**Natural Theology and Miracles: A Defense of Spectator Evidence**

In his recent book *The Severity of God*, Paul Moser develops and amplifies a number of themes in his philosophy of religion, which he has presented in a number of recent publications.[[1]](#footnote-1) According to Moser, philosophy of religion as it has typically been done in the past, especially for the last sixty years or so, fails to resolve the question concerning the existence of God because it is based on an erroneous conception of God, the theistic God of the Philosophers, rather than the Christian God, a God supremely worthy of worship who loves His enemies. Because of this, says Moser, philosophers have been looking for God in all the wrong places. In particular, they have been supposing that the question concerning God’s existence is predicated on the existence of a certain kind of external, publically available evidence, such as that upon which the traditional arguments for God’s existence have been founded, which Moser calls “spectator evidence.” In *Severity*, Moser has extended this critique to traditional Christian apologetics by denying that a God worthy of worship would bother about providing miracles as *evidence* of the claims on behalf of the messiahship of Christ. (He does not deny that Jesus performed miracles, only that they can be used as impartial, neutral empirical evidence for the Scriptural claims made about God.)

According to Moser, the Christian God has as His primary aim to establish an intimate, personal relationship with His rational creatures, one in which God’s grace becomes the medium, not of advanced philosophical speculation, but instead of genuine conversion the fruits of which are not just love of God and neighbor, but also of one’s enemies - a form of love that Moser takes to be the acid test for genuine conversion. Moser says that belief in God can be both evidentially grounded and rationally justified, but only for those who are prepared to believe prior to the receipt of that evidence. Divine seriousness about our salvation demands that we be prepared to accept God’s free gift of salvation on His terms, not our own or such as we are prepared to stipulate. Indeed, only those who are antecedently prepared to acknowledge and respond to God’s authoritative call to fellowship with Him can receive such a call to begin with. Those who demand evidence for God’s existence independently of such a call show themselves antecedently unworthy of it, and thus God rightly withholds it from them. God thus hides Himself from the wise and the learned but freely reveals Himself to those who are willing to become like little children. For such persons, God becomes present through conscience as a perfectly loving being supremely worthy of worship, who challenges us to become perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect and offers us the means - the grace of Christ - to actually achieve this end, something that it does not lie within our power to attain on our own.

The proof of all of this resides in our apprehension of an influx of *agape*-love that renews our hearts and makes possible genuine of love God and neighbor, including our enemies, expressing itself in our thoughts, words, and deeds. This evidence is internal, not external or public, but nevertheless leaves the believer with no doubt of the reality of God. For such an one, no other evidence is either possible or necessary. Non-believers, of course, have no inkling of or access to this evidence, but that does not make it any less real or convincing to those who do. The task of the Christian philosopher is not to attempt to find neutral rational grounds for belief in a first cause or an ontologically perfect being, but instead to exhort others to confront the authoritative divine call and respond to it with passionate inwardness and gratitude for God’s gift of salvation.

Moser is rather less clear about why a perfectly loving God would eschew making any public witness to His existence or nature. His main reason seems to be that such evidence is somehow superfluous and unnecessary, something that the Divine Seriousness would consequently not bother about. On other occasions, Moser suggests that such evidence would simply be an opportunity to rest content with a merely theistic or deistic God, one that we could hold “at arm’s length” or construe after our own fancy. Indeed, robbed of His nature as the God supremely worthy of worship whose authoritative love-command is the foundation for all of our thoughts and attitudes towards Him, any such God is merely a “cognitive idol” of our own creation. Since external, publically observable evidence could never confront us with the Christian God, its existence is neither here nor there and not worth having even if it were available. Such a God, then, has no interest in making any purely intellectual appeal to His creatures or to acceding to their demands for theoretical proof prior to believing; this is not to the point, merely a snare and a distraction. Indeed, it is good that God should hide Himself from people who make this demand. On this view, then, we ought not to anticipate any mere “spectator evidence” for God, such as that which natural theology and miracles would supply, so natural theology and traditional apologetics have no value for Christian philosophers. Christian philosophers need to stop attempting to provide such evidence and instead try to lead others to a personal faith in Christ that transcends and makes superfluous the traditional conception of philosophy as the search for truth.

Of course, this will only be true if Moser’s supremely loving God worthy of worship can plausibly be thought to be the Christian God. If not, Moser will be open to the charge of cognitive idolatry that he has raised against many others. The difficulty, as I see it, is not that Christianity does not teach what Moser says it does, but simply that it teaches so much more than he says it does, and much that is relevant to the issue of knowledge of God’s existence. Within this wider understanding of the Christian message, both natural theology and traditional apologetics find genuine employment - and a home. I will first make some comments about natural theology, as traditionally understood, within the context of faith. Next, I will suggest some reasons for “Bible Christians” to take it seriously by building a bridge from certain centrally important Christian beliefs to the traditional arguments for God’s existence. Finally, I will turn to traditional apologetics, and in particular miracles, and make a similar claim.

**Some Remarks on Traditional Natural Theology**

In the past, natural theology was a branch of theology and so was done within the context of faith by philosophers and theologians who already had an active Christian faith-commitment. As St. Anselm (surely as great a rationalist as there ever was in theology) noted in his *Proslogion*, I do not wish to understand in order to believe, but rather I believe in order that I might understand.[[2]](#footnote-2) Within this context, natural theology is simply the tentative investigation of the extent to which the truths of the faith can investigated and justified by reason. There is no suggestion that either one’s personal faith or the propriety of belief depends in any crucial way on the outcome of this investigation. Conceived of in this way, natural theology is neither necessary for faith nor in any way intended to supersede or replace it. It is simply one branch of theological investigation among others and claims no privileged status in relation to them. Whatever its intrinsic interest or importance that it may have for some, it lives in peaceful coexistence with other theological endeavors. Natural theology was later largely abandoned by theologians and became a branch of philosophy (under the name “philosophy of religion”) and such that anyone, whether believer or not, could participate since the rational investigation of religious belief was now no longer carried out under the aegis of faith.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, this reflects a merely accidental historical development in this regard, not something essential to natural theology.

Secondly, while the philosophical development and presentation of the traditional arguments for God’s existence can be abstruse and may be inconclusive for some, it does not follow that the pre-philosophical grounds that motivate such arguments need be in any way abstruse, esoteric, or difficult to grasp. Indeed, the standard intuitive grounds upon which such arguments are raised are typically common-sense observations that occur to many thoughtful persons and are common to theistic religions worldwide. They do not take any great learning or acumen to acquire or to be fully convincing. Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindley report the following:

We once heard a radio debate among scholars concerning the existence of God. When

the phone lines were opened to the public, an irate woman called who obviously lacked

academic sophistication...she complained, “Ain’t you guys got your eyes open? Look out

the window. Where do yins think all that come from?”[[4]](#footnote-4)

This woman would have been hard pressed to state the cosmological argument, but the basic intuition on which any such argument is based was clear and obvious to her. The same holds for the teleological argument, the moral argument, and for many other such arguments. Even the ontological argument is based on an intuitive definition of God as a perfect being, “the being a greater than which none other can be conceived.” These naturally occur to people, or seem intuitive to them when casually presented to them. The abstruseness and inconclusiveness of philosophical attempts to articulate these grounds as valid and sound deductive proofs may have another explanation, which I will essay below.

Now I wish to make a couple of concessions to the sort of view represented by Moser, whose work (along with that of Plantinga and the Skeptical Theists) has helped me to acknowledge. I now deny, with Moser and Plantinga *et al.*, that natural theology is necessary for justified Christian belief. Theism is no longer “make or break” for religious belief, as earlier generations of philosophers of religion, both theist and atheist, were inclined to believe.[[5]](#footnote-5) For this reason, the philosophical defense of theism, of the existence of the God of the Philosophers, is not as salient as it once was given that it is Christianity, and not theism as such, that is the focus of religious belief. More than this, I am also willing to concede that it may be the case that (at least some) Christians possess evidence for the existence of the Christian God which only those who have made the “leap of faith” have access to. In that case, such Christians are capable of knowing that the claims of Christianity are true in a way that neither depends upon nor can be undermined by any public evidence, and against which the skeptical arguments of unbelievers are vain because irrelevant.[[6]](#footnote-6) In such case, Christian religious belief will be both rational and epistemically justified, despite the believer’s inability to prove this to the satisfaction of unbelievers on their own terms or on those they are willing to accept. Such belief, then, will not need to be supplemented by external, public evidence in order to be completely in order for those who believe.

Having conceded Moser his positive doctrines, why continue to bother about natural theology at all? What possible purpose could it serve? I can think of at least three such purposes relevant to our discussion here and to the current intellectual atmosphere, which I understand in a manner somewhat different from Moser. Moser takes it that God is hidden, or rather hides Himself, from unbelievers, withholding His presence from them due to their refusal to agree to encounter God on His own terms. Although Moser suggests at one point that God does this for their own sake, it is not immediately clear to me that God in any way benefits Michael Scriven, Daniel Dennett, or Richard Dawkins by withholding His presence from them or that this makes it more likely that they someday see the light. Indeed, it seems that Moser’s God, by putting so much emphasis on an immediate confrontation between the Christian God and the person open to the Divine Challenge, makes it very difficult and highly unlikely that many, especially many contemporary intellectuals, will ever be in a position to encounter that challenge. For God to withhold Himself from His cognitive enemies, either because they are not worthy or because they have placed themselves beyond His reach, seems to tell against either the Divine Goodness or His power to save. It also raises questions about the culpability of such persons for their non-belief. If God is truly hidden from them in a way that makes Him inaccessible to them, can they really be blamed for not believing and can they excuse themselves, as Russell did, by saying “Not enough evidence, God, not enough evidence?” Perhaps Moser has too narrowly construed the possible strategies that God, in His wisdom, could employ in order to win souls by preparing them for that divine confrontation through indirect means. It is here that natural theology could play a role, albeit a limited and merely transitional one, from unbelief to belief.

Unlike Moser, I don’t think that God hides Himself from anyone - His presence is evident and palpable to those with eyes to see.[[7]](#footnote-7) It is just the case that, given our fallenness, we lack the appropriate eyes - more than this, we are content with our blindness and would prefer not to see. Being fallen, we are thus born enemies of God who will do anything we can to avoid the confrontation and the Divine Challenge in whatever form it comes. We are in headlong flight away from God and will build bulwarks against the inbreaking of the Divine Presence. For most of us, this takes the form of various distractions that keep us firmly mired in the flat, myopic, and quotidian sort of existence that Hume refers to as our common life and Heidegger calls *dasein*. We pursue wealth, power, pleasure, fame, “relationships,” hobbies, etc., investing our Tillichian ultimate concern in the passing things of this world, our eyes resolutely turned away from the spectre of death from whose perspective all of what we do is completely meaningless. To be more specific, if we are intellectuals, we build intellectual bulwarks against God, hoping thereby to insulate ourselves from having to consider the claims and the demands of religion, and of the Christian religion in particular and most of all.

Since we are all fallen, and even those of us who believe are not yet fully restored by the grace of God, all of us are naturally inclined to find fallen suasions intuitive – even attractive – and to so allow them to unconsciously influence our thinking. Without knowing or intending it, we naturally fall in step with the sort of thinking that spontaneously flows from the promptings of our disordered motivational structure and so find ourselves faced with “challenges” to our faith, difficulties, and even doubts that threaten to undermine it entirely. Of course, philosophy will not solve this problem by itself, since Christian commitment is neither primarily or even essentially an intellectual matter; without doubt, the best antidote is prayer and an active immersion in Christian life of service to others. Still, philosophy and natural theology can make some contribution to our remaining faithful to the Gospel.

So, then, even if natural theology and apologetics are not essential to the faith, they can support it, both by articulating the reasonableness of the Gospel message and its values, analyzing its essential concepts, the implications of its claims, and examining arguments both for and against those claims. In this way, Christian philosophers can bolster their own faith and that of others. Of course, we must not take on too much or assign too much significance to the philosopher’s efforts in this regard. Intellectual difficulties about the faith are typically only symptomatic of more serious problems in a person’s spiritual life that the philosopher has little competence to address. Still, that is nothing against doing one’s best and leaving the rest to God.

In a similar fashion, there undoubtedly are those who do not yet believe but to whom God has vouchsafed His prevenient grace in such a way that that they are at least open to hearing the Christian message. In that case, intellectual objections to the faith that have occurred to them or that they have heard from others may continue to serve as stumbling-blocks to the act of faith that they are otherwise disposed to make. Some notable Christian converts such as G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Sir Arnold Lunn, and Peter Geach were spiritually ripe for conversion (so far as their interior dispositions were concerned) long before they were intellectually ready to make a sincere profession of faith. Their own philosophically guided reflections, as well as the influence of other Christian intellectuals they read and encountered, were instrumental in these well-known cases and surely have figured in many others not so prominent or well-known. There is no reason, either in principle or in fact, that the intellectual witness of Christian philosophers cannot play such a role, or the philosophically informed considerations they present on behalf of the faith serve their traditional role as *praeambula fidei*. Indeed, such preambles to faith may play their most important role by persuading us that the object of faith is the very goal of reason, one that it can to some extent envisage but cannot itself reach. In this way, we may think of reason as being like Moses, able to see the Promised Land even though unable to enter it, except that we are more than just reason and so we can, through an act of Grace-inspired will and with reason’s blessing, cross the Jordan and enter the land of milk and honey through the act of faith.

More than this, Christian philosophy (natural theology) and apologetics can even take the fight into the enemy’s camp, and attempt to dismantle the intellectual bulwarks that unbelieving philosophers have constructed to keep the divine confrontation at bay. Of course, more than this is needed in order for genuine Christian faith to be possible for many ideological atheists. Nevertheless (and again in apparent contrast to Moser) I think the inherent dynamic of reason, if left to its own devices, naturally leads us to the God of the Philosophers as the *alpha* and *omega* of theoretical inquiry, both as one of its substantive presuppositions and as the ultimate Truth in which all truth, however humble, both participates and finds its completion.[[8]](#footnote-8) Nonbelievers want to engage in theoretical inquiry, yet are loath to let reason lead them where it will. So, like Hume, Kant, the Positivists, Wittgensteinians, and contemporary proponents of Scientism, they attempt to circumscribe the employment of reason within arbitrary boundaries designed to protect their comfort zone and preempt others from applying reason outside of those strictures. Thus, if a Christian philosopher can show that even basic commitments in this area will provide some sort of platform upon which an argument for the existence of God can be raised, this may create unease and prepare the way for an intellectual recognition of God on the part of even hide-bound atheists so long as they retain some vestige of rationality – the late Antony Flew is a case in point. Of course, if one argues that, e.g., abstract objects, *a priori* truth, objective moral values, scientific realism, etc. etc. all provide plausible grounds for theistic belief, it remains the unbeliever’s privilege to perform the corresponding *modus tollens* and deny theism along with its rational grounds. However, the intellectual costs of so doing are quite high, so that it may at last dawn on some of them that it is not worth paying, even to avoid the great evil of belief in God. Such belief, as in Hume’s case, or Flew’s, may amount to nothing more than a tepid commitment to a deistic substitute for the Christian God, but it is a first step and may bring such persons closer to openness to the divine confrontation and the choice for Christ. This will especially be the case if God’s grace allows for the possibility of one’s making such a choice without a profound religious experience of the sort that St. Paul, St. Augustine, Luther, Pascal, and Hamann enjoyed.

Furthermore, these are the sorts of things that Christian philosophers *can* do, given their philosophical training and expertise, their knowledge of contemporary philosophical interests and leanings, and their ability to understand and interact with other philosophers in particular and intellectuals in general. By contrast, Moser’s own proposal for Christian philosophy, sketchy as it is, seems to be a sort of anti-philosophy that encourages philosophers to abandon philosophical research and discourse in favor of some sort of direct appeal to non-believing intellectuals to seek the divine confrontation, “get right with God,” and accept Jesus as their personal savior. This is not the sort of things that philosophers of any sort are trained to do or likely to do successfully, or any rate with greater success than the legion of amateur, street-corner evangelists who used to invade college campuses in my youth, seeking to save souls but generally meeting with nothing but disdain and ridicule. Perhaps they did some good; I am quite sure that I would not.[[9]](#footnote-9) At any rate, if the corrosive effects of entrenched atheism in the academy can be instrumental in causing young people to lose their faith, I see no reason why the intellectual witness of Christian philosophers going about doing their job cannot have a similar effect, at least in principle.

**Building the Bridge from Religion to Natural Theology**

The Christian religion teaches that God is love and that this is a central fact about God and the key to understanding His dealings with us.[[10]](#footnote-10) However, the Christian faith also teaches a good deal more about God than this, so to focus as Moser does exclusively on God’s loving nature presents an overly narrow account of the Christian God. For example, the Judeo-Christian tradition has always maintained that God is the creator and designer of the universe, one who exercises ongoing, providential care for His creation. These claims about God are surely as central to traditional Christianity as the claim that God is love. Yet if the Christian God actually exists, it would be remarkable if these centrally important facts about the universe did not publicly testify to the existence of the Creator God. In that case, we would find grounds for belief in God in precisely those apparent[[11]](#footnote-11) facts upon which traditional natural theology is based: the contingency of the world and everything in it, the order, design, and beauty of the universe, our sense of morality, and so on. Even non-Christian philosophers concede this – Hume explicitly and others (Kant is a noticeable example) implicitly in their attempts to argue that these apparent facts are just that, mere appearances or illusions produced by reason or the intellect or capable of alternate explanations that do not require us to postulate a God in order to account for them.[[12]](#footnote-12) It remains that, in accordance with the Experiential Presumption, the natural and spontaneous affirmation of God’s existence evoked by consideration of these facts remain the “default position” on this question. Thus, even if such evidence is not religiously central or foundational for Christian belief, it does not follow that it does not exist, and cannot serve in some ancillary way to bring people to the faith.

In the same way the Scriptures themselves, both in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, constantly testify to these claims about God and treat them, on the most natural reading, as manifest to all. Moser comments on this only in regard to *Romans* 1:19-20, which is often quoted as Scriptural warrant for natural theology. Moser asserts that this passage does not claim that nature *by itself* testifies to God’s existence, something that Paul could have said if he had intended this. To this argument from silence we can oppose another: neither does Paul say that nature testifies to God’s existence only to those who antecedently believe, as he easily could have if he had intended this. Further, the natural reading of this text, as well as of the surrounding context, support the traditional interpretation according to which God has revealed himself through nature to all, unbelievers as well as unbelievers, so that the latter have no excuse for their unbelief. At any rate, from *Genesis* 1 onward, the Scriptures proclaim that God is the Creator and that the goodness of creation is publicly observable. Here is a particularly striking passage from *Psalm* 19,1-4:

The Heavens declare the glory of God

the firmament proclaims the works of His hands.

Day unto day pours forth speech;

night unto night whispers knowledge.

There is no speech, no words;

their voice is not heard;

A report goes forth through all the Earth,

their messages, to the end of the world.

Here is another from *Isaiah* 45, 18-19:

For thus says the Lord,

the creator of the Heavens,

who is God,

the designer and maker of the Earth

who established it,

not creating it to be a waste,

but designing it to be lived in.

I am the Lord, there is no other.

I have not spoken from hiding

nor from some dark place of the earth.

And I have not said to the descendants of Jacob,

“Look for me in an empty waste.”

I, the Lord, promise justice.

I foretell what is right.

There are many similar passages in the *Psalms*, the Prophets, and the Wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible, which were certainly accepted as Scripture by Jesus and Paul. In such passages, I think we find plenty of warrant for the program of natural theology articulated within the bounds of faith.

**The Importance of** **Miracles**

The Judeo-Christian religious system is an historical religion, not just a religion of Kierkegaardian passionate inwardness, even if this suffices for some. The Bible consists of many books and many different genres of literature, yet what ties the whole thing together is the narrative arc of what we used to call “salvation history,” the story of God’s ongoing, providential relationship with the fallen human race, a story punctuated by publicly observable miraculous interventions in human history. Miracles and prophecies serve as testimony to God’s guiding hand in history, and thus as evidence for His existence and for the specific claims of revealed religion, both Jewish and Christian. This has always been the Christian view from the beginning. There are many passages in the *Gospels*, for example, in which Jesus says something, goes somewhere, or does something in order to fulfill a messianic prophecy from the Hebrew scriptures - obviously, Jesus did not think that this was a trivial matter, since he went out of his way to see to it that they provided public witness and testimony to his messianic mission. In the same way, Jesus performed many signs and wonders that the Gospel writers took to be and present as public evidence for his messiahship; they obviously did not think that the miracles of Jesus were of no significance either for his contemporaries or for us, since they wrote them down with the intention of preserving them for us. Even St. Paul, upon whom Moser bases most of his Christian philosophy, deserts him at this point. “If Jesus is not raised,” Paul thunders in Corinthians 15:14, “then our preaching is vain, and so is your faith.” For Paul, belief in at least one miracle is absolutely foundational for the Christian faith.

Moser thinks differently about this, pointing to passages where Jesus refuses (or, due to lack of faith in his witnesses is unable) to perform miracles as evidence that God would not bother about miracles on the ground that they are best distractions and at worst mere entertainments, like divine magic tricks done to confound one’s enemies and amaze one’s friends. Thus, as Moser notes, Jesus refuses to do signs for those who demand them as proof or evidence of the claims made on behalf of him. Yet while many miracle claims may fall into this category, there seems to be no reason why there might not be other miracles that, in addition to providing publicly observable evidence for Christian beliefs, serve other spiritual ends as well.[[13]](#footnote-13) I can think of three such kinds. First, there might be miracles intended to advance the divine plan in the face of human intransigence. The Incarnation and virgin birth by means of which Christ entered the world so that we could be saved would be miracles of this sort. Second, there could be miracles that testify in a dramatic way to some truth that God desires us to know and thus to reveal to us with signs and wonders. The baptism of Christ in the Jordan, the Transfiguration, and even the Resurrection itself would be examples of such miracles. Finally, there might be miracles in which Jesus shows his power over nature and exerts it to some good end, such as to respond to the sincere request of faith or to provide a teaching moment. Jesus’ many miracles of healing, his multiplication of the loaves and fishes, his raising people from the dead, walking on water, calming storms, and so on, would be examples of this kind of miracle.

Many miracle claims, such as those routinely reported in *The National Enquirer* and other tabloids (“Burrito in Mexico bears the face of Jesus!” blared an NE headline a few decades ago), do fall into “divine magic tricks” category and as such possess little spiritual point or value. Since God really has no reason to perform miracles of this kind, we can assign a low prior probability to their occurrence, so that in many cases that prior probability is so low that there seems little reason even to investigate the report and little to be gained even from confirming it. We also know that many of these putative “miracles” are fraudulent. However, in the case of the other kinds of miracles I have identified, the fact that the Christian God would have ample reason to perform such a miracle raises the prior probability of their occurrence to a level sufficient to justify initial credence and underwrite further investigation. Given the reliability of the witnesses and the positive outcome of that investigation, acceptance of the miracle as genuine would be reasonable even if we have not logically excluded every other possible explanation of the event. I suggest that Christian apologists have been able to show this for the central miracles of historical Christianity.

In Matthew 11, 4-6, a passage discussed by Moser, Jesus responds to the question put to him by the disciples of John the Baptist (“Are you the one who is to come or are we to expect another?”) not by saying, “Yes, and you must believe me because I speak with authority,” or “Well, if you were truly open to the Divine Challenge you would not be asking me that” but instead by pointing to his publicly observable miraculous acts, from which the correct answer to their question can be inferred. The fact that many people witnessed these miracles and yet did not believe is not proof that these miracles were somehow inadequate as evidence; nor does it show that the evidence is ambiguous in such a way that their evidential value would be recognized only by those who were antecedently inclined to believed. There are some who simply do not wish to believe and will not even if one is raised from the dead. That such persons are prepared to doubt even the testimony of their own senses on (e.g.) Humean grounds rather than accept a truth about Jesus which is repugnant to them does not show them to be somehow more rational that those who believe. Those who have cooperated with God’s prevenient grace and have been freed from the blindness of sin won’t feel the need to question the deliverances of the senses on the skeptical grounds to which unbelievers are driven in an attempt to escape what would, in other contexts, be perfectly acceptable and unproblematic as proof for an empirical claim. At the same time, those who do reject it due to their antecedent desire not to believe cannot legitimately claim that the evidence was not there and will be “without excuse” when they try to claim this at the Last Trumpet.

Christianity, above all other religions, bases its claim to truth on concrete historical events, some of which are recognized to be miracles, direct divine interventions in nature. It thus remains the task of Christian philosophers and apologists to write in defense of both the in-principle possibility of miracles and the historicity of at least a certain set of core miracles centrally important to the faith, each in the manner to which he or she feels called and capable of saying something to the point. Since the claims to be defended are philosophical (“Miracles are possible and knowable in principle by us if they occur”) or historical (“Jesus rose from the dead”) one must be ready to use the established techniques and methods of philosophy and history, in principle available to everyone whether theist or not, to make the case. In addition, they need to be ready to challenge the claims of philosophers or historians who subtly beg the question against these claims by construing the nature of such claims or the standards for their acceptance in such a way as to antecedently exclude the possibility that miracle claims might be true. Doing so requires that we expose the many ways in which our sinful natural bent distorts or prostitutes our reason in order to reach a result dictated by pre-philosophical commitments – a fault that Christian philosophers have often been accused of and of which unbelieving philosophers and historians blithely but erroneously suppose themselves to be free.

None of this casts any doubt on the importance of a more than merely intellectual commitment to Christianity or the need for a living faith that inwardly transforms us and expresses itself in good thoughts, words, and deeds of many sorts, of which love of enemies is but one variety, and of which charity is the crown. Christian philosophers have to remember that, while theism and Christianity are capable of rational defense and that we ought to make that rational defense to the best of our abilities, neither the Christian faith in general nor our faith as individual Christians rests primarily, let alone exclusively, on whatever proofs or arguments we may be able to muster on its behalf. Our faith cannot be sustained on their basis alone. We cannot save ourselves intellectually through our own efforts any more than we can secure our own salvation through works of the Law. By enforcing this idea, Moser calls us back to what is centrally important to being a Christian, something that is the same for all people, whether intellectuals or not, and for all professions. Although we are not and cannot once again become little children, we need to become *like* little children, recognizing our dependence on God and need to proceed in faith and hope, trusting in the promises of God that, while in no way opposed to reason, exceed anything that it can promise or acheive through its own efforts. On such terms, to investigate the claims of natural theology and Christian apologetics, at least in the case of those whose interest and training makes this a viable project, can do no harm to the faith and can even provide positive benefit to believers in the ways I have mentioned above. Given this chastened perspective, there seems no reason why Christian philosophers and apologists ought not to proceed just as they always have, recognizing both the nature of the project, the limits of what they can expect to accomplish, and leaving the result in the hands of God. To abandon such projects as useless, unimportant, and unlikely to succeed sets a dangerous precedent. Judged by the same standards, direct Christian witness of the sort that Moser recommends under the name “Christian Philosophy” seems to be just as superfluous. Moser’s God, who so narrowly concentrates the avenues for grace and encounter with God and assiduously hides himself from all except those somehow antecedently disposed to believe in Him, seems to be just one more cognitive idol based on a personal conception of what makes a being worthy of worship.

That does not mean that there is no Divine Challenge, nor that we are not called to a life of interior transformation and a corresponding transformation in our thoughts, words, and deeds informed by a living faith. Nor has it been my intention to argue that those who possess that faith must either come by it through philosophical and historical study or hold their belief hostage to the ups and downs of current controversies concerning Christian evidences; no one could be saved on those terms.[[14]](#footnote-14) Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, and Christ the rock to which we must cling through all the storms of life, including our intellectual ones. What I have been concerned to talk about here are the means, media, and avenues to encounter with the Divine Challenge, and to suggest that natural theology and apologetics can do humble service in this line. That is not to say that there is no room for the sort of direct witness that Moser recommends as one, perhaps ultimate, avenue to confrontation with the severe love of God. There is room enough for both approaches, and for others as well, as each is appropriate to the circumstances and the temper of the individuals to whom the Gospel is to be preached. One supposes that a good God who genuinely wills the salvation of souls will provide numerous means and avenues to a confrontation with the Divine Challenge, indeed so many that one will be able to avoid that Challenge only by through constant distraction and the intense intellectual contortions of many contemporary unbelievers. The witness of Christian philosophers and apologists stands as a stumbling block and a warning sign to those who seek comfort, safety, and rest behind the intellectual bulwarks they have constructed against the inbreaking of God and His Holy Spirit. Let them heed the warning, lest they perish. Let those who believe pray they will, for their own sakes. This is true love of one’s (intellectual) enemies. Anything else merely enables and makes us complicit in their unbelief.

1. New York, Oxford University Press, 2013. See also his *The Evidence for God* (2010) and *The Elusive God* (2008), also published by Oxford. For a shorter presentation of Moser’s view, see his “Evidence of a Morally Perfect God,” in William Lane Craig and Chad Meister, *God is Great, God is Good*, Downer’s Grove, IL, IVP, 2009, 49-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Proslogion*, Chapter 1, in Stephen N. Deane, *St. Anselm: Basic Writings*, Chicago, IL, Open Court,1962, [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See my book, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion: Its History since 1955*, Tirrell, Penrith, England: Humanities e-Books (2007); an abridged version of this book was published as *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (2008) by the same publisher; both are available in paperback from Troubador or as an e-book from Amazon. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, Grand Rapids, MI, 1984, 22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See my “Theism and Christianity,” also on this website, and references. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See my “Gods Revisited,” also on this website, which explicitly acknowledges Moser’s influence on this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. As I have argued in “God is NOT Hidden!” - also on this website. In *Severity*, Moser notes that we hide God from ourselves, though he does not make as much of this as I do. By overemphasizing God’s deliberate and intentional “hiddenness” from us as a salvation-strategy, Moser makes God too distant and his demands too little intelligible to reach very many people. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. I have argued this in such papers as “Kant and Theoretical Inquiry” and “Toward a Kantian Ethics of Belief”, also on this website. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For a fuller account of this, see my “Can a Christian be a Mycologist?” also on this website. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. As I have argued in my “Sin and Suffering;” I have also urged correction to Moser’s view of divine love as the standard for worthiness for worship in “What’s Love got to do with it?” Both essays are archived on this website. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Here meaning “obvious” in the sense of “such as to naturally and spontaneously suggest themselves to the human intellect.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Richard Popkin, ed., Indianapolis, IN, Hackett Publishing, Part XII, 77-78, and Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith, trans., New York, MacMIllan, 1929, 297-484 (the famous “Transcendental Dialectic”). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. I have discussed this in my paper “The Burning Bush,” also on this website. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. On this point, see C. S. Lewis’s shrewd essay, “On Obstinacy in Belief,” in *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays*, New York, Harcourt, 1960, 13-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)