



The Role and Mission of Philosophy in a Catholic Context

**Symposium Organized by COMIUCAP on occasion of the
World Philosophy Day-2014**

The celebration of the *World Philosophy Day-2014* promoted by COMIUCAP took place at the Pontificia Università Gregoriana and began with a short welcome address by the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy of the same University. **Louis Caruana** referred to the Church's involvement in education since her origins and how crucial it is today that such a tradition should continue to thrive. In this context, the role of the Catholic philosopher should be one of helping society diagnose the problems it needs to face. The need for philosophy becomes all the more urgent as we are especially challenged by a «technological and market driven mentality», constantly inclined to «obscure wisdom». In our era and age, for sure, we have knowledge and information. But do we have wisdom? Hence the special importance of finding, and cultivating, the courage that is needed to enter into a true dialogue with others, *conditio sine qua non* for an authentic humanization in and through the pursuit of wisdom.

As President of COMIUCAP, **João J. Vila-Chã** welcomed all the participants and presided over the entire proceedings of this open discussion on the «Role and Mission of Philosophy in a Catholic Context» today. A short history of the network was presented and special emphasis was put upon the fact that in its self-understanding, the network wants to be the kind of institutional framework that John Paul II's Encyclical «Fides et Ratio» (1998) would need to be implemented across the catholic world. In a time when philosophy as an academic discipline continues to be pushed into the margins and even out of Universities, the network affirms as its goal the effort to bring Catholic institutions together in order to reflect and decide on how to cooperate better and assist one another in achieving the (multiple) ideals of the Catholic University today, most particularly with regard to the formation of the human person for the world of tomorrow.

The first thematic presentation was done by **Joseph Agbakoba** (Nigeria), and versed on meaning and challenges of ***Teaching the Philosophy of Jesus in the XXI Century***. The presentation was inspired by a reading of Peter Kreeft's *The Philosophy of Jesus* and began by pointing out the fact that almost nobody

looks at Jesus as a philosopher today. Notwithstanding, there is nobody like Jesus who brought so much transformation, and evolution, into the world. Jesus is not a philosopher in the traditional sense of the term, and yet he pairs with thinkers such as Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, etc. Jesus is certainly among those that through human history were sage and manifested deep and enduring wisdom. The task, therefore, is to reconstruct the philosophy of Jesus from the very things that he did and said about himself, namely when describing himself as «the way, the truth and the life» (John 14:6). Jesus is the truth in the existential sense of the term; he is authentic because he incarnates the most radical principle of being. Jesus is master because there is a deep sense of consistency in his entire life. Jesus is the living revelation of the very principle of consistency since there is no self-contradiction in him, and the principle itself becomes manifest in the form of a movement that goes from the inside to the outside, and finds ultimate expression in a form of love, characterized by absolute coherence and consistency. To speak of Jesus as philosopher and about the philosophy of Christ is not the same as to defend Christian Philosophy. We can assume that such a point of view would be very attractive to young people. In a comparative perspective, moreover, there are many reasons that vouch for the fact that the Philosophy of Jesus deserves to be considered as superior, or more attractive, than any other form of philosophy.

Francesco Tomatis (Salerno), made considerations around the theme ***La Filosofia come ascolto della Trascendenza*** (*Philosophy as Listening to Transcendence*). The urgency is to recognize how the marginalization of philosophy in the «globalizing civilization» of today is taking place. As such, a cultural situation emerges that is dominated by severe forms of reductionism of the human experience of transcendence. At stake is mainly the superficiality with which the question about death disappears from the horizon of our lives. The danger is serious, and is this: transcendence disappears from among the dimensions of human existence in the world! Whenever a particular reality becomes an absolute, the result is idolatry. Hence the need for a Philosophy understood as a Search, which remains faithful to its original meaning of «love of wisdom». What does it mean to acquire or possess wisdom? The «possession» of wisdom, or truth, must not be understood in a subjectivist sense since the search for wisdom, or truth, must not intend a final possession, but rather a truth and wisdom that comes, whenever we allow it, to possess and inhabit us. The point, in other words, is this: truth always transcends us and as such cannot be possessed by us; on the contrary, if we let it be, it comes to take possession of us. Socrates, one of the most important paradigmatic figures of what it means to be a philosopher, portrays the meaning and the significance of the realization that true knowledge is inseparable from the personal acknowledgement of ignorance. To learn how to recognize the movements of transcendence is to overcome the limitations that keep the human being away from the point of truly achieving wisdom. The affirmation of transcendence goes together with the recognition of the apophatic tradition. Whenever philosophy recognizes its own limits, it becomes able to truly remain open to the transcendent dimension of being and, hence, to the importance of researching and debating issues such as self and non-self, nature and life, freedom and the power of the unconscious, suffering and evil, etc. It is only when it recognizes its own limits that human knowledge truly achieves fulfilment and so becomes capable of an authentic dialogue with others. Hence the philosophical importance of *listening* and the awareness that human beings are destined to be possessed by truth. More so, as only a personal relation with Truth can enable us to enter into an authentic dialogue with others.

Giovanni Salmeri (Roma) brought into the debate the issue of ***How Philosophy can Make Theology Better***. Noting the fact that he is among the last generation of Italians who could study simultaneously in two faculties, the speaker underlined how being both a philosopher among theologians and a theologian among philosophers helps understand the depth of the implications of the matter under discussion, and all the more so as the talk was given from the perspective of someone that teaches at a secular university. The point of departure, however, is the repeated observation that students who have philosophical experience seem to adapt better to the workings of theology. The medieval dictum *philosophia ancilla theologiae* («philosophy is the handmaiden of theology») appears to have lost relevance in our time. But there is another aspect of the question that also needs to be taken under consideration, namely, the recognition of the fact that the growing disconnection between philosophy and theology does not so much arise because the handmaiden no longer does her work, but rather because the mistress appears to no longer love or simply consider the handmaiden. Students seem more and more unaware of the importance of seriously considering the structural bond that, according to our ecclesial tradition, binds together the two disciplines.

Hence the difference in the attitude of the students of theology from those of philosophy. Students of philosophy learn to seek understanding by the use of reason; in the face of important problems they look for solutions by means of methodical philosophizing. Students of theology, on the other hand, tend to think that others have problems and so they want to do something about them, while in the process they may never truly learn how to arrive at the core of their own human (personal) problem. It is often the case that students of theology that lack the proper study of philosophy appear unable to properly distinguish between doctrine and theology. Hence the important role that philosophy has to play in leading students into a deeper reflection, something that amounts to the condition of possibility for the unification of study and life. Inasmuch as philosophy is not limited by a particular object of interest, it can inspire theology in broadening the field of research thereby giving the student adequate instruments for interpreting and accessing reality. Indeed, it is no longer a surprise to hear students, when asked what makes them interested in philosophy, to respond that for them, unlike theology, philosophy is able to teach them how to deal with the multiple realities of life. Kant himself underlined that it is much more important and relevant, to teach how to philosophize than to teach philosophy – and the same should be said in the case of theology.

Pietro Ramellini (Roma) spoke about ***The Character of Catholic Philosophy***. The point of departure was the idea that catholic philosophy more than just «love of wisdom» must also come to understand itself as an authentic «wisdom of love», an *agaposophy*. The implication is that the theological concept of *agape* must be recognized as being also genuinely philosophical. It is proper that the Church addresses all humanity in the spirit of the «wisdom of agape». It is this «wise agape» or «agapeic wisdom» that inspires our practices of compassion, our ways of love. Through agape, the catholic philosopher is immersed and integrated into the human realities in such a way that he becomes human among humans and thereby present to human culture in its multiplicity and diversity of forms. Agape is like the sieve that should be used to refine all catholic concepts and so give rise to an authentic *agapopraxis*. The catholic philosopher can be said to be the one that lets him- or herself be inspired by love and so can be recognized as operating from an agapeic perspective. Such a person, as Confucius would say, becomes «flexible enough to give answers to different people» in different situations. In other words, if there is a structural need for Catholic philosophy, it is because it is needed when it comes to the recognition of the value of pluralism and difference while at the same time being able to grasp reality from the perspective given by God. Within the catholic context, therefore, philosophy must be able to assist human beings, and the new generations in particular, to understand their own position in the world within a framework determined by the experience of faith and all the more so in the globalized world of today. The work to be done includes giving attention to the many philosophical traditions of the past in order to best understand the cultural diversity of the world in which we are living. And so, just as Pope Francis suggests that the best way to cure the sick is to put more heart at the physician's hand, we can say that the best way for philosophers to become effective is to just put a bit more heart into their minds.

Brendan Sweetman spoke on ***Philosophy and the Mission of the (Catholic) University***. Departing from questions such as: Is there something unique to catholic universities that cannot be found in other similar institutions? What is the Mission of Catholic Universities today? Speaking from the background of Catholic Universities in North America, the speaker noted that there is no common mission of Catholic Universities that is applied in the same way everywhere. It was pointed out that the *Mission Statements* of Catholic Universities tend to feature themes such as the relationship between faith and reason, integral development of the human person, religious response to issues of reality and life, etc. Characteristically, however, these mission statements are vague. They are neither concrete nor specific. The role of Philosophy in the mission of Catholic Universities is left with unclear goals even though it can promote the integration of knowledge across the different disciplines and so contribute to achieve the central objective of education, namely, the integral formation of the whole person. While some are discouraged by scholasticism, others are repelled by the analytical approaches. The problem is compounded by the fact that many non-philosophy teachers at catholic universities never took any philosophy course themselves and so, tend to think that students of today do not need them to be well educated. Others may have taken such courses but had a bad experience and thus generalize on philosophy based on their own limited experience. Some teachers also claim that philosophy is not closer to the mission of catholic education than other disciplines. A typical case of denial in relation to the role of philosophy in education can be found in the argument that

a Nobel Laureate presents «Against Philosophy» in a book titled *Dreams of a Final Theory*. The challenge for Philosophy is to justify itself. Hence, the importance of undertaking steps capable of helping and stimulating Catholic Universities around the world to choose *Mission Statements* that are specific and concrete while at the same time working towards adequate forms of outreach, namely through interdisciplinary workshops that, among other things, may also give other disciplines the opportunity to appreciate the role of philosophy as well.

John Ozolins (Australia) offered considerations on *The Philosophy of Education and Its Place in Academia*, a reflection centered on the relationship between ownership and dissemination of knowledge, a problem all the more evident as we live in the time of internet and the corresponding explosive availability of information. For sure, we do not own the bits and bytes. The ownership and dissemination of knowledge is in the first place a matter of perception, on which depends the quality of our belief. In terms of a philosophy of education, the crucial thing remains the capacity to distinguish between true and false knowledge. Education is about transmission, but it is also about formation of character – *educare*, something that leads to the performance of certain activities. True education, therefore, comes at the intersection of transmission of knowledge and formation of the human person. The problem in our time is that we seem to be losing sight of education in the sense of *educare* – the formation of human character. There is also an uncritical acceptance of a «constructivist view» in the light of which knowledge is something constructed by a student. This uncritical view misses the point that knowledge is a public and not a private-subjective enterprise. In particular it was considered the problem associated with the absence of strong links between philosophy and education, a fact inseparable from the actual reduction of funds from governments and the general lack of interest in philosophy. The problem is not just that philosophy has disappeared from education, but also that education continues to disappear from philosophy. In this sense, the goal seems to be one of recapturing the ground that has been lost so that philosophy may become more interested in education by stimulating philosophers to once more venture into educational questions.

Gennaro Auletta (Roma) spoke on the problem of causality. From the background of Aristotle's discussion of the four causes, the presenter distinguished between Aristotle's formal cause and teleological causes making use of controls in biological systems. Formal causes are the «restriction of the space of possibilities» by which we have some outcome and not just any outcome. It is a constraint. All organisms carry along the problem of control. Control is ubiquitous in every biological system in such a way that there is no organ without control. But biological systems are also cognitive systems. Hence the mystery of formal causation since control cannot arise without a level differential. Indeed, control may not be exercised at the same level. Therefore, there are different levels of causation (top-down and bottom-up causation) based on dynamics that originate both from above and below. Top-down causation through information control may be considered as the way in which initial and random perturbations that disturb the homeostasis of an organism are framed in the formal constraints in organism thus «giving rise to a process of fine-tuning, that ends up in an eventual stable form». It results that this top-down process of fine-tuning as a bridge between «randomness and stability» may be the source from which new functionalities emerge. Interesting enough, both Aristotle and Charles S. Peirce converge on this point. While Teleological Causes are relative to the antecedents, formal causes are relative to consequents. In other words, formal causes and teleological causes are not the same. The limitation of possibilities of formal causes is geared to the fact of producing.

Rosanna Finamore (Roma) helped situate the problem of philosophy today in the context of an analysis of the concepts of *Esperienza e Storicità* (*Experience and History*). The presenter discussed the way students perceive the problem of experience as such. For some, the technological experience seems to be ultimate. Very often, students speak about experience as sensations, as something immediate. But the accumulation of sensations cannot yet represent what is meant by the concept of experience. It was noted that students tend to appear as subjects of «experimental narcissism» and «sentimental motivations or incentives» (spinte sentimentali). From these we arrive at the problem of the subject-object relationship in human experience, an issue that becomes more pertinent in the context of Bernard Lonergan's studies on consciousness. There are various debates taking place today that are of direct concern to the question at hand, namely those that in the realm of contemporary epistemology lead to a face-to-face encounter between «externalists» and «internalists». But even stronger are the debates taking place between the re-

representatives of positions such as the ones that go by the labels of realism and antirealism. While turning to the question of history, the speaker reflected on Michel de Certeau's view of history in terms of a past that is «absent» («the absence of what has passed by»). The «absent» needs to be considered as part of the historical discourse, something that Paul Ricoeur teaches in particular when he deals with the difficult process of recovering time. In order to become truly human, time needs to redouble its identity, namely in such a way as to make possible the recovery of the «absent». But if time is human, it is because the human being matures and in the process comes to a better discovery of self and the meaning of life.

Marko Trajkovic (Serbia) spoke on *Philosophy and the Teaching of Law*, a reflection on the relationship between philosophy and law and the need for a philosophical education of future lawyers. Education is like a bridge that transmits and maintains values. Law is not interested in motivations, but Christianity teaches one to ask, «why am I doing what I am doing now?» The values that lawyers transmit are normally the ones they absorbed as students. We must never forget that the legal profession arose because human beings began to discover in themselves an inviolable dimension of being. Hence, the formation of lawyers must include training in the recognition of that inviolable value that is present in all human beings and supersedes all forms of ethical relativism. Many of the problems we have today in the legal profession derive from the fact that the demand for lawyers increased exponentially, while at the same time, there was a lack of moral education in the formative process of lawyers. Thus, it should not be surprising to see how, instead of ethical and moral values, profit and practical results slowly became the central motivating factor in the legal profession. Of course, to achieve profit is something good, and necessary if achieved in a way that is integrated with authentic human values. On the other hand, we have the example of Saint Thomas Aquinas, a thinker for whom law by its nature cannot cover the entire realms and demands of morals and ethics. It also becomes more and more clear that today's lawyers try to narrow down the scope of their own investigations, a tendency that is giving rise to growing forms of egoism and legalism. In other words, the formation of legal professionals today demands, perhaps more than ever, the contributions of philosophy, so that future lawyers become critical thinkers and so develop an attitude that goes beyond any sense of merely blind obedience to the law. The point was also made that future lawyers have much to gain from all serious forms of familiarization with the social teaching of the Church.

Pierluigi Parisi (Roma), PhD. Student at the Pontificia Università Gregoriana, offered a reflection on the *The Contemporary Crisis and the Role of Philosophy (La Crisi Contemporanea e il Ruolo della Filosofia)*. The crisis we experience today has a clear genealogy, one that goes back to the time of Hegel's death (1831). *Crisis* is now the West, a cultural continent that seems completely void of its own (past) power of synthesis. If we read the symptoms of contemporary culture from the perspective of antiquity, we shall be able to identify the sources of the problem, which are rooted in the transformation of our own Indo-European origins. The case was made taking into brief consideration notions whose connotations turn around words such as «stay, stand, statue, state», all of them passible of being traced back to the Sanskrit root «staḥ» meaning «to remain, to stay.» The claim was that it could be possible to refer the major problems present in our contemporary discussions back to the realm of «staḥ» and the corresponding transformations in the global culture of today. After the crisis of «staḥ» there were born disciplines so crucial for the self-understanding of our culture such as sociology, experimental psychology and anthropology. This would be the diagnosis. But the therapy? Perhaps, returning to the seriousness of the dictum according to which *ubi prospectivi ibi subiectum*. Yes, the challenge for the West is to recover its own perspective.

In the exchanges that took place during the time dedicated to a free discussion among all the participants things were said that we deem worthy of being noted as well. For example, in the case of Africa, it was said, one of the recurrent obstacles in doing philosophy is connected with the fact that Christian philosophy appears linked to colonialism and, thus, is often rejected together by arguments that border on nationalism.

Another important question of the day was the one about the relation between Philosophy and Art: What kind of relation should be there between Philosophy and Art? How could Art help philosophy better understand the richness of human intuition? To these questions the following answer was given: Gabriel Marcel argued that human experience cannot be entirely expressed in concepts. Therefore, art complements philosophy. It describes that which in essence cannot be described. Furthermore, it was also said that not all knowledge is conceptual. It would indeed be a mistake to deny this dimension of human knowledge even if it is so difficult to represent it. Wisdom cannot be reduced to conceptual knowledge.

Authentic knowledge is demonstrated only in actual living; it exists only in practice and not in theory and concepts. For some reason, Jesus is the personal embodiment of the way of truth.

Another reflection on this topic put forward the idea that truth is not relativistic, but rather antinomic (contradictory). In reference to authors such as Nicholas of Cusa and Pavel Florensky, it was also made clear the relevance of an understanding of truth as *coincidentia oppositorum* and, consequently, of recognizing *docta ignorantia* as *conditio sine qua non* for the development of any serious attitude of research. Luigi Pareyson was quoted in reference to his idea of a «mistica del ineffabile» and the consequent development of a «cristologia laica» capable of being understood even by non-believers.

Questions were equally raised about the relation between philosophy and education. *Why do philosophers today ignore the philosophy of education?* Well, it would seem that the problem originated in the sixties when attention was diverted to analytic philosophy. Perhaps it was also due to the fact that philosophers of the time had sort of exhausted the themes on philosophy of education. Consequently, there has been decreased interest in philosophy, with less people undertaking studies in philosophy. It goes without saying that philosophy of education is particularly affected all the more, as Universities nowadays seem to be more and more run like corporations and not so much as places of integral human formation. To the question about *the position of the other in Education*, the fact that education, by definition, is *encounter* was emphasized. And the problem we face is precisely that this dimension of the educational process becomes more and more vitiated, when we talk more about outcomes than anything else, such as knowledge.

In the final moment of the day, the conversation turned around the question of charting a course for the future, the way forward. The participants were asked to express their final views on what might be a follow up to the reflection done on *The Role and Mission of Philosophy in a Catholic Context*. The President of COMIUCAP asked the participants to please share their thoughts with a maximum of liberty. The input received was basically the following: One of our modern challenges is to develop a strategy for combating in a productive way secularism and religious pluralism. Since the causes of secularism (in the light of Charles Taylor) were philosophical, the solution will have to be philosophical as well. Theology cannot be the starting point but rather the point of arrival. In fact, it seems that theology without philosophy cannot answer some of the most pressing questions of today. Hence the need to appreciate, and further develop, the critical function of philosophy. Philosophical education needs to address properly the new revolution in communication experienced today. We need to continue to work towards the recovery of the power of reason (logos) and, most importantly, cease to be afraid of entering into dialogue with others. It is in dialogue with the many others that surround us that one will be able to uncover the terms of one's own responsibility. The world needs today, and no less than at other points of history, qualified inventors of new types of social relations. In the light of the recent Synod on the family, and as we in the Church continue to ruminate on how to better serve the society at large, it would be wise to continue to do serious introspection on how to reposition ourselves before the many different expectations of our contemporaries in the complex areas of bioethics, family life, etc. The entire journey was marked by a serious consensus on many things. But perhaps in no other point was it so strong as when the considerations turned around the educational role that Philosophy needs to play in our contemporary world. The formative role of Philosophy in today's world is perhaps more urgent than ever. And to this the Philosophers must continue to respond.

*This Report is strictly based on the oral interventions of the Participants and in no way does it claim to faithfully represent the thoughts or intentions of the Presenters, to all of whom very special thanks are due and hereby most gladly given. The first version of this text was put together by **Felix Akamonye** (Nigeria) and **Jaroslav Duraj** (Poland/China), doctoral Students at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. They deserve our gratitude as well. The present version of the document was revised and edited by **João J. Vila-Chã** (President of COMIUCAP). The Presenters keep the rights to their own ideas, but references to this document must include the fact that it constitutes a **Report** on an initiative of **COMIUCAP**, the Sectorial Group for Philosophy of the International Federation of Catholic Universities. – Roma, December 1, 2014.*



Conférence Mondiale des Institutions Universitaires Catholiques de Philosophie

Celebrates *World Philosophy Day* • *Giornata Mondiale della Filosofia* with an
Open Dialogue on • Tavola Rotonda su

The Role and Mission of Philosophy in a Catholic Context

Ruolo e Missione della Filosofia, oggi

Pontificia Università Gregoriana
20 Novembre, 2014

- 09:15-09:30 – Meeting at the Main Entrance of the Pontifical Gregorian University.
- 09:30-09:40 – Saluto di Benvenuto dal R. P. Decano della Facoltà di Filosofia della PUG.
- 09:40-10:00 – Welcome & Remarks by the President of COMIUCAP.
- 10:00-10:20 – Joseph AGBAKOBA, *Teaching the Philosophy of Jesus in the XXI Century*.
- 10:20-10:40 – Francesco TOMATIS, *La Filosofia come ascolto della Trascendenza*.
- 10:40-11:00 – Giovanni SALMERI, *How Philosophy can Make Theology Better*.
- 11:00-11:20 – Coffee Break • Pausa.
- 11:20-11:40 – Pietro RAMELLINI, *The Character of Catholic Philosophy*.
- 11:40-12:00 – Brendan SWEETMAN, *Philosophy and the Mission of the (Catholic) University*.
- 12:00-12:40 – Open Discussion • Partecipazione Aperta.
- 12:40-14:30 – Lunch Break • Pranzo.
- 14:30-14:50 – John OZOLINS, *The Philosophy of Education and Its Place in Academia*.
- 14:50-15:10 – Gennaro AULETTA, *Il Problema della Causalità*.
- 15:10-15:30 – Rosanna FINAMORE, *Esperienza e Storicità*.
- 15:30-16:00 – Marko TRAJKOVIC, *Philosophy and the Teaching of Law*.
- 16:00-16:20 – Coffee Break • Intervallo.
- 16:20-16:40 – Pierluigi PARISI, *La Crisi Contemporanea e il Ruolo della Filosofia*.
- 16:40-17:20 – Perspectives for the Future • Prospettive di Sviluppo.
- 17:20-17:30 – Closing • Chiusura.

PARTICIPANTS • PARTECIPANTI – AGBAKOBA, Prof. Joseph (Nigeria) • ARIANO, Prof.ssa Chiara (Univ. Lateranense) • AULETTA, Prof. Gennaro (Pont. Università Gregoriana) • BACCARINI, Prof. Emilio (Univ. Roma 2) • BERTOLINO, Prof. Lucca (Univ. di Torino) • CARUANA SJ, Prof. Louis (Pont.

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Hanno partecipato nell'evento anche i seguenti Dottorandi della Pontificia Università Gregoriana: AKAMONYE, P. Felix O. • P. DURAJ, Jaruslaw • IBÁÑEZ, Mr. Franklin • MAROTTIPPAPAYIL, Thomas • PARISI, Mr. Pierluigi • RELA, Mrs. Nara • SOUZA, P. Simplicio de.



To all the participants in this one-day Symposium on «The Role and Mission of Philosophy» organized by COMIUCAP on occasion of the *World Day of Philosophy* at the Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome), we express our deep gratitude and profound appreciation for all the efforts done and the many contributions shared with one another. It was a memorable day! For any eventual contribution to the discussion that this Document of COMIUCAP represents, please, go to our special Forum in <https://www.facebook.com/groups/comiucap.deans/>. Thank you!

Roma, 1 of December of 2014

**Prof. João J. Vila-Chã, SJ
(President of COMIUCAP)**