomas."

17. "The same remark applies to the 'scientific' method held in honor by some historians, which consists in gathering *all* the passages related to a doctrinal position before attempting its interpretation. Preliminary inquiries of this sort are most useful, and they cannot be too extended, but one should not expect miraculous results from this method. On the contrary, it has its own dangers. Two passages of the same author handling what looks like the same problem are only comparable if they consider it from the same point of view and approach it in the same spirit."
18. "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 gate to sacred theology. It is not to be found at the term of metaphysics, nor above metaphysics, but outside it; it is, so to speak, somewhere else. To enter it one should first establish oneself in faith."
19. "Grounded in the theological virtue of faith, never to be found without hope and love, the theologian uses all his natural resources to obtain an imperfect and provisory knowledge of the object of faith. Theology thus puts him on his way to the vision of God he hopes to enjoy in the future of life."
20. "None who is not a saint can pretend to go very far along this way, but there is no other one in which to follow the master."
21. "Whatever the outcome, the art of being a Thomist will be acquired and perfected in this undertaking, namely, philosophizing as only a Christian can, *within* faith."

Jacques Maritain as an Honorary Member of The Faculty of the Center for Thomistic Studies, 1966



Rev. Victor Brezik, CSB, Jacques Maritain, Rev. Eddie Sullivan, CSB
At the home of John Howard Griffin, Fort Worth, Texas
October 5, 1966

Forth Worth, Texas

October 5, 1966

Greetings and best wishes
to the Faculty and Students
of the University of St. Thomas,
from an old philosopher who
deeply loves America and the
American people

Jacques Maritain

Honorary member of the
Faculty, University of
St. Thomas.



Father Victor Brezik celebrates his 96th birthday with members of the philosophy department at the University of St. Thomas 2009 (Terry Hall, Roland Houser, Steve Jensen, Chris Martin, Rev. Victor Brezik, CSB, John Hitinger, Mary Catherine Sommers, Joseph Graham)

The Center for Thomistic Studies was founded in 1975 at the University of St. Thomas, a Catholic University founded by members of the Congregation of St. Basil and located in the Diocese of Galveston-Houston. English-speaking Basilians in North America have long been connected with fostering the study of Aquinas, most prominently by founding, along with Etienne Gilson, the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies at the University of Toronto in 1929. In 1976, at the request of the Center's principal founder, Fr. Victor B. Brezik, CSB, Professor Anton C. Pegis, formerly president of the Institute of Mediaeval Studies at Toronto, accepted the position of Director of the Center. His was the responsibility of designing the program, acquiring a suitable faculty, and supervising the accumulation of library resources. After Dr. Pegis's sudden death in 1978, Professor Vernon J. Bourke accepted the position of Interim Director from 1978-80. The official announcement of the opening of the Center occurred in October of 1979 at a symposium to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*. Graduate courses began to be offered in the Fall semester of 1980. By this time Fr. Ronald D. Lawler, OFM. Cap. had assumed directorship of the Center. In 1982 he was succeeded by Fr. Leonard A. Kennedy, CSB; in 1987 by Fr. Thomas A. Russman, OFM. Cap.; in 1996 by Interim Director Dr. Jerome Kramer; in 1998 by Fr. John C. Gallagher, CSB; in 1999 by Dr. Christopher Martin and in 2000 by Dr. Daniel McInerny. The current Director of the Center is Dr. Mary Catherine Sommers, who assumed the position in 2002.

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