



# DOCTORAL DISSERTATION EXAMINES CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF ÉTIENNE GILSON

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James D. Capehart successfully defended his dissertation, “Étienne Gilson and the First Two Stages of His Christian Philosophy,” at the University of St. Thomas’s Center for Thomistic Studies on Friday, April 6. In his dissertation, Capehart examines the nature of Étienne Gilson’s (one of the 20th Century’s greatest Thomists) beliefs regarding Christian philosophy.

“In short, Gilson believed that there is such a thing as a philosophy that has been not only ‘negatively’ influenced by Christianity—that is by offering corrections to keep it from error—but also ‘positively’ influenced by Christianity—by suggesting certain topics or content for rational treatment,” Capehart said. “This philosophy he believes to exist even as philosophy precisely because of this Christian influence. If such a philosophy exists because of Christian influence, then he regarded it to be deserving of the name ‘Christian philosophy.’”

One of the reasons Capehart was drawn to the Center for Thomistic Studies was for its connection to Gilson: In the city of Toronto, Gilson helped the Basilian Fathers found the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, where many UST faculty members themselves have studied. With this in mind, Capehart knew he always wanted to write about Gilson in his dissertation, which delineates three stages of Gilson’s Christian philosophy and focuses on the first two.

“It came to me to do something on his doctrine on Christian philosophy precisely because many people would claim in essays and talks that Gilson had said ‘this’ or ‘that’ about Christian philosophy, but there were no book-length works treating of his doctrine historically to give context to those statements,” Capehart said. “I felt this would be a great contribution to offer clarity regarding what he wrote earlier in his career, how it developed over time and what factors contributed to that development.”

Capehart’s dissertation committee included Dr. Jo Meier-Marquis, associate professor of psychology; Dr. John Hittinger, professor of philosophy; Dr. John F.X. Knasas, professor of philosophy; Dr. Mary Catherine Sommers, professor of philosophy; Dr. Mirela Oliva, associate professor of philosophy; and external reader Dr. Peter Redpath (Chair, Graduate Philosophy Concentration in Christian Wisdom, Holy Apostles College and Seminary).

Capehart currently teaches at a Minor Seminary in Indiana, but hopes to return to college-level teaching in the future, which he believes is his true calling. He also hopes to write more on Gilson and Christian philosophy.

*By Katie Fleming*