



## RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY, PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE, AND OBLIVIOUS SALVATION

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, I employ recent work on divine ineffability (Jacobs, 2015) and personal knowledge (Benton, 2017) to argue that specific propositional knowledge cannot be required for salvation, where salvation is understood to involve a general claim about a person’s union with God. If this is true, I show that nobody can be excluded from salvation through mere happenstance of birth. Furthermore, I argue that adherents of this minimalist order of salvation ought to adopt a position of significant religious humility, for it is a consequence of this view that those with wildly divergent propositional beliefs about God, including people of different faiths, and even of no faith, can ultimately experience union with the same God. Although presented as an argument for salvific inclusivity, I conclude by showing that a similar argument can be adapted in defence of salvific pluralism. If there are *no* fundamentally true propositional beliefs about God to be had, each true claim made about God must be non-fundamentally true. Furthermore, just as there are multiple ways to truly, but non-fundamentally, describe the same object (ways that might contradict each other), so might there be multiple ways to truly, but non-fundamentally, describe God.<sup>1</sup>

**KEYWORDS:** ineffability, salvation, union, grace, faith

### Introduction

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” So says St Peter to the Jewish Council in Acts 4:12. Taking St Peter’s declaration at face value, one would be forgiven for thinking

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pre-mortem propositional belief in the existence of a specific person, Christ, is a necessary condition for salvation. And indeed, the idea that belief is necessary for salvation seems commonplace throughout the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> But if this were the case, how could salvation come to those who through mere happenstance of birth knew nothing of Christ, being born either before Him, or in a place untouched by the gospel?

Responding to concerns such as these, we find conceptual space carved out in the Christian tradition for the salvation of those who non-culpably lack such explicit propositional belief. Thus, for example, Aquinas writes:

If, however, some were saved without receiving any revelation, they were not saved without faith in a Mediator, for, though they did not believe in Him explicitly, they did, nevertheless, have implicit faith through believing in Divine providence [...]. (*ST II-II, Q. 2, A. 7, ad. 3*)

In this paper, I employ recent work on divine ineffability and personal knowledge to expand upon this conceptual space, outlining a minimalist order of salvation that does not require belief in any particular proposition prior to a person's death.<sup>3</sup> Granting this, nobody can be excluded from salvation through mere happenstance of birth. I suggest that because of this, adherents of this minimalist order of salvation ought to adopt a position of significant religious humility, for it is a consequence of this view that those with wildly divergent propositional beliefs about God, including people of different faiths, and even of no faith, can ultimately experience union with the same God.

Although presented as a particularist argument for salvific inclusivity, I conclude by showing that a similar argument can be adapted in defence of salvific pluralism. If there are no fundamentally true propositional beliefs about God to be had, each true claim made about God must be non-fundamentally true.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, just as there are multiple ways to truly, but non-fundamentally, describe the same object (ways that might contradict each other), so might there be multiple ways to truly, but non-fundamentally, describe God. Granting this, the presence of religious diversity should not undermine confidence in a system of religious belief that views union with God as the purpose of salvation.

I will start by outlining what I take to be a plausible conclusion to the process of salvation, namely, a person's union with God, and what I take to be the minimum

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Mark 16:15–16, John 3:16, John 8:24, Acts 16:31, Romans 10:9.

<sup>3</sup> I shall understand salvation to involve a general claim about a person's union with the God of classical theism.

<sup>4</sup> Fundamental truths carve (as it were) nature at its joints. But at what joints could claims about an ineffable God carve? On the other hand, non-fundamental truths are ontologically imperspicuous, even if they, like fundamental truths, happen to be mind-independently true. For a fleshing out of the concept of "fundamental" and "non-fundamental" truths, see Jacobs (2015). Thanks to a reviewer for encouraging me to say a little more about this here.

prerequisites for such union. Should belief in a certain set of propositions prove to be a necessary condition for salvation, such propositional belief ought to appear in these prerequisites. Starting with a plausible analysis of the conclusion to process order of salvation, that is, of a person's union with God, I will suggest that one can unite with God without coming to any specific set of pre-mortem propositional beliefs.

### Salvation as Union with God: Part 1

Let us begin, then, with what one might take to be the telos of salvation; a person's union with God. In the Christian tradition, this is often taken to coincide with a person's glorification.<sup>5</sup> Of this end, the Catechism of the Catholic Church reads:

The life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He makes partners in his heavenly glorification those who have believed in him and remained faithful to his will. Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Such "perfect incorporation" occurs (at least in Latin Christianity) at the beatific vision, when a person sees God as God is, and comes to know God as God knows them.<sup>7</sup> So for example, we find in Aquinas that

Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence [...]. And thus [the person's intellect] will have its perfection through union with God as with that object, in which alone man's happiness consists.<sup>8</sup>

Here, beatific revelation serves as the mechanism by which a person's union with God is completed, with its post-mortem beholding concluding the process of salvation in them. Granting this, salvific steps that precede such union must enable a person to behold the vision of God. So, might pre-mortem propositional belief be required for a person to behold the beatific vision post-mortem?

Answering this question requires an answer to two further questions: first, what is required to unite with God? And second, how might beholding the beatific vision contribute to such union?

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<sup>5</sup> For discussion on the connection between glorification and deification or theosis in the Eastern tradition, see Russell (2004).

<sup>6</sup> See *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1026, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P2M.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P2M.HTM)

<sup>7</sup> Of course, for reasons that will become apparent later, Aquinas is quick to note one will not see God through one's eyes. See *ST Suppl.* 92:2.

<sup>8</sup> *ST I-II Q.* 3, A. 8. See also *ST Suppl.* 92:2 and *ST Suppl.* 92:3 ad. 12.

## Personal Union

I suggest that any progress on an answer to the former question will require an account of union between persons simpliciter. As I see it, the best contemporary account of personal union can be found in Eleonore Stump's *Wandering in Darkness* (2010). Developing Aquinas's account of union,<sup>9</sup> Stump suggests that real union<sup>10</sup> between persons requires two things: significant personal presence and personal closeness (see chapters 5 and 6, Stump, 2010).<sup>11</sup>

On Stump's account, for Peter to be significantly personally present to Jack, Peter must have

- (i) unmediated causal and cognitive contact with Jack,
- (ii) second-personal experience of Jack, and
- (iii) (dyadic) joint attention with Jack.

Whilst if Peter is to be personally close to Jack,

- (iv) Jack must reveal his mind to Peter, and
- (iv) Peter must need Jack for who he is, and not because Peter lacks something in himself.

On this account of union between persons, if any of (i) – (iii) fail to obtain between Peter and Jack, real union between them will be either limited, or impossible. As a result, even if both Peter and Jack do want, all things considered, union with each other, to the extent that Jack is unable to dyadically share attention with Peter (due, for instance, to distance, or significant psychological or physical distress (see Stump, 2012)), Jack cannot be significantly present to Peter, and so, they cannot be “really” united.

Likewise, to the extent that (iv) – (v) either fail to obtain or are limited, affective union (that is, a union of minds) between Peter and Jack will be limited. So, if Jack is internally fragmented, that is, desirous of things that are mutually contradictory, to that extent will it be impossible for Peter to be maximally close to him, for Jack cannot be close to himself (see Stump, 2010, Chapter 7). Similarly, to the extent that Peter is

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<sup>9</sup>ST I-II Q. 28, A. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Rather than formal or affective union, see ST I:II:28:1.

<sup>11</sup> Much of what follows finds its genesis in Stump's work. To the extent I deviate from her program, I do so because I have come to think that the beatific vision is better understood as a “vision” of divine subjectivity, where divine subjectivity is extrinsic to the divine essence. Knowledge of the essence of God is, in my view, better understood as a by-product of the beatific vision. I can't escape the worry that a fixation on knowledge of the essence of God treats God as an object to be used in the service of one's own beatitude. Such divine instrumentalization seems wholly inappropriate. Stump gestures towards the difference between a desire for the essence of God and a desire to share in the subjectivity of God in chapter five of her *Image of God* (2022, 133–135), but I do not think she sees divine subjectivity as extrinsic to the divine essence, rather I take it she treats divine subjectivity (although she does not use this term) as an aspect of the divine essence.

doubleminded in his desire for Jack, to that extent will Peter's affective union with Jack be limited. Given this, whatever else union requires, in order for maximal union to obtain between them, Peter must be wholehearted in his desire for union with Jack, and Jack must be able to dyadically share attention with Peter.

If the process of salvation concludes with a person's maximal union with God, and if maximal union requires maximal knowledge of the other, a person can only be maximally united with God if they are willing and able to behold God's beatific revelation. Given the preceding desiderata, a person can only avail of such revelation if they have a wholehearted desire for union and the ability to dyadically share attention with God. Granting this, it follows that the processes that directly precede beatific revelation (in the Christian tradition, justification and sanctification), must (at least) culminate in a person having a wholehearted desire for union with God and an ability to dyadically share attention with God. Could possessing a set of propositional beliefs be a necessary condition for either?

### **Justification, Sanctification and Wholehearted Desire**

Setting aside obstacles to dyadic shared attention, I will focus on one condition necessary for wholehearted desire, namely, psychological integration. A person who is psychologically fragmented cannot will wholeheartedly. To the extent that a person has conflicting desires about a certain action or state of affairs, to that extent are they psychologically fragmented, incapable of wholeheartedly desiring any one of the conflicting desires they may have.

To become psychologically integrated, a person's psyche must be integrated around one particular desire. On at least Aquinas's optimistic view of human moral psychology, that is, that a person's will is an appetite for goodness,<sup>12</sup> a person can only ever be *fully* psychologically integrated around a desire for good. Furthermore, as there are lesser goods and greater goods, and as such goods might conflict, stable psychological integration is only possible around what is in fact a person's greatest good, namely, their union with God. Aquinas writes:

Man must, of necessity, desire all, whatsoever he desires, for the last end [...] First, because whatever man desires, he desires it under the aspect of good. And if he desires it, not as his perfect good, which is the last end, he must, of necessity, desire it as tending to the perfect good, because the beginning of anything is always ordained to its completion [...] Wherefore every beginning of perfection is ordained to complete perfection which is achieved through the last end. (*ST I-II Q. 1, A. 6*)

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<sup>12</sup> Namely, that a person's will is just an appetite or inclination for goodness in general.

If the process of becoming wholehearted in such a desire (in the Christian tradition, sanctification) immediately precedes a person's union with God, and, if this union is possible only in case the person is psychologically integrated around a desire for such union, then, the process of psychological integration must have some role to play in the process of sanctification. That is to say, sanctification must include the integration of a person's higher-order desires around a desire for their greatest good, union with God, and the integration of that person's higher- and lower-order volitions around that same unitive end.

However, this process of sanctification does not account for how a person first comes to a higher-order desire for union with God. For that, a person must come to an ordinary higher-order volition for union with God (the "will of justification"). Without such a will, this sanctifying process of integration cannot begin.

### **The Will of Justification, Operative Grace and Original Sin**

At first glance, it would seem that starting the process of psychological integration is something that can be willed by a person. If they want the will of justification, they can just will it (indeed, if they want this will it would seem that they already have it). In any case, it would seem as though the will of justification, that is, the will for union with God, must be predicated on *some* propositional belief, for instance the proposition that God exists. In this case, however, both appearances are deceiving.

According to the Christian doctrine of original sin, the same defect in the will that causes a person's present alienation from God, their psychological fragmentation (their privileging lesser goods, like personal power and pleasure over greater goods, like union with God), also prevents that person from willing their own psychological integration. It is, therefore, part of accepted Christian tradition that for this defect in the will to be overcome, God must give fallen humans the gift of grace, operative, initially, and cooperative, subsequently. On that same orthodox tradition, efficacious operative grace causes in its quiescent recipient saving faith, where the possession of saving faith is sufficient to cause in that person the will of justification (and where cooperative grace is sufficient to complete the process of sanctification).

Before I turn my attention to operative grace and saving faith, it will prove helpful to address an obvious objection to this account of grace. Given the doctrine of original sin as so defined, the natural state of a fallen person's will must be to reject this gift of operative grace as well. It is therefore part of orthodox Christian tradition that it is impossible for a person suffering from original sin to *accept* God's gift of operative grace; any account of salvation that includes a person's accepting God's gift of operative grace is susceptible to the charge of Pelagianism, that is, the heresy that the post-fall human will is still capable of moral goodness without divine assistance. It might seem, then, that this gift of grace is less a gift than it is an imposition, and,

therefore, that talk of the conditions for salvation is to a large extent moot. However, this is not so.

Operative grace does not need to be accepted for it to be efficacious. On the account of mind favored by Aquinas (and in recent years popularised by Stump (see Stump, 2003), the will is not a digital on / off switch. It is capable of more than just “accept” or “reject.” It is also capable of quiescence, neither accepting nor rejecting something, but rather, being turned off to it.<sup>13</sup> And, importantly, on this account, a person has control over whether they are quiescent.<sup>14</sup> As a result, however it happens (be it through external experiences of suffering or of love or of perplexity), a fallen person’s quiescence to God’s gift of operative grace is sufficient both for operative grace to become efficacious and plausibly to avoid the charge of Pelagianism (for a dissenting view, see (Kittle, 2015)). If a person becomes quiescent to this gift of operative grace, then this operative grace will be efficacious. That person will come to saving faith and, thereby, they will come to possess the will of justification.

With this initial objection set to one side, what might cause the will of justification in a person? Working on the premise that the will of justification includes an ordinary higher-order desire for union with God, I will, for the remainder of this essay, explore what I consider to be plausible explanations for these sequentially preceding doctrines of saving faith and operative grace, explanations that do not require specific propositional beliefs.

### **The Will of Justification, Saving Faith, and Conative Desire**

On this minimalist process of salvation, saving faith is bookended on one side by operative grace, and on the other by the will of justification. Saving faith occurs *after* the gift of operative grace is given to a person in a state of quiescence with respect to it, but *prior* to the person coming to possess the will of justification. So, what might saving faith amount to?

To my mind, there is only one plausible explanatory candidate. Only one thing could happen after efficacious operative grace is received by a quiescent intellect but before a person can act on the will of justification (on the assumption that as soon as one has the will of justification one begins to repent), namely, that this person forms, or forms something akin to, the higher-order desire for union with God. Given the above account of justification, the only candidate for saving faith is the forming of something that resembles a (ordinary, not necessarily wholehearted) higher-order

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<sup>13</sup> See SCG III:159.

<sup>14</sup> Whether a person actually has the right sort of control over their coming to quiescence is still a live debate. See Stump (2007), Timpe (2007), Gould (2008), Russell (2010), and Kittle (2015). For Stump's most recent defence of the species of quiescence required (that which gives one sufficient control without also rendering one praiseworthy), see Stump (2022, chapters 3 and 4).

*volition* for union with God.<sup>15</sup> If a person does not have this higher-order volition (i.e., they do not have saving faith), their will cannot be psychologically integrated;<sup>16</sup> consequently, they are incapable of wholeheartedly committing themselves to anything, and so they cannot be fully united with God.

Given that it prompts the will of justification, might saving faith require propositional belief? Not necessarily. Nothing in what I have suggested rules out the possibility that this account of faith is purely conative, where conation is understood as a natural, intrinsic impulse or urge.<sup>17</sup> Conative desire requires no propositional belief. On such a realist yet noncognitivist account, saving faith is best described neither as an affective desire (like a passion or emotion), nor as a cognitive desire (an intellection); rather, it is described simply in terms of its being a certain kind of conative desire for union with God (and so, given the coreferency of the transcendentals, a conative desire for greatest goodness, beauty, and truth).

Thus, contra someone like Daniel Howard-Snyder (2013), the act of saving faith is the will's willing and does not include the intellect's apprehending (which could be described in terms of either propositional doxastic belief or understanding but could also be described in terms of trust, or hope, or acceptance, or assent brought about by quiescence to (or acceptance of) some propositional or propositionally ineffable revelation).<sup>18</sup> Saving faith, therefore, moves a belief (or hope, etc.) to a higher-order effective desire, that is, to a volition. Whilst belief (or hope, etc.) might prompt the desire, it does not guarantee that this desire is effective. Something like a belief (or hope, etc.) might, therefore, be necessary for an act of saving faith (for, on the Thomist account of mind, every act of will is preceded by an act of intellect), but it cannot be the act of faith itself.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, if a person has an ordinary (life-orienting) higher-order volition for union with God (or greatest goodness, etc.), they have saving faith. If they do not have a higher-order volition for union with God (that is, that part of them wants to want union with God), even if they have an occasional first-order volition for such, then they do not have saving faith. Saving faith can thus be explained purely in terms of conative desire, requiring no propositional content. Saving faith *is* the desire for union with God

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<sup>15</sup> By "resemble" I include here the desire for *greatest* goodness, or *greatest* beauty, or *greatest* truth.

<sup>16</sup> Given the optimistic view of human nature, the only thing a will can integrate around is their greatest good, which is union with God.

<sup>17</sup> Where "conative desire" just refers to an intrinsic, natural desire for something that is not based either on an intellectual belief (a cognitive desire), or an emotion (an affective desire). Cognitive and affective desires might also lead to a higher-order desire for union with God; however, the intellectual or emotive component of such desire is not a necessary condition for such higher-order desire.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Alston (1996), Audi (2011a), Pojman (1986), and Schellenberg (2005) on ways to explain the intellect's apprehending of some revelation that does not require (potentially irrational) propositional belief.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Kvanvig (2000), and Audi (2011b).



(which is itself identical to a desire for greatest goodness) that composes the will of justification.<sup>20</sup>

### **Operative Grace and the Intellect**

In the above account, I suggested that saving faith was merely an act of will, but on the Thomist theory of mind I have been working with, every act of will must be preceded by a corresponding act of intellect (that is, an “intellection”). Granting this connection between the act of intellect and the act of will that I take to comprise saving faith, could such an act of intellect require propositional beliefs?

Let us grant both that quiescent receipt of operative grace is a necessary condition for saving faith, and that the will is indeed an appetite for goodness, with every act of will necessarily preceded by an act of intellect. If saving faith is an act of will, that is, if saving faith is a higher-order desire for union with God, it is plausible that whatever else operative grace might do, operative grace also prompts an act of intellect akin to a presentation of the great goodness of the willer’s union with God. For, when such an act of intellect is attended to, the will will, quite naturally, desire union with God. If God is indeed goodness personified (see Matthew 19: 17, Mark 10: 18, Luke 18: 19.), operative grace could amount to nothing more than the revelation of God’s goodness. Appropriately attending to such revelation would, as I see it, result in saving faith, with further attention to this revelation continuing the process of a person’s psychological integration.

### **Operative Grace, Personal Knowledge and Connaturality**

If such divine revelation is necessarily propositional, then belief in a certain set of propositions will indeed be necessary for salvation. However, whilst it seems as though such propositional revelation would prompt saving faith, it is not clear that propositional revelation is the only sort of revelation that can do so, neither, indeed, is it evident that either God’s essence or God’s subjectivity (if the two are distinct) could be captured propositionally.

As argued elsewhere<sup>21</sup> operative grace could instead amount to God’s revelation of propositionally ineffable *connatural* knowledge of God’s attributes, among which include God’s goodness and God’s beauty.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, God’s revelation could amount

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<sup>20</sup> Saving faith differs from the will of justification in as much as it does not also include the corresponding acts of that will, namely, some form of contrition, repentance, and apology.

<sup>21</sup> See Eford & Worsley (2017a). Specifically, I argued there that if the doctrine of divine ineffability is true, no propositional statement can fundamentally capture the nature of God, nevertheless, non-propositional knowledge of persons might.

<sup>22</sup> Where this connatural knowledge is broadly equivalent to Stump’s knowledge-of-persons. For more on connatural knowledge, see Maritain (1951), White (1944), and Suto (2004).

to what Eleonore Stump calls propositionally ineffable *Franciscan* knowledge, that is, personal knowledge of God, knowledge that captures something of divine subjectivity (see Eford & Worsley, (2017). Stump writes:

I want to claim that there is a kind of knowledge of persons, a Franciscan knowledge, which is non-propositional and which is not reducible to knowledge that. What could that possibly be?, a skeptical objector may ask. But, of course, if I give an answer to the skeptic's question, I will have an incoherent position: in answering the question, I will be presenting in terms of knowledge that what I am claiming could not be presented that way. (Stump, 2010, p. 52)

If Franciscan knowledge of persons is indeed by its very nature beyond description, and if, roughly speaking, to be ineffable is to be beyond description – that is, to have the property of not being expressible – all Franciscan knowledge of persons must be in some sense ineffable. If, as Stump suggests, knowledge of other persons can be propositionally ineffable, it is easy to see how God, too, could be, in some comparable sense, propositionally ineffable.

Of course, a putative objector might at this point complain “Operative grace comes too cheaply! It seems as though *anything* in creation might reveal God's attributes.”<sup>23</sup> But there is a straightforward way to deal with this objection. Recall first that operative grace is efficacious only when attended to by a quiescent intellect, and second, that the ubiquitousness of God's self-revelation is recognised by none other than St. Paul, who writes in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. (Romans 1:19-20)

If God can be known connaturally through God's creation (even if one only recognises God as great goodness or great beauty), it is plausible that such connatural knowledge might perform the directing function required of operative grace, and that quiescence with respect to reflection upon such connatural knowledge might make such grace efficacious, causing a person to conatively desire (something akin to) union with God. On this view, then, such propositionally ineffable knowledge can direct the will's conative desire for goodness in the direction of God, the greatest good.

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<sup>23</sup> Indeed, on this view, anything that reveals God's attributes, including God's goodness or beauty, could constitute operative grace. For Aquinas, beauty is one of the forms of the good. See ST I:5:4 ad 1.

## Salvation as Union with God: Part 2

On this minimalist process of salvation, I have suggested that externally motivated quiescence with respect to God's ineffable self-revelation could direct a person's conative desire for goodness, which given the coreferency of the transcendentals amounts to a desire for union with God, which in turn results in their possessing the will of justification. From here, possessing the will of justification, coupled now with acceptance of God's continued self-revelation, might continue the process of sanctification in a person, such that when the process has completed, that person is psychologically integrated around their desire for union with God.

Should God reveal Godself fully and completely to this person at the beatific vision (see 1 Corinthians 13:12), the ultimate self-revelatory gift of grace,<sup>24</sup> the beholding of such a vision and the union that follows would then constitute a person's glorification, an event that concludes this process of salvation in them.<sup>25</sup>

### Divine Ineffability, Religious Humility, and the Epistemic Conditions for Salvation

It is a consequence of this view that those wishing to endorse such a minimalist account should maintain a significant degree of religious humility.<sup>26</sup> For, if operative grace can be explained through propositionally ineffable revelation, and if saving faith can be explained through a corresponding conative desire for union with God, salvation (i.e., union with God) seems at the very least *possible* without *any* propositional beliefs about God *at all*.

Furthermore, as we cannot say what constitutes true connatural knowledge or true knowledge of persons and what constitutes false connatural knowledge or false knowledge of persons, we cannot rule out an experience someone else claims to have had of God just because it is different to our own experience, or just because the propositions they use to describe God are different to the propositions we might use to describe God.

If God has revealed his goodness and beauty in his creation (as St. Paul suggests in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans), it seems perfectly plausible on this account of salvation for a person who has never been exposed to religious texts, or to

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<sup>24</sup> If the process of sanctification has not concluded by the time the person beholds the beatific vision, the site of God's self-revelation will conclude the process, assuming a person has the ordinary higher-order desire for union with God, that is, the will of justification.

<sup>25</sup> There is, of course, a corporate element to the beatific vision (Aquinas, for instance, states that we are united in a state of *philia* with both God and with other creatures, see ST Suppl.:93:1), but I mention that here only to leave this to one side.

<sup>26</sup> By religious humility, I mean the adopting a belief that their (propositionally expressible) understanding of God is not necessarily the only one available, and by a "significant" degree of such humility, I mean that they accept that wildly different (propositionally expressible) understandings of God might still lead a person to salvation.

religious people, to reflect on the beauty and goodness of God's creation, and in so reflecting, conatively desire (greater) goodness and beauty.<sup>27</sup>

Granting that such a person possesses a higher-order desire for goodness and beauty, if, at the beatific vision, God were to reveal himself fully and completely to them, I suggest that their reflection on God's unveiled goodness and beauty would cause that person to complete the process of sanctification *immediately*. God's completely self-revelatory grace would be, to the receptive beholder, totalising.<sup>28</sup> If such a person has a higher-order desire for greater goodness and beauty, what can compare to Goodness and Beauty personified?<sup>29</sup> Aquinas notes:

Final Happiness consists in the vision of the Divine Essence, which is the very essence of the goodness. So that the will of him who sees the Essence of God, of necessity loves, whatever he loves, in subordination to God; just as the will of him who sees God's Essence, of necessity, loves whatever he loves, under that common notion of good which he knows.  
(ST I-II Q. 4, A. 4)

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<sup>27</sup> This is even more the case, as Aquinas thinks our will is an appetite for goodness in general. See ST I:82:2.

<sup>28</sup> Aquinas writes concerning this vision,

Final Happiness consists in the vision of the Divine Essence, which is the very essence of the goodness. So that the will of him who sees the Essence of God, of necessity loves, whatever he loves, in subordination to God; just as the will of him who sees God's Essence, of necessity, loves whatever he loves, under that common notion of good which he knows. (ST I.II:4:4)

<sup>29</sup> If what I have said so far is indeed plausible, it would seem as though connatural knowledge of God's goodness or beauty is sufficient for salvation, at least on the order of salvation I have sketched. But, a Christian might worry: given this account, is the atonement, the central doctrine of the Christian faith, really necessary? Certainly, reflection on the love shown in Christ's death could bring a person to quiescence with respect to God's revelation of his goodness or beauty, but it also seems possible those utterly unaware of Christ's death might still come to desire goodness, and may still behold the beatific vision. So, the question remains: why the cross?

It is here worth recalling the other necessary condition for union. As well as psychological integration around a desire for union with God, a person must be able to (dyadically) share attention with God. It certainly looks like the former might be attainable without any reference to the atonement. However, there is good reason to think the latter may not be. Elsewhere, Eleonore Stump (2018) has suggested that guilt (the belief it is appropriate for someone else to desire your hard treatment) and shame (the belief that it is appropriate for someone else to reject you as a person) might work to prevent dyadic shared attention from occurring between a person and God. A person guilty or shamed (as according to the doctrine of original sin, we all are before God) is likely to avert their attention from the one they think could appropriately reject them, or desire some hard treatment from them, even if that person does not in fact desire so. A shamed or guilty person could not, then, behold the beatific vision.

However, so long as something about Christ's death adequately deals with the problem of guilt and shame (as it purports to do), and so long as whatever it is about Christ's life and death that deals with these problems is available to a person who so desires to avail of these provisions after their death, Christ's atonement might be at once necessary for union with God, and yet a person might still come to salvation without (in this life) any knowledge of Christ.

## Conclusion: Ineffability and the Epistemic Conditions for Salvation

Indeed, there is a further reason to think we should adopt a position of significant religious humility with respect to the salvation of others. On one prominent strand of Christian thought, God's nature just is propositionally ineffable. But if God's nature is propositionally ineffable, God's self-revelation (i.e., God's gift of operative grace) is necessarily propositionally ineffable. And so, whatever or however a person's intellect processes this ineffable self-revelation, their intellect cannot process it propositionally. It cannot for, if the doctrine of divine ineffability is true, there is *no* (fundamentally) true propositional knowledge of God to be had at all.<sup>30</sup>

If operative grace is indeed divine self-revelation, such grace *must* consist in something akin to non-propositional knowledge of God. Indeed, adopting such a view of divine ineffability lends greater credence to the thought that saving faith is simply a conative desire. Saving faith could not involve belief in a certain set of propositions about the nature of God for the simple reason that there are no such (fundamentally) true propositions to be believed.<sup>31</sup>

Although I have presented a somewhat particularist argument for salvific inclusivity, it is easy to see how this account might embrace salvific pluralism. If there are no fundamentally true propositions that capture the nature of God, it is possible for people of different faiths, and even of no faith, to ultimately experience union with the same God. Furthermore, if, given divine ineffability, it is the case that operative grace can *only* consist in something akin to connatural or personal knowledge of God, we may have no trustworthy way of (on the basis of propositional statements) adjudicating between those who profess knowledge of God whether they do in fact know God.<sup>32</sup>

To one degree or another, we all may be (propositionally) oblivious to our salvation.

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<sup>30</sup> For a fuller defense of this position, see Eford & Worsley (2017b). It's worth noting here that (contra Jacobs (2015, p. 167)) even the proposition "God is ineffable" will turn out to be non-fundamentally true.

<sup>31</sup> For more on this line of thought, see Jacobs (2015).

<sup>32</sup> This is not to say that shared reasoning concerning God is impossible. There may be plenty of mind-independently non-fundamental truths to discover (as it were) regarding God. Only, that any such shared project would be independent of questions about salvation. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to make this point a little clearer.

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