

Religious Exclusivism

Paul K. Moser

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Edited by Chad Meister

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Abstract and Keywords

A system of claims of a particular kind may sometimes be called a religion, and sometimes a human commitment of a particular kind may be called a religious commitment. In general, we might say that a commitment is religious for a person if and only if the commitment is intrinsic (that is, not merely instrumental toward something else) and is intended to be life-defining (that is, intended to be constitutive of living) for that person. This article shows that some versions of religious exclusivism are undeniably true and that at least one version is undeniably false. It argues that even in the absence of explicit *de dicto* human acknowledgment of divine intervention and evidence, God can properly advance human redemption and judgment. As a result, in connection with redemption and judgment, we are well advised to consider human attitudes deeper than mere belief and then to understand redemptively relevant “faith” toward God accordingly. This would be in keeping with the divine redemptive purposes of a God truly worthy of worship.

Keywords: God, religious exclusivism, religion, religious commitment, divine intervention, redemption, judgment, worship, faith

It is no small task to specify clearly when something is a religion (and when something is not) and when we have one religion rather than two or more religions. Familiar candidates for a religion include, of course, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Sikhism, Daoism, Shinto, and Baha’ism. Sometimes we call a system of claims of a particular kind a religion, and sometimes we call a human commitment of a particular kind a religious commitment.

In general, we might say that a commitment is religious for a person if and only if the commitment is intrinsic (that is, not merely instrumental toward something else) and is intended to be life-defining (that is, intended to be constitutive of living) for that person. This is a broad, latitudinarian approach to something being a religious commitment; it might even allow some intrinsic commitments of sports fans to their favorite sports to count as religious. This is no defect for current purposes, specifically for our asking: Can’t all religions get along? This question is intolerably vague until we specify what getting along consists of. Perhaps advocates of various religions can get along even if reli-

gions cannot. We need to examine both (1) the sense in which religions can be exclusive and excluded and (2) the sense in which advocates of religions can also be exclusive and excluded. We shall see that some versions of religious exclusivism are undeniably true and that at least one version is undeniably false.

Exclusivism Clarified

Whatever else religions have, they obviously have diversity and even logical conflict in their religious statements, at least in comparisons across religions. Some religions affirm that God exists; others don't. Some religions affirm that just one God (p. 78) exists, others affirm that many gods exist, and still others claim that no God exists. Even among versions of monotheism, diversity and conflict in positions flourish. For instance, some versions of monotheism teach that God has and promotes love for all people, including even God's enemies; others deny this. In addition, some versions of monotheism hold that we humans must earn our approval before God; others deny this and affirm instead that God approves of people by way of a gracious divine gift. Of course, this is just a small sample of the extensive diversity and conflict in positions among religions. The history and the sociology of religions uncover such diversity and conflict in remarkable detail.

We can easily see that no complete thematic unity across religions is to be had, however much some people might allege otherwise. Taken together, the claims of the various religions are logically inconsistent; they can't all be true. (It is astonishing that anyone would suggest otherwise after even a cursory review of the religions in question.) Any available unity of religions will thus be at best partial, that is, incomplete. Even if, for example, Judaism and Hinduism in their most prominent forms can agree on some religious views, they disagree on monotheism. The monotheism of classical Judaism is denied, at least by implication, by the prominent versions of Hinduism. So, we should not expect both Judaism and Hinduism to be true; they are logically contrary religious positions, at least regarding some key religious claims. The same holds among many, if not all, other mainline religious positions. It follows that some mainline religious positions logically exclude some other mainline religious positions. This view might be called *logical religious exclusivism*, regarding logically contrary religious positions, and its truth cannot be denied with any plausibility. We will consider whether any other kind of religious exclusivism merits acceptance.

For the sake of manageable focus, we limit our talk of religion to theistic religions, that is, religions that acknowledge the existence of a divine agent. Let's also use the terms *divine agent* and *God* as maximally honorific titles that signify a being worthy of worship. The title *God*, given this use, connotes an authoritatively and morally perfect agent who is inherently worthy of worship as wholehearted adoration, love, and trust. This connoting holds, in keeping with titles generally, even if a titleholder does not actually exist; that is, the title *God* is intelligible even if it lacks an actual titleholder. Let's use *authoritative* to signify worthiness of an executive decision-making status in some area and *perfectly authoritative* to connote such inherent worthiness regarding every relevant area. So, one

does not become authoritative just by acquiring power to control one's surroundings. One must be worthy if one is to have the status in question.

Some proponents of the traditional monotheism of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam use the term *God* as a title connoting a unique agent worthy of worship. Other proponents of such monotheism claim that their use of the title *God* connotes a unique agent worthy of worship, but they set the standard for worthiness of worship too low for actual moral perfection. For instance, some proponents of monotheism acknowledge a God who arguably lacks moral perfection, at least by the most compelling standard of such perfection, in virtue of their God's hating evil people. The writer (or writers) of Psalms 5:5 and 11:5, for example, claims that God (p. 79) "hates" wicked people and not just wicked thoughts, desires, intentions, or actions. The psalmist's view of a God who hates some people conflicts irredeemably with the portrait of God offered by Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:43–48 (Luke 6:27–36; John 3:16–17); in fact, Jesus appears to be correcting a misguided view of God offered by some of the Hebrew scriptures. (See Matthew 5:43–45: "You have heard that it was said ... 'hate your enemy,' but I say to you, 'love your enemies ... in order that you may be children of your Father in Heaven.'")

Jesus identifies God's love of even enemies of God as central to divine moral perfection, and this approach to moral perfection is preeminently commendable in virtue of excluding divine hate of people. Such hate would be destructive and condemning of people in a way incompatible with perfect moral goodness and thus with worthiness of worship. We may plausibly hold, then, that there is significant religious diversity and even conflict within the teachings of the Jewish and Christian scriptures and that a God who hates some people lacks moral perfection and therefore is not worthy of worship. Jewish and Christian monotheism, accordingly, comes in sharply conflicting varieties relative to the moral characters those varieties ascribe to God. Given the preeminent standard of worthiness of worship, we are well advised to rank the competing varieties by means of the required standard of moral perfection. By that standard, the perfectly loving God acknowledged by Jesus would, if real, trump the psalmist's God who hates some people. The God of Jesus, in any case, is a viable candidate for the title *God* that signifies worthiness of worship, but the psalmist's God is definitely not. The psalmist's God is morally too much like us wayward humans to be worthy of worship.

Monotheism seems more credible than polytheism, at least initially, because it is hard to find even one case of an agent who is morally perfect and worthy of worship. The various gods of the polytheist pantheon turn out to be too much like us morally imperfect beings, at least regarding their moral failings. In particular, these gods are similar to the hateful God of Psalms 5:5 and 11:5 in falling short of moral perfection and thus of worthiness of worship. Polytheists might find it convenient, or at least self-supporting, to relax the standard for being divine, but we then would divorce being divine from worthiness of worship, and the category of being divine would thereby lose its moral preeminence. This is a serious problem for the prominent versions of polytheism in circulation, and, as just suggested, some variations on monotheism also fall prey to it.

Religious Exclusivism

Logical religious exclusivism is altogether compelling, given the actual logically contrary claims made by various religions. It leaves us with the platitude that the claims of some religions logically exclude some claims of some other religions; that is, necessarily, if the claims of the former religions are true, then some claims of the latter religions are false. If this were the only species of religious exclusivism in circulation, our present topic would be easy; we then should all be avid religious exclusivists. Dissenters would be guilty of demonstrable logical confusions, and could be offered some straightforward logical corrections. Matters are, however, more complicated.

Some people propose what we might call *redemptive religious exclusivism*: the view that some religions are redemptively exclusive, that is, exclusive regarding the (p. 80) redemption, or salvation, of humans by God. Redemptive religious exclusivism offers two main variations: programmatic redemptive exclusivism and personal redemptive exclusivism. We need to clarify this distinction.

Programmatic redemptive exclusivism states that some *programs* for religious redemption exclude some other such programs. Consider a Jewish-Christian program that characterizes redemption as originating solely from divine grace (as a freegift) through human faith. Such a program excludes any program that characterizes redemption as originating from the human earning of salvation from God via a righteousness of one's own, say, from one's obeying a law. Redemption originating solely from divine grace, at least in the Pauline Christian program (see Romans 4:4–5), logically excludes redemption originating from human earning in terms of one's own righteousness (see Philippians 3:9 and Romans 9:32 for Paul's suggestion that as a zealous Pharisee, he had promoted the latter kind of redemption originating from human earning). Necessarily, in other words, if the divine redemption offered to humans originates solely in a humanly unearned gift from God, then it does not originate in any human's own righteousness, including one's righteousness from obeying a law. The redemptive program offered by the Christian religion of the apostle Paul thus excludes the earlier redemptive program offered by the religion of Saul of Tarsus. (This does not suggest, of course, that all versions of Judaism agree with the Pharisaism of Saul of Tarsus; clearly, the Judaism of Jesus, for instance, did not agree.)

Programmatic redemptive exclusivism is a specification of logical religious exclusivism, regarding, of course, programs for religious redemption. Such redemptive exclusivism is undeniably true, given at least the logical conflict between the redemptive program of Saul of Tarsus and the later redemptive program of the apostle Paul. We could illustrate this kind of logical conflict across the redemptive programs of various religions, but we need not digress. Any sustainable philosophy or sociology of religion will embrace programmatic redemptive exclusivism.

Religious Exclusivism

Personal redemptive exclusivism states that given certain religions, some people are excluded from divine redemption or salvation. We need to distinguish between two positions:

1. *Hypothetical personal exclusivism*: If certain religions are correct in what they explicitly state or at least imply, then some people are excluded from divine redemption.
2. *Actual personal exclusivism*: Religion X is correct in explicitly stating or at least implying that some people are excluded from divine redemption.

Hypothetical personal exclusivism is undeniably true, because it is obvious that some religions deny universalism about salvation; that is, they deny that all people will be redeemed by God. Consider, for instance, the Reformed Protestant predestinarian view of either John Calvin's 1536 *Institutes of the Christian Religion* or the 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith (while bracketing any theological differences between the two). Following the later Augustine, Calvin offered an influential predestinarian exclusivist position as follows: "By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which (p. 81) he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death." (Calvin 1536/1989, Book 3, chap. 21, sec. 5)

Here's how the Westminster Confession of Faith, under the influence of Calvin's theology, puts an equivalent predestinarian exclusivist view, at least regarding humans:

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished.... The rest of mankind [beyond those foreordained to everlasting life], God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice. (Schaff 1919b, chap. 3)

The clear implication (particularly of the second sentence just quoted) is that God's foreordaining activity makes some people "particularly and unchangeably designed" for "everlasting death." Calvin's corresponding idea is that God "determined with himself whatever he [that is, God] wished to happen" to each person, including each person excluded from salvation. The Reformed exclusivist view implies that God in divine sovereignty foreordains, or predestines, some people to everlasting damnation rather than salvation and that this divine decision to exclude some people is ultimately *God's* own will and is thus *undetermined* by human wills. In Calvin's way of putting the matter, what God wishes to happen to people who are not redeemed does, in fact, happen to them; that is, they are excluded by God from redemption, and this is by divine intent. Regardless of the questionable moral char-

acter of a God who would proceed in this way, we cannot plausibly deny that hypothetical personal exclusivism follows from some influential religious views. Such exclusivism, we shall see, also follows from some religious views that oppose predestinarian Calvinism and attribute the cause of redemptive exclusion to humans themselves who resist salvation.

Excluding God

Regarding any proposed version of actual personal exclusivism (as characterized above), the critical initial question is: On what basis, or in virtue of what, are some people (allegedly) excluded from divine redemption? One exclusivist Christian view, in keeping with the aforementioned Reformed predestinarian view, implies (p. 82) that some people are excluded from divine redemption in virtue of God's own decisively condemning sovereign will and that God's will in this connection is not determined by human wills. So, in this view, God is causally responsible for the exclusion of some humans, given that God intentionally wills their exclusion. Another exclusivist Christian view avoids a predestinarian view but implies that if an adult person of normal intelligence fails to believe a redemptive Christian message about what God has accomplished via Jesus Christ, then that person is thereby excluded from salvation. This view has been embraced by many Christians who hold that a person's lacking a specific belief about salvation excludes that person from salvation. We will see that both of these exclusivist views, the predestinarian and doxastic views, are actually implausible, because they exclude a God worthy of worship.

As noted above, we are using the term *God* as a preeminent title with definite semantic content, requiring worthiness of worship and thus moral perfection in its holder. We thus should ask how our corresponding notion of God bears on any proposed version of actual personal exclusivism. Let's consider the predestinarian variation first. It implies that God chooses to exclude some people from redemption on the basis of God's own sovereign condemning will and that this divine choice is not determined by any human will, such as a human will to oppose redemption. God, according to this predestinarian view, foreordains some people to be condemned and not to be redeemed by God, and this sovereign divine action causes the actual exclusion of these people from redemption. Some predestinarians invoke a dubious reading of chapter 9 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans for support, even though chapter 11 of Romans explicitly states that the unredeemed people in question are excluded on the basis of their own distrust, or unbelief, toward God (see Romans 11:20). Paul does not teach, in any case, that a sovereign divine choice itself causes some people to be excluded from salvation. On the contrary, Paul writes concerning God: "But of Israel he says, 'All day long I [God] have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people'" (Romans 10:21, citing Isaiah 65:1-2).¹

A God worthy of worship, as suggested above, must be morally perfect; that is, worthiness of worship excludes moral deficiency of any sort. One who is morally defective in some way lacks the moral character needed for worthiness of adoration and complete trust. As a result, such a being lacks worthiness of worship. One who fails to be perfectly

loving toward all people (when one could be so) is morally deficient, at least regarding one's failure to love others perfectly. In addition, if one condemns another person, even *one* other person, to destruction as *the* (intended constitutive) result of one's own will, then one fails to be perfectly loving toward the person condemned. Accordingly, one fails to be worthy of worship. One's perfect love toward a person excludes, by definition, one's condemning that person to destruction as *the* (intended constitutive) result of one's own will. So, if one excludes a person from redemption as the result of one's own will, then one fails to be perfectly loving and thus fails likewise to be worthy of worship. If, therefore, one excludes a person from redemption as the result of one's own will, one fails to be (p. 83) God. The God of the aforementioned predestinarian position is thus not the true God; that position actually excludes the true God in excluding divine perfect love toward all human persons.

An influential representative of the aforementioned doxastic exclusivist view is the Christian trinitarian Athanasian Creed (ca. 500, according to many historians). The relevant affirmations of the Athanasian Creed are as follows:

1. Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith;
2. Which faith, except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
3. And the catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in trinity, and trinity in unity; ...
4. This is the catholic faith which, except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved. (Schaff 1919a)

The doxastic redemptive exclusivism of the Athanasian Creed is straightforward: if a person does not actually believe the Christian trinitarian faith in question, then that person "cannot be saved." Specifically, the required belief in question is irreducibly propositional: it is belief "that we worship one God in trinity, and trinity in unity." By implication, Jewish and Muslim monotheists (including perhaps even Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David)—and, for that matter, all others who are not Christian trinitarians—are excluded from salvation, owing to their lacking trinitarian belief regarding God. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, among many other Christians, seem committed to such exclusivism, at least regarding people who have lived since the time of the inception of the trinitarian faith.

The exclusivism of the Athanasian Creed conflicts with the character of a perfectly loving God. Consider a simple case in which an adolescent child, call her Vanna, from an isolated island in, say, Vanuatu (in the South Pacific) has not heard of the trinitarian "catholic faith" and furthermore will not hear of it during her life on earth. Is Vanna's mere failure to believe sufficient for morally acceptable exclusion by a perfectly loving God? Clearly not. Suppose that Vanna fails to believe the "catholic faith" only because she has not heard of it at all and that she would believe it if she heard of it, although (as it happens) she will not be presented with it in her life on earth. So, Vanna is disposed to believe it (because she would believe it if she heard of it), but she does not actually believe it and will not actually believe it during her earthly life. Suppose, in addition, that Vanna has a will (that is, a motivational set) open to God's will and that therefore she is willing to re-

ceive, and even to obey, any well-grounded redemptive message from God. It is arguable that God is not obligated to redeem Vanna (or any other morally defective person) on the basis of what she (or any other mere human) has earned, but God's morally perfect character must nonetheless uphold the highest moral standards, including in connection with human redemption. So, if God condemned Vanna to everlasting death solely as a result of her failing to believe the "catholic faith," we could rightly question the moral perfection of God's character.

(p. 84) Divine moral perfection entails morally perfect love, and such divine love seeks what is morally best for a morally imperfect person, including a received offer of forgiveness for the sake of reconciling wayward people to God. Of course, an offer of forgiveness and reconciliation might or might not actually be received by a person, and divine coercion of a person would undermine genuine divine-human reconciliation. More specifically, God's condemning Vanna to everlasting death would not include seeking what is morally best for her, because God would have a morally better alternative at hand: namely, at some point to remove Vanna's doxastic deficiency (with suitable evidence for belief) and thereby to enable her to enter into explicit fellowship with God. The latter alternative would obviously be morally better for Vanna than for her to undergo condemnation to everlasting death solely for a doxastic deficiency. A God of perfect love would not allow such a morally insignificant deficiency to preclude Vanna's ultimately entering into explicit fellowship with God. The doxastic version of personal exclusivism fails to accommodate this point about God's perfectly loving character and thus offers a morally deficient God. In short, that version excludes the God worthy of worship.

Reformed exclusivists will reply that God is "sovereign" and therefore has a right to exclude whomever he wishes. That might sound remarkably pious and even orthodox to some, but it neglects divine worthiness of worship as central to God's character. Specifically, God's will is not permitted to violate the moral perfection inherent in worthiness of worship. An agent's violating such moral perfection would exclude that agent automatically from the category of divinity. Accordingly, given a perfectly loving God, one's being excluded from salvation is not the result of one's failure to pass a mere informational test, because a perfectly loving God would always seek what is best for one, including the provision of needed information at the opportune time. Conversely, salvation is not anchored in one's passing a mere informational test. Various gnostic and intellectualist approaches to redemption imply otherwise, but they neglect the inherent morally perfect character and concerns, including redemptive concerns, of a God worthy of worship.

Morally perfect divine concerns would approach redemption (or salvation) relative to a person's will and moral character and thus steer clear of any mere informational test. A mere informational test is both too hard and too easy from the standpoint of divine moral perfection. It is too hard given the consideration just mentioned: one can fail an informational test owing just to an easily correctable cognitive inadequacy, even while one's will is genuinely open to conformity to God's will and moral character. In such a case, one would not be a lost cause at all relative to divine redemption; on the contrary, one would be an excellent candidate, that is, "good soil" for redemption, in the language of Mark

4:20. A mere informational test is also too weak, given that one can pass the test by having the correct belief (say, belief that the “catholic faith” in the aforementioned Athanasian sense is true) but hold this belief solely out of selfishness and hate, even with one’s will largely and resolutely opposed to God’s will and moral character. Doxastic versions of exclusivism run afoul of these considerations.

(p. 85) Inclusive Exclusivism

We should not confuse doxastic Christian exclusivism with a more inclusive Christian version of exclusivism regarding the unique redemptive role of Jesus as God’s atoning son. The relevant inclusive Christian version of exclusivism affirms that Jesus is God’s unique mediator for redemption and that therefore the divine redemption of humans depends uniquely on Jesus. The big question concerns what the language “depends uniquely on” means. We have seen that it would be a mistake, given divine moral perfection, to affirm that a person must believe, or trust, in Jesus in this earthly life to be a candidate for redemption by God. The aforementioned discussion of the isolated Vanna illustrates this point. So, the relevant sense of “depends uniquely on Jesus” must not require that one “believe in Jesus” in this earthly life. Of course, one could consistently hold nonetheless that a candidate for divine redemption must *ultimately* believe in Jesus as Lord, even if after death.²

According to the inclusive Christian exclusivism under consideration, divine salvation of humans is inherently christological, being mediated uniquely by Jesus Christ, but such salvation can be christological *de re* without being *de dicto* in a human’s earthly life. That is, given this inclusive exclusivism, the ultimate offer of divine-human reconciliation includes Jesus as atoning mediator, in reality, but it does not follow that ultimate recipients of the offer must assent to or even conceive of such christological mediation in this earthly life. So, we should contrast the inclusive Christian exclusivism under consideration with the aforementioned doxastic exclusivism as represented in the Athanasian Creed. Like traditional Christian orthodoxy, this inclusive exclusivism excludes as false any account or doctrine of redemption that omits Jesus as the unique divinely appointed mediator for human redemption. Unlike doxastic Christian exclusivism, however, it allows for (i.e., in principle includes) human candidates for redemption who do not and will not acknowledge Jesus as Lord in their earthly lives. We should briefly consider both of these features, the exclusive and the inclusive.

The exclusive side of the present view fits with the traditional Christian view, suggested by various writers of the New Testament documents, that Jesus is God’s unique revealer and mediator for redemption. For instance, Matthew’s gospel states:

At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no

one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Matthew 11:25–27; compare Luke 10:21–22; John 5:22–23, 17:25–26)

Jesus thus refers to himself as "the Son" of God and identifies himself as the only one who can reveal God to humans. Going beyond talk of knowledge of God, some later writings in the New Testament characterize Jesus as the unique atoning mediator between God and humans. For instance: "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all (p. 86) men" (1 Timothy 2:5–6). In addition: "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.... Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10, 12). The New Testament thus includes claims implying that Jesus is *exclusively* the revealer and mediator for God. A single brief chapter such as this cannot, of course, establish this demanding exclusivist position, but it can identify how it can be inclusive in an important manner.

The inclusive side of the Christian exclusivism under consideration finds support in the following story of judgment told by Jesus in Matthew's gospel:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?" He will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. (Matthew 25:31–46)

The surprise experienced by "the righteous," coupled with the King's focus on their caring behavior toward others, suggests something other than a doxastic standard for approval by God. This fits with the remark of Jesus in Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in

heaven.” One can do the will of God, as Jesus illustrated, without explicit doxastic commitment to God. This consideration speaks against excluding Vanna in the aforementioned case.

Still, there is an exclusivist nondoxastic criterion at work in Matthew’s judgment story from Jesus: the human manifestation of divine unselfish love toward others. Such a manifestation, it is arguable, requires one’s yielding, and being conformed, to the divine unselfish love manifested in one’s own life, but it does not follow that one must have an explicit doxastic commitment to God. One could (p. 87) yield volitionally to God’s unselfish love and thereby to God *de re*, without corresponding acknowledgment *de dicto* and thus without one’s knowing that one is yielding to God or even knowing that God exists. This consideration accounts for the element of surprise in Matthew’s judgment story from Jesus.

We should acknowledge a corresponding *de re* approach to rejection of God, in keeping with the judgment story from Jesus. One can resist, or otherwise neglect, conformity to the unselfish love presented to one and thereby resist, or otherwise neglect, *de re* the purported redemptive activity of God in one’s life. That would amount to resisting or neglecting *God*, especially on the Christian view that “love [*agape*] is from God” (1 John 4:7) or that “God is love” (1 John 4:16). In fact, one’s resisting or neglecting unselfish love could have dire cognitive results regarding one’s knowing divine reality. As one New Testament writer states, “The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8).³ If hell is just exclusion from a life of fellowship with God, then hell should be understood as ultimately *self*-exclusion from such a life with God.⁴ Such self-exclusion can be *de re* in the sense indicated and need not be *de dicto* in terms of an explicit corresponding belief that one is rejecting God or even belief that God exists (or does not exist). As a result, one can be living in hell or moving toward hell without even knowing this *de dicto*.

Conclusions

Variation in beliefs among humans regarding divine redemptive activity raise numerous difficult questions, including questions about evidence and knowledge of divine reality. For instance, why do some people (avowedly) have evidence regarding God’s redemptive activity and believe (or trust) in God on that basis, whereas others (avowedly) lack the needed evidence and thus refrain from trust in God? Perhaps some people are not ready to receive the needed evidence correctly, on God’s terms of unselfish love. If anything is clear, however, it is clear that we have no simple answer to the question.

It is arguable (in keeping with Moser 2008) that divine redemptive purposes account for divine evidence given and not given among humans, but it does not follow that we can always specify the exact divine purposes at work among humans. Just as we have no comprehensive exact theodicy regarding evil (and, for that matter, should not expect to have one in our cognitively limited situation), so also we have no comprehensive exact account of divine elusiveness regarding divine self-revelation. Even so, our lacking any such comprehensive account does not undermine one’s having conclusive evidence of divine reali-

ty. The lesson of this chapter is that even in the absence of explicit *de dicto* human acknowledgment of divine intervention and evidence, God can properly advance human redemption and judgment. As a result, in connection with redemption and judgment, we are well advised to consider human attitudes deeper than mere belief and then to (p. 88) understand redemptively relevant “faith” toward God accordingly. This would be in keeping with the divine redemptive purposes of a God truly worthy of worship.

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Notes:

(1.) See Meadors 2006, chaps. 8–10, on divine judgment in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans.

(2.) The apostle Paul might have had the latter view in mind in Philippians 2:9–11.

(3.) For an attempt to make good cognitive sense of this distinctive position, in keeping with divine elusiveness, see Moser 2008.

(4.) Compare Kvanvig 1993.

Paul K. Moser

Paul K. Moser is professor of philosophy and chairperson of the Department of Philosophy at Loyola University of Chicago.