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M. F. SCIACCA'S ONTOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

I. INTRODUCTION

Michele Federico Sciacca (1908—1975) is little-known outside the Roman world. Meanwhile, he is the author of a comprehensive metaphysical system of a Platonic-Augustinian-Rosminian and, at the later stage, also of a Thomist, orientation. The reason for a seemingly insufficient interest to Sciacca's philosophy in Italy may be that he has elaborated no particular historico-philosophical methodology. Even his metaphysics, despite the renaissance of the metaphysical tendency among Italian philosophers, enjoys rather small popularity and is outweighed by the Padua school oriented towards the classical Aristotelean metaphysics and influenced by the Tübingen school (in the first place, by H.-J. Kramer¹).

¹ In Russia nobody deals with Sciacca's philosophy. In fact there seems to be no experts in the Italian philosophy (except in Croce, probably) among the young Russian scholars. One can find, however, a brief outline of Sciacca's philosophy in the sound book, dating to the pre-perestroika „stagnation” age, by a Lithuanian philosopher B. Kuzmitskas, *Philosophical Concepts of the Catholic Modernism*, Vilnius: Myntis 1982 (in Russian). Yet I believe that Sciaccian metaphysics will rouse interest in this country, since many Russian scholars now feel themselves inclined to Platonism and Christian tradition, as well as to the desire to revive philosophy as metaphysics based on the ontological foundations. Russian religious philosophical tradition in fact survived the Soviet era in the works of several prominent thinkers (like A. F. Losev). This tradition comprised two lines of thought: the „existential” one (e.g., L. Shestov), now apparently extinct both in the East and West, and the „Platonic” one rapidly gaining strength. See, e.g., A.L. Dobrokhov, *The Category of Being in the Classical Western Philosophy*, Moscow: Moscow State University Press 1986 (in Russian).

What makes Sciacca an interesting figure? First, it is his metaphysical system. However, Sciacca's intellectual biography is no less remarkable than his metaphysics. In what follows I shall dwell on some traits of Sciacca's personality. Then I shall move to his ontology and philosophical anthropology.

II. SCIACCA AS A PERSON

Outwardly, Sciacca's evolution seems quite ordinary. Grown up in Sicily, he studied in Catania and Pavia, and later became a chair of theoretical philosophy in Genoa. The final and philosophically most significant period in his life was related to this city where he also headed „Giomale di Metafisica” and trained many pupils².

Having lost a religious faith in the age of fourteen, Sciacca returned to it in his early thirties, basing on theoretical grounds and becoming influenced by monsignor Olgiati. An immense erudition and a combination of literary and philosophical abilities are manifested in all Sciacca's creative work. Till the end of his life he was not completely sure whether he has made an appropriate choice between these two occupations. Love for solitude and *vita contemplativa* are, according to Sciacca, the constant companions of the religious mentality. In describing the idle life of his father, a Sicilian landowner who was ruining himself bit by bit, Sciacca expresses respect to his self-concentration, contemplativeness and contempt to all „utile”. Absolute indifference to politics is also characteristic of Sciacca's personality. By his own admission, he has seen none of Mussolini, nor hasn't he heard a single speech of his. Incidentally, he has never heard any speeches of democrats, as well. Among various philosophical lines of thought that roused his attention one can find neither materialism nor positivism and, hence, nor philosophy of science. Sciacca never believed in a possibility of a real contribution of science to philosophy.

Three basic stages should be distinguished in Sciacca's creative life: 1) philosophical discourse within the framework of Gentile's actualism, accompanied by the gradual rejection of immanentism; 2) dominance of the „Christian spiritualism”; 3) development of his own metaphysical system, the „philosophy of integrality”.

However, all philosophical endeavours of Sciacca were in fact always devoted to a single problem — that of a *human as a spiritual being* (animal spirituale) which also became for him later a problem of the *ontological status of man* — quite a Platonic one, except for a rather different concept of the soul and a purely intellectualist ideal of man. No viable solution to this problem could be found on the ways suggested by the philosophy of actualism. And the Christian spiritual tradition was also insufficient for that, taken by itself. It was thus an immanent philosophical demand, a purely theoretical reasoning that prompted Sciacca to

² Some of them have founded later on the „Society of M. F. Sciacca's Friends” (Societa degli Amici di Michele Federico Sciacca).

return to the traditional Christian metaphysics.

Wasn't it however his own personal inability that played a crucial role here? No, and the logic of the XXth century philosophical development proves to this. One could see Neohegelism coming to naught, both Christian spiritualism and existential philosophy being eroded, and personalism changing its primal orientation.

It will be reasonable to enter into some details of Sciacca's quest for his own way in philosophy. The beginning of his spiritual development is characterized by an exceptional susceptibility to the *question of morality*. Before Sciacca became involved in the tenets of Gentile's actualism, he was studying the classical German philosophy and particularly the transcendental idealism of Kant and Fichte. After that the problems yet remained the same — those of personality, individual and human freedom, for Sciacca was dissatisfied with the Kantian postulative treatment of the latter.

It was the modern literature that brought Sciacca close to the same questions. He loved Nietzsche (at this stage, Sciacca's attitude may be paralleled to that of Nietzsche, as regards the apparent anti-Christian direction and a combination of philosophical and literary interests), Gabriele D'Annunzio and, especially, the novels and pieces of Pirandello. And again the problem of the human personality arose before Sciacca. Having won a freedom from God, man must now attain the ultimate meaning of himself. But how can he hope to do that, if a human personality is unable to be the foundation of itself, and if God does not exist? This persistent question has been labeled „mine” by Sciacca during the period when he was a follower of Gentile.

The thirties mark Sciacca's disappointment in the actualism (though he kept his anti-religious pathos in those times). The reason for the departure from it was this: a philosophy that denies the concept of personality (by reducing it to the bygone moment of the single transcendental subject) cannot be regarded as an ethical one. The immanentist idealism is unable to substantiate morality and to preserve personal values. After excluding a transcendent God from the ground-stones of their system, Neohegelians proceeded to build the traditional superstructure of values above Him, as if no changes have occurred in the foundations. Little by little, the actualist Philosophy ceased to be Sciacca's philosophical *belief* (on his opinion, the latter is required of any true philosopher) and became just one of the philosophies.

This disappointment was completed as Sciacca became informed in the field of Neoscholasticism. The question yet endured: if God has died, then a human has to find the value ground of his integrality outside Him, in lines similar to those provided by Christianity. Otherwise the theological problem will necessarily rise before him.

Dostoyevsky succeeded better than Neoscholasticists did it in convincing Sciacca that the latter conjecture is right. It was Dostoyevsky who has led Sciacca to the final conclusion that there is an intimate connection between Christianity

(Revelation) and the philosophical question of the ontological status of man. Contacts with cleric teachers, such as monsignor Olgiati, helped to overcome the last doubts.

The second stage (1939—1948) in Sciacca's intellectual evolution was characterized by the dominance of the „Christian spiritualism”. During this period he proceeded along the lines of the idealistic philosophy of his time, subordinated to the religious demands, and expressed the views similar to those of A. Guzzo and A. Carlini. Like Guzzo, Sciacca rejected transcendentalism but had nothing to replace it by. Sciacca dubbed such a „suspended” position an „idealistic spiritualism” or an „idealism striving after transcendence”. Soon after that he introduced the term „Christian spiritualism”.

The spiritual situation of Sciacca at that stage was analogous to that of St. Augustine before he became a Christian (informed in Neoplatonism). Disappointment in Manichaeism, St. Ambrose's lectures, and philosophical books convinced him in the truth of Christianity. But St. Augustine encountered philosophical difficulties of coordination of the new faith with his theoretical notions.

Apologetic tones prevails in Sciacca's works dating to that time. His favourite philosophers then were those who stood before the similar task, trying to answer the question posed by current research, on the basis of the Christian philosophy, or the philosophy standing in harmony with Christianity. Such a task was fulfilled by Pascal (in the age of a dawning scientific rationality), Rosmini (in the age of the „Kantian revolution”) and Blondel (in the age of the non-religious, rationalistic consciousness). Sciacca also became himself familiar with Bergson, Lavelle, Heidegger, and other contemporary thinkers.

To develop his worldview position into the elaborated metaphysical system based on ontology, i.e. into the „philosophy of integrality”, Sciacca needed an intermediate chain similar to Neoplatonist philosophy which aided St. Augustine to create the system of Christian metaphysics. In Sciacca's case the aid came partly from St. Augustine himself, and partly from the XIXth century Italian philosopher and theologian Antonio Rosmini Serbati. These two sources played a crucial role in shaping the Sciaccian metaphysics, the comprehension of the former being for Sciacca the way to the profound understanding and development of the latter. This has made it possible for him to distinguish the two lines of thought within the philosophical idealism: 1) Plato — Augustine — Pascal — Rosmini — Blondel and 2) Descartes — Spinoza — Kant — Fichte — Hegel — Gentile, and to place himself in the first row represented by „his” thinkers, without whom he would not be that what he was^{3 4}. The first-row-

³ It must be noted that in speaking about „his” thinkers, Sciacca did not seek originality and emphasized that his task was not so much to describe a given thinker „as he was in reality”, as to show what *he*, Sciacca, would *not* be *without* the influence of the philosopher at hand.

⁴ The term „interiority” came from St. Augustine.

philosophers are those who recognized the presence of a truth in the human mind, a truth transcending the latter and not posed by it. They all spoke of an *objective inferiority**. Here lies the main difference between them and the transcendental philosophers of the second line who used to pose thinking itself as truth, thus denying the latter.

I turn now to Sciacca's ontology as expounded in his works written since 1951 and put together under the title „philosophy of integrality”. I shall attempt to clear up its affinity with metaphysics of St. Augustine, Rosmini and St. Thomas Aquinas.

III. ONTOLOGY OF SCIACCA

Sciacca's ontology may be summarized as follows.

1. *The being is, it is posed by itself, and it is one.* Post-Kantian philosophy in practice merely denied all ontology. As a rule, the being was reduced to one of its forms. A common delusion of both idealism and realism was an identification of being with reality.

2. *Being is opposed by non-being, in the sense that the latter does not lie outside the former but is its essential boundary.*

3. Being exists not because thinking exists but, on the contrary, *thinking exists because there is being, for thinking thinks thanks to being, to which it is given as an Idea.*

This basic principle defines the Sciaccian „ontological realism” in contrast to the Modern-age epistemologism. Leading with Descartes, epistemology had a strong influence on the ontological problems. „Cogito ergo sum” starts, according to Sciacca, a mistaken reasoning of the modern idealism that „thinking poses being”. As Sciacca maintains, this is impossible, for thinking cannot exist without being.

Apart from reducing being to one of its forms, there is another fallacy underlying the above delusion, which idealism and realism also share, — the idea that being and thinking are opposites. In fact, thinking could not think outside being, while the latter could not be self-contained.

Only in the intimacy of being is thinking left to itself. On the other hand, being is being thought only because it is present in the intimacy of thinking⁵.

4. *Being as an Idea is the primary act of spirit. It is an object which mind cognizes by its very nature, and about which spirit has an intuition, due to just that fact only that it is a spirit.* The ultimate act of consciousness is always a consciousness (though perhaps a vague one) of the *presence* of an infinite object in mind.

⁵ M. F. Sciacca, *Acte et Eire*, Paris: Aubier 1958, p. 25.

5. The main ontological problem is that of being as an objective act constitutive of the spiritual being as such.

Thus, in Sciacca, the matter is about the metaphysics of man, not of reality. It is quite a Platonist problem statement modified, of course, by the Christian demands. Sciacca talks not of the „naturalist” but rather of the „spiritualist”, Augustinian-like interpretation of metaphysics as a discourse of the inner experience in its ontological, and not only psychological, aspect.

6. Consequently, the ontological system of Sciacca may be structured in the following way:

a) *Being as an Idea*. An Idea, and not being in the fullness of its forms, presents itself in a human. (Only God, the Absolute being, is being-in-itself, for God exists independently of a spirit, and outwardly to it). But the presence of an Idea makes a human involved in the being-in-itself. An Idea is present both in the Divine Mind and in a human mind. In both it is „identified”, in the first case — with the Divine Mind itself. An Idea unites a Creator with a creation. And a human participates in being via the intuition of an Idea.

b. *Existential being*. c)

Real (natural) being.

The last two forms of being will be discussed in the final section that will be devoted to the ontological principles of Sciacca’s philosophical anthropology. Now I shall try to make some history-of-philosophy comments on Sciacca’s ontology.

Besides the impact of the Augustinian concept of *interiority*⁶, it was the philosophy of Rosmini that was of major importance for Sciacca in substantiating his own metaphysics. According to Sciacca, Rosmini is the only thinker of the Modern age who managed to revive the authentic meaning of ontology and metaphysics, by recognizing the priority of the latter over epistemology. However Rosmini took a proper account both of the Modern age philosophical evolution after Cartesian *cogito*, and of the Platonic tradition. This impelled him to treat the ontological problem as that of the primary constitutive object of the spiritual being as such. Originally, Rosmini proceeded from Kant and sought to find the source of Kantian *a priori* forms. This has led him to the „idea of indeterminate being” („l’idea dell’ente indeterminato”) as, first, the source of any other ideas, and, what is more important, as one of the ontological dimensions of the subject. In fact, it was a Platonist interpretation.

In the Italian literature Sciacca is usually considered as a rediscoverer of Rosmini’s teaching. The reason is that Neohegelians who studied Rosmini’s heritage before Sciacca, were concentrated upon his epistemology and, hence, qualified Rosmini as a Neokantian. Sciacca, on the contrary, by focusing on the ontological and anthropological aspects of Rosmini’s philosophy, found the latter discrepant from the Kantian spirit: Kant did not assume the reduction of *a priori*

forms to any single source. However it would be improper to treat Sciacca as a mere successor of Rosmini. The idea of indeterminate being borrowed from Rosmini was developed further by Sciacca. This brought him closer to the Thomist metaphysics. The logic of this development made Sciacca the centre of attention for the Padua school of thought. Marino Gentile who is well-known as an adherent of the classical Aristotelean-Thomist metaphysics regards Sciacca's transition to the „philosophy of integrality” the most important moment in his philosophical career. M. Gentile refers to his correspondence with Sciacca that clarifies his evolution from Rosmini to Aquinas (whom Sciacca always „refined” of Aristotle and considered as the follower of Augustine, in the first place)⁷.

As was noted, Sciacca adopted the Rosminian „idea of indeterminate being”. Besides there are some additional parallels between the two thinkers, such as the intuition of being as an infinite object given to mind, illumination of mind by the light of truth, etc. At the same time, the Sciaccian interpretation of the idea of indeterminate being differs from the Rosminian one. Rosmini puts the Idea as the form of mind in the foreground, while Sciacca assigns such a place to the existent subject. Hence a different ontological structure. Apart from the Rosminian real, ideal and moral forms of being, Sciacca, as was mentioned, distinguished the existential one, the moral form being treated as a link between the existential form and being as an Idea, or as love of the former to the latter. Besides, Sciacca made Rosmini „his own” thinker as well, by abstracting from theological concepts elaborated by Rosmini in his „Theosophy”⁸.

What brings the Sciaccian ontology close with Thomism is his concept of personality as a synthesis of all forms of beings. That's why Sciacca gives a high value to the Thomist idea of the substantive unity of matter and form, body and soul, in a human. The Thomist interpretation of the soul as the *only* form of body has been recognized by Sciacca as a considerable contribution to the Christian metaphysics. Even the Augustinian position (not to say of the Platonic one) tended to the rapprochement of a human with his soul alone⁹. *Admittedly*, Augustine has already overcome many aspects of Platonism. And Aquinas, according to Sciacca, has completed his job.

In Sciacca's view, the difference between his own spiritual metaphysics and that of Aquinas is not so great. The line of demarcation may be associated with the Aristotelean metaphysics of „being as it is”, gravitating towards the metaphysics of

⁷ See M. Gentile, *La svolta dalio spiritualismo alia filosofia dell'integralitd*, *Giornale di Metafisica* 31, 1976, pp. 526—530. A thorough examination of Late Sciacca's theoretical development was made also by another famous Paduan scholar. See C. Giacon, *Un itinerario: Agostino, Rosmini, Tommaso*, *Giornale di Metafisica* 31, 1976, pp. 531—543.

⁸ In a letter to M. Gentile Sciacca wrote: „Quel che io dico non e piu Rosmini, anche le miei formule sono diverse (Rosmini parla di Idea dell'essere; io dell'Essere come Idea, ecc.) — Rosm. e il filosofo dell'idea dell'essere; io non lo sono, ma filosofo dell'esistente nella sua integralita ontologica” (cit. from Ref. 7, p. 529).

⁹ See, e.g., E. Gilson, *L'Esprit de la Philosophie Medievale*, Paris: Vrin 1948

nature. As regards the epistemological distinction between the Thomist doctrine of „lumen naturale” of the human reason and the Augustinian concept of the Divine „illuminatio” of the latter, — Sciacca considered both approaches admissible within the single metaphysical framework^{10 11}.

The final rapprochement of Sciacca with the Thomist teaching is only natural and reflects his entire creative evolution from the modern philosophy to the traditional Christian metaphysics. The need to substantiate a human, which is immanent to all philosophy, irrespective of the supposed existence of God, or the task to establish the ontological status of man, turned out to be insoluble for Sciacca outside Christianity and led him to the other synthesis, the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas. Sciacca has come to recognize that any attempt to solve the riddles of the philosophical anthropology independently of the Christian doctrine is simply senseless. Such concepts as personality, freedom, love, creative spirit are all revealed by Christianity, and one can hardly approach them otherwise, having rejected what has been already achieved. The principle of creation underlies the concept of personality. We are persons, for we are created singularly — each with his own body and soul. This idea brings Sciacca back to Aquinas, and to the Christian anthropology".

IV. METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE SCIACCAN ANTHROPOLOGY

These are based on the ontological understanding of a human as a spiritual being, in the first place.

1. ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF MAN

a) In the natural world *only* man is a spiritual subject, since he is the only creature endowed with *intelligence*, reason and will. (Spirit is therefore a unity of all spiritual activities. Besides the traditional forms of the latter, such as sensibility, will and reason, Sciacca gives prominence to the underlying form, intelligence).

b) A human subject possesses the ultimate ontological synthesis, the primary act of such a possession — self-awareness — being the unity of:

— subjectivity, a *fundamentally corporal feeling*^{12 13}, that helps a subject to perceive his spirit as connected with his body;

— objectivity, the primacy of the self-awareness act which is always a

¹⁰ See M. Stefani, *L'ontologia triadica dell' ultimo Sciacca*, Giornale di Metafisica 31, 1976, pp. 731—742.

" 1 suppose some of the most known Thomists stand close to the synthesis of the two basic Christian traditions. Gilson, for instance, appears to share, in part the spiritualist attitude.

¹² This term was introduced by Rosmini.

¹³ Cf. Augustine: „In interiore hominis habitat veritas”.

consciousness of the *presence* of an *infinite object*, i.e. of *being-as-an-Idea*, in the mind.

One comprehends being-as-an-Idea intuitively, via intelligence, the already mentioned faculty, in the inner experience. The subject is therefore the ontological synthesis of being and of his finite existence.

c) Sciacca calls this primal objective ontological act, constitutive of a spiritual being as such, an *objective inferiority*¹².

Sciacca applies a term „act” to being and to the spiritual subjects only. Act is basically spiritual, and only that which exists spiritually may be act; there can be no acts without intellectual and volutative principles. In nature there are no acts, only facts. The spiritual subject exists by himself; the reality — via him. In the order of nature only human, as a subject, is completed. The subject is *intelligence* just because of the presence of being; outside it, *I'intelligence* ceases to exist. An Idea is the light of the human mind.

d) In a human, an Idea is present, and not being in the fullness of its forms. Sciacca insists on this.

The immediate presence of truth in mind does not mean either the immediate presence of God, or the intuition of its source, or the direct contact between spirit and God, but only the immediate presence of truth as given to mind by God, not as it is in God¹⁴.

For this reason, Sciacca is very careful in using the term „participation”. The concept that God is present in our mind is called by him *ontologism*. Sciacca blames Louis Lavelle for ontologism, which Sciacca, in this case, traces down to Eriugena. Rosmini's opponent V. Gioberti was an „on- tologist” as well (in fact, that was the matter of their debate). One can also remember some statements of the „ontological” argument by

Anselm, some definitions of Descartes, and, to a lesser extent, those of Malebranche.

e) A human is thus the ultimate ontological synthesis of the finite being and the absolute being present in him via an Idea. The absolute being is that which enables him to be both spiritual and thinking. However, unlike in God, in a human the existential and the spiritual beings do not form a unity. A human is the synthesis of the finite and the infinite. Hence the absence of equilibrium: an Idea surpasses the existence and poses the latter as the *aspiration for the transcendent infinite*.

f) *Existence is not identical to reality*. The former preceeds the latter, since the ultimate ontological synthesis in that of the ideal and existential forms of being. Likewise, the *time* of the human existence is *not* equal to his existential time. The latter is the time of the objective interiority which is created and spent by the will of a particular human. The time of life-in -the-world is due to one type of a free will, *la scelta*-, the *existential* time — to another type, *l'elezione* (*election*, not choice).

¹⁴ M. F. Sciacca, *Filosofia e Metafisica*, Brescia: Morcelliana 1950, p. 197.

Human death is the end of the time *della vita*, but not of the existential time. Existentially, life is contingent; it is needed only for the being-in-the-world. Death is tragic not because the human life in the world is thereby reduced, but because a human now stands before a completely new situation, having recognized the unpredictability of his end. Only in the face of death comes he to realize his unavoidable ontological *nonentity and greatness* (*misere et grandeur*). In this way his fear and hope assume a genuine reality.

2. THE CONCEPT OF THE HUMAN PERSONALITY

A *person* is, according to Sciacca, the ontological synthesis of the ideal being, existential being and reality. In his metaphysical structure, a person is something more than all the acts in which he realizes himself.

A person is the principle and goal of creation. He is unique. There can be many things, but there cannot be many persons, since each one is only that which he is by himself. Being a value himself, a person personalizes all values which he expresses.

The two additional features are distinctive of a person.

a) The feeling of a deep *ontological dependence*, manifested in the act of self-awareness. „I am” has its *raison d’être* outside itself. This feeling of createdness is the fundamental *charitas* of a human.

b) The *moral form of being* (which is the link between the existential form and being-as-an-Idea) is characteristic of a human person only. When an Idea is loved by the subject, a person becomes a moral being.

c) A person is not isolated.

By means of his body a human communicates with other bodies. By means of being-as-an-Idea — the only object common to all thinking subjects — he communicates with all the other thinking entities. A human, a thinking subject, is co-scient (*cum-scient*). Human consciousness takes place in the light of the truth internal to his thinking. The first stage of communication is a connection of a human with himself in truth, a monologue which is in fact an inner dialogue. The highest degree of self-awareness is associated with a Theistic self-awareness, *cum-scio*, triple by its very nature, one of the participants being the absolute and united God. The meeting with Him happens by analogy with the comprehension of truth constituting and transcending the subject.

The discovery, made by man, of his „compatibility” with God underlies the feeling of „compatibility” with other humans. It constitutes the foundation of *societas humana*, the society of humans based on their mutual understanding in the name of God. The relations between humans — I — you — we — are primary and prevail over those between a human and the things of nature.

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I did not touch, in this brief survey of Sciacca’s philosophical anthropology,

upon either the connection of his ideas with the moral philosophy of Rosmini, or on the impact of Augustinian notions of interiority, time and *Civitate Dei*. These links are evident, as well as the influence of Kierkegaard's view of the human intermediate position between the finite and the Absolute, and that of Pascal who spoke of self-limitations of the human reason, of the judgement of heart (somewhat similar to Sciacca's „intelligence”) and rejected the interpretation of man as a purely rationalistic entity. One more source of Sciaccian anthropology can be associated with Greek Patristics and particularly with Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of man.

V. CONCLUSION

The original philosophical system created by Sciacca, i.e. „philosophy of integrality”, turned out to be closely connected with the traditional Christian metaphysics. The return to the latter was due to the impossibility of solving the fundamental problem of man as a spiritual being (*animal spirituale*) within the limits of the XXth century philosophies, such as Neohegelism, Christian spiritualism, etc. For this, the ontological status of man had to be strictly defined, as it was done in the Christian metaphysics. In his philosophical quest Sciacca drew strength from the „spiritual” line of Christian thought (Augustine, Rosmini). However, in the later years, Sciacca came closer to Aquinas, in his attempts to incorporate the modern philosophical reasoning into the cultural tradition of Christianity.