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On Moser's Christ-Centered Metaphilosophy

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Abstract: Paul K. Moser has produced several publications in which he has issued challenges with a purpose to reorient philosophy, in general, and Christian philosophy, in particular. He makes a distinction between doing philosophy in a “discussion” and in an “obedience” mode. His call is to reorient philosophy from *merely* doing it in a discussion mode to an obedience mode without altogether jettisoning a discussion mode. In this paper, I introduce an idea, inspired by Moser’s distinction of two modes of doing philosophy. I call a mode of doing philosophy, especially fitting for Christian philosophy, an *obedient discussion* mode of doing philosophy (“Obedient discussion” can be contrasted with *mere* discussion or just discussion *per se*). Obedient discussion recognizes that some discussion as a mode of doing philosophy can be and is obediently done under the authority of the Lord Jesus. This notion is intended to subsume discussion, at least some discussion, under an obedience mode of doing philosophy. On my proposal, an obedience mode of doing philosophy inherently involves a discussion mode of doing philosophy. I reject the idea that the discussion mode, in most cases of philosophy done by Christian philosophers, consists only in *mere* discussion without involving any obedience. I also distinguish two senses of obedience such that these two senses of obedience capture what a Christian philosopher does *as* a Christian philosopher and *as* a disciple of the Lord.

I: Moser on Two Modes Doing Philosophy

Paul Moser’s distinction between a discussion mode and an obedience mode is largely predicated on his claim that the discussion mode of doing philosophy consists exclusively in talks, endless arguments, and counterarguments. On the other hand, the obedience mode demands that philosophy be done by submission of the will of a philosopher to the authority and lordship of Jesus Christ. Moser writes, “We undermine the authority of Jesus when we respond to him just with a discussion mode that does not include an obedience mode. We then treat him as something less than the Lord of heaven and earth. We reduce him to a philosophical interlocutor. We make

him like us. So, he is no longer Jesus as Lord.”¹ Moser urges philosophers to move from a *mere* discussion mode of doing philosophy to an obedience mode of doing philosophy. For Moser only doing philosophy in the obedience mode requires yielding one’s *will* to the authority of the Lord since the discussion mode can be done without ever submitting one’s will to the Lord. According to Moser, most of philosophy, even what is considered Christian philosophy by many, has been done and is done in a discussion mode, which is a normal mode for most of philosophy. Christian philosophy has thus been caught up in the way philosophy has typically been done in a discussion mode. Hence, Moser’s call to reorient Christian philosophy.

Here is an extended quotation that addresses the urgency for the importance of doing philosophy in the obedience mode:

How, then, is Jesus relevant to philosophy as a discipline? I mention just one important way. Philosophy in its normal mode, without being receptive to authoritative divine love commands, leaves humans in a discussion mode, short of an obedience mode under divine authority. Philosophical questions naturally prompt philosophical questions about philosophical questions, and this launches a regress of higher-order, or at least related, questions, with no end to philosophical discussion. Hence, the questions of philosophy are, notoriously, perennial. As divinely appointed Lord, in contrast, Jesus commands humans to move, for their own good, to an obedience mode of existence relative to divine love commands. He thereby points humans to his perfectly loving Father who ultimately underwrites the divine love commands for humans, for the sake of divine-human fellowship. Accordingly, we need to transcend a normal discussion mode, and thus philosophical discussion itself, to face with sincerity the personal inward Authority who commands what humans need: faithful obedience and belonging to the perfectly loving Giver of life. Such obedience and belonging of the heart provide the way humans are to *receive* the gift of divine love. Insofar as the discipline of philosophy becomes guided, in terms of its pursuits, by that gift on offer, it becomes kerygma-oriented in virtue of becoming an enabler of the Good News of God in Christ.² [Italics in the original]

¹ Paul K. Moser, “Jesus and Philosophy: On the Questions We Ask”, in *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 22, no. 3, 2005, p. 275

² Moser, “Christ-Shaped Philosophy”, p. 12, an EPS web-based project located here: <http://bit.ly/ChristShapedPhilosophyProject>

It is crucial to understand that for Moser, engaging merely or only in a “discussion mode” without moving beyond it to the “obedience mode” is failing to do Christian philosophy in a robust way. Consequently, his proposal is to correct this mere engagement in a “discussion” mode; or the target that he is against is a mere engagement in the “discussion mode”, not the “discussion mode” *per se*.

One helpful way to understand the preceding quotation is by considering what Moser suggests about the role of philosophy, when it is done under the obedience mode, that it must serve as an instrument in the mission of the church. Moser contends in his various writings that philosophy that fails to promote the Good News or the mission of the church is not Christian. How can Christian philosophers move from doing philosophy in the discussion mode to the obedience mode? One answer to this question is provided in the above quotation. That is, “As divinely appointed Lord... Jesus commands humans to move, for their own good, to an obedience mode of existence relative to divine love commands. He thereby points humans to his perfectly loving Father who ultimately underwrites the divine love commands for humans, for the sake of divine-human fellowship.”³

Furthermore, Moser also answers the above question as follows: “The needs of the church are urgent, given that the mission of Jesus is urgent and the church is the bearer of this mission. Issues *extraneous* to the needs of the church, however intriguing, will not occupy the attention of philosophy under the lordship of Jesus.”⁴ [Italics mine]. Philosophical questions are perennial, they typically consist in arguments and counterarguments, in short, and, therefore, philosophy typically consists in endless discussions. Hence, the discussion mode of doing philosophy. In contrast, the mission of Jesus is urgent. The mission of the church is about redemption of human beings, including philosophers. When the *perennial* pursuit of philosophy, in the discussion mode, comes in conflict with the *urgent* mission of the church, Christian philosophers should move from doing philosophy merely in the discussion mode to that of doing philosophy in the obedience mode. Though determining which philosophical projects are extraneous to the needs of the church is contentious let that pass for now. I’ll return to this in the next section.

Let’s consider one more test for a philosophy to be Christian or not, according to Moser. He writes,

³ Ibid.

⁴ Moser, “Jesus and Philosophy”, p. 277

A test question arises for any proposed Christian philosophy: does the philosophy uphold the importance of one's obediently dying with Christ under the guiding agent-power of God as "Abba, Father"? If not, the philosophy misses the mark as a Christian philosophy. Most philosophy fails this redemptive litmus test, because redemption, as being saved by God, is ignored by most philosophers, who thus fail to honor the unique redemptive Mediator from God, the inward Christ.⁵

Moser's response in the quotation needs to be understood in light of the broader context of his project which the title of his paper, "Christ-Shaped Philosophy", is meant to capture. According to Moser, a philosopher to be properly a Christian philosopher, he or she, must seek *union* with the living Christ, willingly submitting his or her will in the same way Jesus submitted his will to the perfect will of his Father. A Christian philosopher's life must be guided by the *power* of the living Christ, the inward Christ. A philosophy done when a philosopher's will is united with the will of God or with the will of Christ would *prioritize* projects that reflect the will of God and thereby promote the will of God for the good of human beings. Consequently, a Christian philosophy must reflect God's desire, or God's perfect will, for humans and it should be done with a motive that takes into account God's redemptive purposes to humans.

A careful observer of philosophical works by Christian philosophers in the last several decades would want to know, in light of Moser's proposed view of Christian philosophy, how much of the contributions made by Christian philosophers are properly works of *Christian* philosophy. It does not seem plausible to think that Moser's proposed view to reorient Christian philosophy targets only a small class of work done by Christian philosophers. Reading his challenges to Christian philosophers does not support that his target is rather a small class of work on apparently Christian philosophy. If Moser's proposal is correct, the answer cannot be that *all* of the writings produced by Christian philosophers are works on Christian philosophy. If all of the contributions made by Christian philosophers are works that would count as Christian philosophy, then Moser's call to reorient Christian philosophy would be left unmotivated or unjustified. In order to justify his proposed view Moser would need to argue that even the majority of work done by Christian philosophers is *not* an example of work on Christian philosophy. If a case can be made for such a claim, then Moser's call to reorient Christian philosophy would be well motivated. But why would anyone believe that this judgment about Christian

⁵ Moser, "Christ-Shaped Philosophy", p. 9

philosophy is right? In the next section, I propose a mode of doing philosophy, an obedient discussion mode, which avoids some problematic consequences Moser's conception of Christian philosophy seems to give rise to.

II: Obedient Discussion

In this section I introduce an idea, inspired by Moser's distinction of two modes of doing philosophy. I call a mode of doing philosophy, especially fitting for Christian philosophy, an *obedient discussion* mode of doing philosophy. Obedient discussion recognizes that some discussion as a mode of doing philosophy can be and is obediently done under the authority of the Lord Jesus. This notion is intended to subsume discussion, at least some discussion, under an obedience mode of doing philosophy. On my proposal, an obedience mode of doing philosophy inherently involves a discussion mode of doing philosophy. I reject the idea that the discussion mode, in most cases of philosophy done by Christian philosophers, consists only in *mere* discussion without involving any obedience. Most of philosophy can be and is, in fact, done in a discussion mode but it does not follow from this that most of philosophy done, especially, by Christian philosophers is done merely in a discussion mode. Some discussions in philosophy are responses, as a result of being obedient to the Lord, such that the discussions are consequences of one's intellectual commitment or a way of using one's intellectual ability or gifts to the advancement of the Kingdom. Philosophical work done in a discussion mode, when the discussion involves an obedient response to a call from the Lord, such work is fruit of obedience and hence such work is not a mere discussion without any regard to the Lord. I submit that much of the body of philosophical work produced by most of contemporary Christian philosophers, especially in the last several decades, can count, directly or indirectly, as a body of work on *Christian* philosophy. To be more specific, when I say-- "the body of philosophical work produced by most of contemporary Christian philosophers, especially in the last several decades"-- I mean to refer to the body of work done in philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, works on distinctly Christian doctrines, works on apologetics, and more recently, works in analytic theology.⁶ Some of such works could be or are directly related to an

⁶ I think Mike McFall for alerting me to be more *specific* about the body of philosophical work done by contemporary Christian philosophers in light of the fact that there are many Christian philosophers who do not do any work on any distinctly Christian philosophy. Probably, one would think that Moser's call to reorient philosophy targets the philosophical works of Christian philosophers that show no relationship, especially directly, to Christianity. But a call to such philosophers, more plausibly, as opposed to their

ongoing and urgent work of the mission of the church. For an example of work, among many, that fits the mode I'm proposing one can think of William L. Craig's work in apologetics that draws heavily upon his work in philosophy. Craig is an example of a Christian philosopher whose life embodies and exemplifies the command in 1 Peter 3:15, Mathew 28: 16-20, among other commands in the Bible. I would suggest that Craig is one of the most notable examples of Christian philosophers who do philosophy in an obedient mode that involves discussion but no mere discussion.

Having said the above, however, some other projects that do not directly address particular issues in the mission of the church might target broader intellectual culture in the context of which the mission of the church is being carried out. Such works could be construed as works on Christian philosophy when Christian philosophy is broadly construed. Publications from Alvin Plantinga's works such as *God and Other Minds* and *The Nature of Necessity* and the two *Warrant* volumes, *Warrant and the Current Debate*, and *Warrant and Proper Function*, could count as works on Christian philosophy broadly understood. One could think of this broader understanding of Christian philosophy as work on theism with implications for Christian theism. Note that Christian theism entails theism, though the converse is not the case; consequently, work on theism could be part of work on Christian theism since Christian theism is part of generic theism. Now moving beyond Plantinga's work on theism one can think of Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief* as an example of work on Christian philosophy. It's plausible to claim that when Plantinga worked on all these projects his engagement in the discussions (the discussion mode) was not an example of a mere discussion with no regard to the Lord and his Kingdom. Once again, Plantinga's commitment can serve as an example of philosophical work done in an obedient response to the Lord that *involved* doing philosophy in a discussion mode. One could say that when Plantinga did/does philosophy he *obediently discusses* issues that matter to Christianity. Hence, in such philosophical works there was no mere discussion. The suggestion I'm making has a potential to dissolve a need to pit one mode of doing philosophy, especially for Christian philosophers, against another mode of doing

philosophical work, does not seem to be a call to reorient Christian philosophy. The relevant call that such Christian philosophers presumably need is that they should *start working* on distinctly Christian philosophy under the authority of the Lord. I don't have any disagreement with Moser if Moser's call is to challenge such Christian philosophers to directly engage in distinctly Christian philosophy. However, my understanding is that Moser's call is to reorient what is taken to be an extant body of work on Christian philosophy.

philosophy. When obedience properly involves discussion there is no room for mere discussion without obedience.

The above discussion on *obedient discussion* is intended to capture a broader and more plausible conception of Christian philosophy than the suggestion Moser seems to make. One can add the following distinction to the above for a better understanding of Moser's call to reorient Christian philosophy. Consider understanding "obedience" in two senses: Obedience in the sense when a disciple, whatever the background, is trying to live up to the practical implications of discipleship such as loving the Lord, loving one's neighbor, helping the needy, and the sick, etc. In short, let's call this obedience₁. Obedience₁ admits no philosophical way of doing things. That is, there is no distinctly *philosophical way* of being obedient in the sense of obedience₁. Philosophers, as disciples of the Lord, are not exempted from the love commands and hence this sense of obedience captures their volitional cooperation with the Lord as his apprentices as they obediently try to live out the divine commands. The other sense of being obedient is that which involves a Christian philosopher's intellectual contribution to the mission of the church by producing philosophical work that inevitably requires engaging in a discussion mode but this engagement is a result of one's being obedient to her call as a Christian philosopher. Call this sense of "obedience", obedience₂. Hence, obedience₂ is obedience in the theoretical dimension of a Christian life. Though a theoretical dimension is distinct from a practical dimension but being *obedient* in both senses unifies them as *a way of life* for a disciple, in this case for a Christian philosopher. I see no conflict between these two senses of being obedient.⁷ I'm inclined to think that many Christian philosophers would agree with this view.

Note that *obedient discussion* need not include obedience₁. Obedience understood as obedience₂ overlaps with the notion of obedient discussion. But this latter sense is introduced to contrast it with obedience₁ and to show that these two senses of obedience need not be in conflict. One advantage of introducing these two senses of obedience is that a Christian philosopher who is obedient in these two senses need not move from a mere discussion mode of doing philosophy to an obedience mode of doing philosophy in my suggested

⁷ One could raise a worry as to what a Christian philosopher ought to do when a call to work on philosophical projects, even when they are done in obedience to the Lord, takes away one's time from obeying the love commands that call for urgent actions. In such circumstances a Christian philosopher may seek wisdom from the Lord as to how to balance these two responsibilities, among many others. A Christian life is never perfect and there is no perfect solution for issues like this but that does not mean that there is no adequate solution at such moments.

view. When a Christian philosopher does philosophy, when this is done properly, the philosopher is already doing philosophy in obedience to the Lord. Christian philosophy is done *properly* when a Christian philosopher *intentionally* undertakes a project of philosophy for the *right* reason and with a *genuine motive*, i.e., for the purpose of the advancement of the Kingdom. One reason Moser presents the challenge to Christian philosophers to move from one mode of doing philosophy to the other, from a mere discussion to obedience, is to encourage them to participate in love commands of the Lord moving *beyond* a mere discussion. But now obedience₁ contains an answer to the love commands in the practical sense and hence there is no need to move to a different mode of doing philosophy because obedience₁ is not a mode of doing philosophy. For that matter, a Christian philosopher who is doing philosophy in the obedience₂ sense is already doing philosophy in an obedience mode. When a Christian philosopher properly does philosophy, there is no room for doing philosophy in a merely discussion mode. These two distinct senses of understanding obedience give us the same result that we encountered above when we considered the obedient discussion mode of doing philosophy.

So far I've suggested a couple of ways of understanding modes of doing Christian philosophy that, I think, capture the idea of Christian philosophy which is more *accommodative* than Moser's recommendation. One other advantage of my suggested way of understanding Christian philosophy applies to Moser's own work of philosophy. To the question why his philosophical work has become more focused on the philosophy of religion since the late 1990's and lately on distinctly Christian philosophy, Moser answers thus, "Since the age of 16 years old, I have sought to do my work in philosophy for the sake of knowing and following Jesus. Much of my writing in college and graduate school was explicitly for the cause of knowing and following Jesus. One of my first publications was in the philosophy of religion, on the problem of evil. Later publications focused on knowing and following Jesus as I became able to offer a focus that was faithful to him."⁸

Doing philosophy in an obedient discussion mode plausibly captures at least some of the body of philosophical work produced by Moser himself as Christian philosophy with an increasing focus on more distinct projects that are *explicitly* Christian.

Furthermore, on my understanding of Christian philosophy the trajectory of philosophical works produced by various contemporary Christian philosophers roughly parallels the trajectory for Moser's own work. Most of the philosophical writings of prominent contemporary Christian philosophers were

⁸ See <http://www.luc.edu/faculty/pmoser/idolanon/MoserInterview.htm>

more on general philosophical issues on theism earlier on and became more focused on issues in Christian theism later or recently. To think of the trajectory of philosophical works by contemporary Christian philosophers one can consider works by Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, William L. Craig, J.P. Moreland, Garret DeWeese, Eleonore Stump, Stephen Davis, Dallas Willard, William Hasker, etc. Of course, I think, there is a plausible explanation why the trajectory of philosophical works by many Christian philosophers has been more on theism earlier and later on has received more focused attention on distinctly Christian issues.

The most plausible explanation for the trajectory of philosophical works is the intellectual environment in which these Christian philosophers had begun working on their philosophical vocations. In an intellectual and cultural environment that was dominated by atheism and naturalism the first theistic response was to show that belief in God was rational and to provide good reasons to believe that theism is true. A genuinely truth-seeking atheist deserves a genuine answer about theism, whether God exists, since if theism is false it'd be implausible for the atheist to consider arguments for Christian theism.⁹ It's for this main reason, as I take it, that earlier works by Christian philosophers had to focus on making the case for the rationality of belief in God, and arguments for the existence of God, among other important works of prolegomena to future works on distinctly Christian theism.

The most plausible reason I can think of that explains the more recent concentration in philosophical works on distinctly Christian philosophy is this: It's because so much work has already been done on theism. Once a case for theism has been made and when some progress has been made with respect to theism, the next logical thing to do is to pay more attention and focus on distinctly Christian issues and that is exactly what has been witnessed.¹⁰ I submit that Moser's most recent work, including his paper, "Christ-Shaped

⁹ One can dispute the suggestion that in order to make a case for Christian theism a Christian needs to establish that, at least, generic theism is not false. One way to dispute this goes by denying that the "God" theistic arguments purport to establish or attempt to prove, the so-called "God of the philosophers", is not the "God" of Christianity. As a matter of fact, Paul Moser holds this view. It's no coincidence that Moser's view on Christian philosophy departs from many others' who work on Christian philosophy and hence his call to reorient Christian philosophy. See Winter 2012 issue of *Philosophia Christi*, p. 307 for his view, for example, on the "God of the philosophers."

¹⁰ Even a prominent atheist philosopher, Graham Oppy, acknowledges progress that has been made regarding the rationality of theism. He writes, "In any case, I'm inclined to grant from the outset that belief in the existence of God is rationally permissible: Some-but only some-of the smartest, most thoughtful, most well informed people that I know are theists." See *Alvin Plantinga: Contemporary Philosophy in Focus* (Cambridge UP, 2007), p. 42.

Philosophy”, which is the subject of this online Symposium, is one clear example of work by a Christian philosopher that challenges Christian philosophers to be even more Christian in their philosophical works and even in their own lives as Christians.

Philosophical writings of Christian philosophers are integral to life lived as a Christian and life lived as a Christian should underwrite the work done by Christian philosophers. That is Moser’s call that cannot be dismissed without going against one’s Christian conviction. For this challenge and call Moser deserves commendation. However, I contend that Moser’s view on the obedience mode of doing Christian philosophy seems to be unduly restrictive. Here is one more reason why I think that is to be the case. When giving examples of Christians whose work manifests doing philosophy in an obedience mode Moser writes, “As for philosophers who consistently manifest the obedience mode of philosophy in their writings, they are few and far between. Three straightforward examples, who are as much philosophers as theologians, are Helmut Thielicke, H.H. Farmer, and John Baillie.”¹¹ On my understanding of Christian philosophy, as I’ve tried to illustrate above, the body of work *obediently* done on Christian philosophy is much larger and the corresponding number of Christian philosophers, including Moser himself, who have done Christian philosophy, in an obedient discussion mode, is much larger.¹²

¹¹ See Moser, “Jesus and Philosophy”, in *Faith and Philosophy*, note 24, p. 283. To cite Moser’s example of Christian philosophers, those “three straightforward” examples, need not entail a claim that Moser considers these three examples as the *only* philosophers whose writings exemplify doing philosophy in an obedience mode. Of course, Moser’s own recent body of work is a clear example of Christian philosophy done in an obedience mode in the sense he conceives of doing philosophy in an obedience mode. Probably my suggested conception of Christian philosophy is more liberal since I provided more examples of Christian philosophers whose writings show philosophy done in an obedient discussion mode. But my conception of philosophy is broader than his and hence the relevant difference between Moser’s conception and my conception of Christian philosophy. Thanks to Mike McFall for calling my attention to say more about this point beyond what I’ve said in the text above.

¹² I’m not implying that any piece of writing a Christian philosopher produces should be counted as an example of a work of Christian philosophy. The *content* of the work, the *motive* for writing it, and the *intention* or the *purpose* for the writing will be among crucial factors to determine whether a work is an example of Christian philosophy, directly or indirectly. It’s also important to note that writings produced by philosophers who are Christians but without any relevance to the Christian faith, directly or indirectly, need not be counted as works of Christian philosophy. Such works can, at best, be deemed as works done *merely* in a discussion mode insofar as they have not been done with an intention to

Before concluding this section let me quote a couple of Christian philosophers, Plantinga and DeWeese, on their views about what is crucial for Christian philosophy. Plantinga writes:

There is still another way, perhaps the most important way, one that a Christian philosopher neglects at great peril. For a Christian philosopher is first of all a Christian and only secondarily a philosopher. Her philosophy is her specific way of working out her vocation as a Christian; but then to be a proper Christian philosopher, she must be a proper Christian. This means that all of her thought and activity will be shaped and formed by the traditional ways in which we Christians try to make progress in the Christian life: prayer, Bible reading, taking part in the sacraments, associating with other Christians for fellowship and edification. Those who neglect these things are cutting off the source and root of their being as Christian philosophers. ...This task is challenging, formidable, difficult, frustrating; it is also fascinating, beguiling, fulfilling. *Most of all, it is the service we Christian philosophers owe to the Lord and our community.*¹³ [Italics added].

DeWeese writes,

Doing philosophy as a Christian means doing philosophy under the authority of the Lord Jesus and of the Bible, the Word of God. It means reasoning within the bounds of religion. It means, in the end, doing philosophy in a way that aims intentionally at the ultimate goal of personal transformation into the image of Christ, and of extending a meaningful invitation to others to enter into that transformation—that is, of extending the kingdom of God on earth.¹⁴ [Italics added]

As I take it, the above views on Christian philosophy expressed by both Plantinga and DeWeese are not far from Moser's views on Christian philosophy when it comes to the purpose Christian philosophers engage in philosophy. They do not, however, speak in terms of the two distinct modes of doing philosophy as Moser does. However, their views and their philosophical

work out one's Christian vocation in a philosophical project that has a potential to contribute to the advancement of the Kingdom.

¹³ See Plantinga, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/plantinga_alvin/christian_philosophy_at_the_end_of_the_20th_century.pdf

¹⁴ See, DeWeese, *Doing Philosophy as a Christian* (IVP, 2011) p. 67.

works are compatible with my proposed view of doing Christian philosophy even though they don't speak in the way I proposed. The upshot: There is no evidence that supports the view that these philosophers (Plantinga, DeWeese, among many others) hold a view that suggests that Christian philosophers should do philosophy with no regard to the authority of the Lord Jesus over their lives, including their philosophical projects, as Christian philosophers.

Now in conclusion of this section I present a *trilemma* for Moser, which is based on what I said at the end of the first section of this paper and a conception of Christian philosophy I proposed in the current paper. The trilemma is that either Moser has to concede that (a) *all* of work done by contemporary Christian philosophers can and should count as work of Christian philosophy; but this would leave his project unjustified or unmotivated since this entails that there is no reason to reorient Christian philosophy, or (b) a small class of work done by contemporary Christian philosophers needs to be reoriented; but this is implausible given the evidence presented in Moser's writings that seems to support that, more plausibly, his call is to reorient a large body of work done by Christian philosophers, or (c) his call is to reorient a large body of work done by contemporary Christian philosophers¹⁵; but for this to be the case, Moser is invited to provide more compelling reasons why his view of Christian philosophy is more plausible than the view proposed in this paper.

If much of what Christian philosophers have been producing is philosophical work done in obedience to the Lord Jesus and if their obedience inherently involves discussion with a purpose to advance the kingdom of God, then there must be a compelling reason to reorient their work as Christian philosophers. I'd like to think that one main purpose of this paper is to extend an invitation for Moser to provide fellow Christian philosophers with additional reasons that call for reorientation of Christian philosophy. In the next section I consider a couple of objections that could be raised based on Moser's reasons that underwrite his challenge to reorient Christian philosophy.

III: Objections and Replies

Objection 1. One potential objection that could be raised against a broader conception of Christian philosophy suggested above is this: There are issues that are extraneous to the mission of the church. Christian philosophers, like any other human beings, have limited amount of time. But much of the

¹⁵ Recall what I mean by "the body of philosophical work produced by most of contemporary Christian philosophers." I specified such a body of work would consist of work in philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, etc.

philosophical work produced by contemporary Christian philosophers tends to consume their time and is not directly relevant to the mission of the church. But Christian philosophy should contribute to the urgent mission of the church. To work on projects to answer to the urgent needs of the church requires resisting the pursuit of extraneous projects. In Moser's words,

Philosophical truth-seeking, given the redemptive mission of a perfectly loving God, shouldn't float free of the Good News ministry to the divine love commands. In particular, it shouldn't become bogged down in the discussion mode, but should aim instead for a genuine contribution to philosophical ministry within the church community of God's people.¹⁶

A couple of points in response are in order.

Reply: *First*, my suggested *obedient discussion* mode of doing Christian philosophy takes into account obedience to the authority of the Lord Jesus for philosophical projects and hence a need to move from a mere discussion mode to an obedience mode of doing philosophy does not arise. Christian philosophers may work on philosophical projects that are *directly* related to the urgent mission of the church while, at the same time, they devote some of their time to work on philosophical problems that would take much longer period of time to make progress. Philosophical projects that would take more time to work out could make an indirect contribution to the mission of the church at a given point in time but they could directly contribute to the mission of the church later on.¹⁷

Second, consider Christian philosophers as missionaries. Cross-cultural missionaries need to learn a lot of things in order to communicate the Good News in an effective way. Christian philosophers need to learn the language,

¹⁶ Moser, *The Elusive God*, p. 239

¹⁷ Think of Moser's book *Knowledge and Evidence*. A crucial feature of Moser's religious epistemology, which is distinctly Christian, receives a significant support from a general epistemological framework that was prefigured or laid out in *Knowledge and Evidence* (Cambridge UP, 1989). Think, for example, of Plantinga's work on the metaphysics of modality in *The Nature of Necessity*, which took a significant amount of time to develop. But as many would agree applications of this project to the logical problem of evil can help remove an obstacle for some in coming to believe in God. Also, think of Craig's work on *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (KCA) and its use in evangelism. But to develop KCA it took a significant amount of time. More examples could be added but the point I'm making I hope is clear.

the worldview, and the intellectual culture in which they are called to communicate the Good News. That means Christian philosophers need to spend a considerable amount of time receiving training that will equip them to responsibly and hence obediently communicate the Good News. But part of this training inherently involves discussion of philosophical issues that might not be immediately relevant to the mission of the church.¹⁸ When a traditional cross-cultural missionary learns the language, the worldview and culture of a community to which he or she intends to share the Good News the learning process has to be thorough. It's likewise for Christian philosophers. But to engage in a discussion mode with a purpose need not be seen as an exercise in mere discussion. Moser himself is one of the best examples among Christian philosophers to illustrate the point I'm making. He's spent a significant amount of his time competently conversing with the larger philosophical world before his work became more focused on a distinctly Christian philosophy.

The bottom-line: To be a good Christian philosopher one has to invest a considerable amount of time in a discussion mode in order for a Christian philosopher to be well-equipped to be at the forefront of the market-place and the battle of ideas. But engaging in discussions for many Christian philosophers is a consequence of being obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ. But for a Christian getting involved in a discussion mode should be done in an obedient response to and under the authority of the Lord Jesus.¹⁹ Therefore, understood the way I suggested above, Christian philosophy need not float free of the Good News mission of the church, nor should it be seen as unnecessarily becoming bogged down in a discussion mode.

Objection 2: Another objection can be raised based on a question Moser poses as a “test question” to distinguish Christian philosophy from non-Christian philosophy. He writes,

¹⁸ For example, a Christian graduate student cannot simply opt out of required philosophical works that need to be done as part of one's graduate studies or training. Many, maybe the majority of Christian graduate students, receive their philosophical training in secular universities engaging in discussions as a mode of doing philosophy.

¹⁹ One advantage for, especially, current and future younger Christian philosophers is that they can, to a great extent, choose to work on distinctly Christian philosophical projects. That is because of the fact that the intellectual environment for current and future Christian philosophers is significantly different than what it was like about 50 years ago or so. But the significant change in the intellectual environment has come about because of a significant body of work on Christian philosophy, broadly understood, that has been produced in the last several decades.

A test question arises for any proposed Christian philosophy: does the philosophy uphold the importance of one's obediently dying with Christ under the guiding agent-power of God as "Abba, Father"? If not, the philosophy misses the mark as a Christian philosophy. Most philosophy fails this redemptive litmus test, because redemption, as being saved by God, is ignored by most philosophers, who thus fail to honor the unique redemptive Mediator from God, the inward Christ.²⁰

Reply: The objection is clear from the above quotation. That is, most philosophy fails the redemptive test and the agent-power of God by way of missing the power of the inward Christ. A couple of points in response.

First, the claim that "most philosophy fails the redemptive power" is not clear in light of what I've suggested above for what I take to be Christian philosophy broadly understood. I grant that most philosophy would fail "the redemptive test" but if we're focusing on the body of work produced by Christian philosophers with a purpose to advance the kingdom of God, it is not clear that that is the case.

Second, here is one legitimate question to raise regarding the agent-power of God or the inward Christ: Is there evidence that a large body of work done by Christian philosophers was *not* based on the agent-power of the inward-Christ? To the extent that a Christian philosopher's life is transformed by the power of the inward Christ, and to the extent that a Christian philosopher is obedient to the Lord even when he or she engages in a discussion mode of doing philosophy and his or her contribution is directly or indirectly to the mission of the church, I take it that what that Christian philosopher produces is an example of Christian philosophy. To Moser's credit it is true that not many Christian philosophers write about doing philosophy under the authority of the Lord and by the agent-power of the inward Christ. But it does not follow from this that most of what many take to be Christian philosophy has not actually been done by the agent-power of the inward Christ.

IV: Conclusion

In this paper I argued for the following claims: To engage in a discussion mode of doing philosophy is not necessarily engaging in a *merely* discussion mode of doing philosophy with no regard to the authority of the Lord Jesus. Obedient discussion is discussion done obediently when the obedience inherently involves doing philosophy in a discussion mode. I also argued that

²⁰ Moser, "Christ-Shaped Philosophy", p. 9.

there are two senses of obedience and they constitute obedience of a Christian philosopher both in the practical and theoretical ways a Christian philosopher should be obedient to the Lord. I argued that given my proposed conception of Christian philosophy, in contrast with Moser's, a large body of work done by Christian philosophers, as I specified above, counts as work of Christian philosophy. I issued a challenge for Moser to provide more compelling reasons why much of the work done by contemporary Christian philosophers does not count as an example of work on Christian philosophy.²¹

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²¹ I'd like to thank Alvin Plantinga, William Hasker and Mike McFall for their comments on an earlier version of this paper. Much of my philosophical thinking about *Christian philosophy* contained in this paper has been deeply influenced by Paul K. Moser's work on Christian philosophy. I'd like to thank Moser for his never-failing support to me whenever I had questions about his work, disagreements with him which he never treated unfairly. I'm also in deep debt to Moser for almost all of the insights in this paper regarding how to think about Christian philosophy. My disagreement with Moser in this paper is expressed in one typical way a philosopher serves a fellow philosopher by way of raising objections, challenges, etc. Not much philosophy could be done if philosophers were simply to agree with one another all the time. However, I wholeheartedly agree with Moser's *vision* of Christian philosophy in particular. My disagreement with his conception of Christian philosophy lies in what he thinks should count as Christian philosophy, i.e., the *scope* of work done by contemporary Christian philosophers rather than the *content* of work done by contemporary Christian philosophers.