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CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

PHILOSOPHY

A STUDENT'S

GUIDE

David K. Naugle

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Philosophy: A Student's Guide

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Philosophy, without his heavenly guide,
May blow up self-conceit, and nourish pride;
But, while his province is the reasoning part,
Has still a veil of midnight on his heart:
'Tis truth divine, exhibited on earth,
Gives Charity her being and her birth.

—William Cowper, "Charity"

In all these schemes [scholastic, pseudo-Lutheran, enthusiastic] the cause of Christ becomes a partial and provincial matter within the limits of reality. . . . [However] there are not two realities, but only one reality, and that is the reality of God, which has become manifest in Christ in the reality of the world. . . . There are, therefore, not two spheres, but only the one sphere of the realization of Christ, in which the reality of God and the reality of the world are united. Thus the theme of the two spheres, which has repeatedly become the dominant factor in the history of the church, is foreign to the New Testament.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

—Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 10:5

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

—1 Corinthians 14:20

An older colleague once asked me as a novice philosopher to whom I had hitched my philosophical wagon. At the time, I didn't know what to say. I had learned from many, but I didn't follow anyone in particular. Now I would say Augustine.

This guide to philosophy, written to help readers reclaim a Christian intellectual tradition in philosophy, is Augustinian in character. Among many possible things, this means I place faith in the lead position before reason, and I define Christian philosophy as faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*). To elaborate on this Augustinian tradition just a bit, I would say two things. The first is that unless you believe, you will not understand. This means that in an Augustinian order of knowing (*ordo scientia*), belief renovates reason, grace restores nature, and faith renews philosophy. Second, Christian philosophy is essentially Christian faith seeking *philosophical* understanding, specifically in areas such as metaphysics, anthropology, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. To put it otherwise, Christian philosophy is a reflection *of* and a reflection *on* the essential themes of canonical Trinitarian theism (or a biblical worldview).¹ As Christian philosophers Ronda Chervin and Eugene Kevane have stated, “Christian Philosophy is philosophizing that proceeds within a [Christian] religious faith.”² In this Augustinian fashion, then, I try to accomplish the following things in this volume.

¹I owe this thought to Benno van den Toren.

²Ronda Chervin and Eugene Kevane, *Love of Wisdom: An Introduction to Christian Philosophy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 49.

First, I seek to highlight the importance of prolegomena for philosophy. A prolegomena, of course, is the statement of presuppositions and principles that serve as a prelude to and govern any inquiry. I want to emphasize how important it is for philosophers to state up front where they are coming from so that those who seek to learn from them will know what to expect in advance. This involves two steps. First, “know thyself,” as the old oracle would have it, especially in terms of what you believe and are philosophically. Then “show thyself” prolegomenously, as a newer oracle would demand. It will take a little courage. Honesty and integrity are at stake. A prolegomena, we might say, resembles a trailer to a film or an overture to an opera. It’s the general, governing word spoken beforehand and is the subject of the first chapter of this book.

Second, I desire to spell out the relationships of a Christian or biblical worldview (I’ll be calling it “canonical Trinitarian theism”), Christian philosophy, and regular philosophy.³ Sorting these out is not an easy task. I can, however, say that the movement between biblical faith and regular philosophy is a two-way street. Christianity and a Christian philosophy have a lot to offer regular philosophy. At the same time, regular philosophy contributes significantly to a Christian Weltanschauung and in shaping a Christian philosophy and philosophy (these last three domains can be difficult to distinguish). Regular philosophy, in other words, serves as a *handmaiden* to these disciplines. Yet sometimes it’s the reverse. In any case, philosophy needs Christianity and vice versa. I will also address this concern in chapter 1.

Third, I will attempt to articulate elements of a Christian philosophy based on faith in God and a biblical worldview (*viz.*,

³Albert M. Wolters sees three levels to theorizing: (1) a worldview; (2) a philosophic understanding of things formulated out of the worldview; (3) scholarly theorizing in a particular discipline (theology and philosophy included) under the influence of a particular philosophic understanding derived from the foundational worldview. See his *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 116.

canonical Trinitarian theism) in the basic philosophic subdisciplines of metaphysics, anthropology, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. In other words, I will try to convey something of what the Scriptures contribute to grasping reality, humanity, knowledge, morality, and beauty. This content will be covered in chapters 2 through 6.

Fourth, not only will I offer a Christian perspective on each of these main philosophical areas, but also I will try to show how a Christian philosophy in each of these subdisciplines can serve as a guide by which to interact with regular philosophy in affirmative, critical, corrective, complementary, and creative ways. At the same time, we will also investigate how regular philosophy, as handmaiden, helps to illuminate, clarify, and contribute in significant ways to understanding and applying Christian philosophy. Additionally, each main chapter in this volume will conclude with an example of one or more of these strategies in the given field.

Fifth, I intend to explain how the content of a biblical worldview shapes an understanding of the Christian philosophic vocation. I will try to show how Christian faith and philosophy frame or, perhaps, reframe the character, work, and purposes of Christian philosophers whether as professors or students. What does a gospel-shaped philosophic vocation look like? A focus will be on philosophers as lovers—of wisdom, of God as the true wisdom, and of others. This topic will engage our attention in the last chapter, one of the most important in the book.

Here are a couple of final thoughts. First, this book will not be a general survey of the various introductory issues in the different fields of philosophic study. Since there are many helpful volumes, both in Christian and non-Christian dress, that cover this ground admirably, I see no need to repeat such readily available material. Rather, my goal is to set forth a Christian philosophy in light of a particular prolegomena in several main areas of philosophic investigation.

Second, I was not able to cover every Christian topic that needed to be covered in any given area, even in overwriting the first draft of this volume considerably. The book, as you now have it, is quite abridged. Nevertheless, what the reader will find here are a few provocative ideas that will stimulate further reflection and practice for those who are called by God to wrestle with philosophy as believers. My ultimate hope is that this effort will enable Christian philosophers as *Christian* philosophers to be *other-wise*.⁴

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Dallas Baptist University
Fourteenth Week after Pentecost 2011

⁴Inspired by James H. Olthius, ed., *Knowing Other-Wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*, 2nd ed., Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

PROLEGOMENA

[Saint Paul] asserts that Christ is the wisdom of God and that only Christians can attain true wisdom (1 Cor. 1–2).

—E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*¹

Jesus Christ is Lord of philosophy. To be sure, no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). Certainly no one can say Jesus is Lord of *philosophy*, and mean it, except by the same Holy Spirit. A substantial change in inner being and outlook fostered by Pentecostal power is surely necessary to affirm Christ's lordship in general and his lordship over philosophy in particular. To affirm Christ's lordship over life and philosophy, in other words, is a function of regeneration. You must be born again (John 3).

Affirming that Jesus is Lord of philosophy is a *radically* countercultural position. It is sure to appear ludicrous to many. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) once bemoaned but later applauded Jesus Christ as the “transcendental Interferer” in life.² Jesus is the “transcendental interferer” in philosophy as well, a proverbial “game-changer.” More theologically, Jesus Christ as incarnate Savior and Lord interferes with philosophy by redeeming, converting, and transforming it. He decisively shifts the philosophic paradigm.³

If we have a christological disposition, we should ply our philosophic trade *coram Deo*—before the face of God. Augustine

¹E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), 505.

²C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, A Harcourt Brace Modern Classic (New York: Harcourt, 1955), 166.

³For Mark A. Noll (*Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011]), Christ and christology are the basis for the life of the Christian mind. Shouldn't he be for philosophy as well?

(354–430) is an example. By God’s grace, he and those who have followed after him have recognized the supremacy of Jesus as the creator and redeemer of all things and knew he was the one “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) certainly wanted to honor Jesus and his lordship over all creation, including education and the academic disciplines, philosophy among them. The noted Dutch polymath offered his signature proposition on the matter in these often quoted words from his inaugural address at the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880: “There is not a square inch,” Kuyper thundered, “in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”⁴

Kuyper’s Spirit-inspired affirmation of Christ’s lordship over everything is certainly a biblical notion. It is derived from God’s native supremacy and sovereignty (see Ex. 9:29; Deut. 10:14; Job 41:11; Pss. 24:1; 50:12; 103:19; Dan. 4:17; cf. 1 Cor. 10:26). God’s rule is especially manifest in the redemptive triumph of Jesus over sin, death, and Satan and other wicked forces that had deformed humanity and creation. In Christ, the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:15). Jesus is *Christus Victor* (Col. 2:15).⁵ In light of his conquest, God exalted Jesus by granting him authority and lordship over all things as the Great Commission and Paul’s words make clear (Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2:9–11).

God’s existence and sovereignty and Christ’s lordship couldn’t be more influential for the study of philosophy. Or complicating! In light of these realities, we have to ask different questions and participate in new conversations, if we are to reclaim a Christian intellectual tradition in philosophy (actually, the questions and conversations are rehabilitations of older ones). In short, we want to know how to philosophize in light of God and the gospel. We

⁴Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

⁵Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003).

want to grasp the philosophic implications of the Scriptures as divine revelation. Perhaps the recent turn or *return* to religion in philosophy and cultural affairs will facilitate discussion of these questions. That is, unless ABC prevails.⁶

Regardless, we must ask: What are Christian implications on metaphysics, anthropology, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics? These matters constitute a veritable Gordian knot that is difficult to untie, almost as challenging as apprehending the mystery of the Trinity. Hence, we need a *prolegomena* to help us sort this out.

PROLEGOMENA AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Prolegomena is derived from the neuter present passive participial form of the Greek verb *prolechein*, which means “to speak beforehand or predict.” A prolegomena, or a word spoken beforehand, is a preliminary exercise to any subject matter or discussion. Its purpose is to spell out the fundamental assumptions, methods, principles, and relationships that guide any specific inquiry, especially academic ones.

Normally, theologians offer a prolegomena at the outset of their theologies to inform people of the basic concepts that are driving their reflections. From time to time, theologians’ prolegomenas are quite biblical. Other times, they deploy extrabiblical ideas as the bases on which they theologize. Regardless, a theological prolegomena is quite influential. “Show me your prolegomena,” says one theologian, “and I will predict the rest of your theology.”⁷

A prolegomena is also philosophically prophetic. Very often, however, and this is *a very important point*, philosophers philosophize *unprolegomenously*.⁸ That is, philosophy’s main practitioners, Christian philosophers included, pursue the subject without giving

⁶ABC stands for “anything but Christianity.”

⁷Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 40.

⁸Immanuel Kant’s *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic That Will Be Able to Present Itself as a Science* (1783) is an exception.

much, if any, attention to prefatory concerns. With a tip of the hat to a presumed objectivity, many jump right into the philosophic process and churn out theories willy-nilly. We think our thoughts and theories can explain reality unmediated. We think that reality is automatically present to mind and directly expressible.

This approach, however, is naive. Philosophies have antecedents (as well as consequences), and philosophers ought to state their assumptions up front so that people will know from where they are coming. As C. S. Lewis reminds us, “For what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing: it also depends on what sort of person you are.”⁹ Show me your prolegomena, and I can predict the rest of your *philosophy*.

PROBLEMATIZING CHRISTIAN PROLEGOMENA

Before I build, however, I must do a little blasting. My concern is that a fair number of Christian philosophers have often relied on non-Christian sources to guide them in their thinking. Plato and the neo-Platonists, Aristotle and the Aristotelians, Descartes and the Cartesians, Kant and the Kantians, Hegel and the Hegelians, Reid and Common Sense Realists, Heidegger and the Heideggerians, and so on, have supplied various and sundry Christian philosophers with their basic principles by which they have offered an alleged Christian philosophy.

However, we must ask whether such appropriations help or hinder a Christian philosophical apprehension of God, life, and the world. For example, did aspects of neo-Platonic philosophy assumed by the early church fathers help them produce a more biblically faithful understanding of things? What influenced Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–c. 107) to write this comment in his epistle to the Romans: “I have no delight in corruptible food nor in the pleasures of this life”?¹⁰ Is this a Christian sentiment? Just

⁹C. S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: Collier, 1970), 125.

¹⁰Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, *Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 76.

how orthodox were these early Christian theologians and philosophers? Note Friedrich Nietzsche's charge that Christianity overall was basically "Platonism for the people."¹¹ Where does such thinking come from? It seems that various Greek conceptions damaged Christian philosophy and theology early on and in a residual way. Aren't we still struggling with the fallout of Christianized versions of stoicism, asceticism, Gnosticism, and so on?

We might also ask how more recent appropriations of aspects of rationalism, empiricism, scientism, idealism, evolutionism, processism, logical positivism, linguisticism, pragmatism, existentialism, Marxism, feminism, and so on, have affected Christian thought. Have these "isms" helped or hindered our understanding of God and his ways? What about modernism? Or postmodernism? These are huge issues. Has Christian philosophy been in thrall to a kind of philosophic captivity over the centuries? No doubt the very idea of a "Hellenization," used here to stand for interpreting Christian truth by means of foreign outlooks ("Christ of culture") has continued unabated.

Though there will always be imperfections and impurities, we conclude, nevertheless, that a Christian philosophy requires a biblically sound prolegomena, not an interloper. A prolegomena should be indigenous to the material it directs, like a *native* guide pointing out the features of his or her homeland to visitors. Let's call it a "prolegomena to the glory of God."¹²

A PROLEGOMENA FOR CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

I begin with the claim that faith is a universal component of human nature.¹³ Faith is the deepest thing within us, and, as a result, it

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: Modern Library, 1954), 378.

¹² Inspired by John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994).

¹³ Though supplemented by the work of others, generally these reflections on faith are from Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrick De Vries (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 125–46.

guides our thinking and living. For all of us, then, and not just Christians, “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).

If we are creatures living naturally in a God-given, faith-based mode, this means at least two things. First, we cannot divide the world between believers and nonbelievers since all people have faith and everyone believes. To be sure, objects of faith differ, and we can still divide the human race between those who possess *saving faith* and those who do not. Saving faith itself, however, is best understood as a graciously redirected function of the faith-based nature we all possess.

Second, in light of this we cannot say that religious philosophers have faith and nonreligious philosophers do not. Or that the former are biased because of faith and the latter are unbiased. Or that religious philosophers are faith-based individuals dealing with subjective values, while nonreligious philosophers are scientific and are concerned with rational, objective facts.

Rather, faith as a universal structural component of human nature levels the playing field. It means that *all* philosophers are people of faith and *all* are as biased and subjective as anyone else. In a shared way, *all* philosophers see and hear certain things, and don’t see and hear others, because of who they are and where they are standing. Various and sundry *controlling stories and control beliefs* quietly guide the thoughts and lives of philosophers, even if the philosophers themselves claim to bracket their prejudices when doing philosophy.¹⁴

Bracketing the presuppositions we posit underneath in advance and hold by faith in our hearts, however, is impossible and doesn’t happen.¹⁵ Can we even identify our assumptions? Who can strip

¹⁴ On the idea of “control beliefs,” see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 67–70. On the concept of “controlling stories,” see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 42.

¹⁵ Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 147, defines a “presupposition” etymologically as *pre-sub-ponere*, or that which is posited underneath in advance.”

himself of himself or herself of herself? Even if it were possible, who would want to? Hence, presuppositions are consistently at work guiding philosophic reflection in hidden and yet powerful ways, as the moon affects the tides. Philosophers with presupposed, faith-based presuppositions are not nonreligious in nature, protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. All philosophers are religious philosophers. Secularism hasn't eliminated religion, just relocated it, especially in the direction of various forms of contemporary worship.¹⁶ Thus, as Roy Clouser has shown, this means that religious neutrality in scholarship and theory making, philosophy included, is simply a myth.¹⁷ Thought is a function of religion.

Another main point in this prolegomena follows directly from this. The faith of Christian philosophers ought to rest upon God, and they should derive their philosophies from canonical Trinitarian theism.¹⁸ This is a shorthand expression for the Christian faith, referring specifically to the Trinitarian God, who has made himself and all his works known in the inspired revelation of the biblical canon from Genesis to Revelation. "Canonical Trinitarian theism" is also known, more commonly, as a biblical or Christian worldview, or as a Christian "social imaginary," if you prefer.¹⁹ Regardless of the name, Christian philosophers ought to be Christ followers, and Christian faith ought to be the primary source of Christian philosophers' philosophy in metaphysics, anthropology, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and other subdisciplines.

¹⁶Pete Ward, *Gods Behaving Badly: Media, Religion, and Celebrity Culture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 19.

¹⁷See Roy Clouser's books *Knowing with the Heart: Religious Experience and Belief in God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999); *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

¹⁸What I am calling "canonical Trinitarian theism" is inspired by, though different from, William J. Abraham's proposal of "canonical theism." His proposal, which is also Trinitarian, is primarily *ecclesiological* in character, whereas mine is *bibliological*. See William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk, eds., *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

¹⁹Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). See also Taylor's *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), chap. 4.

MORE ELEMENTS OF A CHRISTIAN PROLEGOMENA

On this fundamental foundation about faith, let me add some additional features to a Christian philosophical prolegomena. First, in light of the doctrine of creation (Genesis 1–2), there is an important distinction between God the infinite creator and his finite creation. This prevents us from identifying God with nature (naturalism) or of identifying nature with God (pantheism). Nature is nature or creation, and not God. God is God or divine, and not nature or creation. This distinction also prevents us from equating God and humans. God is God and not people; people are people and not God (Ps. 100:3). Finally, it maintains God’s sovereignty over the world he created. He is incomparably great in his person, power, and presence. Acknowledging God and his authority in this reverent way, according to Scripture, is unsurprisingly the beginning (and end) of both knowledge and wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10).

Despite this ontological division, heaven and earth are not strangers. God upholds all things in existence (Jer. 33:20; Col. 2:17). All reality is holy (Isa. 6:3), “shot through with the presence of God” as Alexander Schmemmann (1921–1983) has said.²⁰ The world is not a neutral place. It is God’s. Christian philosophy must reflect these profound realities based on the distinction and intimacy between God and his world.

The next basic principle of a Christian prolegomena is that *grace restores nature* (GRN). GRN is established on the inherent connections and theological unity that exists between cosmology (nature) and soteriology (grace) in the biblical story. The doctrines of creation and redemption are deeply connected. God made a very good creation. It fell into sin. Out of covenant love, God saves and renews all things in Christ. The movement in Scripture is from creation to a new creation. God is not interested in making new

²⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 16.

things since the first things he made were very good (Gen. 1:31; Rom. 8:18–25; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 1:20; Rev. 21:5). To use an analogy, God created a barn. It got rats, but he didn't burn down the barn to get rid of the rats. Rather, he got rid of the rats in order to get his barn back. Christianity, in other words, is about the restoration of a sin-wrecked world.²¹

The Catholic Augustine and the Protestant Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) advocated GRN.²² So did Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann. “Christ came,” Schmemmann writes, “not to *replace* ‘natural’ matter with some ‘supernatural’ or sacred matter, but to *restore* it and to fulfill it as the means of communion with God.”²³ This has tremendous philosophical implications, for if grace restores nature, or salvation renews culture, and philosophy is part of culture or nature, then salvation and grace restores philosophy. In other words, Christ restores philosophy. Saving faith enables Christian philosophers to seek philosophical understanding in him.

A third feature of a Christian philosophical prolegomena is the distinction between *structure and direction* and the associated notion of *antithesis*. Structurally, the creation was very good (Gen. 1:31). Yet, sin parasitically affected everything and all of life went in the wrong direction. Though deeply entwined, sin is still distinct from creation. To equate creation and sin is Gnostic or Manichean, not Christian. Sin is ethical misdirection. It's a moral matter, not a metaphysical one.

We can make bad use of good things, according to St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 318–387).²⁴ There is nothing wrong with sex, food,

²¹ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 12.

²² Augustine, “On Nature and Grace,” trans. Peter Holmes and Robert E. Ernest, in vol. 5 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 125, 142. See also Augustine's *Retractions* on “On Nature and Grace,” vol. 5 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 116. On grace and nature in Herman Bavinck, consult Jan Veenhof, *Grace and Nature in Herman Bavinck*, trans. Albert M. Wolters (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2006).

²³ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit* (London: SPCK, 1976), 49.

²⁴ St. Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures*, trans. Edwin H. Gifford, vol. 7 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 49.

or self, he said, since God made them all. It's their misuse that's sin. The same is true of the words we speak. We can pour into them the wine of truth or error. They are the good gifts of God, but they can be used to hurt or heal—the antithetical directions (Prov. 12:18).

John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) and Augustine espoused the structure, direction, and antithesis distinctions.²⁵ So did C. S. Lewis. In his earlier days, Lewis disdained the customary idea of loving the sinner (structure), but hating the sin (direction). Then he realized there was one person who had been the gracious recipient of this distinction all along, namely, himself. As he confesses in *Mere Christianity*, “However much I might dislike my own cowardice or conceit or greed, I went on loving myself. There had never been the slightest difficulty about it.”²⁶ Lewis loved and embraced himself as structurally good, so to speak, even if he didn't like his misdirected behavior on occasion.

A fourth feature of this Christian prolegomena is *common grace*. By it, God shows nonsaving favor to all by bestowing natural gifts such as rain, sunshine, and food, on all creatures, by preserving creation and restraining sin in human affairs, and by giving diverse gifts and capacities to all people who are able to make distinctive contributions to the common good.²⁷ As we read in Psalm 145:9, “The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.”

Common grace is an antidote to taking the wrong direction at the antithetical fork in the road. Even if people go astray and misuse God's good things, common grace means that these very same people, regardless of their spiritual state, do things well and make

²⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues*, trans. W. R. W. Stephens, vol. 9 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 369; Augustine, *Confessions*, Oxford World's Classics, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 19.

²⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 90.

²⁷ Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 9.

remarkable contributions to life and the world. Beethoven and the Beatles, for example, have produced some really good music. Plato and Aristotle wrote some fine philosophy.

On the basis of common grace among philosophers, Puritan divine Cotton Mather (1663–1728) encouraged his associates to “find a friend in Plato, a friend in Socrates and . . . in Aristotle.”²⁸ Maybe Mather got his thoughts from John Calvin (1509–1564), who espoused the same perspective.²⁹ So did Augustine, who came before both of them. On the basis of the Exodus story in which the Israelites plundered the gold, silver, and clothing of the Egyptians, Augustine said that believers ought to seize what is intellectually valuable from non-Christians and put it to better use in service to God.³⁰ Who knows, then, what insights Christian philosophers may obtain from their non-Christian colleagues? However, we must be careful not to turn our Egyptian “gold” into an idol half-way to Canaan, as Mark Boone has wisely warned.³¹

Fifth and finally, Christian scholarship is primarily *Hebraic* rather than *Hellenic or something else*. The point is that the Hebrew mind-set stands in notable experiential contrast in various points to the more abstract character of the Hellenic thought style. Hence we ask: Wouldn’t neglecting the influential principles and patterns of a *Hebrew mind* deposited in the Bible seriously weaken a proper Christian scholarly understanding of God, the world, and ourselves?³² Shall we think and live, primarily, with Greek or Hebrew lenses and hearts? Of course, we want to know

²⁸ Quoted in Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 169.

²⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 22 of *The Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John Baillie, John T. McNeill, Henry P. Van Dusen (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.2.15.

³⁰ Augustine, *Teaching Christianity: De Doctrina Christiana*, vol. 11 of *The Works of St. Augustine for the 21st Century*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996), 159–60. See Ex. 3:22; 11:2–3; 12:35–36.

³¹ Mark J. Boone, “Don’t Turn Your Egyptian Gold into an Idol Halfway to Canaan.” http://berry.academia.edu/MarkBoone/Talks/39443/_Dont_Turn_Your_Egyptian_Gold_into_an_Idol_Halfway_to_Canaan_.

³² Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 135.

the essential differences between these two outlooks and whether a combination is possible.³³

The French polymath Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), who was of sincere Christian persuasion, would certainly appreciate the Hebrew character of Christian thought since he emphasized the distinction between the God of the Bible and the “God” of the philosophers. His distinction is clear in the “Memorial” of his conversion about which he wrote in his book *Pensées*. Here he affirmed the fiery character of the God of the Hebrews, while debunking the alternative deities of scholars and philosophers as seemingly mild or timid. “Fire,” he said, “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, *not* of philosophers and scholars. . . . God of Jesus Christ.”³⁴

Christianity is Jewish, and to some extent a Christian philosophy based upon it should be as well. Yet, most Western philosophy is derived from “Athens” rather than “Jerusalem.” Yet there is a difference.³⁵ For example, Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972) observed that the “Hebrews learned in order to *revere*,” whereas the Greeks learned in order to *comprehend*, and modern people learned in order to *use*.³⁶ The Jewish and Hellenic differences are also on display in the figures of a worshipping Israelite and an entranced Socrates:

When Socrates was seized by a problem, he remained immobile for an indeterminate period of time in deep thought [*Symposium* 175b]; when Holy Scripture is read aloud in the synagogue, the Orthodox Jew moves his whole body ceaselessly in deep devotion and adoration. The Greek most acutely experiences the world and existence while he stands and reflects, but the Israelite

³³ Adolf von Harnack in his *History of Dogma* has called attention to the historically recognized influence of Hellenism, and especially Plato’s philosophy, on doctrinal development in the early church.

³⁴ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, The World’s Classics, trans. Honor Levi (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 178 (emphasis added).

³⁵ See Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, trans. Jules L. Moreau (New York: Norton, 1970); Claude Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, trans. Michael F. Gibson (New York: Desclee, 1960); Duncan Black Macdonald, *The Hebrew Philosophical Genius: A Vindication* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1936).

³⁶ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), 34 (emphasis added).

reaches his zenith in ceaseless movement. Rest, harmony, composure, and self-control—this is the Greek way; movement, life, deep emotion, and power—this is the Hebrew way.³⁷

Reverence, comprehension, or use? Detachment or the dance of devotion? These are the options. Yours?

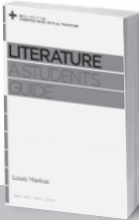
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Hence, we have a biblically established prolegomena for Christian philosophy if we prioritize the dispositions of the Hebrew mind over those of the Greeks, if we retain the idea of common grace, if we recall that grace restores nature, if we recognize the difference between the good creational structure and its possible antithetical directions, if we remember the ontological distinction between the creator and the creation, if we base Christian philosophy on canonical Trinitarian theism, and if we remember that faith is a universal structural component of human nature. In any case, Christian philosophy is theological in character, “under the constant restraint of the Biblical presentation of the faith.”³⁸ Christian philosophers will need pluck to be countercultural. This prolegomena often stands in critical, corrective, and creative contrast to today’s approaches.

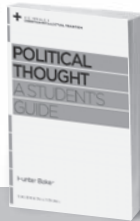
³⁷ Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 205.

³⁸ G. E. Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (New York: SCM Press, 1952), 109.

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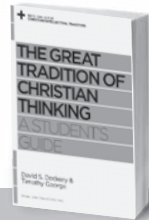
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