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HOW TO BE A BAPTIST PHILOSOPHER

Abstract. In this paper I will give some provisional answers to the questions how one can be a Christian philosopher rather than just a philosopher who happens to be a Christian, how one can be a Reformation philosopher rather than just a Christian philosopher who happens to be a Reformation Christian, and how one can be a Baptist philosopher rather than just a Reformation philosopher who happens to be a Baptist. A good way to be a philosopher is to, like Socrates, seek wisdom concerning spiritual good. A good way to be a specifically Christian philosopher is to, like Augustine, seek that wisdom in Jesus Christ. A good way to be a specifically Reformation philosopher is to recognize and reflect on a distinction between two inseparable spiritual goods on which we are seeking wisdom: justification and sanctification. A good way to be a specifically Baptist philosopher, taking some inspiration from the likes of Locke and Kierkegaard, is to also recognize and reflect on some signs of these spiritual goods which Baptists emphasize: resistance to the idea of a state church and believer's baptism.

Keywords: Christian philosophy; Reformation philosophy; Baptist philosophy; John Locke; Søren Kierkegaard

1. Introduction. 2. How to be a philosopher? 3. How to be a Christian philosopher? 4. How to be a Reformation philosopher? 5. How to be a Baptist philosopher? 6. First steps into Baptist philosophy. 6.1. A question in Baptist epistemology. 6.2. A question in Baptist ethics. 7. Conclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

How can one be a Christian philosopher, rather than a philosopher who just happens to be a Christian? How can one be a Reformation philosopher, rather than a philosopher who just happens to be a Reformation Christian?¹ How can one be a Baptist philosopher, rather

1 A word on terminology. While I have no particular objection to terms like "Protestant" or "Protestantism," they may connote a reactive religious identity – nothing more than some sort of objection to Catholicism. Terms like "Reformation" and "Reformed" more easily

than a Reformation philosopher who just happens to be a Baptist? How can a philosopher's philosophizing manifest *the essential qualities* of these traditions, instead of merely being the philosophizing of someone who happens to *be* in these particular theological traditions? In this paper I will give some provisional answers to these questions. At least since the patristic era, when Tertullian asked what Athens has to do with Jerusalem, there has been a long debate on the specifics, the character, and indeed the very *idea* of Christian philosophy. My own modest contribution will be to explore the specifics of Baptist philosophy, a thus-far underexplored area of the discussion.

Perhaps, before we begin, some readers will benefit from a brief introduction to the Baptist tradition. The Baptists are one of the larger – and perhaps the largest – of the branches of Reformation Christianity. The Baptist churches, as I understand the history, originated in the 1600s both from the Calvinistic English Separatists and from the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists carried the Reformation into new theological territory by abandoning state churches and practicing believer's baptism.² To this day, these remain distinctive characteristics of Baptist churches. Another characteristic of Baptists is the Congregationalist model of church organization – a bottom-up model where churches are independent of centralized control, and themselves create and govern general conventions of churches. Thanks to missionary movements in the 1800s and 1900s, the Baptist churches have taken root in every continent.³

suggest the positive sense of the theology of the Reformation. Meanwhile, I find the term "Reformed" often used, more narrowly, to refer to the Calvinist branch of Reformation Christianity. Hence I favor "Reformation" as a general descriptor for Reformation theology or of a Christian who adheres to some version of it.

2 William Estep's book is a superb source to read on the history, categorization, theology, and legacy of the Anabaptists (see: Estep 1996).

3 For additional information on the history and characteristics of the Baptist churches, I suggest Estep 1996 as well as Hatch 1991, and Williams 2016.

Baptist scholars are not new to philosophy, although they have never enjoyed the prominence and engagement of Catholic scholars in philosophy. Many Baptist universities and seminaries worldwide have a long history of teaching philosophy (normally, I suspect, with a focus on the history of philosophy and philosophy of religion). Baptist philosophers have achieved some measure of prominence and influence, from Eric Charles Rust of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, to my own teacher, David Naugle of Dallas Baptist University as well as several philosophy faculty at my other alma mater, Baylor University.

But why should anyone care about what I have to say about Baptist philosophy? Alvin Plantinga once considered the question who he was to give advice to Christian philosophers, humbly stating: “That’s a good question. I shall deal with it as one properly deals with good questions to which one doesn’t know the answer: I shall ignore it” (Plantinga 1984, 254). I can do no better on *this* question. However, I can give three answers to a different question: Why should anyone care about how to be a Baptist philosopher? *First*, perhaps the question itself is at least interesting. *Second*, those who, like myself, *are* Baptist philosophers have reason to care. *Third*, part of my answer also applies to all *Reformation* philosophers, while another part applies to all *Christian* philosophers, and another part applies to all *philosophers*. Anyone in those categories has those additional reasons to care. Moreover, perhaps my provisional answers could help point towards answers to the corresponding questions for such philosophies as Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, or Presbyterian. This is an exploration of the sort of Christian philosophy Christian philosophers have a responsibility to offer the world.

I have already hinted at my approach: I will give answers that apply, respectively, to all philosophers, to all Christian philosophers, to all Reformation philosophers, and, finally, to Baptist philosophers specifically. For all Baptist philosophers are Reformation philosophers, all Reformation philosophers are Christian philosophers, and all

Christian philosophers are philosophers. Accordingly, a promising approach is to work backwards: First find out how one can be a philosopher, then how a philosopher can also be a Christian philosopher, then how a Christian philosopher can also be a Reformation philosopher, and finally how a Reformation philosopher can also be a Baptist philosopher.

Note that I am not saying these are the *only* ways to be a philosopher, a Christian philosopher, a Reformation philosopher, or a Baptist philosopher. I am suggesting what I think are *good* ways. Perhaps it is possible to state necessary and sufficient conditions for being a philosopher, and then again to state such conditions for being a philosopher of a particular type. But it is not easy, and I for one do not know how to do it.⁴ An alternative method is to study exemplary cases of philosophy, or of Christian philosophy, in order to identify their salient characteristics.⁵ I will do so, and then I will consider the theological distinctives first of Reformation and then of Baptist theology to further narrow down what sort of philosophy would be appropriate to them.

Specifically, and firstly, a good way to be a philosopher is to do what Socrates did. That means using reason to seek wisdom concerning spiritual goods – meaning the goods of the soul. A good way to be a Christian philosopher is to use reason to seek that wisdom in

4 For an introduction to the whole issue of how to define philosophy, see Joll 2017. Joll gives a solid introduction to some different ways of conceiving philosophy, but does not give necessary and sufficient conditions for philosophy, nor a definition that covers only philosophers and all philosophers – say, from Confucius and Mencius to Plato and Aristotle and from Boethius to Kant and from Hegel to Plantinga.

5 This connects to Roderick Chisholm's question of how to think about a criterion for something being knowledge – do we begin with a criterion and then apply it to things we believe, or do we start with things that are knowledge and reason about them to find a criterion for knowledge? Chisholm prefers the latter approach. This parallels my approach to understanding the nature of philosophy; I would rather study paradigmatic cases of philosophy to learn what philosophy is than begin with an abstract definition of philosophy and apply it to different thinkers (see: Chisholm 1982, 61-75).

Jesus Christ. Augustine is a paradigmatic example of a Christian philosopher, but we can also connect his approach to some other notable sources on the nature of Christian philosophy: Paul Moser, Plantinga, and Étienne Gilson. A good way to be a Reformation philosopher is to recognize and reflect on a distinction between two inseparable spiritual goods on which we are seeking wisdom: justification and sanctification. And a good way to be a Baptist philosopher, taking some inspiration from the likes of Locke and Kierkegaard, is to recognize and reflect on some traditional Baptist practices that accompany these spiritual goods: resistance to the idea of a state church and striving for a regenerate church membership by practicing believer's baptism. After giving these answers I will take two cautious steps into the field of Baptist philosophy. First, I will consider a question in Baptist epistemology: What is the role of the church in the individual's knowledge of God? Provisionally, I will answer that knowing is an activity of trust in God put into action through loving those in the church. Second, I will consider a question in Baptist ethics: Does government have any legitimate role in supporting the spiritual good of sanctification? Provisionally, I will answer that it does inasmuch as it also has a legitimate role in promoting virtue. For sanctification involves virtue, and government has a legitimate role in promoting virtuous states of character, or at least in resisting vicious states of character, inasmuch as vicious states of character do that harm which it is the function of government to resist.

2. HOW TO BE A PHILOSOPHER?

Philosophy is the love of wisdom. An exemplary philosopher is Socrates, the account of whom in Plato's writings presents one who uses reason rigorously to investigate the nature of the soul and of its needs, seeking wisdom in particular on how to have a healthy soul.

Plato's *Symposium* presents Socrates as the paradigmatic philosopher, telling us what sort of *love* we are talking about. This love is the seeking, not the having, of wisdom. The desirous pursuit of wisdom craves what it lacks. Once we have wisdom, we may delight in it, but we will no longer have *eros* for it. And, of course, we must seek it using reason, tracking down, like hunters tracking down their prey (Plato 1997c, 432b-d, 1064), all the ins and outs of a question and of a possible answer. We must strive for a theory that is consistent with itself and which constitutes an orderly and unified account. "Dialectic" is the name of the final subject in the ideal liberal arts education of Book VII of *Republic*. The dialectical journey (*dialektikeb poreia*) involves the logically rigorous investigation of being, a study that leads us to wisdom (Plato 1997b, 532b, 1148). Ultimately, dialectic would lead the well-educated man to the point where he could give a thoroughly logical account of reality as the result of careful study and investigation; "for anyone who can achieve a unified vision is dialectical, and anyone who can't isn't" (Plato 1997b, 537c, 1152).

But, if we pursue wisdom in this manner, what sort of wisdom will we be seeking? Plato's writings provide several answers. On the *human* side, the wisdom we seek is the health of the soul. We are seeking to understand spiritual goods, not physical ones. In particular, we are seeking to understand what the health of the soul consists of. This is what Socrates seeks in the account of the *Apology*: "Who is an expert in this kind of excellence, the human and social kind?" (Plato 1997a, 20b, 20). We want to understand the proper function of the human being as such – of his soul and not only his body. Socrates adjures the men of Athens to pursue an understanding of this proper function, which is to say – to care for the health of their souls: "... as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy, to exhort you and in my usual way to point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet: Good Sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power; are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess

as much wealth, reputation and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?" (Plato 1997a, 29d-e, 27).

To understand the health or proper functioning or virtue – the *areteh* – of the soul is likewise the agenda of Plato's *Republic*. The conclusion of Book I of the *Republic* is that there *is* such a thing as this *areteh* of the soul, that it is the only way to live a happy life, and that this *areteh* requires us to live justly (Plato 1997b, 352d-354c, 996-998). The rest of the *Republic* is a grand quest to examine this idea in more detail and to justify it, ultimately giving an account of the soul's structure to justify the conclusion that justice inheres in the soul itself as its health and proper functioning.

On its *divine* side, the wisdom we seek is described in more than one way. In the *Symposium*, it is Beauty Itself: "But how would it be in our view," asks Diotima in Socrates' account of her instruction to him, "if someone got to see the Beautiful itself, absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality, but if he could see the divine Beauty itself in its one form?" (Plato 1997c, 211e-212a, 494). In the middle books of the *Republic*, we seek to know the Good Itself, as a result of which we will also be able to understand justice (Plato 1997b – see especially the end of Book VI and the beginning of Book VII). It is ultimately knowledge of the Good that enables us to live rightly (Plato 1997b, 517c, 1135). Of course, it is also the proper functioning of the soul, itself a non-physical thing, to know non-physical reality. Thus it is the seeing of Beauty Itself which produces true human excellence or virtue – genuine *areteh*. In this way the divine height of wisdom connects to human wisdom at the practical, everyday level (Plato 1997c, 212a, 494).

3. HOW TO BE A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER?

Now how should a philosopher who seeks wisdom on goods for the soul be, specifically, a Christian philosopher? If a philosopher, like Socrates, uses reason to pursue wisdom on the health of the soul, then a Christian philosopher is one who also does this, yet with the distinction that he is looking to find that wisdom in the person of Jesus Christ. We may look to Augustine as a role model for Christian philosophy. Augustine continues the ancient pursuit of wisdom on the health of the soul, which he continues to pursue using reason, but he looks for this health in Jesus Christ. Plato gives us advice like “Live for the soul, not the body!” in the *Phaedo* (Plato 2008), and he, Aristotle (Aristotle 1954), Epicurus (Epicurus 2004), the Stoics (see, for example, Seneca 2007 – sections 3 and 9), and Cicero (Cicero 1877, Book V) all commend the virtues as necessary for happiness. Augustine agrees. But he also recommends that we seek happiness in and through Jesus Christ – in fact, the whole Trinity! His early book *De Beata Vita* is instructive. The happy life, Augustine declares, is piously knowing the one who leads us to the truth (the Holy Spirit), the Truth itself (Christ), and the Supreme Measure itself (God the Father) (Augustine 1922b, 4.35).⁶

The pursuit of wisdom in Christ results from his own mighty pursuit of sinful souls in the Incarnation. In *Contra Academicos*, Augustine reveals that the only true philosophy is that immaterialistic system of thought touted by Plato (Augustine 1922a, 3.19.42). However, souls would not return to their own good, a love of the same non-physical world of which they are a part, without Jesus Christ’s help. Wisdom comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and we must follow him, beginning with faith, if we would gain the understanding we seek. Thus we all must have faith, and those of us who can

6 For more details on the themes I mention here from Augustine’s *De Beata Vita* as well as *Contra Academicos*, *De Ordine*, and *Soliloquia*, see: Boone 2016.

should add to it some growing understanding of things, learning from the metaphysical insights of the Platonists (Augustine 1922a, 3.20.43; also 1922c, 2.5.16). This sets the agenda for the entire Augustinian corpus – *Deum et animam scire cupio*, “I yearn to know God and the soul” (Augustine 1910, 1.2.7). Augustine’s *Soliloquia* illustrates the ascent towards wisdom, a prayerful exercise of reason to understand these realities we already know a little about from the truths of the faith.

Now the primary disease that infects the soul is certainly not the body, nor even an undue attachment to physical things. The real problem is *pride*. The humility of Jesus in the Incarnation is the cure; Book VII of the *Confessions* is a fine passage on this subject. In the beginning of *Confessions*, we read: *Tu excitas, ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*; “You stir [man] that he might delight to praise you, because you have made us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it should rest in you” (Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1. – translated by M.B.). That rest is only found through Jesus. “It is one thing to see the land of peace from a wooded mountaintop,” catching a partial glimpse of it, as did the Platonists, and “yet not find the way to it ...; and quite another to hold to the way that leads there,” the way made by Jesus in the humility of the incarnation which conquers the pride of the philosophers (Augustine 2006, 7.21.27). Augustine is thus seeking the same wisdom as did Socrates and the Platonists, but giving a more detailed and more Christian account of it than they did, and seeking this wisdom through Jesus the Messiah.

Other texts in Augustine on this subject include Book I of *De Doctrina Christiana* and *Letter 118*. Jesus Christ is at once the soul’s physician, its healing, and its health: He can tell us how to have spiritual health, following Him is the path to spiritual health, and spiritual health also consists in knowing Him. While the Stoics surpassed the Epicureans in thinking that the greatest good (*summum bonum*) is virtue in the soul rather than any good in the body,

and while the Platonists surpassed the Stoics in recognizing that the greatest good is *above* the soul, they all fall short of recognizing that the greatest good is the Holy Trinity, whom we know through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

This connects to some more recent work on the nature of Christian philosophy. Let's first take a look at Moser. I take the following to be Moser's thesis statement: "If philosophy is the love and pursuit of wisdom, *Christian* philosophy is the love and pursuit of wisdom under the authority of Christ, which calls for an ongoing union with Christ, including one's belonging to God in Christ" (Moser 2012, 2). Now this is a very Augustinian notion, but Moser is adding to our basic Augustinian sense of Christian philosophy. Consider these remarks: "The key feature of Paul's idea of 'Christ in you' is the inward agent power of Christ working, directly at the level of psychological and motivational attitudes, toward a cooperative person's renewal in God's image as God's beloved child. We may call this appeal to the inward agent-power of Christ the *Gethsemane union* approach to 'Christ in you'" (Moser 2012, 4). "A test question arises for any proposed Christian philosophy: does the philosophy uphold the importance of one's obediently dying with Christ under the guiding agent-power of God as 'Abba, Father'? If not, the philosophy misses the mark as a Christian philosophy" (Moser 2012, 8). "Gethsemane union with Christ as Lord is no mere correct belief that something about Christ is true. Instead, it calls for volitional cooperation and companionship with Christ, who empowers and guides *how* we think, not just *what* we think" (Moser 2012, 9).

Christian philosophy emphasizes union with Christ, and obedience unto death. Moser is telling us how to answer Socrates' question. Whereas Socrates could, in Plato's *Crito*, recognize that death with justice is better for the soul than injustice with life, Moser tells us that participating in *the death of Christ* is the mark of the best philosophy. We pursue wisdom on the health of the soul in Christ, but also by following him in total obedience. Some of this is also,

of course, in Augustine: Christ is the inner teacher in *De Magistro*. The *Enarrationes in Psalmos* is guided by the idea of the *totus Christus* (the “whole Christ”), the idea that the church and Christ make two persons in one body; the life of the church is joined to the life of Christ such that he gives utterance to our own prayers and takes our death and sin into himself, sharing his divine life and holiness with us in return.⁷

In *Advice to Christian Philosophers*, Plantinga argues that Christian philosophers should, first, think independently of the prevailing philosophical winds and, second, strive to have a wholistic, integrated Christian worldview, all while having the boldness and confidence of people of faith – people who really *trust* in their God! (Plantinga 1984, 255). Christian philosophers should be true to their own beliefs and do philosophy as if they have a right to those beliefs – not merely a political or legal or moral right, but an epistemic one. Christian philosophers should make it an aspect of their philosophy that they think from their own Christian beliefs, and they may do so with the confidence that this is their business as philosophers, no matter how many anti-Christian philosophers insist on keeping faith and philosophy separate.

I quite agree with Plantinga on this point, but I have to admit that he is less focused on the spirituality of Christian philosophy, on which Moser focuses – that union with Christ which is part of our pursuit of wisdom. Still, I do not see any conflict with Moser and Augustine here. To the contrary, if Plantinga is right, then his own analysis points us towards Moser and Augustine. For those very Christian beliefs on the basis of which Plantinga argues we should proceed themselves require this very spirituality.

Now of course the topic of what constitutes Christian philosophy is immense, and I confess that I have little knowledge of some of the classic debates. Briefly, and consulting a fine summary by Greg

7 For a good intro to Cameron's excellent work on this topic, see: Cameron 2005, 59-70.

Sadler (Sadler 2009), it seems that Étienne Gilson held that we need a description of the philosophies which philosophers have actually employed, not just some abstract definition. A Christian philosophy is not some ideal way of thinking, but a system of thought used by actual Christians. My account of Baptist philosophy would seem to be, at best, incomplete as judged by this criterion – I am not going to analyze Baptist philosophers in this paper. Gilson also held that faith and reason do not act separately in Christian philosophy, which is certainly something I am aiming at. Gilson initially welcomed the Augustinian and Anselmian *fides quaerens intellectum*, “faith seeking understanding,” as Christian philosophy, later rejecting its claim to be true Christian philosophy. Christian philosophy employs rigorous rational investigation, which takes place as a result of faith. It is not merely reason in service of faith, but reason and faith working together to understand whatever we learned from faith.

It seems that what I am describing is not quite the same as Gilson, but is similar – it is the rational pursuit of wisdom in and through the Christ known by faith. As we proceed, we will be interested in what sort of Christian philosophy – and Christian with a Reformation, Baptist specificity – can accept Christian theology and proceed, through reason, to understand better, in light of that theology, the goods of the soul. I think we can build on Augustine, Moser, Plantinga, and Gilson by looking at more specific versions of Christian philosophy. “A philosophy can be theistic or deistic without being Christian...,” Moser says (Moser 2012, 1). True enough! And a philosophy can be Christian without being a Reformation philosophy, or a Reformation philosophy without being Baptist.

4. HOW TO BE A REFORMATION PHILOSOPHER?

One distinctive Reformation teaching is that justification and sanctification are not the same thing. They are not *separate* – one must follow the other. But they *are* distinct. “Justification” is the word for

our being made right with God, for our being counted righteous, for our sins being washed away and forgiven. Justification is the reconciliation of sinners to God. It is God's not counting our sins against us, reckoning us to be in good standing with him, canceling the record of debt against us, forgiving our sins, seeing us as righteous because we are found in Jesus who is righteous, declaring us innocent in his divine courtroom. "Sanctification" is the traditional terminology (although not the best terminology⁸) for our becoming good, for our souls being healed, for our growth in Christlikeness, for our being conformed to the image of Christ. Justification, in the Reformation account, is a change in *God's way of looking at us*.⁹ Sanctification is a change *in us* – the process of moving closer to being as good as the Messiah in whom we are *counted* as good, of living more and more like the righteous people we are counted as. The Reformation

8 The English "sanctify" corresponds to the Greek *hagiazō*, which means to make holy or to consecrate, to set apart for God. This term is actually used in the New Testament as an alternative term for justification. Paul in 1 Cor. 6:11 tells believers they were sanctified. He uses the aorist tense, conveying a single unit of past action, for this and two other verbs. The believers were washed (from *apolouō*) and justified (from *dikaioō*) as well as sanctified. These three verbs are all describing the same thing, which Paul conceives not as a process but as a single completed past event. Eph. 5:18 describes what we now call "sanctification," ordering to be filled with the Holy Spirit, saying *plehrousthe*, a present imperative middle (or passive) verb from *plehroō*, to be filled. Since the Greek present tense connotes ongoing action, the sense is something like "be being filled with the Spirit." Similarly, Rom. 12:2 tells us: *metamorphousthe*, another present imperative middle form, from *metamorphoo*, to be transformed. It means something like "be being transformed." These verbs are describing the process of what we usually call "sanctification," although they do not suggest any obvious alternative names unless we could get used to saying "transformation" in this sense or to simply using the longer description "being filled with the Spirit."

9 See, for example, Questions 33-35 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* or the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, section IV. Calvin's *Institutes*, Book IV, chapter 14 (see: Calvin 2008) is a very clear statement on justification. I leave open the question of how Calvin uses the terminology of "sanctification," but he clearly treats justification in the manner I have described, while presenting that growth in holiness which is subsequent to it as a process.

doctrine has it that justification is complete from the moment it is applied. Justification is binary; we either do not yet have it at all, or we already have *all* of it. Sanctification, however, is a long, slow process; it comes in degrees. So they are not the *same* thing, although they are by no means separate: Everyone being sanctified has been justified, and everyone who is justified will be sanctified (at least) until the moment of his or her death. By contrast, Catholic theology, while joining Reformation theology in recognizing justification as the reconciliation of sinners to God and remission of sins, equates that reconciliation with the process of “sanctification and renewal of the interior man.”¹⁰ This teaching from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* draws on the Council of Trent, which clarifies that justification is not only our being classified as righteous, but our being *made* righteous.¹¹ Justification, in this view, is a thing that has either begun in us or not; but, having merely begun, it is not complete; justification continues and increases in the Christian’s life of faith.¹²

Plainly, these are both spiritual goods. And, accordingly, one good way of being a Reformation philosopher must be: Recognize both of them, recognize the distinction between them, and use reason to seek wisdom on both. If a philosopher is one who, like Socrates, uses reason to pursue wisdom on the health of the soul and if a Christian philosopher is one who does the same while looking specifically to find this wisdom in Jesus Christ, then a Reformation philosopher is one who does these things while reflecting on that distinction between these two spiritual goods.

Put differently, sanctification is that spiritual good Socrates and Augustine were talking about, the health of the soul, and Reformation philosophy would recognize that it comes in large part through a life

10 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part 3, Section 1, Chapter 3, Article 1, I. *Justification*.

11 The Council of Trent, Sixth Session, *Decree on Justification*, Chapter 7.

12 The Council of Trent, Sixth Session, *Decree on Justification*, Chapter 10.

of spiritual union with Christ that follows on our being joined with Christ and counted righteous along with him.

I confess that I cannot think of any straightforward role model for a Reformation philosopher *as such*. John Locke and Søren Kierkegaard are certainly in the vicinity, of course, and we will consider them shortly. Some inspiration for this way of thinking could of course come from the Reformers themselves, who see the distinction and connections between justification and sanctification. Martin Luther's theology involves the rediscovery in Paul's writings of this idea of justification as distinct from sanctification; but he never gives up the idea of the soul's ill health and desperate need for healing in Christ through sanctification. Similar, John Calvin's theology explores the connections between the soul's forgiveness and its healing. With the idea that regeneration of the soul precedes conversion, Calvin implies that some degree of life and health in the soul is required if we are to accept the free gift of justification in Christ. A growth in holiness accompanies faith – a healing of the soul through which sinful desire is eradicated and we learn to love God properly.¹³

5. HOW TO BE A BAPTIST PHILOSOPHER?

How, then, can a philosopher with these Reformational distinctives also be a Baptist philosopher – not merely a Reformation philosopher who happens to be Baptist? Central to Baptist theology and tradition are the recognition of two practices that accompany these distinct but inseparable spiritual goods.¹⁴ First, there is resistance to the idea of a state church, since justification cannot be forced onto one man

13 Among the good sources on these matters I would suggest Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, chapters 3 and 14 (Calvin). Also Saarnivaara 2005, chapter 1. While offering no opinion on Saarnivaara's overall contributions to Luther studies, my working understanding is that his analysis of the difference between Augustine and Luther in chapter 1 is at least largely correct.

14 A useful introduction to these matters, if somewhat polemical in style, is Verduin 2001.

by another man (although some degree of spiritual healing may be forced on my soul without my full consent). Second, there is the policy of striving to have a regenerate church membership by practicing believer's baptism (i.e., baptizing professing believers and not others, particularly infants), since justification cannot be chosen for me by my parents. These are defining components of Baptist thought.

Since these are distinct theological characteristics of a Baptist, one distinct characteristic of the Baptist variety of a Reformation philosopher is that he will recognize these practices, and that his philosophy will reflect on them. If a philosopher is one who, like Socrates, uses reason to pursue wisdom on the health of the soul; if a Christian philosopher is one who does the same while looking specifically to find this wisdom in Jesus Christ; and if a Reformation philosopher is one who does these things while accepting and reflecting on the distinction between justification and sanctification; then a Baptist philosopher is a Reformation philosopher who also attends to believer's baptism and resistance to a state church, analyzing them, or other things in light of them, as part of his reasoned seeking of wisdom.

Of course, this sort of project might draw both insight and inspiration from the modern sources of these ideas: theologians like Balthasar Hubmaier and the Anabaptist tradition in general.

But what about Baptist *philosophy*? What precedent is there for this? I notice two sources of inspiration for Baptist philosophy in the western philosophical canon. While not exactly Baptist themselves, John Locke and Søren Kierkegaard are philosophers who engage in the sort of reflection in which a Baptist ought to engage (although focusing on resistance to the idea of a state church, not on believer's baptism).

Locke's argument for separation of church and state in the *Letter Concerning Toleration* presumes the Reformation idea that favor in the eyes of God is an all-important spiritual good (Locke

2002, 140-141), and from time to time connects to the Anabaptist tradition.¹⁵ The reason the church has no business coopting the power of the state is that God grants us justification in return for sincere faith alone, a goal the state cannot hope to support through force. Hence the New Testament's exclusive commendation of strictly non-violent means of conversion. (Curiously, Locke ignores the importance of sanctification, which, being the health of the soul, might possibly be something that force *can* hope to support to some extent. This, I suspect, is one vulnerable point in his argument. We will return to this later.)

Kierkegaard writes powerfully on the need for the individual to know God for himself, independent of the mediation of a state church. The most moving book (of many) is, perhaps, *Fear and Trembling* (Kierkegaard 2013). This book is written by Kierkegaard under the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio; or, more precisely, Kierkegaard invented the personality of de Silentio and wrote a whole book in his name! de Silentio, representing a Hegelian philosophy that cannot make sense of genuine Christian faith, observes that all interaction with God is supposed to be mediated through universal humanity; God is a God we all know together, through our own common reason and labor. But biblical faith, as exemplified by Abraham, has a lone individual meeting of God apart from the human community. This cannot but appear paradoxical to one who, like de Silentio, thinks in Hegelian terms – the idea that the individual knows God directly and apart from the social order is astonishing! (In one of many interesting Kierkegaardian subtleties, Kierkegaard was himself a faithful member of the Danish Lutheran church. Evidently, he thought there was no need for him to *leave* the state church; but

15 For example, see his remark that state persecution of religious dissent is more contrary to the Gospel than is “any conscientious dissent from ecclesiastical decisions, or separation from public worship, whilst accompanied with innocence of life” (Locke 2002, 116).

the state church nevertheless fails to be any kind of substitute for knowing God for yourself. But we will return to this issue shortly.)

In summary, I suggest that a philosopher ought to seek wisdom on the health of the soul; that a Christian philosopher ought to seek wisdom on the health of the soul in Jesus Christ; that a Reformation philosopher ought to seek wisdom on the twin spiritual goods of justification and sanctification; and that a Baptist philosopher ought to seek the same wisdom with attention to the idea that we should resist a state church and should strive for a regenerate church membership by practicing believer's baptism.

The idea here is not merely to talk about theology as dealing with Baptist philosophical questions. The goal of Baptist philosophy is to have faith and reason working together in pursuit of wisdom – and a Baptist faith specifically. Like Augustine, it would look for Egyptian gold from other philosophers; like Anselm, it would carefully develop ideas to see where they lead; like Aquinas, it would make distinctions, explain things, and do its best to banish confusion. The general idea of this philosophy is to accept Baptist theology and proceed to better understand through reason both it and anything else on which that theology may cast some light.

6. FIRST STEPS INTO BAPTIST PHILOSOPHY

What specific questions might a Baptist philosopher try to answer? For one thing, he could use philosophical tools wherever helpful to explain the things we have already been talking about: Where can we find wisdom? What is the health of the soul? How does Jesus heal the soul? What is justification, what is sanctification, how are they connected, and how are they different? What does baptism of professing believers symbolize, and what precisely is the correct relationship of the church and the state? Perhaps theology and the preexisting philosophical tradition have not yet fully answered these questions, and maybe a Baptist philosopher could find some work to do here.

All the same, I propose two somewhat more specific questions that I think merit the attention of a distinctively Baptist philosophy: an epistemology question inspired by Kierkegaard and an ethics question inspired by Locke. First, if we are supposed to know God by ourselves, what role does the church play in that knowledge? Second, does the government have any business supporting our sanctification? These are the sorts of questions the Baptist community has a need to ask. Plantinga correctly observes that “the Christian has his own questions to answer,” as well as “his own starting point in investigating these questions” (Plantinga 1984, 262). These are good questions for a Baptist, and I will suggest starting points in investigating them which are appropriate to Baptist thought. Or, put differently, here are some ways a person holding Baptist convictions might think through these questions.

6.1. A QUESTION IN BAPTIST EPISTEMOLOGY

Let’s look at an epistemology question inspired by Kierkegaard, relating both to believer’s baptism and to resistance to a state church. Since the individual needs to know God for himself, what role does the church play in the knowledge of God? I will suggest more than one answer, but my main, if provisional, answer is simply this: Knowledge of God is an activity that closely involves the church, for the biblical idea of the knowledge of God involves belief in God put into action through the love of one another in the church.

Now this is a subtle topic. For example, Reformation theology recognizes the infallibility of the Bible in agreement with such sources in the Catholic tradition as Augustine,¹⁶ Aquinas,¹⁷ and Vatican II,¹⁸ but also teaches *Sola Scriptura*, the doctrine that the Bible is

16 Among other examples, Augustine 2006 (12.18 and 13.29).

17 See, for example, Aquinas 1947 (Prima Pars, Question 1, Article 8, Reply to Objection 2).

18 *Dei Verbum*, Chapter III.

the *only* infallible authority. But nothing prevents a Reformation Christian from recognizing the church as a reliable, even a necessary, authority. I recognize that myself. But whether the church is an authority, and what kind of authority, is not the question. Nor is this particular Kierkegaardian question asking the sort of thing analytic epistemologists might ask: What sort of justified or warranted true belief is knowledge of God, how do we avoid any trouble from Gettier cases in crafting a definition of this knowledge, and what role does the church play in whatever is the process by which our beliefs about God achieve this epistemic status? The Kierkegaardian question I have in mind here is more along these lines: In the individual believer's encounter with God, what role does the church play? The question might almost be mistaken for a brand-new one; the idea of knowledge employed by the question has some resemblance to North American evangelicals in the last hundred years talking about your personal "walk with the Lord," or the visiting pastor in the undergrad chapel service reminding all the students at the Baptist university to be sure they have a personal relationship with God!¹⁹ However, the kind of knowledge we are talking about is much, much older; it is the Hebraic idea of knowledge, knowledge as a practical and personal activity, a relationship with another person.²⁰

So the question, then, is: If we must know God individually and for ourselves, exactly what is the role of the church in this knowledge? This is the sort of question a Baptist would naturally have a use for: Baptists tend to think of the act of saving faith in Christ as one each individual believer must do for himself; Baptists emphasize this through the baptism ritual, which we only do for the professing believer; Baptists have historically emphasized this, also, through

19 When I was in undergrad, it seemed like this was indeed the standard message of visiting chapel preachers.

20 A recent work of philosophy, still unexplored by me but promisingly exploring this idea, is Meek 2011.

their resistance to a state church, thinking that no one can make that faith decision for me. Since we supposedly enter the church as people who have already known God, what role can the church we are not yet a part of play in that knowledge of God?

There may be some guidance, or at least some promising future research, available in the life of Kierkegaard. While Kierkegaard strongly emphasizes the need for the individual to know God for himself, he reveres the fathers of his own faith, from the Apostles and the Church Fathers down through Luther to his own father's pastor, Bishop Mynster. Since his own tradition is a state church tradition, perhaps these priorities exist in a state of some tension in Kierkegaard's own life. He was willing to *critique* the state church, but it seems this critique did not overrule his reverence for the faith of his fathers. Or, alternatively, perhaps we should merely say that this critique targeted some aspect of his church, but one that he took to be open to the possibility of reform through a spiritual renewal of faith and practice – *semper reformandi*. In any case, it seems that Kierkegaard's emphasis on knowing God for oneself did not, in his view, require abandoning the state church.

But what actually *is* the role of the church in my *knowing* God in this way? I can suggest two relatively simple answers, which I think must be part of the truth, followed by what I take to be a better answer. (And perhaps there are other answers as well.)

First, the church can certainly lead me up to this encounter with God. It testifies to the importance of my repenting before God, giving evidence from reason, experience, and the Scriptures and helping us believe and know that this is a thing I should do. Here is one place where a good bit of the contemporary analytic philosophical tradition is quite relevant. Analytic philosophy could clarify the role of a community in bringing about the conditions for a warranted true belief which is not a Gettier case.

Second, even if the encounter with God – the salvific interaction with God – takes place on an individual basis, it still leads us

to a community with others who have had the same experience. Thus Carl Vaught, a philosopher who died a member of Dayspring Baptist Church in Waco, TX, observed in considering Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Perhaps Abraham is indeed the lone individual acting on his faith in God, no one able to help him make the encounter. Nevertheless, after he and Isaac have both been through their respective faith experiences, they are no longer solitary individuals; they form a community of those who have stood alone in faith before God! (Vaught 2004, 36-37). Similarly, Baptist theology teaches that an individual who has professed faith in Christ must be baptized and join a church of Christ-following Christians.

But I think a third, and better, answer would be in order. We have to remember what faith itself actually is. Faith is not merely a belief, but an action. Rather, faith is belief *put into* action. Any number of biblical passages and themes are relevant to this insight. Every Old Testament story of faith is a story of action. Noah believes, and he builds a huge boat. Naaman believes, and he bathes in the Jordan. New Testament faith is not mere inner belief, but inner belief expressed in action, the first step of which is a public profession sealed with baptism. Paul is no exception, preaching faith *with* repentance (Acts 20:21). James says faith must be shown by works. Even the Greek *pistis*, when we consider those of its aspects which are lost by rigidly translating it as "faith," tells us something. Faith, in New Testament Greek, is *trust*. But what is trust without action? *Pistis* is also *faithfulness*. There is no biblical faith without a *life* of faith, except perhaps in the highly unusual case of faith begun at the point of death.

The second clause of Hebrews 11:1 helps to clarify. Faith is the *elegchos* of unseen *pragmaton* (a genitive plural, from *pragma*). This means it is the reproof required by these unseen *pragmata* ("*pragmata*" being the nominative plural of *pragma*). These *pragmata* are not the object of faith, as we might imagine in a simple faith-as-belief model – with the *pragmata* as passive objects, faith performing

on them the operation of belief. The reverse would be nearer the truth: The *pragmata* are the unseen deeds of Christ described in Hebrews 10, and *they* are performing *on us* the operation of faith. For these deeds impose on our lives a certain reproof. Faith is that *elegchos*, that reproof. It is the reproof of the unseen deeds of Christ. Faith is the change in our lives which is the necessary response to the deeds of Christ.²¹

And what has this to do with the part the church plays in the individual's knowledge of God? Simply this: That life-change is meaningless apart from the church. The church is the context in which the changed life is lived out. What's more, the church is itself a living community the very life of which *is*, in and of itself, the activity of this changed life. Paul's letters testify again and again to these truths. "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13). "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor" (Rom. 12:10). "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Eph. 13:8).

Good deeds do not earn God's favor – not for sinners such as we with grievous sins in our ledger, and unable to do these good works in any case. Still, there is no faith apart from action, and no action apart from the life of the church. And, since this faith is itself the relationship with God by which each of us may know God, it seems that knowing God is, even for the individual, a largely communal business. An individual needs his own faith, but we know God together in the life of faith.

These are my provisional answers to our epistemological question. And can this be called *Baptist* philosophy? My tentative answer is: Why not, as long as we are, in a Baptist mode, seeking wisdom on

21 For additional analysis of this verse and its connection to other New Testament passages, see: Boone 2020, 133-146.

these spiritual goods? But further connections to philosophy are certainly available. Dru Johnson says: “But in Genesis 2, the decided difference between knowing about and knowing is that proper knowing seems to be revealed in sacramental engagement, where one acts in accordance with what one knows” (Johnson 2014, 36).

Johnson’s scholarship is, no doubt, a good place to go for a proper look at the biblical idea of knowing – that knowing which is deeper, more personal, more about a good life lived, and more about a relationship than the standard analytic philosopher’s justified or warranted true belief with some clever scheme for avoiding getting in trouble with Gettier cases. Johnson’s work also draws out the connections to philosopher of science Michael Polanyi. While I leave Polanyi to the experts, I can draw out a connection to William James. James says in *The Will To Believe* that “The maximum of liveness in an hypothesis means willingness to act irrevocably. Practically, that means belief; but there is some believing tendency wherever there is willingness to act at all” (James 1912, 3). James is describing that character of a proposition, or rather of a proposition’s relation to a person, of being believable, and this remark captures his pragmatic approach to belief. What it means for a belief to be believed is that we *act* on it. In Footnote 4 of the same talk, James states that “belief is measured by action.” On a Jamesian philosophy there is no religious belief without religious action. This, I think, is a healthy corrective to any tendency – whether in modern philosophy, Reformation religion (which, I confess, sometimes makes this mistake), or elsewhere – to categorize faith as merely some mental act of agreement. True faith, like any meaningful belief, is lived out.

And, of course, the nature of the belief is expressed in the nature of the corresponding action. Christian faith is, therefore, Christian action, which means *belief lived out in the context of the church*. So that belief by which the individual knows God must involve the church.

Thus our first foray into Baptist philosophy. The Augustinian approach to philosophy is that of believing in order to understand

– Anselm’s *fides quaerens intellectum*, “faith seeking understanding.” In this mode of philosophy, the Baptist philosopher accepts that the Bible is telling us correctly what it means to know God. He can then seek to understand how that knowing works in relation to the church, and can use some philosophical insights to understand it better. Borrowing the ancient analogy for the use of philosophy in service of Christian faith, James is a source of Egyptian gold here. He gives us some tools we can use to understand our faith, serving, in relation to Baptist epistemology, the role which Platonism serves in Augustinian metaphysics.

6.2. A QUESTION IN BAPTIST ETHICS

A question in Baptist ethics, inspired by Locke and relating closely to the Baptist suspicion of a state church, is whether government has a legitimate role in supporting sanctification. Locke’s own position is that the government does not have a legitimate role in seeking spiritual good, but he focuses on justification alone. After clarifying Locke, I will give a cautious affirmative answer based on non-atomized views of human nature: Since virtue is beneficial and vice harmful, and since government has a legitimate role in preventing harm, it also has a legitimate role in promoting virtue, or at least in resisting vice. And virtue is a spiritual good, and a part of sanctification.²² In asking this question we are seeking wisdom on the spiritual good of a well sanctified, healthy soul as such a soul is understood in Baptist theology; and we may, in philosophical fashion, give a rigorous logical analysis of the question leading to a provisional answer.

Now Locke argues that the church should not use the state’s tools in her pursuit of spiritual good, and his argument rests on fitting means to ends. The church is seeking the eternal good of God’s favor

22 N.T. Wright makes a superb case for this in *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (Wright 2010).

(Locke 2002, 120). This can be won for oneself by “Faith only and inward sincerity” (Locke 2002, 131), and promoted only through persuasion rather than force. (I am persuaded that Locke is under some influence from the Anabaptists, but that is a topic for another time.)

We have to be careful with this question. Locke objects to the government, in a misguided effort to get more people to heaven by flexing its earthly muscles, telling us which church is correct and enforcing its decree. Locke’s premise that faith and inward sincerity are necessary for forgiveness of sins, and for a ticket to heaven, provides some solid support for his view that the state should not try to help people choose the right way to heaven. We may agree with him on this as well as agree that the government should (as in American law) not establish an official church, and that it should not force its view on the populace (as in both British and American law). However, Locke still seems to be missing something important, at least from a Reformation perspective: Virtue is also a spiritual good, a good of the soul. Thus we may agree with Locke’s conclusions on religious toleration and yet disagree with part of his reasoning: Not all spiritual goods come by means of “faith only and inward sincerity.” *Virtue* doesn’t. Note how Locke, relying on a forensic understanding of spiritual good, excludes a medical understanding: “But, after all, the principal consideration, and which absolutely determines this controversy, is this: Although the magistrate’s opinion in religion be sound, and the way that he appoints be truly Evangelical, yet, if I be not thoroughly persuaded thereof in my own mind, there will be no safety for me in following it. ... I may be cured of some disease by remedies that I have not faith in; but I cannot be saved by a religion that I distrust and by a worship that I abhor” (Locke 2002, 131).

Now the Reformation prefers a forensic model of *justification* to a medical one: We are made right with God when God, as righteous judge, declares us innocent in his lawcourt – not when God, as divine physician, heals our souls of sin. Nevertheless, that healing

does happen on the Reformation model – we call it sanctification, not justification. Locke here sticks with the forensic model of spiritual good, that attainable by faith, and explicitly sets aside the medical. He is using an attenuated version of Reformation theology, and the crucial point for our immediate purposes is only this: *Virtue*, as a spiritual good and an aspect of sanctification, does *not* depend on “faith only and inward sincerity.” No matter how much it may indeed depend on faith and inward sincerity, it is *also* a habit of mind and life that is amenable to social and legal influences! Locke, earlier in the *Letter Concerning Toleration*, argues that “the care of souls is not committed to the civil magistrate any more than to other men” because the care of souls is the province of a religion which cannot rely on force, which is the sole means available to the magistrate (Locke 2002, 118-119).²³ However, this whole argument presumes that the phrase “the care of souls” refers only to the means of their finding favor with God, leading to a happy eternity. But this is not correct. *Contra* Locke, the cultivation of virtue is *also* a part of the care of souls.

So does the government have a proper role in supporting virtue, which contributes to our sanctification? If we resist a state church, must we also resist such a notion? No doubt any role of government in cultivating virtue would be less than our own personal efforts to be virtuous, the influence of families, the instructions of the local church, the training of religious education, and so on. But is government not to promote virtue *at all*? And, if it is, how should it do so? And need its promotion of virtue be guided by any particular religious perspective?

I can suggest only a provisional, and partial, response, perhaps not even *quite* so much as an answer: Even if we accept that proposition of classical liberalism that government may only enforce morality to the point of preventing harm, we may still reasonably conclude

²³ See also the briefer introduction to this idea at the beginning of the text (Locke 2002, 115).

that *some* level of the promotion of virtue is a legitimate exercise of government insofar as *virtue is itself necessary to prevent harm*.

Rooted in classical liberalism, and central to most forms of libertarianism, is the principle that the government may not restrict human freedom except to prevent harm – particularly harm done to other people.²⁴ In this view, government may not support virtue at all except insofar as this is a side-effect of preventing harm. People are just a tiny bit closer to virtue and further from vice when they are not allowed to steal, rape, murder, and so on.

And, of course, on this view, the government avoids all specific religious perspectives, except incidentally where they also overlap with the prevention of harm. Thus we associate this idea with the separation of church and state.

In tension with this principle is the idea that government should promote a more robust vision of the good life, up to and including the application of some religious perspectives on the good life. For example, although many give reason-based arguments for traditional views on heterosexual marriage, abortion, and so on, faith-based arguments are also made. “God made them Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve,” as the trite phrasing used to go. Or some may argue, as Locke does in his *Second Treatise of Government*, that all human beings have rights – to life, liberty, or what-have-you – and that the basis for these rights is our having been given them by God, or our being made in the image of God. Or, for a third example, appeals to the religious requirement to care for the poor are sometimes given as reasons for government welfare programs.

But suppose we do a little philosophy here. This would put us nearer to an answer to this question, for we would find abundant arguments that harm actually comes through any number of immoral behaviors. This philosophy would involve some metaphysics, but even more so ethics. Some familiar ideas to students of philosophy would

24 See, for example, John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter 1 (Mill 2001).

get the job done, and before going any further a quick survey would be in order. Aristotelian ethics gives us the idea that the human being has a proper function. We all understand the idea that the human *body* has a proper function – the activity of a healthy human body. With Aristotle we are talking about the human being *as such*, not *just* the human body. The body is only part of us, and a lesser part than the soul. Aristotle, picking up where Socrates and Plato left off, understands the proper function of the soul as a mental, psychological, spiritual, and social activity.²⁵ Confucianism also understands the human person in terms of proper function, with a more obvious emphasis on the *social* aspect; Confucius also puts less emphasis than Aristotle does on a metaphysics that can explain his ethics. In another connection between western and Chinese philosophy, Mencius, another great Confucian philosopher, presents morality – including the proper treatment of others – as the necessary condition for one’s own flourishing and happiness.²⁶ The morally right in my treatment of others is also what’s useful *to me*. This is the central conclusion, in fact, of Plato’s *Republic*. The idea turns up also in the argument of the Stoic philosopher Panaetius that the honorable is the useful, which motivates Cicero’s *De Officiis*, inspiring church father Ambrose of Milan to write *De Officiis Ministrorum*, arguing that Cicero’s moral teachings were already in the Bible. William James later defends the idea that the good and true are also the useful, giving his book *Pragmatism* the subtitle *A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. Finally, there is also positive psychology, a research program in contemporary psychology which aims to study the good life empirically and pave the way to greater human flourishing. Martin Seligman, after playing a key role in the founding of positive psychology (Seligman 1998), went on to consider a traditional list

25 A fine introduction to this concept is MacIntyre 1981.

26 See: *Mencius*, Book I.

of virtues – wisdom, courage, moderation, justice, humanity, and transcendence – as keys to the good life (Seligman 2002).

These traditions and ideas all have in common the notion that there is a good life for a human being, that we have certain obligations to ourselves and others, and that self-interest and our obligations converge. Virtue is what leads to the good life.

And so, I suggest, it is possible to join the classical liberal idea that government may only intervene on behalf of virtue if doing so prevents harm with a non-atomized view of human nature according to which harm results in many ways, as a matter of course, from non-virtuous behavior. The government may, thus, have some real role in, indirectly, promoting sanctification by means of promoting virtue in order to prevent harm.

Perhaps all positions carry some danger or other. *This* one does. We rightly fear the tyranny of a government that promotes virtue, especially when it's *someone else's* view of what is actually virtuous. I have no solution to this potential problem, although I can offer some clarifications that may serve to lessen this concern. I am not suggesting that anyone's idea of virtue should be backed up by the full force of government once he and his cohorts win an election. I am only suggesting that, in principle, it is permissible for government to prevent harm by promoting virtue, or at least by restraining vice. This should be done cautiously, bearing in mind the danger of tyranny. Probably, the default setting should be *not* to do it, and to do it only when a demonstration of harm is available. Moreover, if it must be done, then when 'tis done, 'tis well 'twere done at the local level of government. The *principle* is all I'm getting at. And that principle must surely be correct, for the alternative is a world where very harmful vices and sins receive no governmental restraint at all on the grounds that they do no direct and obvious harm to anyone not partaking of them, or to no one at all, according to some atomized view of human nature. Pornography comes to mind as one possible

example, along with adultery, frivolous divorce, suicide, and harmful indulgence in addictions to gambling or mind-altering drugs.

But *whose* idea of virtue, and *which* rules to promote it, would I actually recommend? And what sort of argument for harm should count as a satisfactory demonstration? In particular, need a governmental promotion of virtue be guided by any particular religious perspective? I can, again, give a provisional answer: *Sure! Why not?* Religion can help to inform us of what is harmful – and this without any such thing as a state church. Isn't that largely the point of all the old religious teachings about the Golden Rule, love of God and neighbor, marriage, honesty, humility, almsgiving, and so on? Religion is responsible for sharing these insights with a hurting world, and I see no reason why government alone among all the world's hearers should not listen. Religion has a place alongside philosophy, psychology, economics, and the sciences in the pursuit of knowledge concerning what precisely is beneficial, what precisely is harmful, and what rules should promote the one and resist the other, and government should at least take these views into consideration.

7. CONCLUSION

Reflections on just what makes Christian philosophy are varied and rich, and so likewise should be reflections on what makes Baptist philosophy specifically. All the same, I propose that that very specificity is part of the answer, and I take from historical sources such as Socrates, Augustine, the Reformers, Locke, and Kierkegaard a model for thinking through the question just what Baptist philosophy *is*. It is a type of Reformation philosophy, which is a type of Christian philosophy, which is a type of philosophy. It is a variety of the pursuit of wisdom, a variety that seeks wisdom concerning spiritual good in Christ while recognizing and reflecting on the distinction between justification and sanctification as well as some Baptist signs of this soteriology: believer's baptism and resistance to a state church. I suggest

that one interesting question in Baptist philosophy concerns the role of the church in the individual's faith encounter with God, and in my own efforts to pursue wisdom Baptistly I have suggested that the church is itself the context in which is lived out that faith which constitutes our knowledge of God. I suggest that another interesting question in Baptist philosophy concerns the role of government in sanctification, and I have suggested that it does have some role; without promoting a state church, the government's legitimate interest in preventing harm justifies its promotion of virtue, or at least its resistance of vice, which contributes to sanctification. If, like Socrates, we are striving to give a logically rigorous account of matters pertaining to the soul; and if the matter we are investigating arises from Baptist teaching on these matters; then I suggest that that investigation is a form of Baptist philosophy.

"Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (Ecc. 12:12). Neither will there be a final end to any of the questions we have considered here. However, as we often find in philosophy, and even in theology, even when we have the right answer, a complete understanding of it will take more work. Thus we philosophers must keep at it (at least) until the Lord returns, always seeking a fuller understanding of the wisdom of Christ. I hope that my framing of these questions and suggested answers will be a small step in the direction of that wisdom. I have presented, to my knowledge for the first time, an account of what it means to be a Baptist philosopher, helping to clarify important questions concerning the nature of Christian philosophy. However, there is still a great deal of work to do clarifying Baptist and other varieties of Christian philosophy. One significant limitation of this research is its lack of a close look at the work of those philosophers who are Baptist to see to what extent it manifests the characteristics of Baptist philosophy I have described, or to see what other characteristics they may exhibit. In addition, the work of pursuing wisdom in the manner I have described must continue with further investigation

of the questions I have identified in Baptist epistemology and Baptist ethics, as well as other questions in Baptist philosophy. There is a good deal more to research on the question, and in the field of, Baptist philosophy.²⁷

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²⁷ I am grateful to a blind reviewer for *Studia Philosophiae Christianae* for several helpful suggestions.

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