

JESUS AND PHILOSOPHY: ON THE QUESTIONS WE ASK

Paul K. Moser

What, if anything, has Jesus to do with philosophy? Although widely neglected, this question calls for attention from anyone interested in philosophy, whether Christian or non-Christian. This paper clarifies how philosophy fares under the teaching of Jesus. In particular, it contends that Jesus's love (*agape*) commands have important implications for how philosophy is to be done, specifically, for what questions may be pursued. The paper, accordingly, distinguishes two relevant modes of being human: a discussion mode and an obedience mode. Philosophy done under the authority of Jesus's love commands must transcend a discussion mode to realize an obedience mode of human conduct. So, under Jesus's teachings, we no longer have business as usual in philosophy. The discipline of philosophy then takes on a purpose foreign to philosophy as we know it, even as practiced by Christian philosophers. Under the authority of Jesus, philosophy becomes *agape*-oriented ministry in the church of Jesus and thus reflective of Jesus himself. In this respect, Jesus is Lord of philosophy.

Beginnings

Philosophy, according to Plato (*Theaetetus* 155d) and Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 982b12), begins in wonder (*thauma*). Wonder, as they understood it, involves not just a feeling of astonishment but a *question* about what is real or true. Plato typically asked questions of the form "What is X?", where "X" may stand for "knowledge," "justice," or "courage," for instance, but grammatical form does not explain the substance of philosophical questions. It is itself a substantial (and not merely formal) question of philosophy to ask what, specifically, a philosophical question is. Philosophers have offered a wide range of answers to this question, and no consensus is anywhere in sight. The philosophy of philosophy thus resembles much of first-order philosophy. Its questions linger and even multiply, apparently without end. So, whatever else it has, the discipline of philosophy has staying power.

The questions of philosophy seem perennial indeed, if only because they generate perennial controversy. Perhaps here, in the kind of controversy generated (if nowhere else), we find a key feature of a philosophical question. Perennial controversy seems to dog most, if not all, areas of philosophy. Still, the reality of philosophical questions is undeniable even if we are



hard put to define or otherwise to analyze their reality. Some realities, for better or worse, stubbornly resist clean analysis. The realities are not therefore at risk; only our purported analyses are. We could, of course, stipulate an analysis or offer a definition by fiat, but little, if anything, would thereby be gained. Some of what others deem philosophical questions would then be omitted, and controversy would arise over that matter.

Let's settle now for a broadly lexical approach: the questions populating the writings of self-avowed philosophers are, for our purposes, *philosophical* questions. See, for example, the writings and questions of Plato, Aristotle, Sextus Empiricus, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, Leibniz, Descartes, Kant, Hume, and so on. If someone prefers a narrower definition, so be it. We can proceed now with a more inclusive approach, and stay above the fray regarding a philosophy of philosophical questions. Otherwise, the metaphysical nature of philosophy will have a way of delaying our getting on with pressing concerns. We'll never get beyond the philosophy of philosophy, the philosophy of the philosophy of philosophy, and so on. Endless regress will be our common fate.¹

Why do we, as philosophers, ask the questions we do rather than either no questions at all or significantly different questions? The easy answer is: we want *answers*; in particular, we want answers to the questions we raise. This answer is acceptable as far as it goes, but it does not go very deep. In fact, it's superficial. In asking questions in philosophy, we do not simply raise questions; we *pursue* the questions we raise, with considerable time and energy. We sometimes become *preoccupied*, if not obsessed, with the questions we raise. Our questions become projects, so-called research programs. They fill our lives, including our nights as well as our days. They become projects we love, or at least projects about which we deeply care. They define what we do with the bulk of our lives. Given finite time and energy, we find ourselves *excluding*, or at least ignoring, other available projects and even other people. Our philosophical questions compete for our time and energy and win out, by our own choice, over other options. As a result, Wittgenstein and others have vigorously sought ways to defuse philosophical questions as a group. They have, in this vein, sought freedom from the obsessions of philosophy. Such freedom, however, is hard to come by.

Why, in the competition for our time and energy, do we allow philosophical questions to win out over the wide range of alternatives? What explains this, and is our rationale viable? We'll ask if Jesus has anything to say about our tendencies toward philosophical questions, and we'll see that he does indeed. At a minimum, he shows us how to be free of philosophy as an obsession that interferes with life. Christians, at least, should care about the bearing of Jesus's teachings on philosophy, if only because they proclaim him as their Lord. Others should care too, because the wisdom of Jesus about human life is undeniable, even from a reflective secular standpoint. Even if Jesus does not comment directly on philosophy, his teachings have straightforward implications for philosophy. We do well to attend to these implications. It is surprising, therefore, that the relevance of Jesus to philosophy is largely ignored by philosophers, including Christian philosophers.² This paper takes a step to correct this neglect.

Loving to Question

Do some people love philosophical questions more than they love God and other people? There's no doubt about it, however perverse this may sound. Some people love philosophical questions but don't love God *at all*, and that's by their own acknowledgment. Some of these people would also acknowledge that they love philosophical questions more than they love other people. I, for one, know a number of philosophers who love their philosophical questions passionately but, by their own admission and actions, care not at all about most other people. In addition, they don't seem ashamed of this, and they aren't inclined to change. They are, in fact, proud of their thoroughgoing philosophical pursuits. They consider truth-seeking in philosophy to be more important, all things considered, than loving God and other people. In addition, they live their lives accordingly.

Typically, the questions we eagerly pursue manifest what we truly care about. (My talk here and below of what one does *eagerly* concerns what one does willingly and gladly, and not compulsively or grudgingly.) Suppose that I eagerly spend all, or even almost all, of my time and energy pursuing questions about, say, the nature of abstract entities: properties, propositions, sets, and the like. I then must care about the nature of abstract entities more than I care about the alternatives to which I give less time and energy: God, other people, and so on. If the reference to concerns about abstract entities seems unfamiliar, we may substitute reference to a more familiar philosophical concern. The same lessons will apply.

I might *say* that I care more about God and other people than about my philosophical concerns, but my eager commitments of energy and time can belie this. By identifying my eager time and energy commitments, you can tell what I truly care about, even if I claim otherwise. What I eagerly (as opposed to compulsively or grudgingly) spend my life on provides a window into my true cares and concerns, into what I truly love. *Talk* about what one loves is cheap indeed, but my life's eager commitments *show* my priorities, my true loves, that is, my heart. A person who eagerly chooses to spend virtually all of his time watching entertainment television loves watching television more than he loves serving God and other people, regardless of any of this person's avowals to the contrary. Likewise, a person who eagerly chooses to spend virtually all of his time pursuing questions about the nature of abstract entities cares more about the nature of abstract entities than about serving God and other people. (God and other people, I assume, are not abstract entities.)

One likely reply is noteworthy: in pursuing questions about the nature of abstract entities, I am pursuing *truth*, and all truth is *God's* truth; so I, as a truth-seeking philosopher, am pursuing the things of God. Such an appeal to "all truth as God's truth" has loomed large in reformed Protestantism at least since the time of Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin, and it has analogues in parts of Roman Catholicism, including the Thomist and Jesuit traditions.³ In addition, the reply continues, our having truth is good for all people; so my pursuing truth about abstract entities is in the best interest of all people. Some Christians would add that, in keeping with Genesis 1:26-28, we have a cultural mandate from God to exercise domin-

ion under God in all areas of human life, including intellectual areas of human life. Our pursuit of philosophical questions, according to this reply, is just faithful obedience to a divine cultural mandate.

By way of a counter-reply, let's consider whether truth-seeking, even philosophical truth-seeking, can clash with the biblical love commands. That is, can my truth-seeking lead me to fail to love God and other humans? I am using the term "God" as a maximally honorific title, to signify (that is, to connote) a being who is worthy of worship and thus all-loving. I have in mind, therefore, the kind of God revealed in the love commands of the Hebrew scriptures and the Christian New Testament. Jesus summarized these commands in the following way:

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:28-31, NIV; cf. Deut. 6:4, Lev. 19:18).

These commands, found in both the Hebrew scriptures and the Christian New Testament, give a priority ranking to what we should love. They imply that at the top of our ranking of what we love should be, first, God and, second, our neighbor (as well as ourselves). They thus imply that any contrary ranking is unacceptable, and that our projects are acceptable only to the extent that they contribute (non-coincidentally, of course) to satisfying the love commands.⁴

Whatever else loving God and our neighbor involves, it requires *eagerly serving* God and our neighbor. Characterized generally, eagerly serving God and our neighbor requires (a) our eagerly obeying God to the best of our ability and (b) our eagerly contributing, so far as we are able, to the life-sustaining needs of our neighbor. Such eager serving is central to love as *agape*, the New Testament kind of love incompatible with selfishness or harmfulness toward others.

We humans, undeniably, have limited resources; in particular, we have limited time and energy resources for pursuing projects. For better or worse, we do not have endless time and energy to pursue all available projects. We thus must choose how to spend our time and energy in ways that pursue some projects and exclude others. If I eagerly choose projects that exclude, for lack of time and energy, my eagerly serving the life-sustaining needs of my neighbor, I thereby fail to love my neighbor. I also thereby fail to obey God's command to give priority to my eagerly serving the life-sustaining needs of my neighbor. To that extent, at least, I fail to love *God* and my neighbor (cf. 1 John 4:20-21). Given the divine love commands, we may not choose to love even God to the exclusion of loving our neighbor.

The lesson applies directly to philosophical questions. If my eager pursuit of philosophical questions blocks or even curbs my eagerly serving the

life-sustaining needs of my neighbor, I thereby fail to love my neighbor. I also fail, then, to obey the divine love command regarding my neighbor. In this case, my eager pursuit of philosophical questions would result in my failing to love God and my neighbor as God has commanded. The failing would be a deficiency in serving God and my neighbor, owing to my eager choice to serve other purposes, in particular, philosophical purposes. Even if a philosophical purpose is truth-seeking, including seeking after a truth about God or love, it may run afoul of the divine love commands. It may advance a philosophical concern, even a truth-seeking philosophical concern, *at the expense* of eagerly serving God and my neighbor. For instance (examples come easily here), I may eagerly pursue a metaphysical issue about transfinite cardinals in ways that disregard eager service toward God and my neighbor. Not all truth-seeking, then, proceeds in agreement with the divine love commands. This lesson applies equally to philosophy, theology, and any other truth-seeking discipline. (We need not digress to the specific conditions for truth; the lesson holds for any of the familiar conceptions of truth in circulation.)

Will a “division of labor” regarding the duty to love salvage philosophical pursuits without qualification? Some philosophers will propose that they have a special calling to philosophy (a “vocation”) that, in effect, exempts them from full-time obedience to the divine love commands. The difficult questions of philosophy demand whole-hearted attention, according to this reply, and this allows me, as a philosopher, to delegate the duty to serve my neighbor to others. Just as not all people are called to be evangelists or teachers, a philosopher is not called to focus on eagerly serving others in love. Instead, the proposal goes, a philosopher is called to pursue philosophical questions full-time or almost full-time, and this exempts him or her from focus on eagerly serving others. Allegedly, the labor of loving others must be divided up in a way that leaves the bulk of the labor to people outside philosophy. Philosophers, according to this proposal, have a special right to pursue philosophical questions, even at the expense of failing to love others.

A division of labor makes good sense in some areas but not others. For instance, the different ways of loving others should be divided up among people with different talents, skills, and gifts. For instance, some people are talented in the area of imparting needed information to others, whereas others are talented in feeding and comforting the poor. These people, in accordance with their varying talents, express love to their neighbors, but they do so in different ways. This kind of division of love’s labor is effective and acceptable. Nobody is here exempted from the duty to love others. Likewise, the biblical love commands do not exempt any group of people, not even philosophers. Their purpose is to call *all* people to reflect the character of God, their creator. Jesus identifies this purpose in the Sermon on the Mount, after calling his followers to love even their enemies (see Matt. 5:44-45, 48; cf. Luke 6:35-36). Given that all people are created by God to be obedient creatures, all people are called to image God’s character of self-giving love. As a result, no one is exempt from loving God and neighbors. A person is not permitted to exclude himself or herself from the purpose of human existence, even for the sake of philosophy. Before an all-loving

God, truth-seeking does not trump the requirement to love others, because it does not override the requirement to mirror God's character. An assumption of the autonomy of philosophers relative to the love commands conflicts with God's universal purpose for humans: to have all humans become loving as God is loving. Accordingly, the love commands of Jesus concern *all* the people of God, and not just the people of God outside philosophy or other special vocations.

Some philosophers will resist with this question: who are you to say that some philosophical questions are not worthwhile or at odds with the biblical love commands? In other words, by what authority do you bar some philosophical questions from pursuit acceptable to God? First, I have not commented on whether philosophical questions are "worthwhile," because what is "worthwhile," as typically understood, can vary widely relative to varying human purposes. Second, I have invoked the authority of Jesus regarding the biblical love commands. 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. In other words, as Lord, Jesus issues commands, including the aforementioned love commands, that bear directly on the questions one may pursue. As a result, I am not myself lord of my questions if Jesus is Lord. The common assumption that *I* am lord of my questions denies the status of Jesus as Lord.

We can make the same point about Jesus and our questions in terms of the use of our time. If Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, as he claimed (Mk. 2:28), then he has the authority to say what is permissible and what is not on the Sabbath. He actually did exercise this authority in a way that created serious controversy about God's expectations for us.⁵ If, in addition, Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, then he is the Lord of the other days of the week too. He is, in other words, the Lord of *all* of our time, from Sabbath to Sabbath. That is, he has the absolute authority to say what use of our time is permissible and what use is not. This is his unqualified prerogative in virtue of being Lord. When I assume that *I* am Lord of my time, I thereby deny that Jesus is Lord. In particular, when I pursue philosophical questions in ways that violate Jesus's love commands, I deny that Jesus is Lord. I then acknowledge and favor someone other than Jesus as Lord, perhaps Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hume, Russell, or (most likely) myself. The result is opposition to Jesus as Lord. This is the heart of unbelief. It is at least as much volitional (a matter of the will) as it is intellectual. Such unbelief thus differs from doubt that is merely cognitive.

The authority of Jesus as Lord, being the authority of one moved by true love, seeks to give us the focus we need to flourish in life and in death. Philosophy, as the supposed love of wisdom, may pretend to do this, but apart from an all-loving God, it cannot deliver what we really need: to be loved by a merciful, forgiving God who sustains us in all afflictions, including death, and teaches us to love as God loves. Given the reality of an all-loving God, it truly matters what questions we pursue, because, in light of the divine love commands, it truly matters how we spend our time. Owing to the divine charge to love God and others, we are morally accountable for the use of our time. If we eagerly spend our time on pro-

jects, even on truth-seeking philosophical projects, that disregard the priority of loving God and others, we are guilty of misusing our time. If our time is a gift from an all-loving God who has life-giving expectations for us, then God is in a position of authority to make demands on our time, particularly demands for our own good.

The situation regarding use of our time is very different in a secular perspective, where God is excluded. My time, according to such a perspective, is ultimately a fluke of nature and not the gift of a God with loving purposes for me. (It is not surprising, then, that philosophical ethics typically has nothing to say about our use of time.) Nature does not give me commands to love others, or *any* command for that matter. Nature remains silent on moral injunctions. In particular, nature does not state how I should use my time. So, in a secular perspective, I am under no command (beyond mere human commands) to use my time with the priority to love others. Given certain goals I have, I might find it advisable to use my time in specific ways that advance my goals. Such instrumental advisability, however, does not amount to an unconditional command to love others. So, in a secular perspective disallowing God, my use of time can be free of any absolute love command. As a result, in a secular perspective, philosophical questioning is not constrained in the way it is in a position acknowledging an all-loving God. When Christians overlook this, they can easily be taken in by a secular attitude to use of time in general and philosophical questioning in particular. In this case, the philosophical pursuits of Christian philosophers may be indistinguishable from those of agnostics and atheists. Something then has gone wrong, very wrong.

Going for Broke

The love commands issued by Jesus reveal his priority in life: loving God and others. His earthly life's commitment to this priority was passionate, even whole-hearted. Indeed, his earthly life goes for broke in upholding this priority. He allows nothing to interfere with his realizing this priority. He resolutely commits all he is and has to it. He holds nothing back, not even his own life, as his crucifixion demonstrates.⁶ The crucifixion of Jesus is primarily about (a) his fully obedient love toward his Father on our behalf (and not his physical suffering), and (b) God's proving His love for us through the self-giving love of Jesus (see Phil. 2:4-8; Rom. 5:8). The cross of Jesus is thus central to the Good News of God's love for us through Jesus, His beloved Son.

Jesus was clear about the priority of eagerly serving God even when this priority required that certain treasured things be released. A good illustration of this occurs in the case of the rich man who asked Jesus what he must do to have eternal life (Mk. 10:17-22). Jesus mentions obedience to some of the ten commandments, but the man responds with a claim to his having obeyed these since his youth. Jesus, however, is not satisfied. He identifies a serious lack, as follows: "Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' he said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me'" (Mk. 10:21, NIV). The rich man was holding on to earthly treasure (namely, his

wealth) that prevented him from truly following Jesus as the way to eternal life. So, Mark reports: "At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth" (Mk. 10:22). This is a kind of disobedience that refuses to put Jesus first as Lord. It puts wealth, instead of Jesus, in the place of priority. The rich man found his importance and security in his great wealth rather than in Jesus as Lord. He was honest enough to acknowledge that he could not follow Jesus as long as wealth was the priority in his life. He was, in the end, unwilling to go for broke with Jesus.

Many philosophers are like the rich man with regard to their philosophical pursuits. Jesus issues love commands that make loving God and others the priority, but some philosophers go away empty, owing to preoccupation with many self-selected philosophical questions. They may think of themselves as having obeyed many of the ten commandments since their youth, but Jesus issues love commands as supreme for human conduct. So, philosophers, among other people, must choose what will have priority: *either* Jesus and his love commands *or* self-selected philosophical pursuits. We have seen that these are not always in agreement, and thus that a choice between them is needed. If we put our own philosophical pursuits first, we thereby refuse to go for broke with Jesus; that is, we refuse to trust and to honor him above all else. We then demote Jesus from the status of Lord. Our philosophical pursuits then acquire for us an importance superior to Jesus and his commands. We thus follow in the steps of the rich man of Mark 10:17-22.⁷

Philosophers do well to ask *what* they are going for broke for: for the acquisition of philosophical truth rather than for the kind of faithful love commanded by Jesus? Jesus has asked the following: "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 10:36-37). Gaining the world of philosophical truth (to whatever extent) does not add up to faithful obedience to Jesus as Lord. In addition, the pursuit of such gain can take us away from what gives us the life we need with Jesus as Lord. In postponing, through philosophy or some other means, a decision to go for broke with Jesus as Lord, we refuse to acknowledge Jesus as our authoritative Lord. In that case, something else functions as our guiding authority. So, we are back with the rich man who departed from Jesus. As representative philosopher, Socrates raises questions, but Jesus commands love, and then demonstrates God's love to us (as identified in, for example, Mark 10:45 and Romans 5:8). We must, and do, choose our lord: Jesus on his terms or philosophy on our terms?

In giving us love commands as supreme, Jesus calls his followers into not just reflection but primarily a *mission*, the *lived* mission of witnessing to the Good News of his Father's self-giving love (particularly in Jesus himself). The followers of Jesus, therefore, are primarily not scholars or theorists but rather *obedient disciples* set on the mission of witnessing to Jesus and his Father by being loved and loving in the way that Jesus was loved by his Father and then loved others. This kind of faithfully obedient discipleship, represented by the life and death of Jesus himself, is normative throughout the New Testament.⁸ A clear statement of its importance is: "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth

has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20, NIV; cf. Acts 1:8). This charge identifies the priority of Jesus and obedient discipleship over all alternatives, including our self-selected philosophical pursuits. If Jesus is Lord, obedient discipleship toward him, the giver of love commands, has priority over our tendencies in philosophical truth-seeking. Our philosophical quests must submit to Jesus and his love commands. (The subsequent section, "Philosophy in the Obedience Mode," outlines how philosophy must be brought under the lordship of Jesus.)

Why do some philosophers, even philosophers avowing Christian commitment, resist the priority of Jesus and his love commands? The most straightforward answer is: we seek, as much as is possible, to be in charge of our lives. In other words, we aim to retain as much authority in our lives as we can. As a result, many people share Thomas Nagel's "cosmic authority problem" with acknowledgment of God.⁹ The underlying sentiment is that if I relinquish my authority over my own life, I will be susceptible to harm by someone who does not have my best interests at heart. So, the reasoning goes, it is in my best interest for *me* to maintain authority over my life. This suggests that I am, and should be, in charge regarding how I use my time. If, in exercising my authority over my life, I deem it important to pursue philosophical questions above all else, then it is permissible for me to pursue such questions. I am, in this view, the proper authority over my life's pursuits.

The question, then, is: who *should*, all things considered, be in charge of my life? Clearly, we should not relinquish authority over our lives lightly. Disasters threaten if we place authority in the wrong hands. Human history demonstrates this without a doubt. Even authorities that initially seem helpful often turn out to have hidden harmful agendas. So, caution is in order. Caution about authority, however, is not resistance to *proper* authority. Jesus amazed and troubled many in his audience, because he taught and acted with authority and not as the intellectuals of his day (Mk. 1:22). When challenged about his authority, he gave no direct answer; instead, he put the challengers themselves under a challenge. This he does to us too. If he is truly the authority over us, we should not assume a role of authority over him. If Jesus is Lord, then he is the authority over us. We must then defer to him and obey him. We will go for broke with Jesus only if we acknowledge and trust him as the absolute authority over us. We should *not* recommend blind commitment, however; we don't need to be authorities over Jesus to have his authority confirmed for us.

How then are we to decide whether Jesus is the proper authority over us? What will confirm his authority over us? The authority of Jesus does not fit with our preconceptions of authority. Jesus warns us of this, as follows:

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of

all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:42-45, NIV).¹⁰

The authority of Jesus is anchored and confirmed not in coercive power but rather in the power of his self-giving love, the kind of unselfish love (*agape*) he attributed to his divine Father. If we disparage or devalue such love, we will likewise disparage or devalue the authority of Jesus. Recognition of the authority of Jesus has as much to do with what we *value* as what we think. If we refuse to love what Jesus loves (in particular, self-giving obedience to his Father), we will overlook or set aside his authority over us. Indeed, in that case, there is a sense in which the authority of Jesus will be "hidden" from us, by our own misplaced likes and dislikes (cf. Matt. 11:25-27; Lk. 10:21-22).¹¹

What we love influences what we know. Love is thus cognitively important in ways that philosophers rarely consider. Helmut Thielicke has observed:

...in human matters there are things that are perceptible only to the personal category of love. In them love has [an] epistemological function.... Nobility of soul, or even charm, cannot be known in an objective, unprejudiced, and unloving way. This is surely what Goethe meant when he said one can understand only what one loves.¹²

A person's likes and dislikes, including morally relevant likes and dislikes, can be in conflict with the character and commands of Jesus. In that case, the person in question will be inclined to set aside or at least to minimize the importance and the authority of Jesus. This person's moral character will then be at odds with the moral character of Jesus. Jesus will be set aside as an implausible candidate for Lord of this person's life.

Exercising authority as Lord, Jesus calls (that is, *commands*) people away from old likes and dislikes for the sake of new loves suited to the biblical love commands and fellowship with God. This threatens to create social and professional turbulence in a person's life. Old securities, honors, and alliances are put at risk. Thielicke remarks:

With [the] calling [from Jesus,] I and my existence are put under obligation. Not just my ears and my perceptive reason are engaged. In biblical terms, my heart, the core of my being, is also engaged. I am not just summoned to hear and ponder; I am called to discipleship and fellowship. This means existential participation to the utmost. The goal is not to grasp the truth but to be in it, i.e., to exist in the name of the faithfulness of God which confronts me bodily in Christ. Thus discipleship cuts deep. It means breaks and partings. I put my hand to the plow. I cannot look back. I am confronted by the transvaluation of all values. I am called out of the familiar world and its security. I must renounce even what I previously regarded as pious duties (Matt. 8:18-22).¹³

The demanded "breaks and partings" call for new likes and dislikes, new

securities, new alliances, and new ways of living. We must either renounce or reconceive old ways in the light of Jesus as Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). The shakeup demanded by Jesus as Lord is palpable and thorough. To the extent that we insist on our own ways of living and thinking, or our own likes and dislikes, we will firmly resist the shakeup. We will thus resist Jesus as Lord. Many philosophers, among others, do just this.¹⁴

In John's Gospel, Jesus offers a straightforward way to discern whether he is God's unique spokesman rather than an impostor: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own" (Jn. 7:16-17). One "chooses to do God's will" only if one chooses to obey the divine love commands, for those commands are the highest expression of God's will. In addition, one chooses to obey the divine love commands only if one resolves to undergo "breaks and partings" with unloving, selfish ways of living, including truth-seeking that disregards the vital needs of others. This movement of the will away from selfishness and toward obeying the divine love commands opens a person to recognizing, even appreciating, the authority of Jesus as Lord. His authority is, after all, uniquely and fully anchored and confirmed in the authority of self-giving divine love. The specific personal confirmation of Jesus's authority comes from the testimony of the Spirit of God; even so, we must be open, in terms of our will, to this testimony and its affirmation of the divine love commands.¹⁵

If we find our importance primarily in pursuing philosophical questions, we will not find our importance supremely in being children of the Father of Jesus. We will then find our importance primarily in something that cannot satisfy or sustain us in what we need. In the end, we will then be left exhausted, joyless, and dead. Philosophical questions cannot give or sustain life, let alone a joyful life. In this respect, at least, philosophy resembles the Mosaic Law (cf. Gal. 2:16-19, 3:18-22). The human tragedy revolves around our looking for our primary importance in all the wrong places, in places that cannot give us what we supremely need. Philosophy is one of those places. When we go for broke with something that cannot sustain us, we end up broke, sooner or later. We may try to obscure this with peer approval, badges of honor, endless discussion, and various other diversions, but the truth ultimately prevails. We cannot hide for long the fate of our chosen sources of importance. Philosophy is not our savior; nor is it a trustworthy avenue to the savior we need. Jesus does not call us into philosophy as the way to approach him. As authoritative Lord, he calls us directly to himself, in faithful obedience. In particular, he calls us into eager obedience to his love commands regarding God and others.

Our philosophical questions, then, may not be as innocent as they seem. One harmful use of them turns them into delay tactics whereby we postpone our facing both the biblical love commands and who we are relative to those commands. We seek to delay the judgment of divine love upon us, as it calls for dramatic changes in our lives, even our intellectual lives. In fact, however, such tactics do not delay; in effect, they rather set aside the love commands as less than supreme. They substitute *other* pursuits, in place of obeying the divine love com-

mands. Whatever the intention, this is to replace rather than to delay obeying the love commands. In this respect, diversions are rarely, if ever, harmless.

A closely related harmful use of philosophical questions turns them into idols, that is, things we embrace in ways that detract from the love and trust we owe to God alone. They become idols whenever they detract from the supreme status of God as Lord of our lives, including our time. So, whenever philosophical questions lead us into violation of the divine love commands, they become idols. In that case, philosophy becomes idolatry, the root of rebellion against God. It then presents a false God to compete with the one true God. An ever-present danger of such philosophy is that it papers over our desperate moral and mortal predicament in the absence of an all-loving God. Some philosophers even make a god in our own philosophical image to underwrite the pursuits of philosophy. Consider, for example, Aristotle's god as "thought thinking thought," who is purely intellectual and altogether devoid of concerns about love in action. The result of such idolatry is sure death, however honored, sophisticated, and rigorous the pathway. Going for broke with philosophy, and without the God of genuine love, will leave us broke indeed.¹⁶

We give philosophy too much power, even dangerous power, when we allow it to demote Jesus as Lord. We do this whenever we let it result in our disobeying the divine love commands. We then give it an authority proper only to Jesus and His divine Father. We then have to face a choice between two competing authorities and thus two perspectives: (a) In the beginning was *the philosophical question*, and (b) In the beginning was *God*. If we begin with philosophical questions about reality, we can always raise philosophical questions about those philosophical questions. So we invite an endless regress of ever-higher metaphilosophical questions. Philosophical questions will then be our beginning and our end, and our middle too. They will have a monopoly on our lives. In particular, our lives will then never get around to the authority of Jesus and his love commands; they will dismiss such authority simply by looking elsewhere for ways to spend time. Philosophy has a way of leading us to do just this, often in the name of truth-seeking.

Philosophy might present itself as the proper avenue to acknowledgment of God's authority, but this avenue is, in the end, superfluous at best. A God who needs philosophy as the avenue to reach us will fail to reach most of us (relatively few of us humans are philosophers, after all) and will not reach us where we need to be reached, namely, at a level much deeper than our philosophical thinking. We need to be reached at the level of what we love, the level of our will; this level is untouched by typical philosophical thinking. We can, of course, raise philosophical questions about love, but philosophy itself does not yield the needed Giver of love commands who descends into history to redeem us from our harmful ways. Such a Giver comes to us only by grace, by a gift unearned even by intellectual means. This is the dominant message, the good news, of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus in the Jewish-Christian scriptures.¹⁷

Two Modes of Being Human

As Lord of heaven and earth, Jesus *commands* what we need; in particular, he commands that we love God and others. Unlike a philosopher, Jesus does not simply propose questions, topics, and arguments for philosophical discussion. He issues vital commands, with absolute authority, the authority of self-giving love. The contrast between Jesus and Socrates here is striking. It points to two different modes of being human: an *obedience mode* and a *discussion mode*. An obedience mode responds to an authority by *submission of the will* to the authority's commands. A discussion mode responds with *talk* about questions, options, claims, and arguments. 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.

Kierkegaard has compared Socrates favorably with Jesus in terms of an allegedly common emphasis on the so-called "inwardness of faith." He suggests that such inwardness "cannot be expressed more definitely than this: it is the absurd, adhered to firmly with the passion of the infinite."¹⁸ Christian commitment, according to Kierkegaard, is at its heart a faith commitment to mystery that does not go away, that does not yield to explanation, nonparadoxical description, or philosophical resolution. The speculative philosopher, he claims, is "the naughty child who refuses to stay where existing humans belong, in the children's nursery and the education room of existence where one becomes adult only through inwardness in existing, but who instead wants to enter God's council, continually screaming that, from the point of view of the eternal, there is no paradox."¹⁹ At times Kierkegaard suggests that the "absurd" and the "paradox" are *just* the divine incarnation in the Jesus of human historical existence.²⁰ If this is all he means, his language of "absurdity" and "contradiction" is arguably too loaded, and he blocks Socrates and others existing before the incarnation of Jesus from the "inwardness of faith" as specified above. The incarnation of Jesus may be shocking and mysterious, but it is not, strictly speaking, absurd or contradictory. Biblical faith, in any case, is a *response of trust* toward the God who has intervened in human history with decisive actions and called people to obedience; it is not an inward embracing of absurdity.²¹

Even if Socrates manifests and recommends a kind of "existential inwardness," this does not compare him favorably to Jesus. The difference between them is, in the end, too vast. Jesus, as the self-avowed Son of his Father (Matt. 11:25-27; Lk. 10:21-22), commands faith as obedient and loving trust in his Father. Such trust moves outward obediently, by command, in love toward God and others. It transcends a discussion mode for the sake of an obedience mode of existence. The focus here is not on "existential inwardness," but on trust in God that works outward in love, in obedience to the divine love commands. The apostle Paul calls this "faith [toward God and Jesus] working through love" (Gal. 5:6). This is the focus of Jesus, and it is absent from Socrates. In this regard, the differences between Jesus and Socrates are more striking and substantial than their similarities.

A misguided understanding of faith leaves many people with neglect of obedience to Jesus's love commands. As noted above, faith in God is trust in God, in response to God's faithful intervention in our lives. Faith as trust in God is a needed anchor for *faithfulness* toward God. It includes an attitude of obedience toward God and what God wills. Such obedience includes my submitting my will to God's will, just as Jesus did in Gethsemane. The apostle Paul uses talk of *obedience* and talk of *belief/faith* interchangeably (Rom. 10:16-17; cf. Rom. 1:5, 16:26). Likewise, before Paul, Jesus acknowledged a crucial role for obedience to God's will in relating to his Father (Matt. 7:21). Similarly, the epistle of James makes obedient action an essential component of vital faith in God: "... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (Jas. 2:17, NIV). Many people shy away from this important theme, for fear that faith may be confused with "works." Obedience, however, is not what Paul dubs "works." Instead, Paul thinks of "works" as what one does to *obligate* God or to *earn* something from God (see Rom. 4:4). We do well, then, to acknowledge the inextricable link between biblical faith in God, as trust in God, and obedience to God.

The history of philosophy, notoriously, leaves us in the discussion mode. Philosophical questions prompt further philosophical discussion of questions about philosophical questions, and this parade of higher-order questions continues, with no end to discussion. Hence, the questions of philosophy are, famously, perennial. Jesus as Lord, however, commands that we move, for our own good, to the obedience mode of existence relative to divine love commands. He thereby points us to his Father, the Creator who has issued supreme love commands to human creatures. So, we must transcend the discussion mode of existence, and thus philosophy itself, to face the Authority who commands what we need: faithful obedience to the all-loving Giver of divine love commands. Such obedience is just the way we are truly to *receive* the gift of divine love. We were made, according to Jesus, to live in obedience to the Giver of love commands. We languish and die when we do otherwise; we then fail to live morally, emotionally, and spiritually robust lives.

Many philosophers are uneasy with Jesus, if not ashamed of him, because he himself transcends their familiar, honorific discussion mode, and demands that they do the same. Discussion becomes advisable, under his love commands, if and only if it honors those commands. Jesus calls us, in any case, to move beyond discussion to faithful obedience to His Father. He 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 tables of mere discussion. He pronounces judgment on this longstanding self-made temple, in genuine love. His judgment brings us what we truly need: the demand of a life infused with faithful obedience to the all-loving Giver of love commands.

The love commands issued by Jesus are not ordinary moral rules that concern only actions. They call for *relationships* of love between me and God and between me and other humans. Such relationships go beyond mere actions to fellowship, friendship, and communion between and among personal agents, with God at the center. The background, foreground, and center of Jesus's love commands are thoroughly and irre-

ducibly person-oriented, person-focused.²² They direct us to persons and relationships with persons, with God and other humans. The love commands cannot be reduced, then, to familiar standards of right action. They cut much deeper into who we are and how we exist. They judge us by calling us up short, and then move us to redefinition after the character of an all-loving God, in faithful relationship with this God as represented by Jesus. We move beyond the discussion mode, then, to personal transformation in the obedience mode, always in relationship with the God who commands unselfish love as supreme. In such transformation, pride, even intellectual pride, gives way to the humility of obedience to the divine love commands. We turn now to some more specific results for philosophy.

Philosophy in the Obedience Mode: From Reflection to Ministry

What exactly is philosophy in the obedience mode, and what questions does it pursue? At its heart, it is obedience to Jesus as Lord, even as Lord of our intellectual lives. Philosophy under the lordship of Jesus must attend to *his* mission (rather than our independent intellectual projects, however earnest) and then be conformed to his mission. I shall outline what philosophy thus reoriented looks like.

If we know anything about the earthly Jesus at all (and we do know plenty), we know that (a) he put obedience to his Father's will first and (b) he regarded all good things as gifts from his Father. Regarding (a) (the primacy of his Father's will), Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come, *Thy will be done*, on earth as it is in Heaven" (Matt. 6:10; cf. Lk. 11:2; Mk. 14:36-37), and he set an absolute priority for them: "Seek first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33; cf. Lk. 12:31). In this connection, he warned against letting anything encroach upon the lordship of his Father (Matt. 6:24), and he identified the doing of his Father's will as the only way to enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 7:21). Jesus meant business, life-or-death business, about doing his Father's will, for his disciples as well as himself. Regarding (b) (gifts from his Father), Jesus taught that his Father freely gives good things to people (Matt. 7:11; cf. Lk. 11:13), and he offered the parable of the talents to illustrate that we are fully responsible to use our God-given gifts faithfully toward *God* (Matt. 25:15-30; Lk. 19:12-27). Our God-given gifts, according to Jesus, are not ours to use as we see fit. We owe their Giver our use of them for *His* kingdom. In other words, given the primacy of God's will, Jesus taught that our gifts must be used in agreement with his Father's will.

The immediate implications of (a) and (b) for philosophy are straightforward. The intellectual gifts underlying and yielding philosophy are gifts from God and, as such, must be used in eager obedience to God's will. Under the lordship of Jesus, we are not entitled to use these gifts just as we like. We owe their Giver our use of them for His kingdom, not ours. We must look to Jesus, once again, to identify what is involved in using philosophical gifts for his Father's kingdom.

Given his love commands, we should expect Jesus to direct us toward loving others in using our gifts in our commitment to him, and he does. This lesson emerges from an exchange between Jesus and the apostle Peter

in John's Gospel, after Peter had betrayed Jesus.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love (*agapas*) me more than these [disciples]?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love (*agapas*) me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love (*phileis*) me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." (Jn. 21:15-17, NIV)

Peter proclaims love of Jesus, and Jesus straightaway commands him to tend to his disciples. Commitment to Jesus, according to Jesus himself, should lead immediately to taking care of his followers. (For the same theme, see Matt. 25:34-45.) Once we acknowledge Jesus as Lord, we must use our gifts to take care of his disciples. This is required by self-giving love.

The apostle Paul develops the same theme in connection with gifts from God (*charismata*). Immediately before identifying wisdom (*sophia*) and knowledge (*gnosis*) as gifts from God's Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8; cf. 1:5), Paul states that God's gifts are for "the common good" of the body, or church, of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7). As a result, Paul advises the Corinthian Christians as follows: "Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, seek to excel in edification of the church" (1 Cor. 14:12). God-given gifts such as wisdom and knowledge, according to Paul, are given to followers of Jesus for the purpose of building up the church of Jesus. Paul thus states that "God has placed" teachers "in the church" as a gift to (and for) the church (1 Cor. 12:28), and Paul would include philosophers committed to Jesus in this category of teachers. The theme of thinking and knowing as self-giving ministry underlies Paul's striking remark that "If I ... can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge ... but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). Wisdom and knowledge, including *philosophical* wisdom and knowledge, count for "nothing" before God, according to Paul, if they do not contribute to the edification of the church of Jesus. Some members of the Corinthian church had neglected this truth, and the result was serious division in the church owing to their selfish and prideful misuse of intellectual gifts (see 1 Cor. 1:10-2:5).²³

Given the foregoing lessons from Jesus and Paul, we should think of philosophy in the obedience mode as, first and foremost, philosophy in the eager service of the church of Jesus. We must reorient philosophy to be used as a spiritual gift designed for ministry within the church of Jesus, which in turn ministers the Good News of Jesus to a needy world (as is commanded by Jesus in, for instance, the great discipleship commission of Matt. 28:18-20). Philosophers should eagerly serve the church by letting the focuses of philosophy, including its questions, be guided by what is needed to build

up the church as a ministry of the Good News of Jesus. As a result, there is no place under the lordship of Jesus for lone-ranger philosophers who choose their questions apart from the needs of the church. Nor is there any place for an exclusive or a competitive spirit among philosophers; they are to be united in a common ministry in and for the church of Jesus.

If Jesus is Lord, then we are not. If Jesus is Lord, then our questions and projects must get in line with his life-or-death discipleship mission. This means that philosophers should actually participate in the church of Jesus, as intellectual servants, to identify its needs and then to serve those needs. So, they are not to be outside observers, as so many are. This lesson alone would change the face of philosophy as we know it, enriching it beyond imagination.²⁴

The reorientation of philosophy under Jesus does not fit with philosophy as practiced in a secular setting, and this is no surprise. The mission of Jesus is, owing to its unrelenting exaltation of the will of God, altogether out of place in a secular perspective. Indeed, the mission of Jesus makes *everything* we do sacred (with *nothing* left as secular) in that everything we do is assessable, and should be assessed, relative to the will of God. Philosophy is no exception. Philosophy under Jesus is sacred throughout, for it is eagerly committed to God's discipleship mission throughout.

Philosophy as ministry within the church is understandable once we consider that the God-given mission of Jesus, in keeping with God's outgoing love, is to build a community "called out" from darkness (literally, an *ekklesia*, a "church") for his Father. The universal unselfish love of God, exemplified in Jesus, seeks to build community among all humans, under God's authority of self-giving love in Jesus (see Eph. 1:9-10). God's building of community requires of us our ministering to people in community, after the example set by Jesus. Such ministering requires our being empowered with gifts of God's Spirit designed to build up community members in their discipleship relationship with Jesus. The mission of the church of Jesus is a discipleship ministry for Jesus throughout, for "all things" were created for Jesus (Col. 1:16). Philosophy, like any other spiritual gift, has its purpose here and nowhere else. Philosophy, therefore, must not be the pursuit of casual or idiosyncratic intellectual concerns, however truth-seeking. It must formulate its questions and projects in light of the needs of the church commissioned, by Jesus himself, to make disciples for Jesus.

Philosophy as discipleship ministry will include a range of ethical issues that serve the church, but it will not be limited to ethics. It will be open to consider *any* intellectual issues prompted by the actual needs of the church in its Good News discipleship mission. Even questions about abstract entities may merit attention from philosophy under Jesus, if, for instance, questions about the nature of truth-bearers merit attention in connection with the Good News of Jesus. 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. For instance, an issue whose answer contributes nothing whatever to the mission of the church should be set aside as not compelling relative to the mission of Jesus. The apostle Paul gives such instruction to Timothy, as follows:

... stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not ... to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's household (*oikonomian*) The goal of this command is love (*agape*), which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to pointless talk (*mataiologian*). They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm (1 Tim. 1:3-6).

Paul advises Timothy to avoid talk that is "pointless" relative to the household, or church, of God, for the sake of giving primacy to God's unselfish "love" in Jesus. My thesis regarding philosophy as ministry under Jesus parallels Paul's advice: Questions that are pointless relative to the actual Good News mission of God's church should be set aside by philosophy under Jesus.

Philosophy can, and sometimes does, wander into the "myths and endless genealogies" proscribed by Paul. For example, some philosophical disputes about the interpretive minutia of the history of philosophy are of a piece with "endless genealogies." Readers may carefully supply their own examples. Just for the sake of illustration, one familiar example concerns whether there is conceptual development in Plato's dialogues regarding the theory of forms and what exactly this development is; another concerns whether there are multiple theories of primary substance in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and what exactly they are. These are areas of ongoing meticulous philosophical scholarship (and I myself must confess to having contributed many years ago), but no one has suggested that they contribute, or even will likely contribute, to the actual mission of the church of Jesus. Conceptual taxonomy is one thing, and it is typically crucial to our reflective lives in connection with the church's mission; philosophical disputes over interpretive minutia of the history of philosophy are something else, and are not always crucial to our reflective lives in connection with the church's mission. Even conceptual taxonomy, however, can become sterile relative to contributing to the ministry of the Good News of Jesus. When we find ourselves drawing conceptual distinctions *just* for the sake of drawing distinctions, we have lost sight of the purpose of the gift of philosophy under Jesus. As always, the ministry of the Good News gives philosophy its overarching purpose under Jesus as Lord.

An issue which nobody *intends*, even on reflection, to contribute to the Good News mission of the church should be bracketed as not compelling for philosophy under Jesus. If nobody has found a way to relate an issue to the church's mission, the issue should be bracketed as extraneous, at least until it does relate. An issue is *extraneous* if and only if its answer does not advance the Good News discipleship mission of the church. Many philosophical issues have not been related at all to the church's mission, and nobody is prepared to relate them in any plausible way. For instance, the medieval philosophical dispute over the metaphysics of angels regarding whether they can inhabit the same place at the same time (see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.52, a.3) may safely be set aside as not com-

elling. Given the discipleship mission of Jesus and his church, the church's needs are clearly elsewhere. The urgency of this mission and the questions it must face recommends that we bracket extraneous issues, however intriguing or philosophically popular they may be.

The needs of the church are determined by the commands of Jesus relative to the church's audience. My talk of the church, as suggested above, concerns the body of Christ overall, and not just an individual part or congregation of the body. So, the fact that an individual congregation has not seen the need to answer a particular question does not entail that the same is true of the church as the body of Christ. As always, we need to assess the bearing of a question on the advancement of the Good News discipleship mission of Jesus and his church. Some questions will be found not to be compelling in this connection, and they will properly fall to the side for the sake of urgently relevant questions. When the church is challenged to explain matters it can explain, the intellectual gifts given to it by God, including philosophical gifts, should be available for eager service. The use of these gifts should not be distracted or dulled by extraneous matters. Only people participating in the church and its mission relative to its audience will be well positioned to assess whether particular questions are urgent or extraneous. This calls for situating philosophy, as a vital ministry, in the actual context of the discipleship work of the church of Jesus. This calls for philosophy in the obedience mode, under Jesus as Lord.

Conclusion and Prognosis

Philosophy, we have seen, is not automatically a friend of Jesus as the Lord of heaven and earth; nor is he automatically a friend of philosophy. A friend of Jesus must acknowledge the lordship of Jesus. As Jesus remarks in John's Gospel:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command (Jn. 15:9-14, NIV).

Jesus bases friendship with him on obedience to him, in particular, to his love commands. He offers himself as the Lord who can also be one's Friend. Indeed, he offers his Lordship, including his love commands, as the avenue to joy, even complete joy. This is not the "happiness" of the world that ebbs and flows with varying circumstances. It is rather the constant affirmation of being loved by the One who can sustain us in any circumstance, even in death. This, only Jesus offers and provides. This, our own philosophy cannot provide. Jesus, then, must be Lord not only of the Sabbath but of philosophy as well. Even philosophers need life and joy, and they need to find these in the only One who can supply lasting life and

joy. Jesus, then, is properly Lord even of philosophers. When philosophers receive this good news, they can do philosophy aright, in keeping with the divinely given purpose of our lives. Only then.

Philosophy apart from an all-loving God will not supply the gift of love we need to begin living in love toward ourselves and others. In particular, it will not supply the kind of merciful forgiveness we need to be freed from our shame, worry, fear, hiding, anxiety, and other obstacles to genuine love among humans. Love's judgment upon us is oppressive and unrelenting apart from the merciful forgiveness of the Giver of the love commands. Whatever else it supplies, philosophy without an all-loving God does not deliver the merciful forgiveness we desperately need.

Given the reality of an all-loving God, philosophy is no longer business as usual. It can still be the "love of wisdom," but wisdom must be understood, in keeping with the divine love commands, in terms of loving God and others. Philosophical pursuits will be commendable only insofar as they contribute (in a non-coincidental manner) to faithful obedience to the divine love commands. Here we should follow the apostle Paul by portraying philosophy as "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5), where the "obedience of Christ" focuses on the divine love commands and thus on ministry. Given this portrayal, we clearly know what philosophy is *not* to be: it is not to be philosophical truth-seeking independent of a genuine contribution to satisfaction of the divine love commands. Philosophical truth-seeking should not float free of the divine love commands and ministry in obedience to those commands. In particular, it should not become bogged down in the discussion mode, but should aim instead for a genuine contribution to obeying the love commands in connection with actual ministry within the church of Jesus. The fine points of this portrayal will need to be worked out in a specific context of faithful obedience among people working together in the church of Jesus. Even so, philosophy under the divine love commands has a distinctive purpose, focus, and ministry from those commands within the church of Jesus, and thus clearly moves beyond philosophy as discussion or truth-seeking.

Finally, a potential self-referential problem: is this paper itself bogged down in the discussion mode and thus illicit by its own standards, relative to the love commands? The short answer: *no*. This paper is designed to give Jesus his status of Lord even over philosophical pursuits. It thus transcends discussion and truth-seeking to re-issue the love commands, under the authority of the One who initially gives those commands. This paper thus transcends philosophy as discussion or truth-seeking to point us to Philosophy, the love of Wisdom, as faithful obedience to the Giver of divine love commands. If obedient, we can begin to live, beyond endless discussion. We can then give our lives to something beyond discussion and truth-seeking, something we can take to a world in need: the love offered by the personification of Wisdom, Jesus himself. Philosophy can then become valuable ministry within the church of Jesus. If one seeks a concrete example of philosophy in the obedience mode, I submit that this paper itself can serve.

We do well, then, to obey, and not just to discuss. Philosophy will then be in its proper place as consciously and eagerly subservient, within the

church of Jesus, to the all-loving Giver of love commands. We will then be in our proper place too, humbly, for our own good. If we are philosophers under the divine love commands, we will be obedient disciples first. As a result, our purpose in doing Philosophy will transcend philosophy itself to involve obedience to the Giver of all wisdom and every other good gift. Under the authority of Jesus's love commands, Philosophy will never languish in discussion or even truth-seeking. Throughout it will be person-oriented because *agape*-oriented, under the authority of Jesus himself. Philosophy will thus be reflective of Jesus himself in moving constantly toward self-giving ministry that honors his all-loving Father. Jesus relates to Philosophy, then, as the One truly reflected in it, whenever it is done right. So, Jesus is Lord even of Philosophy.²⁵

Loyola University of Chicago

NOTES

1. I have discussed the logical and epistemological status of philosophical questions, including "what-is-X?" questions, at length in Moser, *Philosophy After Objectivity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). For a wide range of approaches to such questions, including attempts to dissolve them by Wittgenstein, Waismann, and others, see Paul Moser and Dwayne Mulder, eds., *Contemporary Approaches to Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1994).

2. For discussion of the relation of Jesus to some ancient wisdom traditions, see Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: the Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); and Paul Rhodes Eddy, "Jesus as Diogenes?: Reflections on the Cynic Jesus Thesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996), 449-69.

3. On this theme in reformed Protestantism, see B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 31-41. On this theme in Roman Catholicism, see Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L.K. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956), pp. 3-25.

4. On the background and meaning of the love commands of Jesus, see Ceslaus Spicq, *Agape In the New Testament, Vol. 1: Agape in the Synoptic Gospels* (London: Herder, 1963), pp. 26-32, 62-66; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), pp. 381-400; and V.P. Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972). For a survey of how the love commands figure in some recent influential work on ethics, see Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), and Timothy Jackson, *Love Disconsoled: Meditations on Christian Charity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

5. On such controversy in connection with the Sabbath commandment, see Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, pp. 367-72. On the meaning of the title "Lord" (*kyrios*) as applied to Jesus, see Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 108-18.

6. On the relation of the cross of Jesus to his commitment to the priority of divine love, see Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice* (London: Macmillan, 1951), pp. 299-324; Vincent Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching*, 3d

ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1958), pp. 167-209; and Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 155-77.

7. For helpful elaboration on the question raised by the rich man, in connection with philosophical discussion and the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke's Gospel, see Helmut Thielicke, *The Waiting Father*, trans. John Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), pp. 158-69. In connection with Matthew's presentation of the rich man, see Thielicke, *The Hidden Question of God*, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 162-64.

8. See, for detailed explanation, Luke Johnson, *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999); Richard Longenecker, ed., *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Richard Longenecker, "The Foundational Conviction of New Testament Christology: The Obedience/Faithfulness/Sonship of Christ," in Joel Green and Max Turner, eds., *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 473-88; and Donald Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Meaning of Discipleship," in John Carroll, Joel Green, et al., *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), pp. 234-55.

9. See Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 130. Nagel remarks: "... I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that." He confesses to having a fear of acknowledgment of God. According to Richard Rorty, Martin Heidegger had a similar cosmic authority problem, because he is to be classified with "people who are unable to stand the thought that they are not their own creations." See Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 109.

10. On the authenticity of this passage, see Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 587-93. See also Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), pp. 292-94; and William Manson, *Jesus the Messiah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 182-85.

11. I have discussed the relevant kind of hiddenness in "Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding," in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser, eds., *Divine Hiddenness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 120-48. See also my exchange on divine hiddenness with J.L. Schellenberg in Michael Peterson and Raymond VanArragon, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

12. Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith, Vol. 1: Prolegomena*, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 210. Cf. Thielicke, *The Hidden Question of God*, p. 127. For a helpful application of this theme to interpersonal learning, see Luke Johnson, *Living Jesus*, pp. 57-75. The theme is endorsed explicitly in 1 John 4:7-8.

13. Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith, Vol. 1: Prolegomena*, p. 206. See also Thielicke, *The Hidden Question of God*, pp. 116-30.

14. For a candid autobiographical acknowledgment of such volitional resistance, see Mortimer Adler, *Philosopher at Large* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 315-16. See also the vigorous resistance to any kind of theistic religion, and the resulting unduly harsh conception of God, in Bertrand Russell, "The Free Man's Worship," in Louis Greenspan and Stefan Andersson, eds., *Russell on Religion* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 31-38.

15. I have discussed the epistemological role of the testimony of the Spirit of God in Moser, "Cognitive Inspiration and Knowledge of God," in Paul Copan and Paul Moser, eds., *The Rationality of Theism* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 55-71. See also the helpful discussions in Richard Hays, *First*

Corinthians (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), pp. 26-47; and Alexandra Brown, *The Cross and Human Transformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 105-69.

16. Intellectual idolatry is rarely discussed by theistic philosophers. I have identified one prominent kind of such idolatry in "Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding," in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser, eds., *Divine Hiddenness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 120-48. For a related discussion of "the idolatry of ideas," see John Mackay, *Christian Reality and Appearance* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1969), pp. 34-49.

17. I have discussed this in "Reorienting Religious Epistemology: Cognitive Grace, Filial Knowledge, and Gethsemane Struggle," in James Beilby, ed., *For Faith and Clarity: Philosophical Contributions to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, forthcoming).

18. Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), Vol. 1, p. 214. For a helpful discussion of Kierkegaard on faith, see David Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 122-42.

19. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Vol 1, p. 214.

20. See Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Vol 1, pp. 209-10, 213.

21. For discussion of biblical faith as a response of trust, in connection with Kierkegaard and Bultmann, see Leander Keck, *A Future for the Historical Jesus*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), pp. 47-99. Cf. Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Louisville: Westminster, 1989), pp. 10-17, 99-127.

22. This theme is emphasized helpfully in the writings of H.H. Farmer, including *The World and God*, 2d ed. (London: Fontana, 1963), chaps. 1-2, and *Reconciliation and Religion*, ed. C.H. Partridge (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Press, 1998). See also C.H. Partridge, *H.H. Farmer's Theological Interpretation of Religion* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Press, 1998).

23. For a plausible reconstruction of the role of philosophy in the Corinthian church of Paul's day, see Graham Tomlin, *The Power of the Cross* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1999), chaps. 2-5. See also Alexandra Brown, *The Cross and Human Transformation*, chap. 5.

24. This is no merely theoretical matter for me. In chairing the Adult Education ministry of a large church congregation, I have seen how philosophy takes on new and vital focuses. For instance, I have seen how philosophical issues about spiritual idols and idolatry have emerged as urgent in the church. As a result, I have contributed reflection and writing to a website that bears on such issues: www.luc.edu/faculty/pmoser/idolanon/. 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. For relevant works by Thielicke and Farmer, see notes 12 and 22 above. For an important work by Baillie, see his Gifford Lectures, *The Sense of the Presence of God* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1962).

25. For helpful comments and suggestions, I thank Peter Bergeron, Tom Carson, William Hasker, Linda Mainey, Blaine Swen, and two referees for *Faith and Philosophy*.