

Christian Philosophy as Stance*

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What is Christian philosophy? Despite the much-noted increase in both the number and visibility of philosophers who are outspoken Christians in the last several decades, “Christian philosophy” remains for many at best a quaint diversion, and at worst an oxymoron—something that actually damages the “true philosophic spirit,” to borrow from Russell’s famous comments on Aquinas. Indeed, little seems to have changed in how mainstream philosophy views its Christian subgenre since Russell complained about Thomas’s acceptance of revealed truth. Though one might occasionally hear lip service paid to Christian or other religious concerns as deserving of philosophical treatment, most philosophers, whether “Anglo-American” or “Continental,” seem content to let Christian philosophy idle unobtrusively in its corner, so long as it doesn’t attempt to affect the way mainstream philosophical questions are pursued (hence the common, almost baffled reaction to attempts by folks like Alvin Plantinga to bring Christian ideas to bear on “secular” issues).

On the other hand, within this Christian subgenre, one might easily get the feeling that there is no serious challenge to thinking of philosophy as a Christian endeavor, an unfortunate assumption given the thoughtfulness of many who reject it. In this paper, I try to articulate the challenges to Christian philosophy that I think lie behind its widespread dismissal—namely, irrelevance and inattention to (perhaps morally problematic) inherent bias—and I argue that in fact the Christian philosopher is doing little to address these challenges, owing partially to her perhaps over-zealous adoption of Plantinga’s “advice” to focus on the problems of Christian communities.¹ Additionally, I will explore an objection to the possibility of Christian philosophy from inside the church—for it is not only nontheists who find the notion troubling. While recognizing the value of Plantinga’s advice, I suggest a distinct interpretation of Christian philosophy, one more confessional than rational, more practical than doxastic. The view I propose is Christian philosophy as “stance,” to borrow Bas van Fraassen’s terminology, whereby it is characterized by certain commitments, most prominently living a life of love (here I draw on recent work by Paul Moser). I argue that, in fact, the roots of Western philosophy themselves suggest such a stance (for it is the love of wisdom, and not merely the possession of it, that characterizes our philosophical origins), and thus that Christians may have special insight into the nature of philosophy, insofar as they have special insight into love.

In this brief summary, I have already hinted at a possible answer to an important and admittedly puzzling query that immediately presents itself upon the posing of our guiding question. For, as good Socratic interlocutors, we ought to be suspicious of any attempt to define “Christian philosophy,” until we are first settled on the definition of “philosophy” itself, or for that matter, “Christian.” This is, oddly, a prior question that generally goes unanswered by Christian philosophers who talk about what “Christian philosophy” is.

¹ Alvin Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (1984): 253-271.

Perhaps this is because it is notoriously difficult to get more than two or three philosophers to agree about what it is they're doing. Indeed, one might argue that a distinctive feature of philosophy is that its practitioners are forever squabbling over what it is—hence Husserl's observation that philosophy is continually starting over. Sadly, attempting to define philosophy here would take us too far afield; the best we can hope for is to give a general characterization of philosophy and of Christianity that would be familiar to philosophers and Christians, respectively. In my experience, the best (most resonant) of these characterizations, at least of philosophy, are also the least specific. They are more poetic than precise, in their style, if not in their content. My favorites, in ascending order, are: "asking the Big Questions," "exploring the things that keep you up at night," "speaking truth to one another," and from my own favorite philosopher, "becoming a good dancer." But so far as I can tell, we can still do no better than to say that philosophy is the love of wisdom, with all that "love" implies—affection, pursuit, priority, sacrifice, etc. Note that this carries with it the assumption of action: philosophers do things, and not only in their heads. Whatever actions are required for wooing and "winning" Wisdom (to borrow again from Nietzsche), will be the actions the philosopher assumes; there is no presupposed limitation.²

By contrast, "Christian" can be defined a bit more easily, though no less contentiously. It is to be a follower of Jesus Christ, the historical person, and to imitate and obey him in all areas of one's life. Of course, from here the complexities multiply exponentially, but it should hopefully be uncontroversial that, whatever else a Christian might be, she will be someone who prioritizes Jesus's view of any potential topic. Now, the temptation here is to quickly infer that the Christian philosopher will be someone who does philosophy "Christianly," that is to say, as Jesus would. But this is too fast—we have not yet established that the two realms are compatible, or that Jesus did or recommended anything that could fairly be called "philosophy." It will not do to draw a Venn diagram representing

² In their exchange in the recent volume *Four Views on Christianity and Philosophy*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), ch. 4, Paul Moser and Graham Oppy disagree over the appropriate definition of "philosophy." Moser prefers "the love and pursuit of *wisdom*, where wisdom is an objective reality." (178) He clarifies wisdom as "the special knowledge that enables us to prioritize our values and valued things and to guide our plans and actions in ways that are good." (176) Oppy demurs that on this definition very little of what professional philosophers do on a daily basis would count as "philosophy." (201) He prefers instead to define philosophy as "the discipline that addresses questions for which we do not know how to produce—and perhaps cannot even imagine how to produce—agreed answers using agreed methods..." (201) Moser responds by interpreting Oppy (incorrectly, in my view) as being guilty of a "pessimism" about philosophy, saying "I would not bother with philosophy at all if it had the kind of cognitive deficiency alleged by Oppy." Nonetheless, Moser does clarify that the sorts of philosophical practice Oppy is concerned to protect (e.g. philosophy of mathematics) are allowed under his definition since he takes a broad view of the "larger end of philosophy as the love and pursuit of wisdom," and thinks that such disciplines play an "integral role in the broader project of philosophy," which (again) "enables us to prioritize our values and valued things and guide our plans and actions in ways that are good." He adds that this is what distinguishes these disciplines from the special sciences, which do not have this more general, prioritizing aim. (220) For my part, I am unsatisfied with Oppy's definition, since it precludes the possibility of philosophizing about questions where some consensus has been achieved, and it implies that philosophers themselves have no "method." On the other hand, I must admit to some doubt that debates about anomalous monism (a topic I chose at random from the table of contents of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*) contribute much in the way of prioritizing one's values and guiding plans and actions in good ways. And what's more, I think Oppy is probably right that most questions pursued by most philosophers *don't* do this, or at least, they usually don't do it for the philosophers pursuing the questions. Offering a precise definition of philosophy that accounts for these concerns while maintaining etymological and historical integrity is not my aim here. For my purposes, thinking of philosophy as simply the loving pursuit of wisdom (variously defined) should suffice.

Christians and philosophers, and merely point to the intersection as evidence of their compatibility, any more than this would serve as evidence of “Christian racists,” though such persons are certainly a sociological reality. Nor will it do to simply take it as basic that the two are compatible, since there are good reasons, offered by both philosophers and Christians, to think that they may not be. We must, instead, rule out the possibility that we Christian philosophers are deceiving ourselves. Serious consideration of this possibility, and the arguments in favor of it, are in my experience uncommon among Christian philosophers, who mostly proceed as though the tension either does not exist or is unworthy of attention, opting instead to—per Plantinga’s advice—“get on with the philosophical questions of importance to the Christian community.”³ I see this as an unfortunate oversight, one that is actually incompatible with the way that Jesus approached those outside his kingdom. As his followers, it is our business to serve the world, even to die for it, and this cannot be done in isolation—even philosophical isolation—from it. Of course, I do not mean here to suggest that Plantinga in any way intended such isolation—indeed, he explicitly condemns it in his essay. I have no doubt that, at the time of its writing, there was a real need for greater autonomy and unity among Christian philosophers, such as he recommended. The church cannot serve the world, after all, if it does not have a presence in it. I also think, however, now that we have achieved such a presence, that the time has come for a reevaluation of our approach. If our aim is to serve those outside of our community, it may no longer do to focus primarily on our own interests. A first step in a new direction may be to return to the objections to our enterprise that still hold sway in the majority of the philosophical world.

I can make no better beginning here than to quote Bertrand Russell’s infamous comment on Aquinas:

There is little of the true philosophic spirit in Aquinas. He does not, like the Platonic Socrates, set out to follow wherever the argument may lead. He is not engaged in an inquiry, the result of which it is impossible to know in advance. Before he begins to philosophize, he already knows the truth; it is declared in the Catholic faith. If he can find apparently rational arguments for some parts of the faith, so much the better: If he cannot, he need only fall back on revelation. The finding of arguments for a conclusion given in advance is not philosophy, but special pleading.⁴

Ignoring whether or not this is a fair criticism of Aquinas (it probably isn’t), the charge here—that philosophy is incompatible with revelation—still, I think, undergirds the impression that most secular philosophers have of their Christian counterparts. And I want to add that if what I said above is right—that loving wisdom or truth involves pursuing it—then this objection has a certain *prima facie* warrant. In fact, the Christian view of love serves only to strengthen this warrant, since the chief act of love in the scriptures is the

³ Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” 264.

⁴ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, 463. For a thoughtful critique of Russell’s claim, see Mark T. Nelson, “On the Lack of ‘True Philosophic Spirit’ in Aquinas: Commitment v. Tracking in Philosophic Method,” *Philosophy* 76, no. 296 (2001): 283-296.

Incarnation—God leaving his position in order to *pursue* his beloved. Thus, on the face of it, Russell seems to have a point; philosophy does not start with truth—it seeks it.⁵

Another style of objection to the possibility or worth of Christian philosophy comes from philosophers who are concerned with the inherent biases and prejudices in the history of Western philosophy and the formation of its canon. This concern understandably leads to a suspicion of any claim to some sort of transcendent or universally valid perspective, such as might be involved in Christian or other religiously motivated philosophical projects. Along these lines, some have claimed that any attempt at universal objectivity seems both impossible and irrelevant: impossible since the one attempting it will inevitably possess her own presuppositions and biases, and irrelevant since even if it were achieved, it would apply to no one. Thus, feminist ethicist Margaret Urban Walker writes:

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there no longer seem to be any widely convincing versions of a transcendent standpoint, if we understand that term not to mean a standpoint that transcends someplace we are now, but one that transcends any place we might actually happen to be. At least there are not any widely convincing secular versions of such a standpoint, and a nonsecular one will not serve interpersonal understandings in culturally variegated societies or between them. No one can stand uncontentiously on a particular set of intuitively self-evident judgments or a constitutive feature of moral judgments generally, or what or whom they address; one can't ascend or prescind to the viewpoint of pure practical reason, can't simply stipulate the transcendental pragmatic presuppositions of human discourse, can't simulate the point of view of the universe, or see with God's eyes; and one can't get anywhere being a spectator so impartial that one doesn't privilege any evaluative standpoint over another.⁶

Walker is here writing in an ethical context, but her point can be taken more generally, and applied to all philosophical endeavor. There is something wrong, perhaps even morally wrong, with doing philosophy in a way that requires an extra-human perspective, with pretending to know what God knows or wants. Or so the objection goes. For one cannot avoid privileging one's own contextualized perspective in framing such a universal, and so cannot avoid thereby marginalizing the perspective of others. And indeed evidence for this tendency is not in short supply, as feminists and others have done and continue to do a fine job of marshaling examples from the history of philosophy to support their suspicions. Reading some medieval thinkers or even some contemporary philosophers of religion talk about God, one can sometimes get the impression that the divine must be something like a deified Kant, existing in an eternal state of perfect cogitation, perhaps with a pipe in his mouth. One can hardly help but wonder what religious philosophy might look like if more of it had been written by women. I would add here that if we have properly defined "Christian," then this objection, too, enjoys a *prima facie* warrant, since a love modeled on

⁵ This is of course very close to the point made by Socrates in the *Apology*: "I am likely to be wiser than [they] to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know." (21d)

⁶ Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 257.

the Incarnation would seem to require the privileging of the perspective of the oppressed, and receiving claims of marginalization with seriousness and compassion.

I now come to the portion of the paper where I would normally attempt a satisfying response to these objections, and vindicate the normal practice of Christian philosophy. But I will not do this, for two reasons. First, because I am not sure I know a fully satisfying response, at least to the second objection. I have hunches, to be sure, and in a moment I will argue for a way of viewing Christian philosophy that I think helps to mitigate these concerns. But I cannot say with any confidence that the Christian philosopher has no cause for alarm about these objections. Second, moving immediately to a refutation of the objections would, I think, be in tension with the spirit of what I am going to argue Christian philosophy truly consists in—it would be somewhat like reading a philosopher for the first time with the goal of refutation rather than understanding. I prefer to sit with the objections for a while, and try to see their real force.

To that end, I'd like to briefly highlight some ways *not* to respond to them. There are several ways to err in responding to a Russellian style critique. One way is to assert that Christian philosophers are following the argument where it leads; it just happens to always lead to Christian truth! This may be sufficient to justify the actions of individual philosophers, but it will not do to solve Russell's problem more generally. The problematic assumption here is that with the right conditions, and enough rationality and honesty, anyone will arrive at the truth of Christian theism, or else that only those philosophers who do so are rightly called "Christian philosophers." Neither assumption accords well with reality. Another way to err is by reducing Christian philosophy to philosophical theology, and consigning oneself to utilizing philosophical tools and methodology for analyzing Christian doctrine. This, it seems to me, is to forfeit to Russell, and admit that "true" philosophy cannot be Christian. A third, and more subtle, way to err is by taking Christian philosophy to be one among many approaches to philosophy, one way of seeking truth, of the same order as other ways. This would avoid Russell's objection by noting that there are no presuppositionless starting points for philosophy, including for the nontheist. Everyone must start somewhere, taking something as basic, and Christians start with revealed truth. No one starting place is *prima facie* better than another. I admit to being tempted by this sort of response, since the observation that everyone assumes something is surely correct. This response is present in Plantinga's original "Advice" essay, and is stated more clearly in an article by the eminent Marilyn McCord-Adams. There she says,

The theoretical map is not complete without Christian options. The role of the Christian philosopher is to develop Christian approaches in, say, ethics and metaphysics and philosophy of mind with such rigor and detail as to exhibit their coherence, explanatory power, and fruitfulness. The aim is to show that Christian theories are strong enough to be viable competitors in the theoretical market-place.⁷

While these may certainly be worthy endeavors for the Christian philosopher, I take this to be inadequate as a characterization of Christian philosophy because of the unique character

⁷ Marilyn McCord-Adams, "Christian Philosophy and Philosophers: Socialization and the Need for Fresh Approaches," www.epsociety.org (2013), 4. Accessible here: [http://www.epsociety.org/userfiles/art-AdamsM%20\(CChristian%20Philosophy\)_Edited.pdf](http://www.epsociety.org/userfiles/art-AdamsM%20(CChristian%20Philosophy)_Edited.pdf)

of Christian love.⁸ This love is not conceptual, but is identified with God, and understood to be revealed most fully in the person of Jesus. Thus, a style of philosophy characterized by such love would be *sui generis*. As Paul Moser says, “the distinctive focus of Christian philosophy...[is] the redemptive power of God in Christ, available in human experience.”⁹ No other approach to philosophy is anything like this; the goal of Christian philosophy, so understood, is not to be a defensible member of the marketplace of ideas, but rather to play its part in transforming human communities into the likeness of the crucified Christ. More on this below.

One can err in a similar way in responding to the second style of objection. The temptation here is to say that revelation provides us with a transcendent perspective, which we then seek to understand; we do not ascend to it—it descends to us. And this is right so far as it goes. But it fails as a response to Walker’s point, since it continues to assume a self-evident universal means of access to that revelation—one that will in fact inevitably be modeled on a single means of access. Once the transcendent is accessible by humans, it becomes immanent, and is thus susceptible to varying modes of appropriation, the compatibility of which remains an open question. Notice, though, that there is nothing particularly “Christian” about this tendency to cling to universally accessible standards of truth or beauty or value or what have you. The “standard” for the Christ-follower is not a universal, but a Person, susceptible to all the complexities and ambiguities of interpersonal relationships. Indeed, the Incarnation would suggest moving away from a single perspective that must be appropriated, and towards the privileging of others’ perspectives and the attempt to accommodate their modes of life and thought, with the aim of bringing new life to them.

As I noted above, however, objections to the possibility of Christian philosophy do not come only from outside; there is some reason to think that Christianity and philosophy are incompatible, not because Christianity somehow violates the spirit of philosophy, but because philosophy violates the spirit of Christianity. The idea here is that a Christian philosophy would only be “Christian” in a very loose sense—a matter of explicating and defending some set of doctrinal propositions—but missing everything important and distinctive about a life submitted to Christ. A weaker form of this objection would be that philosophy and Christianity may not be mutually exclusive, but they are mutually irrelevant—they are simply different sorts of things. Being a Christian may of course entail some realities which can become the objects of philosophical inquiry, such as beliefs. But it also entails physical realities: this does not thereby imply a “Christian physics.” More specifically, this objection claims that philosophy and Christianity have irreconcilable notions of truth and human nature. For philosophy, truth is conceptual and humans are defined by reason. For Christianity, truth is personal, and humans are defined by the *imago dei*. Now of course, one might fairly object here that neither truth nor human nature are so clearly and uncontroversially defined in either philosophy or Christianity. But one can, I think, draw general tendencies from the history of Western philosophy to suggest that to be a

⁸ I hasten to add here that McCord-Adams was not in this context attempting to define Christian philosophy, and her preceding points in the essay are characteristically clear and insightful. I critique her here with fear and trembling.

⁹ Paul Moser, “Christ-Shaped Philosophy: Wisdom and Spirit United,” www.epsociety.org (2012), 1. Accessible here: [http://www.epsociety.org/userfiles/art-Moser%20\(Christ-Shaped%20Philosophy\).pdf](http://www.epsociety.org/userfiles/art-Moser%20(Christ-Shaped%20Philosophy).pdf)

philosopher is to place a great deal more emphasis on reasonableness than is acceptable on any robust version of Christianity, which will take a much more wholistic view of human nature, maintaining that reason is only one aspect, and not the primary aspect, of what a human is, and perhaps not part of the *imago dei* at all.¹⁰ Now, the tempting response to this sort of objection is to say that it is the job of Christian philosophers to fulfill the demands of reason, or perhaps tend to the life of the mind more generally, within their Christian communities, while the other aspects of human nature are nurtured by others in the community. But this response becomes immediately susceptible to the feminist-style critique outlined above: philosophy here is assumed to be something defined according to a narrow historical contingency—something discursive and rigorously argumentative, and not, say, affective or spiritual. It is something, in short, that feels very masculine. And this is particularly problematic in Christian communities that submit every aspect of their being and function to the leading of the Holy Spirit, who does not seem overly interested in logical discourse, but rather is described in scripture and Christian experience as working in ways that correspond much more closely with what would historically be considered feminine modes of being (i.e. creative, emotive, outwardly expressive, worshipful activity).

So where does this leave us? Is there a way to do philosophy Christianly that avoids our objections? Fortunately, the failure of the various attempts to respond to our objectors is instructive in that it hints at what a successful resolution of the tension inherent in Christian philosophy might look like. To avoid the Russellian objection, Christian philosophy will have to be something other than primarily doxastic or argumentative, though it may of course have doxastic implications. To avoid the feminist style critique, it will have to be comfortable with an epistemic perspectivalism, and a denial of the need for universally accessible, transcendent axiologies, though maintain room for a robust distinctiveness of Christian identity. And to avoid the sort of “in house” worry that philosophy prescribes an overly narrow view of human nature or truth, it will have to remain open to a dynamic, interpersonal interpretation of Christian distinctiveness and an understanding of human nature that is not overly focused on the cognitive.

Toward this end, I recommend viewing Christian philosophy as a “stance.” I borrow this term from Bas van Fraassen’s well-known book *The Empirical Stance*. There, he suggests a new way to understand empiricism: not as a doctrine or dogma, but as a stance—an attitudinal disposition towards certain commitments and away from others. He says,

...here is the proposal: a philosophical position can consist in something other than a belief in what the world is like...[it] can consist in a stance (attitude, commitment, approach, a cluster of such—possibly including some propositional attitudes such as beliefs as well). Such a stance can of course be expressed, and may involve or

¹⁰ In the volume mentioned in fn. 2, *Christianity and Philosophy*, Paul Moser makes a case for what he calls the “conformation” of philosophy to Christianity for the self-styled Christian philosopher (ch. 4). His position, while different from that described here, is in keeping with the spirit of this concern. He argues that the notions of wisdom found in the Christian scriptures (especially the Apostle Paul) and in Western philosophy are incompatible, since the former are rooted in the human capacity for ingenious speculation and the latter is “God’s wisdom,” which is defined according to the divine revelation of the crucified Christ and aims not at cognitive development, but rather development of character, carrying with it divine redemptive power lacked by “speculative” philosophy. As he says, “The God of the crucified Christ aims to destroy speculative philosophical alternatives to the true wisdom of God in Christ.” (184) I will deal more with Moser’s view below.

presuppose some beliefs as well, but cannot be simply equated with having beliefs or making assertions about what there is.¹¹

He goes on to give a list of the sorts of commitments to which the empirical stance is prone—things like a discomfort with certain forms of metaphysics, an admiration for science, etc. The commitments to which a Christian philosophical stance would be prone are of course very different. We have just mentioned several commitments this stance will be wary of, if it is to avoid the various objections we have discussed. But what are its positive commitments?

In his paper, “Christ-Shaped Philosophy: Wisdom and Spirit United,” Paul Moser provides us with a list of such commitments. Reading Colossians as a guide for “Christ-shaped” philosophy, he outlines some minimal criteria for determining what a Christian philosophy must consist in. Notably, particular doxastic commitments are absent. He includes, however, the following:

- 1) It will be practiced by “Christ-formed philosophers,” those who pursue love and wisdom under the authority of Jesus, as people in union with and belonging to Him.¹²
- 2) The wisdom it seeks will be spiritual, “guided and empowered by the Spirit of Christ.”¹³
- 3) It will be motivated by a “unique vital flood of God’s *agapē* in Christ,” and this *agapē* is uniquely marked by enemy-love. As Moser says, “we can test for God’s love in us by testing for inward love and forgiveness of our enemies, including our intellectual enemies. To the extent that we resist inward enemy-love, we resist God himself, however shrewd our arguments and theories for theism.”¹⁴
- 4) It will “uphold the importance of one’s obediently dying with Christ under the guiding agent-power of God as ‘Abba, Father.’”¹⁵
- 5) It will give “pride of place to Christ and hence to redemption in Gethsemane union with him.”¹⁶
- 6) It will be marked by a certain divine self-verification. I.e. through philosophical reflection, God testifies to himself via the Holy Spirit. Moser here quotes James Stewart: “...you begin exploring the fact of Christ, perhaps merely intellectually and theologically – and before you know where you are, the fact is exploring you, spiritually and morally.”¹⁷

¹¹ Bas van Fraassen, *The Empirical Stance*, 47-8.

¹² Paul Moser, “Christ-Shaped Philosophy: Wisdom and Spirit United,” 2. In his essay in *Christianity and Philosophy*, he expands on this point:

Philosophers conformed to Christ are philosophers conformed to a new life of dying and rising with Christ in the power of self-sacrificial *agapē*. That point involves *philosophers* conformed to Christ, because human agents—rather than philosophical views—undergo the dying and rising in question. (195)

¹³ Ibid. Moser continues in *Christianity and Philosophy*: “Exceeding mere knowledge, spiritual wisdom *welcomes* God’s power, including the power of *agapē*, for the sake of living a lasting good life, pleasing to God...” (194)

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹⁷ Ibid., 11.

Moser does not use stance language and seems here to be giving criteria for how the Christian philosopher should view what she does, and this apparently includes Christian philosophy as it is practiced currently in academia. Although he is less clear on direct application, he does give the following way that, as he puts it, Jesus is relevant to philosophy “as a discipline.” He is relevant in that Christian philosophy will be distinct from secular philosophy in the aim and outcome of its questions. Whereas secular philosophy is characterized by seemingly endless discussion of perennial questions, Christian philosophy as he conceives it will instead take place within a life submitted to obedience to Jesus; it thus “becomes kerygma-oriented in virtue of becoming an enabler of the Good News of God in Christ.”¹⁸

And this is where Moser’s account and my own begin to come apart. Christian philosophy as loving stance would be characterized by the sorts of pre-philosophical commitments he outlines, but it would not serve as a discussion-stopper in the way that obedience might. The stance I envision would rather open new avenues of discussion and new ways of considering perennial philosophical questions that may not have been on the table before, owing perhaps to overly stringent doxastic or methodological allegiances. And it would be kerygmatic only to the extent that this is understood as creating space for the Holy Spirit to perform her saving work in new avenues and ways, and within communities (namely, philosophical ones) where she may not have been welcome before.¹⁹

In closing, I want to highlight a few different ways of viewing the *sine qua non* of Christian philosophy, and to do so in the context of responding to one last objection. The objection is thus: imagine two philosophers, both Christian, both interested in and working on traditional philosophical (i.e., not strictly theological) topics. One is persuaded by something like Russell’s view and claims no Christian influence in her practice of philosophy; in fact, she is careful to avoid it. The other sees her Christian commitments and her philosophical pursuits as inseparable, and seeks to allow the one to inform the other. In short, the former denies the label “Christian philosopher,” while the latter adopts it wholeheartedly. The question is: what principled way is there to distinguish the two?

¹⁸ Ibid., 12. Noteworthy here is McCord-Adams’s similar emphasis on the value of preaching to the vocation of the Christian philosopher in the essay quoted above (fn. 7).

¹⁹ In his essay “The Conformation Model” for the book *Four Views on Christianity and Philosophy*, Moser extends his case by arguing that “Christian philosophy must be conformed to Christ.” (180) By this he means it must be the loving pursuit of God’s wisdom rather than human wisdom, and God’s wisdom is signified by its ability to impart character traits consistent with divine *agapē* and its power to transform persons and give them a “lasting good life with God...as an alternative to despair.” So far Moser and I are in agreement. But I must disagree when he suggests that “speculative philosophy” in its pursuit of “human wisdom” is necessarily inconsistent with God’s wisdom because it is vain and self-aggrandizing. For example, he says, “Whether in Jewish, Hellenistic, or other human wisdom that does not credit God in Christ, eloquent wisdom from humans calls attention to human speakers in their eloquence. It points to a human achievement in a way that ignores or diminishes the importance of what God has done in Christ, the true wisdom of God.” (183-184) It seems to me that this view is inconsistent with divine *agapē* as the fundamental principle of Christian philosophy, since divine *agapē* sets no specific restrictions on the sorts of activities one can desire to pursue, provided those activities conform to God’s nature revealed in Christ. Moser here inadvertently rules out the possibility of the sincere, good-faith pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (i.e. not for personal gain or power) as a consequence of one’s submission to Christ. Perhaps the simplest (but no less profound for that) statement of this idea is the line from *Chariots of Fire* where Eric Liddell muses: “I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure.” This quote is, apparently, apocryphal. See: <https://www.ericliddell.org/about-us/eric-liddell/quotations/>

We can discern a couple distinct characterizations of what might be essential to Christian philosophy in what I have said above. For Plantinga, it might be philosophy done for Christians (i.e., about questions in which Christians are interested). For Moser, on the other hand, it is more importantly philosophy done *by* Christians, with the goal of spiritual wisdom, empowered only by God in Christ. Put somewhat crudely (for both Plantinga and Moser certainly discern both elements, to varying degrees), the former is oriented around *doxa* (on what is the object of the inquiry), the latter around *praxis* (on how the inquiry proceeds). Both, however, will have trouble responding to our objection, since our proposed philosophers may share both an object of inquiry, and all the relevant methodological commitments (e.g., charity, submission to Christ, service to one's colleagues/students, etc.). It is tempting to say here that the philosopher who denies the label "Christian philosopher" is simply mistaken, i.e., that she is letting her Christian commitments inform her philosophical practice unawares. I am not happy with this, however, as I do not want to reduce Christian philosophy to something so vague that one can fall into it accidentally.

Another tempting response is that the salient difference between our two philosophers is the most obvious one: self-identification. I.e., the one is doing Christian philosophy because she intends to; the other is not because she intends not to. This, too, is unsatisfying. Presumably, our two philosophers have some reason for characterizing their philosophical pursuits as "Christian" or "not Christian" that is independent of what they find their motives to be. For the one that denies doing Christian philosophy, her reasoning is Russellian: she is not assuming *a priori* any question-begging truths (up to and including the existence of God), and so is not doing Christian philosophy. For the one who adopts the label of Christian philosopher, however, the reason for this self-attribution is harder to pin down.

Here is a modest proposal: the Christian philosophical stance I put forward can split the difference between the doxastic and practical features of inquiry, stressing as essential rather a particular *directionality of method*. The Christian philosopher is one who displays certain attitudinal commitments (such as those enumerated by Moser), the most prominent of which are practical, but that also include some minimal doxastic commitments (such as a commitment to the Incarnation and its primacy in the Christian life). The key is that the stance stresses the appropriate *prioritization* of these commitments: i.e., the doxastic are subjected to and interpreted via the practical, and not vice versa.²⁰ In fact, on closer inspection, one finds that a purely practical Christian philosophical stance is not tenable, since one of the commitments of this stance is to find ways to submit to and serve one's philosophical opponents, and this assumes that there will be some basis for disagreement (otherwise, there is nothing to submit!). The Christian philosophical stance, then, is marked primarily by the priority it gives to the perspective of the interlocutor. So, in short, the difference between our two philosophers is that one displays this stance—intentionally, as a means of imitating Christ—and the other does not.

In the end, the essential features of the Christian philosophical stance are imitation of and submission to God in Christ, and to one's "neighbor." Thus, Christian philosophy will

²⁰ Indeed, if Incarnation is the minimal doxastic commitment, then the very content of this belief demands its realization in kenotic action.

be both as unique and distinctive as is this divine person, and as flexible, vague, and complex as are person-person relationships. It will thus not insist on “a” Christian philosophy or “the” Christian position on some issue, unless by this one means a methodology or position or philosophical endeavor that is taken up, acted on, or performed by a person actively in submission to Jesus Christ.