PIOTR GUTOWSKI

CREATIVE THINKING ABOUT GOD
AND RESPECT FOR CHRISTIAN IDENTITY*

In this article, I will refer to the philosophy of William Hasker and his way of reconciling respect for the basic dogmas of Christianity with the contemporary standards of knowledge and human religious needs. The subject of my reflection will be, first, the meaning of the term "Christian philosophy" and then Hasker's idea that religious orthodoxy can be approached creatively. I will focus mainly on his articles "How Christian Can Philosophy Be?" (2016), "The Greater God" (2019), and the texts included in the special issue of *Roczniki Filozoficzne* devoted to the philosophy of William Hasker (2022).

1. CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY?

Since William Hasker assumes the truthfulness of the main doctrines of Christianity, he is not opposed to being referred to as a Christian philosopher, but neither is he enthusiastic about this name. He notes that there are philosophers who would refuse to be called "Christian philosophers" be-

Prof. Dr Hab. PIOTR GUTOWSKI, Head of the Department of the History of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy, Institute of Philosophy, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin; correspondence address: Wydział Filozofii KUL, Al. Racławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland; e-mail: gutowski@kul.pl; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9105-4973.

cause of their belief that a philosopher must remain neutral with respect to all uncertain views, which include religious views. Such a Cartesian position is untenable:

> If you really could strip yourself completely of everything you now believe, you would, to be sure, reach a certain sort of perfection. You would be perfectly, unconquerably ignorant—with no hope of ever recovering from that ignorance! (HASKER 2016, 23)

It is difficult to disagree with this view, but it is worth adding that also some Christian proponents of natural theology, who cannot be described as continuators of Cartesian methodology, reject the term "Christian philosopher". They believe that starting from natural, non-religious premises, it is possible to justify on purely philosophical grounds the necessity or at least the greater probability of God's existence than His non-existence, and to deduce divine attributes, including personal attributes (indeed, some authors referring to Duns Scotus believe that the possibility or even necessity of Incarnation can be inferred from these attributes alone). However, philosophy has its limits and should be supplemented by what God has revealed about Himself in Scripture, so the nature of this supplement is already extra-philosophical. These thinkers have usually righty been accused of concealing the religious views they intended to defend in their supposedly religiously neutral premises.

Hasker's (2016) position is as follows:

> The truth is that we simply have no option except to do philosophy as the people we are, believing the things we actually do believe, and doing our best to bring ourselves and our beliefs more in line with what is in accord with sound reason. (23)

The way I understand it is that for a Christian who places her religious beliefs at the center of her worldview, they should be the starting point and the core of her philosophy. Followers of other religions and atheists also have the right and even the intellectual obligation to similarly privilege their own beliefs. However, in this view, it is not the starting point of research that is most important (as in Cartesian methodology), but the point of arrival. Indeed, the initial diversity of views does not necessarily lead to relativism. One might hope, as C. S. Peirce did in his anti-Cartesian methodology, that rigorous respect for the requirements of correct justification of beliefs would eventually lead everyone to the same conclusions. If such an agreement has

not been reached, this means that at least some of the participants in this philosophical enterprise, through their own fault or for objective reasons, have not respected the relevant requirements, i.e. committed formal or material fallacies in their arguments. This is how philosophers usually judge those who defend positions other than their own. Taking this into consideration, one should either advocate a complete resignation from placing adjectives that reveal religious or worldview beliefs of a given thinker from any terms denoting their philosophy, since this presence can be taken for granted, or, conversely, urge every philosopher to reveal them. In the latter case, we would end up with no philosophy as such, but only Christian philosophy, Jewish philosophy, atheist philosophy, agnostic philosophy, etc.

The decision to call one's own views "Christian philosophy" when most people simply use the name "philosophy" would depend on external, for instance political, contexts. Let me give an example from my own backyard. During the communist era in Poland (1945–1989), philosophy was taught at the Catholic University of Lublin in a department that by the decision of the state authorities of the time was called the Faculty of Christian Philosophy. Although this university prided itself on being the only one in the entire communist bloc to be free of Marxism, it was not autonomous, among other things, in naming intra-university administrative units. The communist authorities wanted to distinguish the University's philosophy department from the "proper" philosophy departments at other Marxism-dominated universities—although in Poland, unlike in other countries of so-called People's Democracy, this domination was not complete, and its intensity varied in different periods of communism. This distinction was to be signalled by contrasting Christian (and sometimes more narrowly, Catholic) philosophy with philosophy without additional designations or with "scientific" philosophy, which in the case of Marxism was a primitive version of materialism.[1] For this reason, after the fall of communism, the authorities of the University's Philosophy Faculty decided to change the name of their faculty by removing the adjective "Christian".

Outside of the historical context, this decision, taken after all by a body of professors of a Catholic university who took their religious affiliation seriously, might seem shocking, but in this context it may serve as a warning

---

[1] The term "scientific philosophy" has also been used in other schools of philosophy in different meanings. In my country it was used e.g. by representatives of the Lvov-Warsaw school (Polish branch of analytic philosophy). There, however, it was not applied to the content, but to the way of practising philosophy which consisted in ensuring clarity of linguistic expressions and proper justification of beliefs.

against too eager and hasty use of the name "Christian philosopher" when so many influential non-Christian philosophers are essentially anti-Christian thinkers.[2] This is because, from the point of view of the latter, the term "Christian philosopher" is advantageous, as it facilitates the identification of people whom they regard as religious missionaries. This makes it easier for them to portray themselves as "true" seekers of truth or, like Marxists, as "scientific" philosophers, in opposition to the non-scientific, i.e. religious ones. Hasker (2016) recognizes such a danger, and this is, among other things, why he is unenthusiastic about the name "Christian philosophy": "In the present philosophical climate, this would suggest to many a parochial, self-enclosed enterprise with little relevance to the broader philosophical community—precisely the opposite of what Christian philosophers should be attempting to achieve" (37).

There is another reason to be careful not so much with the term "Christian philosophy" as with some uses of the term, as noted by Graham Oppy. In reaction to Hasker's statement that the objective truth is the goal of all philosophy, but a Christian philosopher should take special account of issues of interest to the Christian community (HASKER 2016, 37), Oppy points to the parallel between the *philosophy vs. Christian philosophy* opposition and the *science vs. Christian science* opposition and adds the following comment: "Even if there are scientific issues and questions that are pertinent specifically to the concerns of Christian communities, it is not clear that we should be happy to countenance Christian scientists paying particular attention to those issues and questions…. Philosophy, no less than science, is an enterprise that belongs to humanity rather than any particular sect or cult" (HASKER 2022, 29–30). One might reply that the universal character of philosophy need not be questioned if we recognize that, in addition to general philosophical topics, there is a certain set of issues highly important to a Christian, which is unlikely to be of interest to, say, the naturalist (unless this were a purely critical interest). Therefore, if reflection on these questions could be separated from general philosophical issues, just as mathematical questions can be separated from those of the social sciences and humanities, then this would suffice to distinguish philosophy from Christian theology or philosophical theology. The task of the latter disciplines would be precisely to reflect on issues of interest only to Christians.

---

[2] This situation must be distinguished from the avoidance of religious naming at originally Christian universities due to their secularization.

However, if being a Christian means recognizing certain truths as central to one's whole worldview, these truths will probably find expression—not necessarily directly visible—in one's treatment of general philosophical issues, for example in ethics, ontology or epistemology, maybe even in logic, not to mention philosophy of religion. The concern expressed by Oppy about the possible bias of a philosopher who in some way prefers issues of interest to the Christian community can be overruled by referring to the already mentioned distinction between the starting point of philosophical reflection, the point of arrival and the requirements one should respect on the way. This is basically Hasker's (2016) point:

> What is required for good philosophy is not an impossible state of absolute neutrality, but rather fairness and a resolute attempt to evaluate all perspectives and beliefs, including one's own, for their internal coherence and their correspondence with the evidence we have. In particular, we must seriously try our best to understand the beliefs of those who disagree with us, rather than caricature and distort those beliefs. And our evaluation of all beliefs, of others as well as our own, must be carried out fairly, not claiming for our own favored perspective privileges we deny to others. These, I submit, are requirements that can and should be accepted in good faith by Christian philosophy. (23)

This "fairness" is not only a methodological requirement, but also an ethical one. It should be the norm for philosophy as such and for all science (it would be easy to find an intra-Christian justification for this norm). It is particularly important, but also difficult, to remain fair to the opponent's view, because by doing so one has to accept that one's own position may need to be revised. It is worth noting here that William Hasker not only preaches but also practices this style of conducting philosophical debate. This can be evidenced by the following opinion of naturalist Graham Oppy on the anti-naturalist argument from reason formulated by Hasker. Oppy writes that, unlike other numerous anti-naturalist arguments, Hasker's "objection to evolutionary naturalism does not turn on jejune misunderstandings of contemporary evolutionary theorizing" (OPPY 2022, 28).

Another requirement formulated by Hasker for Christian philosophers, i.e. to remain "in correspondence with evidence", probably means that it would be best if they maintained the standards characteristic of analytic philosophy. Hasker would certainly agree with the addendum (he expresses it *explicite* elsewhere) that every philosopher (including the Christian philosopher) should be directed not only towards evidence, but also towards

truth, even at the risk of not always hitting it. Of course, correct justification seems to be the best indicator of truth, but the fact is that consent to the *non-logical requirements of justification* usually concerns a narrow scope of empirical evidence, the application of which resolves philosophical problems in a biased way; besides, the assessment of its epistemic value changes even in non-philosophical contexts. Even if we assume optimistically that this change is always for the better, we cannot uncritically take for granted that the current standards are already close to the final ones. This is true even of empirical beliefs: new DNA testing methods have led to the acquittal of many people convicted in the past in trials that respected the contemporary epistemic standards, but other, even better, methods of justification are conceivable in the future that will undermine some of the conclusions obtained by today's DNA testing.

The *strictly logical requirements of justification*, such as consistency, are treated as lethal weapons against poorly constructed philosophical positions. In practice, however, such requirements are most often powerless, because we can only sensibly talk about contradictions in relation to highly formalized theories. There are cases of people defending such theories who, under the influence of appropriate arguments, admitted to contradiction (in logic, Frege's reaction to the paradox indicated by Russell is a case in point). However, it is difficult to find similar examples with respect to highly informal philosophical theories, not because of philosophers' lack of humility or blindness, but because to show the contradiction of positions that, as a rule, operate with fuzzy concepts is like trying to catch a spot of light thrown on the wall with a mirror. When, for example, a supporter of classical theism is accused of inconsistency of his position on natural evil, because the omniscient and Almighty God could at least reduce it, he usually recalls, in defence, the thesis of divine transcendence in relation to human knowledge or, in other words, warns against an overly anthropomorphic understanding of God. However, it is impossible to determine precisely where is the point beyond which divine transcendence is underestimated. It suffices to shift this boundary slightly from where the critic has placed it to avoid the accusation of contradiction. Precisely because a lot of philosophical concepts are vague and philosophical claims cannot be empirically falsified, they have the extraordinary ability to persist in life or unexpectedly revive after being considered definitively dead.

It does not follow, of course, that there are no other reasons for rejecting philosophical theories. One of such reasons may be that excessive vagueness

of certain concepts makes them completely immune to criticism. This, I believe, is the case with the concept of mystery, which is an essential component of the concept of God's transcendence in relation to human knowledge. The classical theist can also be criticized with reference to the axiology of metaphysical concepts, for example, for treating the ancient determinants of perfection (simplicity or immutability) as unquestionable. One has to agree, however, that on the basis of Thomistic language and principles it is possible to remove inconsistencies (contradictions). In my opinion philosophical theories do not rest on indisputable, but on circumstantial evidence.

The difficulties associated with refuting and justifying philosophical beliefs, however, cannot hide the fact that, assuming the classical definition of truth—which is the only reasonable one—they are either true or false. For example, the dispute over the existence of a God of a certain nature has an objective resolution in the sense that such a God either exists or does not exist, and we should relate to this situation as rational beings. I am convinced by the thought of William James that of the two typical strategies for dealing with the situation, namely: *the pursuit of truth* (in the classical, non-Jamesian sense) even at the risk of missing it, and the *avoidance of falsehood*, which leaves us in the safe state of agnosticism, basically, when the case is of great importance to us, the former is rational. This conclusion must, however, be subject to the proviso that recognizing a certain belief as true cannot preclude later revisions under the influence of new data. I would consider such an effective (and not merely apparent) correctability of the initial position an essential element of the rationality of philosophizing. The point is that sound reason, both theoretical and practical, should be the guide in this process. It is part of the nature of philosophy, however, that also reason is subject to rational critique.

2. INTERPRETIVE CREATIVITY AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

In an attempt to answer the question what Christian philosophy should look like, Hasker considers and tries to reconcile three divergent visions of Christian philosophy proposed by Paul K. Moser, Robert M. Adams, and Eleonore Stump. Regarding Moser, who claims that for a Christian philosopher his religious convictions should constitute the heart of all philosophy, Hasker (2016) states:

> We should not, however, insist as he does that Christian philosophers should limit their philosophical interests to such topics, thus in effect consigning philosophy to a merely instrumental status and value. Quite simply, our aim in philosophy should be the truth, and while not all truths are equal in value and importance, truth is under-valued if we suppose that only those truths are worth knowing that have become an issue for the life of the Christian church. (37)

Although Hasker is an analytic philosopher focused mainly on justification of accepted views according to modern standards, he recognizes the shortcomings of the approach which consists in ignoring the achievements of ancient and medieval Christian thinkers. This is pointed out by Eleonore Stump—a proponent of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas—who recommends that contemporary Christian thinkers try to overcome this approach. Hasker (2016) concedes her point:

> We should heed Stump's admonition to pay attention to the earlier history of Christian thought.… Knowledge of this tradition is important not only for enabling us to avoid heresy, but as informing our own work with the insights and concerns that have been important to Christian thinkers throughout that period of time.… Rightly considered, tradition should not be seen as a set of walls enclosing our own intellectual endeavors but rather a source of guidance, inspiration, and strength as we move forward with the topics that challenge us today. (38)

The most important message, I think, for the contemporary Christian philosopher, which is to strive to combine creative thinking about religious matters with preserving the identity of Christian faith, is formulated by Hasker (2016) when commenting on Adams' view:

> In carrying out the task, our objective should not be to create an impervious defensive ringwall around existing doctrinal formulations, but to venture into the unexplored territory, lying between philosophy and faith, from which genuinely new insight can emerge. We need to respond to Adams' call for "creative and imaginative thinking about religious questions." At the same time, we should also remember Adams' insistence, seconded by Stump, on respecting the identity and integrity of the Christian faith we are interpreting. (38–39)

It should be noted that respect for the identity of the Christian faith is not equivalent to respect for the identity of the Christian tradition, if this tradition is understood as a stream of ancient, medieval, and modern philosophical and theological interpretations of already established dogmas. Even if

many of these interpretations, for instance the ones proposed by St. Augustine or St. Thomas, are firmly entrenched in mainstream Christianity, nothing prevents one from modifying or even rejecting them. Thus, in Hasker's praise of the results of Stump's study of St. Thomas' philosophy, the point is that it corrects the prior, perhaps too deformed, picture of this outstanding thinker held by contemporary analytic philosophers. However, a Christian philosopher cannot reject the principles of faith: about the triune God the creator of the world, who takes care of this world (this thesis also includes the concept of the deity of Jesus), about the human immortal soul, or about human guilt and divine redemption. As I understand it, creative thinking need not always lead to a modification of religious beliefs that are rooted in the tradition, it may as well lead, for example, to a justified conviction that the new data do not threaten the faith. However, when objections are serious, it is reasonable to offer a new interpretation of the challenged religious beliefs.

If this is the meaning of "creative thinking about religious issues", it simply describes what has actually been going on in Christian thought for centuries. This creativity has often been conceived more broadly than Hasker would allow, with Unitarians, for example, questioning the doctrine of the Trinity, and Christian materialists such as Peter van Inwagen rejecting the immateriality of the soul while defending human immortality. The nature of this creativity depends on what set of truths of faith is considered necessary for being a Christian, which thesis or theses, explicitly expressed or assumed in these truths of faith, are considered the most important, and on the assessment of the internal coherence of these theses as well as their coherence with current knowledge and people's religious needs.

For Hasker, of particular, perhaps even central, importance is the belief in admittedly limited, but nevertheless authentic human freedom, without which the Christian vision of the world makes no sense. The assumption of libertarian freedom—in my opinion correct—necessitates a modification in the concept of God rooted in traditional theology: God must be construed in such a way as to exclude theological determinism. The least possible alteration in the traditional conception of God is to exclude God's detailed knowledge of future events. In the present context of prevalently naturalistic views, defending the libertarian conception of freedom involves defending the immateriality of the soul. However, the very appearance of the soul in the world should take into account, according to Hasker, the current evolutionary picture of the universe, which is the basis for his view of the

emergence of the soul. Additionally, both human freedom and biological evolution question the immutability and timelessness of God. This course of reasoning has given rise to the concept of open theism.

I will not refer to the detailed arguments with which Hasker supports open theism. Instead, I want to draw the reader's attention to an interesting rhetorical device he uses in *The Greater God* to make the concept more attractive. Those who so far attempted to advertise open theism encountered the following problem: how not to lose anything of the divinity of God, when indicating the fundamental error inherent in the idea of God's full and detailed knowledge of future events (as if their occurrence was predetermined), given that God's theological and philosophical image was shaped by traditional theism, which attributed this knowledge to God. Hasker believes that as Christians we should form our concept of God on the basis of our idea of what it means to be a great person: God would maximally exemplify these qualities. Thus, it can be said that Hasker is concerned with placing God in a distinctly Christian context which differs from the general theistic one. In theism, the content of the concept of God has often been determined by a primarily non-anthropomorphic notion of perfection, which further entails the notions of simplicity, immutability or eternity understood as timelessness.

The notion of maximum greatness can also be found in the writings of St. Anselm, though he used it in the context of his proof of God's existence. Therefore, he proposed an extremely formal version of the notion, so that it would be common to the theist and the atheist (or, more precisely, the fool from the initial verses of Psalms 14 and 53 who says in his heart that there is no God). The most important component of the concept of divine greatness was the *impossibility of non-existence*, or in other words *the necessity of the existence* of its object. A more detailed specification of the remaining properties was unnecessary, which is why proponents of the ontological proof include traditional theists, such as Leibniz, Descartes and Malebranche, proponents of non-classical theism, like Hegel and Hartshorne, as well as pantheists, for example Spinoza. Hasker's proposal is also legitimate from an intra-Christian perspective, and avoids such adverse pluralism: God, after all, created man in His own image and likeness, what is more, God became a human. Therefore, if we take seriously the Holy Scriptures, then it is natural that we can, or even should, base our image of God on how we conceive of a great human.

In describing the qualities of today's depiction of a great human, Hasker tries to combine the properties of a good father who raises children so that they can live independently, and a leader (for example a politician) capable of managing large groups of people in an efficient and just way. A great man should be "strong, wise, capable, reliable, and understanding, with wide sympathies, and generous with his or her efforts and resources". He or she should also have the qualities of a person who "will establish and maintain the goals and the overall structure of the group or organization, and will inspire and motivate others to contribute to those goals to the maximum extent possible for them". The key point, however, is that

> she does not micro-manage her subordinates in such a way as to remove their own scope for initiative and creativity; rather, she develops these qualities in them and seeks to harness them for the greater good of the whole. At times a real leader may entrust resources and responsibilities to others even though she realizes that there is a danger of misuse and subsequent harm. (HASKER 2019, 432)

The God of open theism would exemplify all these qualities but above all this God would exemplify the risky encouragement and maintenance of human freedom.

Wouldn't such a conception of God be excessively anthropomorphic and anthropocentric, in addition to being geocentric and ahistorical? In light of today's knowledge of the vastness of the cosmos, it is quite reasonable to assume that the cosmos could be inhabited by highly intelligent beings other than humans. On theism, they would also have had to be created by God, and they could be *radically different* from us. With regard to this issue, Hasker simply states that one cannot exclude the possibility that God the creator of the universe has taken a special interest in humans, but it does not follow that God is not interested in other beings He may have called into existence in the universe and that He treats them identically to us. This possibility conjures in one's mind the image of God the experimenter who realizes in various parts of the universe diverse possible worlds, including those that from (our) moral perspective are much worse than ours. The possibility suggests further the idea that a world with beings that are radically different from us is more consistent with a non-anthropomorphic (as contrasted with anthropomorphic) God. But this challenges Hasker's definition of the divine nature. Appealing to the Scriptures as a reliable source of information about God's objective nature, not just about his nature "for us", mammals of the species *Homo sapiens* inhabiting a microscopic fragment of the vast uni-

verse, might more effectively help avoid such consequences. A Christian philosopher who is both an epistemological and metaphysical realist is entitled to assume the reliability of the Scriptures in this respect.

However, such a solution would not remove all difficulties. First of all, reading the divine nature from the Scriptures is by no means easy; if, on the other hand, the image of human greatness were to be the guide, we run into the problem of the variability and diversity of this image. It was different for our ancestors 2,000 years ago than it is for us today, it is different for citizens of monarchical or theocratic states than for those of democratic states, and it is different for uneducated citizens than for educated people. Which of these images should be taken as accurate? Advocates of deterministic theism might agree with Hasker's proposal as regards forming the concept of God, but would probably state that it is necessary to focus on the images held by the people of the time when the Revelation took place and when the Christian doctrine was being formed.

In response, Hasker would have to explain why our current ideas of human greatness and analyses of the causes of human imperfections are more plausible than those of the past. This is not difficult under the quite plausible assumption of the development of human scientific, moral and philosophical knowledge and the expansion of our imagination thanks to, among other things, a better knowledge of how people function in different social systems and more extensive recognition of their needs. This however implies that our successors, whose knowledge will be fuller than ours and whose imagination will be broader, will probably develop for themselves a somewhat different conception of God. I don't know if Hasker would agree with this conclusion, but in my opinion it doesn't threaten his objectivist stance in philosophy, as long as one recognizes that successively revised historical conceptions of God tend toward an account that is ever fuller and more adequate.

Hasker, however, has yet another safeguard against historical relativism: the creativity of thinking about religious matters must be limited by respect for the identity of religious faith taken as a set of basic beliefs. Does this respect require recognizing them as unchangeable? My answer is negative and so, I presume, would be Hasker's. To say that open theism merely unveils God's true countenance, consistent with the Bible, does not contradict the fact that open theism changes the image of God which has commonly been regarded as a component of orthodoxy. All Christians can agree that the true orthodox image of God cannot be changed *insofar as it has been unveiled*, but the last assumption is questionable. In any case there is the problem of

what determines the identity of Christianity at the doctrinal level. A good starting point for reflection on the subject is the more general question: what determines the identity of any set of beliefs defined as a doctrine or a theory? Possible solutions range between the following two extremes.

According to the first, any change, even the slightest, precludes the identity of a given doctrine or theory. Suppose there is a theory, say T1, with precisely defined terms, logically defined relations between propositions, and clear empirical consequences. Even a minor change in T1, strictly speaking, yields some other theory T2, and the supporters of theory T2 can no longer consider themselves supporters of theory T1. This model is very useful, for example, for the study of the logical consistency of a theory, because—for such a study to be possible—the theory must be "immobilized" in a certain state, and any vague terms should be specified. For the purpose of logical analysis of a given theory, this restrictive approach to change is advantageous because it allows for a detailed record of the changes made and their timeline. Applying this way of thinking to a religious doctrine, even in its basic version, will ultimately lead to questioning the identity relationship between its original statement and any of its subsequent versions.

It seems that this model can only be effectively applied to very precisely defined scientific theories, preferably with a high degree of formalization. It cannot easily be applied to doctrines with a great number of fuzzy concepts. Suppose there is a general doctrine of democracy as one of social systems. Its adherent must accept certain principles that distinguish him or her, for example, from the adherent of tyranny or monarchy, but these principles are general enough to allow for very different particularizations. A person who considers herself a democrat can therefore make significant additions and modifications to her understanding of democracy over time, while still remaining a full-fledged supporter of democracy. For example, she may believe, contrary to the Greek founders of this social order, that women can and should participate in political decisions on an equal footing with men. Considering democracy in terms of its many centuries of development, it is better to think of it as an ideal towards which, from a certain initial state, its various historical implementations have been moving.

I believe that this less restrictive model of identity should be applied to religion, including religious doctrines. Where is the difference between saying that the doctrine in the form of dogmas is unchangeable but the interpretation of the doctrine changes, and saying that the doctrine evolves or changes towards a certain ideal? Well, the latter way of speaking is simpler

and more natural, and preserves the idea of doctrinal identity in the second sense I mentioned—for, by definition, new content replacing old content does not change Christian doctrine *into some other doctrine*, but merely introduces a change *within it*. This model also allows the term "Christian" to be used so as to include those who in their views are on the borders of current orthodoxy, who doubt various Christian truths but would like to accept them as true, and those who, unable to arouse faith in themselves, live in the Christian way. In the times of intense secularization of Western societies, it is pragmatically unwise to allow them to be treated as disguised naturalists who supposedly only believe in belief. Moreover, the liberal view of doctrinal identity stays safely away from the idea of classical epistemological foundationalism, and allows us to look at the doctrinal core in a flexible way, which enables integrating religious content with modern scientific and moral knowledge.

My goal was to point out the possibility of an approach to the continuity and identity of the Christian faith at the doctrinal level which is more liberal than the one proposed by Hasker. This would allow us to introduce, for example, certain elements proposed in process philosophy, such as the idea that God chose to create a world in which His interventions consist in suggesting to created beings one of the possible courses of action. This does not involve accepting the full process orthodoxy including God's limited omnipotence, the rejection of creation *ex nihilo*, and the rejection of human objective (rather than subjective) immortality. Would such an addendum from process theology help to better deal with the problems facing the open theist as well? Hasker says no, but it seems that the approach I presented at least has an advantage as regards the problem of God's non-intervention in situations in which we might expect Him to intervene.

Admittedly, from the point of view of deterministic theism, such an approach would move further away from traditional Christian orthodoxy than open theism (the problem of miracles, for example, would remain) but it would be more attractive to Christians looking at the world in the context of modern physics or physical cosmology. Hopefully, sufficiently creative thinking might be able to deal with problems concerning orthodoxy. In Poland, this path was explored by Archbishop Józef Życiński (1992, 2009) and is partly being explored by Michał Heller (2003, 2009). Their views can be placed somewhere between open theism and process theism. This is also where my philosophical views are located (2017, 2022). I think that they are not too far from the views of Hasker whom I consider to be one of the most

inspiring and intellectually honest philosophers of our time, combining respect for the basic theses of Christianity with creative thinking about religious matters.

REFERENCES

GUTOWSKI, Piotr. 2017. "O epistemicznym wymiarze religii." *Nauka* 4:19–33.

GUTOWSKI, Piotr. 2022. "Panenteizm a teizm klasyczny." *Analiza i Egzystencja* 57:49–69.

HASKER, William. 2016. "How Christian Philosophy Can Be?" *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 64 (1): 21–40.

HASKER, William. 2000. "The Problem of Evil in Process Theism and Classical Free Will Theism." *Process Studies* 29 (2): 194–208.

HASKER, William. 2019. "Większy Bóg." Translated by Zofia Gutowska. In *Teizm, ateizm i religia. Najnowsze spory w anglosaskiej filozofii analitycznej*, edited by Piotr Gutowski and Marcin Iwanicki, 429–53. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL. Quotations are from the English manuscript "The Greater God".

HELLER, Michał. 2003. *Creative Tension. Essays On Science & Religion*. Philadelphia–London: Templeton Foundation Press.

HELLER, Michał. 2010. *The Sense of Life and the Sense of the Universe.* Kraków: Copernicus Center Press.

OPPY, Graham. 2022. "Anti-Naturalistic Arguments from Reason." *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 70 (1): 15–35.

ŻYCIŃSKI, Józef. 1992. *Bóg Abrahama i Whiteheada*. Tarnów: Biblos.

ŻYCIŃSKI, Józef. 2009. *Wszechświat emergentny. Bóg w ewolucji przyrody*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL.

CREATIVE THINKING
ABOUT GOD AND RESPECT FOR CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

S u m m a r y

In the article I refer to the philosophy of William Hasker and his proposal to reconcile respect for the basic dogmas of Christianity with the contemporary standards of knowledge and the needs of people today.

In the first part I analyse Hasker's view on the idea of Christian philosophy. Since he assumes the truthfulness of the main doctrines of Christianity, he is not opposed to being referred to as a Christian philosopher, but neither is he enthusiastic about this name. This attitude is the result of his conviction that the state of absolute neutrality is not possible in philosophy and that regardless of the views accepted as true by a given thinker the requirement for good philosophy is fairness and evaluating all perspectives and beliefs for their internal coherence and their correspondence with the evidence. Therefore, Hasker first tries very carefully to reconstruct positions different from his own and to track down various difficulties in them, especially contradictions. In my opinion, however, the objection of self-contradiction is ineffective when applied to philosophical positions which, as a rule, use vague concepts. The same applies to the

claim that these positions are contradictory to evidence, because one of such vague notions is also the notion of evidence. That is why philosophical claims have the extraordinary ability to persist in life or unexpectedly revive after being considered definitively dead. It does not follow from this that one cannot convincingly justify one's position using less formal criteria.

In the second part I focus on the rhetorical device used by Hasker to make his concept of God more attractive. He suggests that we should shape our concept of God based on our idea of a great man, i.e. one who educates children to live independently and is able to effectively and fairly manage large groups of people. Leaving aside the accusation of anthropomorphism, the question arises about the epistemic value of this image, which is not universal, changes over time and depends on the conditions in which people live. The content of this image proposed by Hasker isn't also consistent with the idea of the God of Christian orthodoxy, which is dominated by traditional rather than open theism. This is where the problem of linking creative thinking and respect for Christian identity arises. Regardless of the opinion that open theism has among traditional theists, Hasker supports the concept of a strong Christian identity determined by a universally recognized creed. I propose to treat this identity a little more flexibly.

Keywords: William Hasker; Christian philosophy; Christian identity; image of a Greater God; contradiction in philosophical positions.

TWÓRCZE MYŚLENIE O BOGU
I SZACUNEK DLA TOŻSAMOŚCI CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKIEJ

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W artykule odwołuję się do filozofii Williama Haskera i jego propozycji pogodzenia szacunku dla podstawowych dogmatów chrześcijaństwa ze współczesnymi standardami wiedzy i potrzebami współczesnego człowieka.

W pierwszej części analizuję jego stanowisko w sprawie idei filozofii chrześcijańskiej. Hasker zakłada prawdziwość głównych doktryn chrześcijaństwa, więc nie sprzeciwia się nazywaniu go filozofem chrześcijańskim, ale też nie jest entuzjastycznie nastawiony do stosowania tej nazwy. Taka postawa jest rezultatem jego przekonania, że w filozofii stan absolutnej neutralności nie jest możliwy oraz że niezależnie od poglądów akceptowanych przez danego myśliciela warunkiem dobrej filozofii jest uczciwość i ocenianie wszystkich stanowisk i przekonań pod kątem ich wewnętrznej spójności i zgodności z dowodami. Dlatego Hasker stara się bardzo rzetelnie rekonstruować stanowiska odmienne od własnego i tropić w nich rożne trudności, zwłaszcza sprzeczności. W moim przekonaniu zarzut wewnętrznej sprzeczności jest jednak nieskuteczny, gdy stosuje się go do stanowisk filozoficznych, które z zasady posługują się nieostrymi pojęciami. Podobnie jest z zarzutem sprzeczności tych stanowisk z dowodami, bo jednym z takich nieostrych pojęć jest także pojęcie dowodu. Dlatego właśnie filozoficzne twierdzenia mają niezwykłą zdolność trwania lub niespodziewanego odradzania się po uznaniu ich za definitywnie martwe. Nie wynika stąd, że nie można przekonująco uzasadnić swojego stanowiska przy użyciu mniej formalnych kryteriów.

W drugiej części skupiam się na interesującym pomyśle retorycznym zastosowanym przez Haskera w celu uatrakcyjnienia jego koncepcji Boga. Hasker sugeruje, że powinniśmy kształtować koncepcję Boga w oparciu o nasze wyobrażenie wielkiego człowieka, a więc takiego, który np. wychowuje dzieci do samodzielnego życia i potrafi skutecznie oraz sprawiedliwie kierować dużymi grupami ludzi. Pomijając zarzut antropomorfizmu, powstaje jednak pytanie o wartość epistemiczną tego wyobrażenia, które nie jest uniwersalne, zmienia się w czasie i zależy od wa-

runków, w jakich żyją ludzie. Proponowana przez Haskera treść tego wyobrażenia nie wydaje się również zgodna z ideą Boga chrześcijańskiej ortodoksji, w której dominuje raczej teizm tradycyjny niż otwarty. W tym właśnie miejscu pojawia się problem powiązania twórczego myślenia i szacunku dla tożsamości chrześcijańskiej. Niezależnie od krytycznych opinii teistów tradycyjnych na temat teizmu otwartego, Hasker opowiada się za koncepcją silnej tożsamości chrześcijańskiej określonej przez powszechnie uznawane credo. Proponuję potraktować tę tożsamość nieco bardziej elastycznie.

Słowa kluczowe: William Hasker; filozofia chrześcijańska; tożsamość chrześcijańska; wyobrażenie Większego Boga; sprzeczność w stanowiskach filozoficznych.