**Tomasz Duma**

# The God of the Philosophers and the God of Faith

## Introduction

A variety of philosophical conceptions of God in the latest centuries have contributed to the conviction of the majority of thinkers that "the God of the philosophers" has nothing in common with "the God of faith." At the same time, Christian theology, outdistanced towards philosophy, has departed from the traditional doctrine of God and proclaimed faith to be a matter of lived religious experience rather than dogmas. But disregarding the problem of how "the God of the philosophers" has affected the present situation of Christian religion in the Western world, there remains still the topical question of whether we need philosophy to understand Revelation. In this article, I will try to prove that considerations on God in philosophy do not have to deviate from the image of God which is shown in Revelation or Tradition—and what is more—they are complementary to the latter ones. First, I will recall the most significant philosophical conceptions of God. Then

Tomasz Duma, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland
tomasz.duma@kul.pl • ORCID: 0000-0002-6313-0588

I will sketch the problem of God as it is shown in Revelation. Next, I will present the tools which could make it possible to reconcile one approach with the other. To be sure, a lot of authors have written about "the God of faith" and "the God of the philosophers"[1] nevertheless the topic does not seem to be closed, which is corroborated by the present interest in the so-called "philosophical theology." Undoubtedly, undertaking this problem has crucial significance for Christianity, but additionally one should not overlook the fact that the question of the absolute being belongs also to philosophy, so the quality of discourse on this topic is definitely not without influence on the condition of the latter one.

## The God of the Philosophers

The problem of God or the absolute being has had a long and rich tradition in philosophy. Almost each philosophical system embraced,

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[1] Robin Attfield, "The God of Religion and the God of Philosophy," *Religious Studies* 9, no. 1 (1973): 1–9; Robyn Horner, *The Experience of God: A Phenomenology of Revelation* (Cambridge University Press, 2022); Thomas M. Lennon, *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ralph McInerny, *Art and Prudence. Studies in the Thought of Jacques Maritain* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); Georg Picht, "The God of the Philosophers," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48, no. 1 (1980): 61–79; Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995); Tomasz Stępień, "The God of the Philosophers and the God of Faith according to Joseph Ratzinger: Analysis in the Context of the Ambiguity of the Concept of God in the History of Ancient and Modern Philosophy," *Collectanea Theologica* 93, no. 4 (2023): 19–35; Eleonore Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers (The Aquinas Lecture in Philosophy)* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2016); Peter Vardy and Julie Arliss, *The Thinker's Guide to God* (O-Books, 2023); *The Oxford Handbook of Divine Revelation*, ed. Balázs M. Mezei, Francesca A. Murphy, Kenneth Oakes (Oxford University Press, 2021).

more or less distinctly, the notion of God. Some of these reflections were certainly inspired by religious revelation, but, at the same time, there have been quite a lot of conceptions which have sprung from cognition developed by natural reason. Naturally, theologians or the believing philosophers referred such notions of God to the image of God presented by Revelation. Now, however, there is a tendency to question the value of the so-called natural cognition of God, which means that philosophy is not allowed to have any competence of this kind. So what about Plato, Aristotle or St. Thomas Aquinas? Does what they said about the absolute being really have no significance for modern theology?

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PLATO'S GOD

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In Plato we do not find yet a uniform conception of God, as he ascribes the divine attributes both to the ideas and Demiurge, not omitting at the same time the significance of the beliefs in the gods of those days, whose cult he much appreciated, though it was necessary—he pointed out—to purify those religious beliefs from anthropomorphism. Most assuredly, for this very reason he did not label as "god" the highest idea—i.e. the idea of good or beauty in itself; he simply did not want to treat this idea analogically and relatively to gods who people believed in at that time. This, however, does not change the fact that the real divinity, in the light of his philosophy, must be interlinked with the highest idea which is considered by him in *The Republic* as the principle of "being and truth."[2]

   In this dialogue, while discussing the question of models the statesmen should follow when composing the myths about gods, Plato emphasizes that God should be necessarily attributed two qualities,

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[2] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Republic: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h); Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 509 a–b.

which he must have if he is to be considered as God.[3] Otherwise it is better not to talk about God at all, and the more so, not to present him in such a distorted light to the young generation, since this kind of falseness is the most fatal to the human being, fraught with the most evil consequences both in the individual and in the social dimension.[4] So firstly, God must be absolutely and undoubtedly good. It is he who is the absolute good, the measure and the cause of every good in the world.

> Then God—Plato writes—if he be good, is not the author of all things, as the many assert, but he is the cause of a few things only, and not of most things that occur to men. For few are the goods of human life, and many are the evils, and the good is to be attributed to God alone; of the evils the causes are to be sought elsewhere, and not in him.[5]

Secondly, God must be absolutely unchangeable, otherwise he would have to change into something worse. This is why God cannot deceive or misguide with word or with action. He is forever

> beautiful and good as possible, and remains for ever simply in his own form […] So the supernatural and the divine are altogether without falsehood.[6]

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[3] Plato, *The Republic*, 379 a: "But what about this question of patterns for stories about the gods? What should these patterns be?"—asks Socrates, and continues: "Something like this, I should think. They should always, I take it, give a true picture of what god is really like, whether the poet is working in epic, or in lyric, or in tragedy." (Trans. T. Griffith).

[4] "True humanity requires true theology; the man with false theology is an untrue man" (Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. III: *Plato and Aristotle*, in: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 16, ed. D. Germino (University of Missouri Press, 2000), 134).

[5] Plato, *The Republic*, 379 c (trans. B. Jowett).

[6] Plato, *The Republic*, 381 c–382 d (trans. T. Griffith).

Plato's ascribing to God the absolute beauty, goodness and unchangeability aims at purifying his image from anthropomorphization and from what is the result of this—that is from any falseness about this unique being. Relativizing the truth about God, by either questioning his perfection and unchangeability or ascribing evil to him, leads to the greatest illness of the human soul. Such a presentation of God should be forbidden, according to Plato, even if it were to be applied to the works by Homer or Hesiod.[7]

How does Plato know that God is absolutely beautiful, utterly good and unchangeable? Deities then believed in did not show any of these qualities. In the light of those beliefs gods did not have to be good, as just those gods

> apportion calamity and misery to many good men, and good and happiness to the wicked.[8]

However, can we talk about gods without any anthropomorphization? Plato himself admits that

> we know of them only from tradition and the genealogies of the poets.[9]

Whom then should we trust as far as God is concerned—poets, theologians or philosophers?

### ARISTOTLE'S GOD

In the XII Book of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle broadly describes the Divine being, though he does not do it by using beautiful poetic language, but

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[7] Plato, *The Republic*, 386 a–389 a.

[8] Plato, *The Republic*, 364 b–c (trans. B. Jowett).

[9] Plato, *The Republic*, 365 e (trans. B. Jowett).

by means of dry philosophical, systematic analysis in which he goes considerably farther than Plato. For Aristotle, God is thought, spirit and life. So he may be attributed what we nowadays call "self-consciousness." God is the ultimate goal of all reality. All beings move towards Him as to the fullness of perfection of the world. Thus, He is the cause of all dynamism, since nothing moves without Him. And He does not move beings by order or violence, which means that He does not move things physically, but only through love. God is perfect, which means that there is no lack in Him. Aristotle writes:

> Moreover life belongs to God. For the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and the essential actuality of God is life most good and eternal. We hold, then, that God is a living being, eternal, most good; and therefore life and a continuous eternal existence belong to God; for that is what God is.[10]

Without going into further detailed characteristics of the absolute being in Aristotle's terms, it should be noted that in his argumentation Aristotle starts from the data of experience. And besides, the key role in his conception of the Absolute is played by the metaphysical system formulated by him to explain reality. It is primarily the explanation of the dynamism of beings by act and potency that ultimately points out to the necessity of the existence of the first pure act.[11] Another element of the system is the structure of reality (e.g. hylemorphism, substantiality), whose rational explanation demands acceptance of the existence of the highest substance which is the pure form.[12] The next step of the system is finality which, in the end, involves pointing out to the

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[10] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. William D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 1072 b.

[11] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072 a.

[12] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1022 a–1023 a.

necessity of the existence of the ultimate goal of the whole reality which is its highest good and happiness.[13]

Thus the conception of God in Aristotle is an inseparable element of the system which outlines his metaphysical vision of the world. Claiming that God is the thought thinking itself, the pure act, the pure form, the first unmoved mover, the supreme good or the highest substance, is not a poetic metaphor or anthropomorphism, but the necessary "element" of the real world, which would not be understandable for the human mind in its fundamental manifestations, if the existence of the absolute being was negated. Aristotle was the first philosopher who so clearly proved the necessity of giving recognition to the absolute being in a rational explanation of the world. It was not a natural theology, but metaphysics, in the light of which the dynamism of being, the structure of reality, its finality etc. demand the ultimate cause. No wonder that this branch of knowledge became so important for Christian theologians, though they could get to know its Aristotelian version only in the 13th century.

## THE GOD OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Obviously, St. Thomas Aquinas is, first of all, a theologian, so he takes over the theological vision of God presented in Revelation and then handed down and interpreted by the fathers of the Church, especially by St. Augustine, and other Christian theologians. However, in paralell to a theological image of God, St. Thomas formulates a purely philosophical conception of the absolute being which, as far as the cognitive principles are concerned, is totally different from the former one. Similarly to Aristotle, St. Thomas develops a metaphysical image of the world, whose necessary and fundamental aspect is the absolute being. Without going into the details of his rich metaphysical argu-

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[13] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072 b–1073 a.

mentation for the existence of God, we must note that the crucial thesis of Aquinas is that God is the "uncaused first cause."[14] Argumentation for the existence of such cause is based on the data of experience. It does not straightforwardly apply to the God of Christianity, but just to the first cause. It is based on two assumptions: the principle of causality showing that behind each change there must be some cause, and a theoretical exclusion of the infinite sequence of causes.

Those assumptions are the object of criticism nowadays. If we base the thesis that everything that is caused is caused by something else on the definition of the caused, then such causing would not be real; and if the thesis is based on experience, then the latter one is always limited and cannot be extrapolated to all reality. Also, the statement of the impossibility of the infinite sequence of causes contains in its very justification the necessity of the existence of the first cause, which should not be an element but the result of the argumentation. Moreover, how could the sequence of causes be grasped conceptually, if at the beginning there is the uncaused? Although the argument appeals to the incontrovertibility of the principle of causality, it makes an exception for the first cause which is "uncaused." Meanwhile "the uncaused" is a negative description, so how can one reformulate it into the positive concept—e.g. "the creation of the world"?[15]

The cited argumentation of St. Thomas as well as the objections formulated against it look totally different in the context of his existential conception of being.[16] The argumentation is a part of the systematic explanation of the contingent being, which does not exist out of the necessity of its own nature, but by virtue of the existence con-

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[14] Kurt Flash, *Warum ich kein Christ bin. Bericht und Argumentation* (München: C. H. Beck, 2013), 153.

[15] Flash. *Warum ich kein Christ bin. Bericht und Argumentation*, 154.

[16] Here we mean St. Thomas' interpretation of being proposed by Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, and in Poland by Mieczysław A. Krąpiec.

ferred by the cause. The analysis of the nature of the contingent being leads to the need to recognize the necessary being existing by virtue of its own nature, whose essence is its existence; if such necessary being did not exist, the existence of the contingent being would be absurd. In short, a contingent being is always caused, and its existence always implies the necessity of the existence of the necessary being, which does not possess the cause of its existence. The notion of the contingent being is not a universal concept, but it embraces—given in experience—a really existing being whose existence does not belong to its nature. The whole argumentation is contained within the area of the contingent being, whose existence itself would be contradictory if there did not exist the being existing by its own nature.[17] That kind of being is what the principle of causality is about, so there is no vicious circle in the argumentation.

The notion of God as the fullness of existence (*maximum esse*), the existence as such (*ipsum esse*), the existence from essence (*esse per essentiam*) or the existence in itself (*esse per se*) is not a purely negative notion, but it positively points out that there is the dependence of all other beings on this kind of being. This gave to St. Thomas Aquinas a theoretical basis for formulating a philosophical theory of creation as a metaphysical explanation of the origin and the dependence of the contingent being in existence on the first cause.[18] The cognition of the existence of God and, first of all, the cognition that he is the being who exists out of his own essence does not, however, equate the cognition of the nature (the essence) of God. Although, according to St. Thomas, he will always remain unknowable, yet the existential metaphysics gives some tools which enable us, to a degree, to cognize his nature both from the positive and from the negative side. We will come back

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[17] S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra gentiles*, in: *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, vol. 13 (Romae: Riccardo Garroni 1918), II, c. 15.

[18] S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, c. 18.

later to the question of how to describe the nature of God, when it will turn out that St. Thomas' metaphysical analysis concerning the existence and the nature of God is not only contradictory to the God of Revelation, but it is also indispensable to us so that our image of God read from the Revelation isn't solely based on metaphors and anthropomorphisms. But before we touch upon this problem, we must say a few words about the God of Revelation.

## The God of Revelation

A lot of Christian thinkers consider the philosophical notion of God too abstract and not appealing to any human desires or feelings. The Christian faith presents God in a more definite way as perfectly good, all-knowing etc., and as the one who became man for our salvation. That is why philosophical argumentation cannot serve as a substantiation of faith or an introduction to it. Philosophical tools show only that God can be spoken of in a rational way, but they cannot prove the rationality of Christian faith. For this reason, many theologians began to lean towards the de-Hellenization of Christian revelation—that is towards cleansing the Christian faith from the "corset" of Greek philosophy. But what image of God emerges after such a cleansing?

### THE GOD OF THE FATHERS

It is impossible not to classify many elements of the Old Testament image of God as purely cultural creations. Even in the light of contemporary Christian theology, it is difficult to rationalize God's "statements" expressing jealousy about other gods, the demand for absolute obedience, recommending the killing of people or the desire for blood sacrifices.[19] For that reason, the historical-critical method demon-

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[19] Flash. *Warum ich kein Christ bin. Bericht und Argumentation*, 158–159.

strates the cultural nature of this type of statement with the goal of demythologizing revelation and extracting from the biblical statements what can be really considered a revelation from God. But is this method enough to discover what is a real Revelation from God and what is a creation of culture? In the current state of research, it seems more and more difficult. An example is the exegesis of God's words from the *Book of Exodus*, where from the bush of fire God reveals to Moses his name Yahweh, i.e. "I am Who I am" (Ex 3,14).

Already in medieval times those words were interpreted ontologically, emphasizing that God is the one who fully exists. His existence has neither beginning nor end; it lasts eternally. So he is the being *par excellence*, or—as the medieval metaphysics put it—he is the being who is the existence in itself, or the one who exists by virtue of his essence. Creatures come and go, but God always exists. Christian theologians bind this interpretation with the demythologization of the world and religion that happened *de facto* in Christian Revelation— that is in the person of Jesus Christ.[20] The description of that Revelation would not have been possible without Greek philosophy, which made it possible to demonstrate that the truths contained in Revelation converge with the truths discovered by metaphysics. Today, however, also due to historical-critical reflection on the Bible, combining metaphysics with historicity is undermined, as this is considered to be inconsistent with the original oriental approach—that is, with the context in which the Bible was created.[21] For this reason, doubts arise about the ontological interpretation of the words from The Book of Exodus.

Contemporary exegetes of the words "I am Who I am" often translate them as "I am here," "I am concerned about you." The existence

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[20] Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 2nd Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 138–140.

[21] Flash, *Warum ich kein Christ bin. Bericht und Argumentation*, 167.

of God is inextricably linked to caring for Israel, for their fate, for their land. This is the central idea of the story about choosing the nation. God is not a local God, He is not the God of the "place," but of the nation. He is not responsible for all people, but only for Israel. So Yahweh is a "helpful closeness" of God and not the being existing in the absolute manner. K. Flash even thinks that the explanation of the word "God" by using the notion of "being" is also not biblical and does not belong to Revelation. In his opinion, a kind of ontologization of the name of God is a work of recent times.[22] Thinkers like K. Löwith, K. Rahner, K. Barth, É. Gilson or M. Heidegger influenced the emergence of such an interpretation. Not only in relation to the name of God, but also to other Old Testament statements about God does a question arise: since philosophical theories obscure the truth of Revelation, then what tools to use to reach this truth? This problem will become even more visible on the grounds of the New Testament Revelation.

## THE GOD OF CHRISTIANS

Josef Ratzinger thinks that—contrary to what Tertullian claimed—early Christianity stood for the God of the philosophers, and against pagan deities. Ratzinger states:

> The God of the philosophers, however, who was left over, was not regarded by the ancient world as having any religious significance, but as an extrareligious reality. To leave only him standing and to profess faith in him alone and in nothing else seemed like lack of religion, as denial of religion, as atheism. […] By deciding exclusively in favor of the God of the Philosophers and logically declaring this God to be the God who speaks to man and to whom one can pray, Christian faith gave a completely new significance to this God of the philosophers, remov-

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22 Flash, *Warum ich kein Christ bin. Bericht und Argumentation*, 166.

ing him from the purely academic realm and thus profoundly trans-
forming him.[23]

This God,—Ratzinger continues—who had previously existed as some-
thing neutral, as the highest, culminating concept; this God who had
been understood as pure Being or pure thought, circling around forever
closed in upon itself without reaching over to man and his little world;
this God of the philosophers, whose pure entity and unchangeability had
excluded any relation with the changeable and transitory, now appeared
to the eye of faith as the God of men, who is not only thought of all
thoughts, the eternal mathematics of the universe, but also agape, the
power of creative love.[24]

But isn't this an over-interpretation of the assimilation of the Greek
vision of God by Christianity? Aren't the explanations of this assimi-
lation ostensible and they actually do not eliminate the dissonance
between the God of the philosophers and the God of faith? Is it possi-
ble to juxtapose the philosophical descriptions of God taken from
Greek philosophy—such as the highest idea, the supreme good, the
pure thought, the pure act—with the biblical descriptions, which—as,
for example, "Father", "Lord", "King", the "Creator" etc.—are equiv-
ocal and they describe God in the anthropomorphic manner?

Aware of the dissonance between the God of the philosophers and
the God of faith, already the medieval theologians (such as St. Thomas
Aquinas and Blessed Duns Scotus) asked a question about the essence
of the divinity of God (*Deus sub ratione deitatis*). It can be said that,
in this spirit, such a question was contemporarily asked also by
philosophers: for example, Martin Heidegger asked about "the last

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[23] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 143.
[24] Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 143.

God" (*der letzte Gott*)[25] or Bernhard Welte asked about "the divine God" (*göttlicher Gott*).[26] Also contemporary theologians are aware of this difficulty, emphasizing that one should avoid strictly conceptual descriptions of God. And thus, not to be baseless, we can mention K. Barth who claims that God is something "wholly other" (*der ganz Andere*),[27] R. Bultmann who thinks that God is "an inconceivable power" (*die Macht*),[28] K. Rahner for whom God is "a Mystery who ensures the basis for every individual reality as well as the space and the horizon for all cognition and freedom,"[29] or Jean-Luc Marion in whose opinion God should be considered as "without being" (*Dieu sans l'être*).[30] So to simplify things considerably we can say that, in the light of the Bible, on the one hand God appears as someone change-able, often presented in the likeness of man, and on the other hand—as a complete, inaccessible Mystery. In this context, Kurt Flash notes that theologians helplessly hesitate between an anthropomorphic description of God and Him being the "Mystery" or "something whol-ly Other."[31]

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[25] See Hans Hübner, "Martin Heideggers Götter und der christliche Gott: Theologische Besinnung über Heideggers 'Besinnung' (Band 66)," *Heidegger Studies* 15, (1999), 127–151.

[26] See Stjepan Kusar, *Dem göttlichen Gott entgegen denken. Der Weg von der meta-physischen zu einer nachmetaphysischen Sicht Gottes in der Religionsphilosophie B. Weltes* (Freiburg: Herder, 1986).

[27] See Michael Weinrich, *Gott, der ganz Andere: Karl Barth revisited in Polyphonie der Theologie: Verantwortung und Widerstand in Kirche und Politik*, ed. Matthias Grebe (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer 2019), 101–116.

[28] See Klaus Kremer, "Der Gottesgedanke bei Rudolf Bultmann," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 73, no. 2 (1965-1966), 322–338.

[29] Karl Rahner, "Warum bin ich ein Christ?" *Didaskalia* 11, (1981), 242.

[30] Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (University Press of Chicago, 1991).

[31] Flash. *Warum ich kein Christ bin. Bericht und Argumentation*, 149.

In the face of the metaphoricality and equivocality of the message about God in the Bible and Tradition, the question arises of what will be the further direction of the evolution of the concept of God? Are we doomed to the dissonance and consequently to the choice between the God of Revelation (the Mystery, Wholly Other, the Power, The Elusive, The Unutterable) and the God of the philosophers (The Being, the Good, The Act, The One, The Substance, The Spirit etc.)? Won't it be that as the result of separation of theology and philosophy the "death" of the idea of God in the Western culture will go deeper and deeper? But if we want to aim at reconciling the philosophical and the theological understanding of God, then what tools should we use to predicate about God so that both images of the Supreme Being are not only free from contradictions, but also complementary? What kind of language can ensure the reconciliation of both of the cognitive approaches to the absolute being?

## An Attempt at Reconciling the God of the Philosophers with the God of Revelation

Weakening the importance of metaphysics was certainly caused, to a considerable degree, by I. Kant's critique of human cognition, but it seems that an even greater role was played here by the change in the understanding of reason and rationality, which happened in the 19th century under the influence of positivism. Human reason started to be conceived in an immanent manner as incapable of going beyond a phenomenal reality. This was an even greater negation of the possibility of metaphysics than Kant's. In the 20th century that conception was radicalized by neo-positivism, which considered metaphysical problems as senseless. The reduction of reason to an instrumental function was theoretically developed by J. Habermas, who proposed the theory of communicative rationality, according to which the human reason is not

oriented towards the quest for meaning, but only to purely pragmatic goals. The world in this conception is just some definite conceptual scheme, in which there is also a place for God—but only the one who is exclusively an element of the "narration" cultivated within the framework of a given culture. True, questioning the importance of metaphysics and natural theology has not entirely eliminated the notion of God from the philosophical discourse, nevertheless this problem started to be considered mainly in the context of religion and was subordinated to the problem of religion. Only the analysis of the phenomenon of religion and religious language makes is possible to draw a picture of God, though it is always reduced to a given religion or culture. However, is it justified to give up looking for a universal conception of God? Are the universalistic aspirations of the Christian vision of God irreconcilable with the contemporary conception of reason and rationality? It seems that considering analogical predication about God by St. Thomas Aquinas not only makes it possible to solve the question of the universal predicating about God, but also appears to be the only tool to reach this kind of predication.

## THE BASICS OF PREDICATING ABOUT GOD

In the context of predicating about God there is the following problem: on the basis of what do we attribute to God different descriptions or names, such as "good," "just," "father," etc.? If the meaning of the names is determined by the objects they refer to, then aren't the names given to God only metaphors? Such names are, after all, based on the likeness to other beings. So if the likeness between God and all known things *de facto* does not refer to the "essence" of God, then calling God by the name describing this likeness does not go beyond a metaphor. In this kind of description of the Divine reality, both philosophy and theology say nothing directly about God. A metaphor is necessarily equivocal. It may be quite important for developing religious life, influencing particularly the emotional cognition of God, but it is not a proper tool for

formulating a universal description of the Divine being, which is the ambition of philosophy and should also be something that theology cannot give up. Yet are there any foundations for speaking about such likeness between God and the world, which would refer to the "essence" of God? If such likeness exists, it may only be built upon the cause-effect relation—as St. Thomas proved already in the Middle Ages. There is no other possibility, since only because of the dependence of the world on its cause we may claim that the world is, in some respect, similar to its cause. Similarity is, obviously, in the very being of the world, and not in the mode of causation. The latter one, standing on the side of God, is entirely different from the mode the natural causes act like, so it is not right to talk about likeness here. But the world, being the effect of the active God's causation, must be similar to its cause.

What kind of cause is God, then? He, obviously, cannot be the cause in the same order as the effect, as no common nature links God with creation. That is why St. Thomas Aquinas describes God as the "equivocal cause," because it exists in the order of perfection which transcends any effect. The name "equivocal" means that such a cause is not determined to produce any definite effect. For this reason, to God as to the "equivocal" cause, making different effects happen, we may attribute all the perfections of those effects. Thus, nothing stops us from saying that those perfections are in Him, though it does not mean that we can find out what they are. Because we know them only by the effects. Of course, equivocality here cannot be understood as total indetermination, because there is likeness resulting from the originating of the effect from the cause. So it is not likeness of the cause to the effect, but the effect to the cause.[32] The similarity between the effect and the cause might be the basis for ascribing names to God, independently of

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[32] Thomas defines likeness (*similitudo*) as the relation of two qualities of the same species and grade (as equality is the agreement of two quantities); the relation of cause and effect involves the relation of likeness, and in this sense, all things are likenesses of

the incompatibility between the cause and the effect.[33] And the names are not totally equivocal, but analogical.

## ANALOGICAL NAMES:
## BETWEEN EQUIVOCITY AND UNIVOCITY

In the contemporary methodological context, oriented towards the univocality of terms describing a given reality, it is not easy to show the significance of analogical names, as univocality is characteristic of scientific cognition, while analogy is widely applied in the traditional metaphysics. The misunderstanding of analogy is one of the reasons for marginalizing metaphysics and natural theology. Not entering deeper into the veiled problematics of analogy, it should be noted that resigning from analogy on the ground of natural cognition of God inevitably reduces the positive form of this kind of cognition to metaphors and anthropomorphisms. And the value of analogy comes from the fact that analogical names belong to the realm of judgments, and not to the realm of universal concepts. This opinion seems to be first formulated by Gilson, so it is worthwhile to recall his considerations.

According to Gilson, the realm of judgments serves better to express the relation between the effect and the cause, which relation is crucial for cognizing God. For a judgment is a composite act, in which, among other things, a specific identity is stated. In the case of God, we have to do with the identity of some perfection with God.[34] Such an identity may be expressed both by the existential judgments and the subjective-

God. See S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum I*, vol. 1, ed. P. Mandonnet (Parisiis: P. Lethielleux, 1929), d. 2 q. 1 exp.

[33] God is the Creator who brings into existence all creation. He does not create out of nature's necessity, but in freedom. The act of creation does not situate God in any relation to the creation. The relation is one-sided: the creation relates to the Creator, every being—to its principle.

[34] Étienne Gilson, *Thomism. The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Laurence Shook and Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002), 112.

predicative judgments. The former ones concern, first of all, the transcendental properties of being, which embrace the existential aspect. It is not without significance, because—as Gilson notes—in relation to God all judgments are judgments concerning the existence and not the essence of God. For we can cognize that God is, but it always remains unknowable what he is.[35] Predicating about God as being (*ens*), thing (*res*), one (*unum*), something separated (*aliquid*), truth (*verum*), goodness (*bonum*) and beauty (*pulchrum*) refers to those properties in the absolute sense, because only in this form they belong to God. This does not change the fact that those properties are defined on the basis of the contingent being given in the direct cognition. However, thanks to analogy, we note that they belong to the being as such, so they must be attributed to God, although they are not accessible cognitively in the absolute sense. Those properties must be identical with the essence of God, although this is only an aspect of the essence of God and not the essence itself. It is the same with the analogical non-transcendental names, which, as taken in relation to God, can be reduced to subjective-predicative judgments. Saying that "God is just" or "God is wise", we only state that justice and wisdom are the essence of God, although those properties are defined on the basis of the contingent beings.

So when we say that God is "good," "beautiful," "just" or "wise," we do not say that he is such in the same way as known things are good, beautiful, just or wise. Nevertheless, what is good, beautiful, just or wise is in God, since God is the cause of all perfections in beings. While attributing to God perfections of the created things, though they are contained in Him in the way we are not able to conceive of, we avoid both total univocality and equivocality.[36] Names describing God,

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35 S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra gentiles*, I, c. 30: "We cannot understand what God is, but only what he is not and what relation everything else has to him."

36 And in this way, some things are said of God and creatures analogically, and not in a purely equivocal nor in a purely univocal sense. See S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa*

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though they are described as one, simple "object," are not synonyms, because each of them designates a separate perfection existing in the created effects.[37] Analogical predication about God joins in itself the affirmative and the negative way of cognizing God. None of the cognized properties (e.g. goodness, beauty, justice), which are predicated about God refer directly to the essence of God, but this does not mean that, while describing God by those names, we cognize nothing about Him. Gilson observes:

> To say, "God is good" is not simply to say, "God is not bad." It is not even simply to say, "God is the cause of goodness." The true meaning of the expression is that "what we call goodness in creatures preexists in God and in a higher way."[38]

So what do we know about God, asks Gilson? We know that He is, but it is an illusion to think that we know "what" is His existence. Similarly, it is an illusion to think that we know what is the goodness, beauty, justice of God, but this does not mean that—just like the sentence "God exists"—the sentences "God is good," "God is beautiful," "God is just," "God is wise" are not true. Nevertheless, the conceptual content of those words, formulated on the basis of creatures-effects of God's action, does not change when we apply them to God. It is similar with negative names. Their meaning is formulated on the basis of the creatures-effects of God's action and related to God as the cause.

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*theologiae*, in: *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, vol. 4 (Romae: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888), p. I, q. 13, a. 5.

[37] Gilson, *Thomism. The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 112.

[38] Gilson, *Thomism. The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 113; S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae*, p. I, q. 13, a. 3: "Cum igitur dicitur Deus est bonus, non est sensus, Deus est causa bonitatis, vel Deus non est malus, sed est sensus, id quod bonitatem dicimus in creaturis, praeexistit in Deo, et hoc quidem secundum modum altiorem."

The absolute perfection or goodness points to the infinity of the act of God's existence, which cannot be conceived of otherwise than unchangeable, eternal, indivisible, one, perfectly simple.

Perfections attributed to God on the basis of analogy deserve special attention when they are also the highest perfections of man—we mean here intelligence, will and life. Gilson thinks that, since man is God's creature, we should not be afraid of this kind of anthropomorphism. The more perfect is a being, the greater its capability for cognition is. The more perfect is the intelligence, the more forms it is able to assimilate. From the fact that God cognizes, we conclude that He also possesses the will. God wants through what He cognizes. The object of God's will is, first of all, His essence. The only limitation of God's will is that He cannot simultaneously want being and non-being (i.e. contradiction). The will for goodness is Divine love. Loving Himself, He loves everything. God should also be attributed life in the sense that He is His own life as the being living through Himself and He is the One who is the source of life for all other beings.[39] These kinds of names are neither univocal nor equivocal, but analogical. It seems that analogy is the only way to speak rationally about God on the ground of metaphysics and natural theology. Negative cognition is not enough here, since—whether we want it to or not—such cognition must always assume some form of positive cognition.

## Conclusion

To sum up our considerations on the God of the philosophers and the God of faith, it is worthwhile to cite again Gilson, who seeks the source of this problem in the Greek times. He notes that

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[39] Gilson, *Thomism. The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 114–116.

Greek thought from the very beginning struggled with the difficulty of including both the gods of religion and the principles of philosophy in a single explanation of reality—difficulty of uniting the gods of religion and the principles of philosophy in the same account of reality. In order to understand what things are there must be principles, but to understand that things are there must be causes.[40]

And according to St. Thomas, it is the act of existence that is the principle of being. That is why reality becomes understandable only in the light of the highest existence. So God fulfills the role of the highest principle of the existence of being. This way, the God of religion becomes the highest principle of philosophical cognition. In Gilson's opinion,

> this identity cannot come about without danger both for God's divinity and for the intelligibility of the principle, except in the unique case in which all these problems are ultimately settled on the level of the act of being.[41]

Only then

> the radical cause of all existences is at the same time their supreme principle of intelligibility.[42]

The creatures existing in time can give different names to God, but each of those names

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[40] Gilson, *Thomism. The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 152.
[41] Gilson, *Thomism. The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 152.
[42] Gilson, *Thomism. The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 152.

designates a relationship between creatures and him, not between him and creatures.[43]

Thereby it is possible to reconcile the God of the philosophers and the God of faith. Gilson states:

> In order that the first principle of philosophy be joined in this way to the God of religion, and in order that the same God of religion be author of nature and the God of history, it has been necessary to adopt the meaning of the name of God in its profoundest existential implication. I Am is the only God of whom it can be said that he is the God of philosophers and scientists, and also the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[44]



## The God of the Philosophers and the God of Faith
### SUMMARY

In the article I will try to show that considerations on God on the ground of philosophy not only have to start with the image of God handed down by Revelation and Tradition, but they are complementary to the latter ones. In the first part I will refer to the most prominent philosophical conceptions of the absolute being developed by Plato, Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. In the second part I will sketch the problem of God shown on the ground of Revelation, considering the question of "The God of the Fathers" and "The God of Christians." And in the last part I will present the tools which make it possible to reconcile both approaches, indicating the basics of predicating

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43 Gilson, *Thomism. The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 153.
44 Gilson, *Thomism. The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 153.

about God as well as the problem of analogy which makes it possible to predicate about the first cause on the basis of its effects.

**Keywords**: being, cognition, God, philosophy, Revelation, theology

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