

USAGE STATEMENT & AGREEMENT

- **This document is the property of the author(s) and of www.epsociety.org.**
- **This document has been made available for your individual usage.**
- **It's possible that the ideas contained in this document are of a "preprint" quality. Please consult the author(s) for any updated content.**
- **If you quote from this document, whether for personal or professional purposes, please give appropriate attribution and link to the original URL whenever you cite it.**
- **Please do not upload or store this document to any personal or organization owned website, intranet, portal, server, FTP area, or any other shared space.**
- **You are permitted to store this document on your own individual, privately-owned computer or device.**
- **By opening this document, you have agreed to abide by the above stated usage policy.**
- ***We welcome your comments and interaction about the ideas shared in this document by going to www.epsociety.org!***

Doing and Teaching Christian Philosophy: Reply to McFall

Paul K. Moser
Department of Philosophy
Loyola University
Chicago, Illinois

Abstract. This is a reply to Michael T. McFall’s “Christian Philosophy and the Confessional Classroom.” It answers some of his probing questions in a manner that preserves consistency between my essays, “Jesus and Philosophy” and “Christ-Shaped Philosophy.” This reply distinguishes between two senses of “doing Christian philosophy” and between two senses of “Christian witness.” In addition, it outlines a case for the importance of one’s knowing God directly, without reliance on an argument.

Michael McFall helpfully presses some questions about (1) doing Christian philosophy and (2) the teaching of philosophy by one committed to Christian philosophy. This reply outlines answers to his main questions on these two topics.

1. Doing Christian Philosophy

McFall notes that Christ-Shaped Philosophy rests on three major contributing factors: Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God and Christ, and inward human change. He also quotes the following from “Jesus and Philosophy”: “If, as Christians acknowledge, Jesus is Lord, he is Lord of *all* of life, including one’s intellectual life. So, if Jesus is Lord, he is Lord of the questions one may pursue ... [and] the Lord of all of our time.” Finding this theme relatively scarce in “Christ-Shaped Philosophy,” McFall suggests that someone may perceive the latter essay to lower the bar for Christian philosophy.

The perception in question would be a misperception, because the lesson about Christ’s lordship and our use of time still applies in “Christ-Shaped Philosophy,” if only by implication. The lesson follows from the following remarks in “Christ-Shaped Philosophy”: “Many philosophers ignore or dislike Jesus, because he transcends a familiar, honorific discussion mode, and demands that they do the same. Philosophical discussion becomes advisable and permissible, under the divine love commands, if and only if it

honors those commands by compliance with them. Jesus commands love from us toward God and others *beyond* discussion and the acquisition of truth, even philosophical truth. He thereby cleanses the temple of philosophy, and turns over our self-promoting tables of mere philosophical discussion.” Accordingly, we are permitted to use our time for philosophy only if doing so honors the love commands of Jesus by compliance with them. “Jesus and Philosophy” and “Christ-Shaped Philosophy” sing in unison on this theme, even if the former sings a bit more loudly. In any case, McFall wisely notes the importance of the theme in question.

McFall offers a helpful “thought-project” for identifying whether a person is “engaged in Christian philosophy.” It involves the appearing of Jesus before one with this question: “Can you explain how what you are doing right now is advancing my Kingdom?” McFall adds: “if one cannot explain how one’s work is Kingdom-oriented (pertaining to Jesus, Spirit, or inward change), then this would not seem to count as Christian philosophy.” Indeed, aside from unintentional and unanticipated contributions to God’s Kingdom, one’s work in that case would not seem to count as Christian *anything*, let alone Christian philosophy. So, McFall seems to be going in the right direction toward a practical test.

We should distinguish (at least) two common senses of the slippery phrase “engaged in Christian philosophy,” even if they are often conflated. One sense, which we may call “the strict-content sense,” requires interacting with philosophy that is explicitly Christian in conceptual content, involving positive claims regarding Jesus Christ, the Spirit of Christ, reconciliation to God in Christ, inward transformation by Christ, and so on. Another sense, which we may call “the Kingdom-enhancement sense,” requires interacting with philosophy (whatever its content) for the purpose of bringing out its contributions (or the lack thereof) for a philosophy that is Christian in content and enhances God’s redemptive Kingdom in Christ, under the Good News of God in Christ and its divine love commands.

The relevant Kingdom-enhancement can contribute either to new reconciliation to God or to deepened reconciliation with God, including a deepened appreciative understanding of God’s redemptive ways. Given that the desired reconciliation is under divine *agapē* and its love commands, we may understand Kingdom-enhancement in terms of the expansion or the deepening of God’s kingdom of *agapē*. Such Kingdom-enhancement depends on the power of divine *agapē*, which can exist and work apart from explicit Christian content. Otherwise, the Spirit of God would be unable to prepare people in advance of their coming to consider and to receive Christian conceptual content. The position of “Jesus and Philosophy” and “Christ-Shaped

Philosophy” allows for doing Christian philosophy in either of the senses identified, and that appears to be a correct result.

It would be unduly narrow and short-sighted to prohibit doing philosophy in the Kingdom-enhancement sense. In addition (for what it’s worth), such narrowness conflicts with the way various contributors of wisdom literature in the Old Testament engaged with, and borrowed from, non-Hebraic wisdom traditions. If God is the ultimate ground of all wisdom, as Christ-Shaped Philosophy acknowledges, then genuine wisdom is valuable wherever it emerges, even outside the people or church of God. So, we should not expect or advocate for a Christian ghetto with a monopoly on wisdom.

It does not follow that “anything goes” in Christian philosophy; nor does it follow that all philosophical truth or sound argument is intrinsically valuable or even worthy of human pursuit. The Kingdom-enhancement sense sets a definite boundary with this standard: enhancing God’s redemptive Kingdom in Christ, under the Good News and its divine love commands. Mere truth-acquisition, even for philosophical truth, does not meet this standard. Some truths contribute to Kingdom-enhancement; others do not.

McFall wonders about the following remark from “Jesus and Philosophy”: “If, as Christians acknowledge, Jesus is Lord, then he is Lord of *all* of life, including one’s intellectual life. So, if Jesus is Lord, he is Lord of the questions one may pursue.” He remarks: “This seems to imply that Christian philosophers, when engaged in philosophy, should only engage questions relevant to Christian philosophy.” That implication, I suggest, is only apparent. The Kingdom-enhancement sense allows for engaging philosophical questions that *may or may not* be positively relevant to Christian philosophy, in order to find out whether there actually is positive relevance. So, we should reject the apparent implication in question.

“Jesus and Philosophy” expresses doubt about the positive Kingdom-relevance of the medieval philosophical dispute over whether angels can inhabit the same place at the same time.¹ (This actually was a live issue for Aquinas, all exaggeration aside.) I have not found good reason to relax my doubt, even after discussions with some highly qualified Aquinas scholars. Nonetheless, one may engage such a philosophical question, if only briefly, to identify its relevance or the lack thereof for Kingdom-enhancement. I have sincerely tried to do so, but I have come up empty, without a positive contribution. Of course, I am fallible and may need correction here, but in the absence of actual correction, I recommend setting aside the pursuit of that medieval dispute, for the sake of various compelling philosophical contributions to Kingdom-enhancement.

¹ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1, q. 52, a.3.

We humans have finite resources, including finite time, in this life under the divine love commands, and therefore we should adopt a triage approach to the matters we pursue in Christian philosophy (and in Christian life generally). As a result, I recommend a distinction between (a) the philosophical questions we may engage, if only briefly, to find out their positive relevance or the lack thereof to Kingdom-enhancement and (b) the questions we may pursue as a research focus in a Christian life, as an evident means of Kingdom-enhancement. Any new question may be fair game for category (a), but (b) is a much more exclusive category. As a research focus, Christian philosophy (and Christian inquiry in general) should be attentive to (b) in a manner that is often neglected, owing perhaps to the false assumption that any philosophical inquiry or truth is intrinsically valuable or otherwise worthy of human pursuit.

McFall asks the following about my role as the Editor of the *American Philosophical Quarterly* (*APQ*): “If you are going to invest time and energy in being an editor, why invest in a journal that does not advance the Good News? If investing as such, why not be the editor of a new journal that does advance the Good News – the kind of journal that would promote the very kind of Christian philosophy that you envision? After all, few philosophy journals accept research in Christian philosophy as you envision it, many others could serve as editor of *APQ*, and few could successfully serve as editor of such a new journal.” As it happens, I have not had the opportunity to be the Editor of a new journal that advances the Good News by promoting Christian philosophy. Accordingly, I have not been in a position where I need to decide between editing that kind of journal and editing *APQ*. So, McFall’s imagined case does not capture my actual situation. Perhaps it’s noteworthy, however, that if I had to choose between editing *APQ* and editing a journal on Christ-Shaped Philosophy, I most likely would choose the latter (all other things being equal).

McFall’s main concern here remains, I suspect, given his following remarks. “Clearly, Jesus is Lord of all our time in both spheres of our life – work (doing philosophy) and non-work (not doing philosophy). Furthermore, faith and obedience toward God and Christ is expected in both spheres of Christian life. So, the question is whether one must do explicitly Kingdom-advancing work in both spheres. If not, then it seems perfectly acceptable for Christian philosophers to not directly engage in Kingdom-expanding work (say, in the philosophy workplace), so long as they are still leading Christian lives when doing so and are doing explicitly Kingdom-oriented work in their other sphere. But this seems to be the *status quo* position that Moser wishes to reorient.” McFall is correct here: I do want to reorient that *status quo* position.

The big question, however, concerns how we are to reorient that position, particularly in terms of the replacement goal for Christian philosophy.

I suspect that McFall continues to have in mind my “work” as the Editor of *APQ*. We agree on his following remarks: “The mode of engagement of Christian philosophy, which seeks to spread Jesus’s message and transform others, can use non-Christian content to advance Christian goals.... [I]t seems permissible to read and discuss non-Christian philosophy, insofar as the intention is to use the non-Christian philosophy to promote Jesus’s message.” In particular, the Editor of *APQ* may work on the journal with such an intention in connection with his (or her) own writing in philosophy. At the same time, the Editor may seek to produce a first-rate journal issue for its audience of philosophical readers.

Once we acknowledge the aforementioned Kingdom-enhancement sense of “doing Christian philosophy,” the door is open for a Christian philosopher to serve as the Editor of *APQ* consistently, even with a clear conscience. So far as I can tell, my work as the Editor of *APQ* has not detracted from my work on Christ-Shaped Philosophy, but has actually contributed to the latter work in various ways, such as by prompting relevant distinctions and arguments and by clarifying opposing positions. In addition, my conscience has not been convicted of wrongdoing in this connection, even after I took the lesson of 1 John 3:20–21 to heart. So, I find that one’s being the Editor of *APQ* can serve the purpose of doing Christian philosophy in the Kingdom-enhancement sense.

2. Teaching Christian Philosophy

McFall’s suggested questions about teaching Christian philosophy in the classroom are particularly helpful. My own university (unfortunately) has no expectation for its philosophy teachers to teach or to discuss Christian philosophy, but they are free to do so, within the guidelines for their courses. If one chooses to exercise that option, how should one proceed? This question is complex, owing to variable factors about teachers, students, and the announced goals of a course. So, we should not expect a simple recipe for all teachers.

McFall suggests a question about my following remarks: “Some philosophers object to bringing Gethsemane union into Christian philosophy on the grounds that we should keep philosophy impartial, and not make it confessional in any way. The philosophy classroom, in this view, is no place for personal confession or redemption. This view is puzzling, however, because it suggests that we should do Christian philosophy without attending to the redemptive *reality* of being Christian in union with Christ.” In particular, McFall asks about the implications for “the mode of engagement in the Christian

philosophy classroom.” He suggests the following: “it seems, per Moser’s quotation concerning teaching, that the class must at least have a confessional component.”

Let’s assume that a “confessional” component is *discursive* in that it uses assertive language to express a state of affairs. Let’s also acknowledge that the New Testament category of “witness” (*marturia*) is broader than that of “confession.” A witness to God’s redemption may include a confession, but it need not. A *nondiscursive* mode of human existing or relating can be a witness to God’s redemptive character in virtue of manifesting certain properties of God’s character, such as divine *agapē*, without making an assertion. This neglected point bears on an aim to manifest one’s reasons for acknowledging God, even to manifest a reason for the Christian hope within one (1 Pet. 3:15). Even when a witness to God includes a discursive component, that component need not be an argument. It could be a descriptive testimony to what God has done in one’s life.

Christian philosophers often overlook the crucial importance of a nondiscursive manifestational witness to God’s powerful redemptive work, as they overemphasize the role of discursive, intellectual reasons. This deficiency may be the residue of a dubious kind of epistemic coherentism that lacks the needed resources of a modest experiential foundationalism. Alternatively, it may stem from a debilitating confusion of the conditions for one’s either having or manifesting evidence and the conditions for one’s giving an argument. We do well, however, not to confuse evidence and an argument. If all evidence is an argument, we face a devastating epistemic regress problem.²

One’s foundational reasons or evidence need not be discursive or assertive, but can be nonpropositional character traits supplied by God’s Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, and so on (see Gal. 5:22–23). Accordingly, John’s Gospel portrays Jesus as announcing that his disciples will be known by their *agapē* for others (Jn. 13:35). Jesus did not mention, allude to, or use any philosophical arguments in this connection, or in any other connection, for that matter. The same is true of his followers who are represented in the New Testament, although some of them were perfectly capable intellectually of wielding philosophical arguments. This noteworthy fact, moreover, does not qualify as a deficiency in their actual reasons, evidence, or mode of engagement. Talk is cheap, especially regarding God, and therefore many inquirers will wonder whether a confession has support from a

² See my *Knowledge and Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

corresponding nondiscursive witness, which can have power and cogency irreducible to statements and arguments.³

A factor in McFall's suggestion about confessional features appears to be my following remarks: "A Christian philosopher may prompt an inquirer to ask *why* he or she lacks evidence reported by some Christians, such as evidence of the inward flood of *agapē* from God's Spirit. The questions will invite motivational issues about one's desires and intentions with regard to God, such as the question whether I am *willing* to yield reverently with Christ to God in Gethsemane. Have I hardened my heart to God in Christ? Do I welcome the offered inward flood of God's *agapē* in Christ? If not, why not?" Nothing here entails, however, that a class taught by a Christian philosopher "must" have a confessional component, even if it may have one. In addition, I would hesitate to endorse the requirement in question, at least without some careful qualifications. A more plausible view would endorse the need and the propriety, always and everywhere, of a nondiscursive manifestational witness of God's *agapē* in Christ (understood *de re*, not *de dicto*). That witness, unlike a confession, cannot be dismissed as mere, cheap talk. (This fact accounts for the remark of Jesus in John 13:35.)

A problem stems from the ambiguity of the phrase "the Christian philosophy classroom." This phrase, like the phrase "doing Christian philosophy," is ambiguous between the aforementioned strict-content and Kingdom-enhancement senses. A confessional component may naturally arise when the strict-content sense is satisfied, especially for all or most participants in a class. It need not arise, however, under the Kingdom-enhancement sense, particularly where only the teacher has a Christian commitment and the audience is arrogantly hostile. The latter point is important, because in certain cases a Christian teacher may withhold the Good News discursively, so as not to "cast pearls" by subjecting it to abuse or ridicule from people who are not ready for it. Jesus, the model for Christian teachers, did the same according to the New Testament Gospels. (The author of John's Gospel is particularly intrigued by the elusiveness of Jesus in this regard; see, for instance, John 12:20–26.) I suggest, therefore, that McFall's talk of the "flexibility" of Jesus in his "mode of engagement" needs to be extended to his delivery of content as well.

In all cases, a Christian teacher should use discernment by listening for guidance from the Lord he or she represents. It is, after all, the living God who is being represented, and this God can be subtle and elusive, for good

³ The idea of *personifying evidence* in my book *The Evidence for God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) accommodates such a nondiscursive witness.

redemptive reasons. Sometimes we wish for clear-cut recipes that specify exactly when and how to represent God discursively. We do not have such recipes, however, and this lack may serve our own redemptive good. It may prompt us to listen for guidance in our particular situations of teaching as Christian philosophers. Differences in audiences and settings can matter importantly in serving God's redemptive purpose. In this regard, the university classroom is no different from an audience outside the university. In both contexts, a Christian teacher needs discernment regarding how to proceed and how much to reveal discursively, given the readiness of one's audience to receive or not to receive. A nondiscursive manifestational witness of *agapē*, however, can typically proceed apace, as a powerful antecedent to a potential opportunity for a discursive witness. Such a nondiscursive witness can be effective preparation for a testimony to an audience.

The need for discernment in Christian teaching that involves the Good News calls for a larger undertaking. The apostle Paul points us in the right direction, as follows: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2, NRSV). I have referred to the needed transformation as an "undertaking," because it includes intentional action on the part of Christians. Accordingly, the discernment in question is not passive.

Paul identifies the relevant intentional action in terms of a kind of redemptive self-sacrifice, as follows: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1, NRSV; cf. Col. 1:24). A role for such sacrifice rarely emerges in contemporary Christian writing on knowing God, spiritual transformation, or discernment of God's will. Similarly, a crucial role for the spiritual transformation of Christian teachers, including teachers of Christian philosophy, is neglected in much contemporary Christian discussion. An excessive focus on relevant intellectual content may account for these deficiencies. In any case, a correction in emphasis is needed.

The New Testament evidence for the needed Christian sharing in redemptive self-sacrifice is extensive and clear. For instance, the Gospels portray Jesus as saying: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mk. 8:34, NRSV; cf. Lk. 9:23, Mt. 16:24). Even more strongly: "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:27, NRSV). His talk of the cross here suggests that his disciples, including Christian philosophers, must image him in self-sacrificial commitment and action, in redemptive obedience to God. The

author of 1 Peter confirms this lesson: “Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (2:5, NRSV; cf. 2:21). The latter sacrifices are “through Jesus Christ” at least in that they follow his self-giving redemptive path in obedience to God.

We do well to reflect on the redemptive nature of the God for whom we are doing or teaching Christian philosophy in a manner that requires spiritual transformation and discernment. If God is inherently self-sacrificial toward a redemptive end for everyone (even God’s enemies), then that is where we should expect to find God: in redemptive self-sacrifice as we participate in it. The writer of 1 John states: “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (4:8). A corresponding, more suitable translation is: “Whoever does not self-sacrifice (for redemptive purposes) does not know God, for God is self-sacrifice.” Accordingly, one’s coming to know God in discerning God’s will is not a spectator sport or an armchair pastime. Instead, it requires one’s joining in what is inherent to God’s moral character: redemptive self-sacrifice. Such knowing and discerning may be foreign to certain modern conceptions of relatively disengaged knowledge, but they fit with the expectations of the intensely redemptive God, the Father of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps we do not expect God to self-manifest in redemptive self-sacrifice. This omission could result from our having portrayed God in our own image – the insidious root of idolatry. In that case, we may overlook salient evidence for God’s presence, including intended guidance from God, even when it is close at hand. Paul’s theological epistemology suggests that a person needs to rely on “spiritual discernment” to apprehend things revealed by God (1 Cor. 2:14), and that this reliance includes one’s having the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). Paul does not elucidate his notions of spiritual discernment and the mind of Christ in the ways a contemporary philosophical theologian might, but he does leave us with some helpful clues. He introduces these notions in a context that is explicitly concerned with redemptive self-sacrifice, of the kind exemplified by Jesus himself.

In order to discern God’s will, Christian teachers, including teachers of Christian philosophy, need a spiritual transformation that requires their self-sacrifice to God (as a way of sharing in Christ’s perfect sacrifice by the obedience of faith in God). This includes dying to one’s selfishness and pride in order to flourish in life with God, who seeks to kill selfishness and pride (cf. Rom. 8:13). We must undergo the crisis of Gethsemane daily (at least), yielding our will to God’s perfect will, in order to be in a position to discern divine guidance for teaching in particular cases. This Gethsemane experience is the

core of our needed redemptive self-sacrifice to God, as we share in the exemplary sacrifice by Christ to God for us.

Paul's ideas of spiritual discernment and sacrifice may seem too messy for some philosophers who clamor for cut-and-dried principles, arguments, and recipes. Such a worry should subside, however, when we consider that our ultimate audience is not a logical principle or an argument, but a personal divine Spirit who is inherently self-sacrificial. This God reveals that the cardinal human failing is alienation from God whereby we fail to commune with God in a manner that shows us how to love God and others as God does. Accordingly, we should not identify the cardinal human failing with a human's not having or accepting a conclusive argument for God's existence. The challenge for us is much deeper when we face the matter of a purposive, interactive God's reality and intervention.

Contrary to some familiar trends, the teaching of Christian philosophy need not assume that people should endorse a particular argument for God's existence. Instead, such teaching should acknowledge and attend (if indirectly and with subtlety) to the most vital human need: to receive divine love in communion with God and thereby to learn to love God and others as God does. In doing so, Christian philosophers should steer clear of any smarter-than-thou pride and any tendency to mock, harass, badger, or otherwise belittle people who do not honor, accept, or debate certain "apologetics" arguments on offer. The latter tendency, unfortunately, is common in certain sectors of Christian philosophical "apologetics," but it has no place in the redemptive practice of genuine Christian philosophy or teaching. It gives the misleading impression that certain philosophical arguments are crucial to reasonable Christian commitment.

Christian hyper-intellectualism is the view that Christian teachers should be able to settle or resolve matters regarding Christian commitment with the giving of pro-Christian arguments. This view is naïve and often harmful. It ignores that the God and Father of Jesus works by means of self-authentication by "self-manifestation" (Rom. 10:20; cf. Jn. 14:23).⁴ We are not now in the domain of logical proof, as if the conclusion of a sound argument would settle or resolve the matter of Christian commitment. The matter instead is irreducibly agent- and decision-oriented, because it involves a volitional, decisional response of one intentional agent to the expressed will and offer of another intentional agent. Such interactive, decisional agency requires the free self-commitment of a human will to another agent, and hence is not reducible

⁴ I have developed the latter view in my book, *The Severity of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

to or settled by logical proof. Logical proofs do not entail human decisions to self-commitment to another agent; nor do such decisions need to rely on such proofs for their reasonableness or evidential support. The needed supporting evidence can be, and is, much more profound, existentially and experientially.

The decisional interaction in question can begin with God's self-authenticating of divine reality by the intentional self-manifestation of God's perfect moral character to a person (perhaps in conscience). This self-authenticating fits with the Biblical theme of God's confirming God's reality, given that God inherently has a morally perfect character and cannot find anyone or anything else to serve this confirming purpose (see, for instance, Gen. 22:16–17, Isa. 45:22–23, Heb. 6:13–14). It also fits with the recurring Biblical theme that God alone is our foundation, rock, and anchor, including our cognitive foundation regarding God's reality (see, for example, Ps. 18:2,31, 28:1, 31:3, Isa. 44:8; cf. 1 Cor. 2:9–13). The decisional interaction can develop with a cooperative human response of intentional self-commitment to the divine manifestation, on the basis of one's experiencing its perfect goodness. Such interaction is central to a redemptive I–Thou relationship between God and humans.

It would be a category mistake to expect a logical proof to settle or resolve the decisional matter at hand. A proof does not include an agent's intentional decision, even if it can include a *statement about* an intentional decision. A statement, even a concluding statement of a logical proof, is not an agent's intentional decision, and therefore it is not an agent's self-commitment to another agent, such as God. Even if an argument concludes with a recommendation, an agent still must decide on the recommendation: to endorse it, to reject it, or to withhold judgment.

A crucial, widely neglected lesson emerges now. For redemptive purposes, God wants people to know God directly, in an I—Thou acquaintance-relationship, without the dilution or the distraction of philosophical arguments. Accordingly, God wants the self-commitment of a human agent to *God*, not (in this context) to an inference or a conclusion of an argument. God wants to be one's sole evidential foundation for believing in God and for believing that God exists, and hence does not want an argument to assume this role. Strictly speaking, the evidential foundation is *God in God's self-manifesting interventions* in one's life, including in one's conscience. This maintains God's vital existential significance for human inquirers. We can, however, put ourselves in a position to apprehend divine self-manifestation, particularly by being sincerely and willingly open to receive and to participate in redemptive self-sacrifice, the hallmark of God's perfect moral character.

God is self-authenticating regarding divine reality in a way that arguments are not and cannot be, given that arguments are not an interactive personal agent. In addition, God can sustain a flourishing human life in a way that arguments cannot, for the same reason. So, God supplies the needed foundational evidence of God's reality by divine self-manifestation, and God wants that manifestation to provide the ultimate reason for the hope within us. Accordingly, directly knowing God in mutual fellowship is eternal life (Jn. 17:3). Such knowing yields foundational evidence and knowledge that God is real, but does not need to wait for an argument that God exists. A commitment to this kind of position accounts for the absence of the traditional arguments of natural theology in the Old and New Testaments.

An argument can obscure the importance of directly knowing God, and many uses of arguments by Christian philosophers actually do this. In addition, when familiar theistic arguments come under heavy fire, even justified fire, many critics take this fire to underwrite their agnosticism or atheism. This is dangerously misleading. We can represent foundational evidence for God in a sound first-person argument, but such an argument cannot exhaust or replace the underlying experiential evidence.⁵

Seeking full human redemption for each human, God wants people to enter in fully to the program of divine self-sacrifice, and hence to experience and feel it rather than just to think and talk about it. This divine want fits with God's desiring the redemption of the whole person, not just a single human aspect, such as the intellect. In particular, God wants to engage the human will, in order to encourage willing human compliance with God's perfect will. In doing so, God provides compelling reasonable assurance to receptive humans regarding God's reality and goodness (cf. 1 Thess. 1:5), and thereby saves them from cognitive despair.

3. Conclusion

Finally, then, the teaching of Christian philosophy should leave adequate room for God's self-authenticating work among humans. God does not have to wait for philosophical arguments to advance redemption among humans. Christians, including Christian philosophers, are to manifest God's presence in the power of divine *agapē*, and this witness is more profound, existentially and experientially, than any inferential chain or argument. It manifests the power, and hence the reality, of God's own searching, probing Spirit, who seeks to

⁵ On this matter, see my book *The Elusive God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

pour out life-giving *agapē* in the heart of any receptive inquirer, with or without inferences and arguments (Rom. 5:5). We do well to reorient the doing and the teaching of Christian philosophy accordingly, in order to accommodate this Good News. We shall know the truth of this Good News by its nondiscursive divine fruit, and this truth alone can set us free.

Paul K. Moser is Professor and Chairperson of Philosophy at Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL.