

APPENDIX I

EVIDENCE IN OTHER RELIGIONS

In this Appendix I will present a survey of the approaches of other religions to the question of evidence for truth. We will start with the Far Eastern religions which, as I stated in the text, present no evidence of truth at all. We will then examine those that offer evidence that is not unique, including Hinduism and Buddhism. Finally we will look at those whose evidence is not agreed upon by alternative positions.

Munro presents a comprehensive review of Confucian and Taoist thought, based upon original sources. Here is what he says.

P. ix (preface): “There is a general tendency among Western readers, especially those with philosophical training, to interpret and evaluate Chinese philosophy in terms of familiar categories. For example, they look first for the “argument,” or demonstration that the position being advocated in the Chinese work is true; when they find no systematic, step-by-step argument, there is often a feeling of frustration....What were important to the Chinese philosophers, where questions of truth and falsity were not, were the behavior implications of the statement in question. In other words, the Chinese asked: What kind of behavior is likely to occur if a person adheres to this belief? Can the statement be interpreted to imply that men should act in a certain way? The Chinese thinker’s regrettable lack of attention to the logical validity of a philosophical tenet is balanced by his great concern with problems important to human life....A word of caution is also appropriate for Westerners who expect the archaic Chinese texts to show the same consistency in philosophical position that Western writings do.”

P. 54-5: “The Platonists were more concerned with knowing in order to understand, while the Confucians were more concerned with knowing in order to behave properly toward other men. In China, truth and falsity in the Greek sense have rarely been important considerations in a philosopher’s acceptance of a given belief

or proposition; these are western concerns. The considerations important to the Chinese are the behavioural implications of the belief or proposition in question. What effect does adherence to the belief have on people? What implications for social action can be drawn from the statement? ...this special concern with the behavioural implications of a proposition applies not only to the Confucians but to most other early Chinese schools as well – even to the Taoists...”

The de-emphasis of truth did not inhibit the Chinese from taking positions on many matters of fact. As stressed in the text, to accept a belief in the absence of evidence is irresponsible, and will lead to actions that are at least wasteful, and may be positively destructive. Even if, on occasion, the belief adopted happens to be true, the method of adopting it is still irresponsible. Compare the weather forecaster who makes his predictions on the basis of the flip of a coin, and is accurate 50% of the time. Even those predictions that turn out correct are made in an irresponsible manner.

Here are some examples of beliefs about the world in Chinese sources:

P. 12-3: “The Confucian’s ...held that people’s natural differences had little effect on their future performance as members of society...’By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they become different””

Those who hold this belief may be expected to try to organize practice so as to produce their favored kind of people. When they meet with the stubborn resistance of the limits set by differences in DNA, they may resort to more extreme methods, convinced as they are that some method *must* work.

P. 35: "...the Confucians read into nature both the principles governing the customary social norms...and certain social virtues; by doing this, they could then derive a justification for the particular social system they desired to support."

Since the motivation for reading nature thus is really political, they will surely get nature wrong. That will damage their attempts to understand and control nature for all their goals.

P. 40: "The New Text School ...believed that when men did not act with the natural order of things, they upset the previous harmony between man and nature, and unnatural events followed. In other words, there was interaction between man and nature....So, the emperor had to wear the color green in the spring; if he did not, the seasonal regularity might be upset...."

Such a belief, accepted only due to the desire to see a correspondence between the political and the natural, will not lead to a true understanding of nature.

P 40: "...the concept of interaction between the human and natural realms was facilitated by the belief that both were products of a single primal substance. Thus there was no physical barrier to their effects on each other....Tung Chung-shu and others once more endowed Heaven with the attributes of a supreme spirit that wills, commands, is conscious, and is "good." One reason for this was the political unification of China then being carried out by the emperor Wu. The unification of separate region, each with its own local gods, would be facilitated by the introduction of belief in a supreme spirit whose commands are binding everywhere."

In this case, Jewish belief accepts ideas similar to these of the Chinese. Even so, if the only basis of the belief is the desire to create a cosmic backdrop for the political unification of China, then we will have to regard this as arriving at the correct belief by chance.

P. 132: “The Taoists, by contrast, repudiated belief in a natural basis for the social order, and, fully consistent with this position, they assigned the evaluating mind to the ephemeral (and thus nonessential) part of the human endowment. As a result, the Taoists, besides maintaining a doctrine of natural equality of men at birth and rejecting hereditary inequalities, rejected the Confucian categories for differentiating between adults. ...”

As above, the belief in natural equality at birth is false and destructive.

P. 132: “The Taoist rejection of the Confucian natural order and social hierarchy is manifest in the description of the Tao itself....Tao, was without sensible qualities, and could not be characterized by such distinctions as good and bad or high and low.

The absence of any basis for the distinctions that human beings make in their societies was proved by showing that the Tao, the principle of natural order, was completely without the attribute “high” and “low.” The Taoists also attempted to demonstrate the unnaturalness of ethical distinctions by showing that ...since the Tao is absolute and unitary, there is nothing beyond Tao that it can be compared to; therefore no attributes can be assigned to it. Qualities like good/bad, noble/base, cold/hot, or wet/dry are completely relative to the point of view of the person who assigns them; they have no basis in nature.”

As a general conception of the absolute source of all existence, this account of the Tao as beyond all human description is common to many religions, including Judaism. However, the consequence drawn from this

conception – that all human distinctions drawn even in the human realm, including moral distinctions, are illusory – is a radical one that all other religions reject. In fact, what motivated this conception of the Tao was in part a desire to reject the social policy of the Confucianists. Thus a social goal leads to a partly correct conception of the ultimate source of existence, and that leads in turn to the radical mistake of denying reality to all moral conceptions even in the world of humanity.

Kaltenmark presents a review of Taoist thought, based upon discussion of the two major Taoist texts, the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Chuang Tzu*, and related literature.

P. 28: "...the Tao is more than a principle of order, it is a reality behind the origin of the universe...Neither *tao* nor any other word in a human language can serve as a name for the Supreme Principle..."

P. 31: "...the permanent thing [the tao] has no definite qualities; having no definite qualities and no spatiality it cannot be told of."

P. 35-6: "...the multifarious doctrines and systems of wisdom or government current in the world are contingent forms of Tao, and...our language cannot express anything but relative truths. It is utterly incapable of expressing the absolute [i.e. the Tao], for which not even an adequate name exists...this supreme reality cannot be [described]...only mysteries and revelations concerning the seen and unseen world can be mentioned. However, these mysteries arise from the depths of the unknowable; the unknowable does in fact have a Mystical Gate, and is accessible in some way; or rather, it is the absolute that reveals itself, multifariously and by degrees, to human intuition."

As above, this conception of the absolute is common to many religions. However, the next step is that anything that can be described in language is merely relative and ultimately unreal. For that reason, Taoism rejects philosophy, conventional morality, and scholarship of all types.

P. 47-9: “The Taoists condemn mere learning as dangerous: its multiplicity destroys the unity of being. In order to maintain or restore unity, and to struggle against the temptations of discursive knowledge, the intellect has to be purified....Lao Tzu condemns all learning, particularly the pseudo-science of the values taught by the moralists and realists. These philosophers treat values that are as relative as ‘long’ and ‘short’ as if they were absolute....The Taoists considered all social values to be prejudices, and as such, wrong, because they cloud reality and land us in the vicious circle of contradictions. The point is to get out of this circle by transcending it. To do this, we need only look at things from the standpoint of the Tao, for in the Tao all contradictions are reconciled and cancel out....in Taoist thinking no one is really good or really wicked...”

Again the central idea is carried to the unreasonable extreme of denying any reality whatsoever to moral concepts and social distinctions. And again -

p. 75-6: “If we start from the principle that all things and creatures (men included) are fundamentally identical, i.e. all are one, then we cannot legitimately pass judgment on them; we cannot approve of some and condemn others....Granted, men apparently differ in character, temperament, and intelligence. This means that we each have a particular self that we oppose to the selves of others. Yet within each of us there is a ‘Supreme Master’ superior to all these distinctive particularisms...this Supreme Master is, of course, the Tao, the principle of life and unity...”

P. 78: “Discursive knowledge is condemned...for it cannot help being partial, incomplete, and false.”

To accept this conception of an absolute called “Tao” is not just to accept an abstract belief. There is a plan of living associated with the conception. This plan is often described as “inactivity,” but this has a special connotation in Taoist literature.

P. 32: “...the art of living that consists of letting nature alone, of not intervening in the course of events...”

P. 53: “...*wu-wei* is not an ideal of absolute inaction; on the contrary, it is a particularly efficacious attitude since it makes all doing possible. ‘The man who applies himself to study, each day increases [his efforts and ambitions]. The man who applies himself to the Tao, each day decreases [his activity and desires]. From diminution to diminution, he manages to stop acting altogether; once he has stopped acting, there is nothing he does not do.’ (Tao Te Ching, chap. 48). In ‘ensconcing himself in *wu-wei*’ the Taoist merely imitates the Tao, whose efficacy is universal for the very reason that it is ‘inactive’. ‘The Tao never acts, yet there is nothing that it does not do’ (chap. 37). There is nothing the Tao does not do because the Tao is the same thing as universal spontaneity. ”

P. 54-5: “*Wu-wei* is the only means to true success...the Holy Man’s policy of non-intervention is nothing more than congruity with natural law, the ‘Heavenly Tao that conquers without striving’ (chap. 73)...*wu-wei* and nonviolence are the most effective means of getting power and holding on to it. Since all action gives rise to reaction, the normal counterpart of a seemingly right action will be wrong. The only action that does not entail this consequence is the natural action of the Heavenly Tao...So *wu-wei* is not pure passivity...”

P. 67-8: “For Te is a strength that is all-powerful (*Chuang Tzu*, chap 59) and never failing (chap, 28). The ruler who possessed it, as a true Taoist Holy Man, would have an occult power that his subjects would not even be aware of. If he would preserve quietude and simplicity in the likeness of the Tao, not only the nations,

but all creatures would model themselves on natural harmony...the Ruler-Holy Man would establish peace on earth.”

P. 98-9: “We are here in the presence of a particular feature of Taoist mysticism: its practical efficacy. Psychic purification is a method for living in one’s time and for ‘acting without acting’. Totally inhabited by the Tao. The Holy Man possesses a form of Te (mystical power) that exerts a beneficent, but imperceptible, influence on others.”

To the extent that these directions for living can be put into practice, we have a picture of ultimate reality, and a program of living in terms of that reality that is guaranteed to bring certain results.

What reason is there to accept this picture of the world? Kaltenmark tells us:

P. 36: “...the Tao Te Ching...is not a philosophical treatise; it contains no demonstrations of any kind. It gives only conclusions, not the steps by which they are reached; it is up to each man to take the steps on his own.”

P. 64: “Like all mystics, Lao Tzu never attempts to give a rational demonstration of his doctrine; his teachings are deliberately obscure and ambiguous....”

The source of the doctrines of Taoism is revelations to certain individuals (pp. 139-42). But there is of course no evidence that these claimed revelations are in fact genuine. The practice of Taoist meditation is claimed to lead to specific experiential results:

P. 97: “Ecstasy freed the adept from all physical constraints, and he felt as if he were rising up and roaming beyond space and time....”

Thus we have no attempt to present selective evidence for the existence of the Tao, its relationship to our world, or the efficacy of acting according its rules. These beliefs and practices are accepted for reasons of social philosophy, or personal intuition. Included in Taoism is a mystical practice including meditation. This practice is claimed to have certain experiential results. We may assume that these claims are in fact correct. Nevertheless, as we saw in chapter V, they do not constitute selective evidence of the truth of the religious story of Taoism.

A similar attitude is expressed in Buddhist sources. On the one hand, they make very extravagant claims for the powers of meditation and the Buddhas who manifest themselves in every generation. On the other hand, these claims are never put to the test, even though the test is not difficult to perform. They are trusted on the basis of the character of the spiritual excellence of the person making the claims. The following quotes are from Robinson:

P. 18: “The trances [of the Buddha on the night of his awakening] lead to the six “superknowledges”: (1) magical powers (such as levitation and walking on water)...(3) knowledge of others’ minds, (4) memory of one’s former lives”

P. 19: “...the Enlightenment consisted of communicable ideas....the specific destinies of all living beings...memories of one’s own former lives...seeing the past and future, as well as the present, conditions of others...”

P. 20: “...[these] cognitions constitute an empirical verification of the doctrine of transmigration and retribution for deeds.

[Of course, the mere unsubstantiated testimony of those who meditate that they remember their former lives, or know the past and future, would not be regarded by us as “empirical verification.” We would require a public demonstration of that knowledge.]

P. 27: “[Gautama’s] style ... was didactic rather than demonstrative. He elaborated his points but did not attempt to prove them. The chief guarantee of their truth is that they are the testimony of an Enlightened One. It is assumed that men with keen faculties will find them self-evident....”

P. 29: “The Holy Truths... were not premises for a deductive system but enunciations of *gnosis* (“saving knowledge”) to be meditated upon until the hearer “catches on” and breaks through to another plane of being.”

P. 53-4: “The Sunyavadin Sutras assert and illustrate but do not prove their theses. They employ much persuasive rhetoric and very little inference and formal argument.”

The claims of magical powers and reading minds could easily have been tested. The fact that they were not indicates that the normal procedures for testing the truth were not applied to these religious beliefs. All that is left for Buddhism, and for Hinduism as well, are the tangible results of their practices of meditation. As we saw in the text, these true descriptions of experience are not selective evidence of truth.

Islam illustrates the appeal to personal experience as evidence for truth. The claim is that anyone who learns Arabic well and reads the Quran will see that only Allah could have authored it. In order to account for those non-Moslems who have mastered Arabic, read the Quran, and yet remain unconvinced, the claim must be qualified to apply only to those who read the Quran in a special way, with special preparation.

Understanding Islam, Frithjof Schuon, Penguin Books, 1972

P 20-1: “The attitude of reserve adopted by Islam...towards...[the] axiomatic assumption of miracles is explained by the predominance of the pole of “intelligence” over the pole of “existence”: the Islamic outlook is based on what is spiritually evident, on the feeling of the Absolute,...and not as a will waiting to be seduced in either a good or a bad sense, seduced, that is to say, by miracles or by temptations...the Moslem hates the rejection of Allah and Islam because the supreme Unity and its absoluteness and transcendence appear to him dazzlingly evident and majestic....

P. 48-9: “...the supernatural character of this Book [the Quran] does not lie only in its doctrinal content, its psychological and mystical truth and its transmuting magic, it applies equally in its most exterior efficacy, in the miracle of the expansion of Islam;

Ideals and Realities of Islam, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Beacon Press, 1972

P. 42: “One asks how could the Prophet be unlettered and yet ‘recite’. How could he be unlettered [sic] and yet announce the Quran which is the most beautiful of all works in the Arabic language, a book whose eloquence is itself the greatest miracle in Islam.”

P. 57-8: “...no sacred text reveals to human scrutiny and reveals its secret so easily....One has to be prepared to penetrate its meaning...It is essential to realize that we cannot reach the inner meaning of the Quran until

we ourselves have penetrated into deeper dimensions of our being and also by the grace of heaven...It is by spiritual travail that man is able to penetrate into the inner meaning of the sacred text.”

P. 128: “...the Tariqaua in Islam is a spiritual path which can produce sanctity, whose fruit bears testimony to its Divine origin through the spiritual fragrance that it carries... “

Hodgson describes the same evidence from the reading of the Quran:

P. 165: “Muhammad himself claimed no wonder but the Qur’an itself; this, however, he regarded as undeniable. He challenged any man to produce its like; and (like any great creative work) it has in fact proved inimitable. Nevertheless, it is clear from the Qur’an that the divine message ought to be acknowledged without any need for such evidentiary miracles. Those who are blinded by their delight in transient things...will reject any prophet, however how well evidenced. But those who have guarded themselves from such blindness will recognize the truth as soon as they are reminded of it by the warnings of a prophet.”

How to read the Qur’an:

P 184: “...the Qur’an cannot be read as a discursive book, for abstract information, or even, in the first instance, for inspiration. ...[it] is notoriously often lacking in clear logical order or development...Hence many non-Muslims find it a jumbled and incoherent mass, ridden with repetitions, and have been at a loss to fathom why Muslims regard it as supremely beautiful. It must not be read through but rather be participated in: it must be recited, as an act of self-dedication and worship. The Qur’an presents at every point one great challenge: to accept the undertaking of faith. To recite it truly is to be accepting and affirming that undertaking. Then its beauty can be responded to line by line and one will delight in the juxtaposition, whatever the immediate subject, of all its main themes within any given passage.”

Here it is important to distinguish two different claims. Many religions require special preparation to penetrate the deeper meanings of their texts. But they do not cite the experience of this deeper meaning as evidence for the truth of the text. It is the conjunction of the two claims that destroys the value of the evidence. The reason is this. The claim that everyone who reads the text with the appropriate preparation will see that it is true *could be made about any text whatsoever*. Anyone who reads the text and does not see its truth can simply be explained as someone who did not have the necessary preparation. Since the same claim can be made for any text whatsoever, it is not selective evidence in favor of Islam.

[In the text we saw that the other piece of evidence offered in favor of Islam, namely the rapid conquest of large territory, also fails to support the truth of Islam.]

We now turn to Christianity. One of the most important proofs offered for the truth of Christianity is the resurrection. It is claimed that there is overwhelming evidence that the resurrection took place. If it did, that alone can give credibility to the claims that his word should be trusted for the rest of the Christian story. Craig [chap. 8] gives a comprehensive review of the evidence for the truth of the resurrection story.

As background, Craig notes that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a whole school of Christian theology denied that the resurrection took place. These scholars were Christian believers who nevertheless denied that the story is literally true. They gave a symbolic-theological interpretation to the story. Their view was based upon their evaluation of the historical evidence, together with their particular theological positions. They included some of the most eminent Christian theologians of the time. One, Rudolf Bultmann, even admitted that the earliest disciples *did* believe in the literal resurrection, but

nevertheless were mistaken! In our own times there remain believing Christian scholars who maintain this position, though Craig opines that they are in the minority.

As we will see, the argumentation in favor of the truth of the resurrection can be divided into two categories. One part is addressed to the coherence of the elements of the story with each other. Assuming some of the elements of the story are true, it is unreasonable to deny other elements. Another part offers independent evidence that the story, or some of its elements, really took place. The first category of evidence depends upon the second. Without evidence that at least some of the elements of the story are accurate, the coherence of those elements among themselves counts for little. The difficulty for the second category of evidence is that, outside of Christian sources themselves, there is no evidence at all during the first century.¹ Thus everything depends upon the reliability of the Christian sources.

¹ Here is the review by France:

"1.1 The *lack of relevant evidence outside the gospels* makes them the necessary starting-point of any investigation of the historical Jesus.

1.1.1 In the first century or so after the death of Jesus there are very few *references to Jesus in non-Christian literature*.

(a) The brief notice in Tacitus *Annals* xv.44 mentions only his title, Christus, and his execution in Judea by order of Pontius Pilatus. Nor is there any reason to believe that Tacitus bases this on independent information—it is what Christians would be saying in Rome in the early second century. Suetonius and Pliny, together with Tacitus, testify to the significant presence of Christians in Rome and other parts of the empire from the mid-sixties onwards, but add nothing to our knowledge of their founder. No other clear pagan references to Jesus can be dated before AD 150/1/, by which time the source of any information is more likely to be Christian propaganda than an independent record.

(b) The only clear non-Christian Jewish reference in this period is that of Josephus *Antiquities* XVIII.63-64, the so-called *Testimonium Flavianum*. Virtually all scholars are agreed that the received text is a Christian rewriting, but most are prepared to accept that in the original text a brief account of Jesus, perhaps in a less complimentary vein, stood at this point /2/. Josephus' passing mention of 'Jesus, the so-called Messiah' in *Antiquities* XX.200 is hard to explain without some previous notice of this Jesus, especially since Josephus elsewhere makes no reference to Christianity, nor even uses the term *Christos* of any other figure. The different and less 'committed' version of the *Testimonium* preserved in a tenth-century Arabic quotation from Josephus/3/, while it is unlikely to represent the original text, does testify to the existence of an account of Jesus in Josephus' work underlying the Christianized text. But reconstruction of what Josephus wrote is necessarily speculative.

(c) Rabbinic traditions about Jesus /4/ recall him as a sorcerer who gained a following and 'led Israel astray', and so 'was hanged on the eve of the Passover'. Some of the relevant passages may date from the second century AD, but they are very obscure, and bear little relation to the Jesus his own followers remembered. Their polemical nature and their lack of interest in factual data does not create confidence in their potential as historical evidence for Jesus.

I will begin by summarizing Craig's presentation of the evidence. Then I evaluate its credibility.

Craig first presents evidence that over five hundred witnesses saw Jesus after his death and burial. First, Paul's expression of the doctrine of resurrection mentioned in 1 Corinthians² is a quotation

1.1.2 Early Christian references to Jesus outside the canonical gospels fall into two categories.

(a) Practically all surviving Christian writings of the *first century* are found in the New Testament. In the letters of Paul, in the early preaching as Luke reports it in the Acts of the Apostles, and in various references in the other New Testament books, we gain a basic perspective on Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, crucified and raised from death, on whom the early Christians based their hope of salvation. These references to Jesus are made in a context of faith, to which biographical interest takes second place. They do in fact add up to a fairly consistent, if minimal, portrait of Jesus as a remembered figure of history, and their factual content is not negligible /5/. But a historian who had only this material to work on could hope for only the most meagre record of Jesus' life and teaching.

² 1: Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand,

2: by which you are saved, if you hold it fast -- unless you believed in vain.

3: For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the

scriptures,

4: that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,

5: and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

6: Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen

asleep.

7: Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

8: Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

9: For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10: But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than

any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me.

11: Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

from an older Christian formula that he passed on to the converts. In that text he mentions the five hundred witnesses who saw Jesus alive after his death. Second, according to Galatians, Paul was in Jerusalem in 36 C. E. for two weeks a mere five years after the resurrection.³ Thus the list of witnesses of the event must be accurate.

All New Testament scholarship agrees that the gospels were written and circulated within the first generation. Some would argue that some of the gospels were written as early as the 50s. This means that the story of the resurrection was public knowledge at a time when, had it not been true, it would have been easily refuted.

Craig claims conclusive evidence the tomb was discovered to be empty. Here is the argument. The accuracy of the story of the burial of Jesus cannot be challenged. It is mentioned in the earliest Christian sources, exists in only one version, is consistent with the archeological evidence concerning types and location of tombs from that period, and lacks any traces of legendary development.

Assuming the burial story is accurate, then the grave must have been empty. The burial story says that a giant bolder closed the grave, and Roman soldiers guarded it. Now assume that the grave were not empty. To believe in resurrection in these conditions would be folly. Even if some were inclined to accept such a story, the authorities would have exposed the lie by producing the body. After all, the resurrection is the most profound verification that Jesus was not an impostor, that he really was a divine person. Thus the authorities would have the most urgent need to prove that the resurrection was a lie. All they had to do was produce the body. The fact that they did not do this implies that they could not do so. The only possible reason they could not do so is that the tomb really was empty. Furthermore, even if the disciples

12: Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

³ See text below.

could have accepted the story, they would not have generated any following if the grave were not demonstrably empty.

Paul's statements concerning the resurrection imply unambiguously that the grave was empty. Also, the description of the discovery of the empty grave by women could not be invented, since women were not be valid as witnesses according to Jewish law, so they would have the least credibility. Anyone inventing such a story would not have made women the ones to discover the empty grave. Also, the earliest Jewish polemic [as quoted in Christian sources – D. G.] against the resurrection questions only whether the body was moved from the grave, thus admitting that the grave was in fact found empty.

The final type of evidence offered by Craig is the origin of Christianity. The central teaching and proof of early Christianity is the resurrection. Without ample evidence of its truth, it is impossible to explain how the religion was not simply dismissed as a petty fiction. Indeed, even the disciples' belief cannot be explained. Jewish tradition knows only of a general resurrection at the end of time. No mention of individual resurrection can be found in Jewish sources.⁴ The existence of the belief requires the existence of the event itself.

Now we turn to the evaluation of the evidence. Craig claims evidence that the description of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians is a repetition of an older formula used for converts. Even if this is true, we do not know the exact text of the original formulation. In particular, we do not know if it contained reference to the claim that there were over five hundred witnesses. All we could conclude is that the belief in the resurrection itself is older than the speech described in the text of 1 Corinthians.

The earliest possible date for the composition of the gospels is the 50s. Let us say 55. That is 25 years after the resurrection is supposed to have taken place. So all we can conclude is that 1

⁴ This is incorrect. The Jewish Bible records instances of individual resurrection. Elisha restores a dead person to life [1 Kings chap. 17] and Elisha does the same [2 Kings chap. 4].

Corinthians is reporting in 55 an already extant Christian belief. That leaves open the possibility that the belief arose say 10 years before, in 45. This is fifteen years after the event is supposed to have occurred. And this is on the assumption for the earliest possible date for the gospels.

In addition, there is a difficulty for dating the origin of the account in 1 Corinthians as early as 45. The difficulty is this. In the text Paul says that only the majority of the more than 500 witnesses are still alive.

Verse 6: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

Is it credible that a mere fifteen years after the event only a majority of the five hundred is still alive? It would be extravagant to assume that “most of whom” must refer to 90%. But if it refers to 75%, still a rather high “most,” that means that 125 of the witnesses have died. Is that reasonable in a mere fifteen years? If not, that casts doubt on dating 1 Corinthians in 55. If 1 Corinthians is later, there is even more time between the origin of the story and the death of J.

The question then becomes this: Could such a story have been invented ten years before the composition of 1 Corinthians? According to Craig’s dating this would mean in 45; according to our reservation in the last paragraph this would mean some time later, say 55 or even later. See below.

Craig tells us that Galatians describes a two week fact finding tour made by Paul a mere five years after the resurrection. Here is the text of the first chapter of Galatians:

1: Paul an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead --

2: and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:

3: Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

4: who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father;

5: to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

6: I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel --

7: not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

8: But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.

9: As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

10: Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.

11: For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel.

12: For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

13: For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it;

14: and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

15: But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace,

16: was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer

with flesh and blood,

17: nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.

18: Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days.

19: But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

20: (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!)

21: Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cili'cia.

22: And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea;

23: they only heard it said, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."

24: And they glorified God because of me.

Verses 15-19 describe Paul's visit to Jerusalem. Verse 18 describes the time of the visit with the words "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem." The question is: Three years after what? The immediately preceding event mentioned is the revelation in verse 16. But there is no indication when that revelation took place. In particular, there is no reason to assume that it took place at the time of the resurrection. We have no way to place the time of this trip to Jerusalem. Thus to describe it as a fact-finding tour five years after the resurrection is without basis in the text.

Paul says (in 1 Corinthians above) that Jesus appeared to all the disciples and to over five hundred other witnesses after his death. Yet on his trip to Jerusalem, Paul sees only Cephas and James. He sees none of the other disciples, and there is no mention of any of the five hundred. Is this a thorough "fact-finding" tour? From the text there is no indication of the purpose of the trip to Jerusalem other than to visit Cephas.

Craig refers to "the list of witnesses." But in the text there is no list at all. They are completely anonymous.

Here is a summary of what we have found so far. The evidence places the belief in the resurrection no earlier than fifteen years after the event, and there is reason to think that it is later than that. The story recorded in Galatians mentioning the 500 anonymous witnesses can be verified no earlier than 55. The date and purpose of Paul's trip to Jerusalem are uncertain.

Now add the following fact: The gospels were written in Greek. The population of Jerusalem, including Jesus himself, spoke Aramaic. For what population were the gospels intended? Who read them and had to evaluate their credibility? Indeed, why were not the original records written in Aramaic and only translated later into Greek?

Here is a scenario that can explain these facts without assuming that the resurrection really occurred. The belief originated fifteen or more years after Jesus' death. It circulated slowly among those who were still affected by their earlier contact with him. It was gradually elaborated, including an appearance to 500 unnamed witnesses. The location of this appearance is left undetermined [see below]. This story was recorded in a Greek document. The document was designed for the majority of Jesus' followers at that time who were Greek speakers. This group is therefore considerably different from the original followers of Jesus who spoke Aramaic. For this reason there was little danger of a confrontation with the supposed 500 witnesses themselves or their relatives – the witnesses and their relatives would belong to the Aramaic speaking population.

Let us go on. Craig claims that the burial story must be accurate because it is mentioned in the earliest Christian sources. But that is at the best in 55, and more likely even later, 25 or more years after the event. That is more than enough time for the details of the event to be forgotten or changed.⁵

⁵ We cannot assume that the details of so momentous an event - the execution and burial of the founder of Christianity - would surely be remembered. That would beg the question. According to our explanation, the event was not momentous at the time. No one at the time knew that this person would later be come to be accepted as divine. Only the assumption that the resurrection really occurred makes the burial seem

Craig's claim that there is only one version of the story is not completely accurate. In fact there are stories of appearances in different places under different conditions. Many hold that these are somewhat confused memories of one event [including a spokesman for the Pope – see below]. If one assumes that they are all true, then it becomes impossible to determine their order. For events as crucial as appearances of Jesus after his death, it would be very surprising that no precise record was made. Furthermore, the fact that there is only one version of a story need not mean that it is accurate. Multiple versions of invented stories depend upon many conditions being met – alternative versions would need to be just as plausible, serviceable for the needs of the group, of sufficient interest to engage the creative imagination of the group, etc.

The consistency with the archeology and history of the period is explained by the fact that when the story was invented burial practices had not changed. The lack of legendary content is due to the short time span between the invention of the story and the composition of the gospels that record it. This evidence does not discredit our explanation.

The evidence linking the burial story to the empty tomb has the following form. *If* the burial story is true, and *if* the belief in the resurrection was immediate upon Jesus' death, *then* the tomb must have been empty. Our scenario rejects both "ifs." Thus this evidence does not even bear on our explanation.

Paul's statement reflects at most his belief that the tomb must have been empty. It gives us no reason to think it really was empty. The fact that the story credits the discovery of the empty tomb to women who [according to Craig's inaccurate description⁶] are invalid as witnesses according to Jewish law is of little significance. After all, the story goes on to describe human witnesses who saw Jesus after death. According to the story, a credible witness for the empty tomb is of little importance when you have witnesses

momentous. On the other hand, since the resurrection would have been a momentous event had it occurred, it might seem that KP should require us to accept its truth. This is not correct – see below.

⁶ See Meiselman, chap. 13.

of the dead person returned to life. It only seems significant to us since we doubt the resurrection story altogether. To those creating the story it has little weight.⁷ Finally, the choice of objection by the Jewish critics of Christianity is recorded here in a Christian source. It is to their interest to portray the Jews as admitting the empty tomb. This evidence does not discredit our explanation.

The final piece of evidence is the belief of the disciples and the growth of Christianity. Should these facts be regarded as extremely improbable – so improbable that they cannot be explained unless the resurrection occurred? In order to answer this question, let us first look at Swinburne's evaluation (in [1] p. 235) of the growth of Christianity as evidence for the resurrection:

The way the early Christians behaved is contrary to the way most of us behave most of the time. But perhaps there are no laws in this field, and the unusual sometimes occurs. Or perhaps there are laws, and given the circumstances of Palestine in the first century AD, Christians behaved as the laws of sociology (as yet unknown by us) predict.

Thus Swinburne is not prepared to cite the growth of the early church as a miracle, even though he is committed to the truth of Christianity.

Furthermore, instead of trying to answer this question (How can we explain the early growth of Christianity if the resurrection did not occur?), we ought to turn it on its head. Craig tells us that if the tomb had not been empty, the authorities would surely have produced the body in order to prove the resurrection a lie. They did not do this because, according to Craig, the tomb was empty. Why then did not the belief in the

⁷ Indeed, the choice of women as the discoverers of the empty tomb has positive theological support since Jesus is consistently portrayed as the defender of the disadvantaged. That could explain this element of the story.

resurrection take hold instantly? Why did it not become a cause celebre? Here is the scenario: The followers tell everyone he will arise; the scoffers refuse to believe. The uncertain should post watch, thousands should be present on the third day to see it happen, or not happen. When the resurrection takes place, there should be massive immediate confirmation of the event followed by immediate mass conversions. The resurrection should have been the marvel of the age. It should have produced mass conversions and massive documentation.

In fact, nothing like this happened. Recall the quotation from France [footnote 1] – there is no mention of Christianity outside Christian sources in the first century. And even those sources give a very minimal picture of Jesus' life. In France's words: "They do in fact add up to a fairly consistent, if minimal, portrait of Jesus as a remembered figure of history, and their factual content is not negligible /5/. But a historian who had only this material to work on could hope for only the most meagre record of Jesus' life and teaching." The belief in Christianity spread only slowly, and left no external documentation at all. This fact by itself – the slow growth of Christianity – is strong evidence that the resurrection did *not* take place.

Our scenario can account for the invention of the resurrection and the gradual growth of Christianity. As we said, the belief in the resurrection could have been introduced fifteen or more years after his death. A sufficient reason for inventing this particular belief is the fact that resurrection was a theme of Jesus' message. The New Testament records a number of debates between Jesus and Sadducees who rejected resurrection altogether as a Jewish belief. Jesus sided with the Pharisees in accepting the belief. Indeed, one of the most attractive aspects of Christianity was the promise of eternal life. Roman religion recognizes only the life of the body. In John, chapter 25, he says the he *is* the resurrection:

24: Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

25: Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

What better way to substantiate this central controversial principle than to have an actual case occur? Those who were already convinced that Jesus was an extraordinary, godly person were brought to believe that his godliness was expressed in the personal fulfillment of his own teaching. At one stroke, this refutes the Sadducees and attempts to enlist the support of the Pharisees by giving dramatic evidence of the truth of their position.⁸ More important, it demonstrates that the Christian promise of eternal life is realistic.

Finally, let us consider Luke 9: 22 where Jesus predicts his own resurrection:

22: Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.

⁸ Furthermore, in Luke 9: 22 he even predicts his own resurrection:

22: Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.

If we take the prediction as historically true – if Jesus really did predict his own resurrection – then everyone should have been waiting for it to occur. The followers tell everyone he will arise; the scoffers refuse to believe. The uncertain should post watch, thousands should be present on the third day to see it happen, or not happen. When the resurrection took place, there should have been massive immediate confirmation of the event followed by immediate mass conversions. Since this did not occur, we must assume that Luke 9: 22 is a later attribution. Jesus never really made such a prediction. But then, we must ask, how could such a later addition be made to his original teachings? The answer is the same as above. His teachings are preserved in different forms in different places. After the story of the resurrection itself is accepted, his prediction can be added. The vast majority of followers know that no one of them is aware of all the sources, so each can say that the new information must have come from one of the sources that he does not know.

If we take the prediction as historically true – if Jesus really did predict his own resurrection – then one of two things should have occurred. Either the prediction came true, in which case there should have been massive conversion and documentation, or the prediction did not come true, in which case the early Christian belief should have died immediately. Since neither of these occurred, we must assume that Luke 9: 22 is a later attribution. Jesus never really made such a prediction.

But then we must ask how could such a later addition be made to his original teachings? Craig's argument should apply here – such an important prediction, one actually verified by the resurrection, would surely be remembered. Craig should hold that it could not be fabricated later. But we see that in fact it was fabricated. How could this happen?

The answer is a continuation of the same scenario we have been using. The story of the resurrection itself is accepted in order to demonstrate the truth of the Christian promise of eternal life. Gradually more details are added, like the anonymous 500 witnesses. The prediction from Luke can also be added. Jesus' teachings are preserved in different forms in different places. The vast majority of followers know that no one of them is aware of all the sources, so each can say that the new information must have come from one of the sources that he does not know. They are recorded in Greek and directed to a population different from his original followers.

Just as this scenario can account for the addition of the prediction of resurrection, it can equally account for many lesser additions. The growth of the belief follows credible patterns of human psychology; it does not require us to assume it is true in order to explain how it came to exist.

The above is the strongest evidence that Craig presents for the belief in the resurrection. A survey of the remainder of his material can be found in this footnote.⁹

⁹ Chapter 8 of Craig is 43 pages long. Most of its points are made in two or three sentences. There are considerably more than one hundred individual pieces of evidence that Craig cites for the truth of the resurrection. In the text of this Appendix I have considered the most important of these. This footnote is

provided for the reader who is interested in how some of the rest of Craig's material can be answered. In particular, we will see that none of Craig's evidence contradicts the scenario provided in the text that explains the origin and growth of early Christian belief.

In favor of the authenticity of the Gospels, Craig cites the style of writing, reference to the details of life and the prediction of apocalypse. These facts indicate that the Gospels must have been written before 70 C. E. *Reply*: Our scenario allows that date and still accounts for the belief in a false story of the resurrection.

Craig says: "Furthermore, it would have been impossible for forgers to put together so consistent a narratives that which we find in the Gospels. The Gospels do not try to suppress apparent discrepancies, which indicates their originality." *Reply*: There seems to be a contradiction here – both consistency and contradictions support the authenticity of the Gospels!

Craig says that the style of each particular Gospel is appropriate to what we know of the personalities of the traditional authors. *Reply*: Since we have no information about the authors other than from the Gospels themselves, this only means that whoever authored them took care to write them in a style appropriate to the person to whom authorship is attributed.

Craig claims that the Gospels and Acts are cited by a series of authors, beginning with authors contemporary with the apostles. *Reply*: As France documents, there are no references outside the Christian scriptures in the whole of the first century. Indeed, Craig quotes Paley as conceding that the names of the authors of the Gospels may be incorrect. That is hard to imagine if contemporaneous authors already mention those works.

Craig devotes a whole section to considering the following proposition: If the Gospels are false, then the apostles were either deceivers or deceived. He argues that neither alternative is plausible. *Reply*: Our scenario avoids this dilemma. Imagine that the story began about twenty years after Jesus' death and spread slowly in different versions in different locations. The details of appearances to the apostles could have been added in locales where they did not reside and/or after their deaths.

Craig cites the universal tradition of belief in the resurrection and other miracles performed by Jesus. "The letters of Barnabas and Clement refer to Jesus' miracles and resurrection. Polycarp mentions the resurrection of Christ, and Irenaeus relates that he had heard Polycarp tell of Jesus' miracles. Ignatius speaks of the resurrection. Quadratus reports that person were still living who had been healed by Jesus. Justin Martyr mentions the miracles of Christ." *Reply*: All these sources date from the end of the first century and later. Our scenario takes the belief to start in the middle of the first century. This allows fifty years for the spread of the belief. Thus our scenario explains the record of the belief in the sources cited by Craig. [The following is from the Encyclopedia Britannica. Barnabas letter - an early Christian work written in Greek by one of the so-called Apostolic Fathers, Greek Christian writers of the late 1st and early 2nd centuries. Ascribed by tradition to St. Barnabas, the Apostle, the writing dates possibly from as late as AD 130 and was the work of an unknown author who refers to himself in the letter as a teacher. Clement - Latin name TITUS FLAVIUS CLEMENS (b. c. AD 150, Athens--d. between 211 and 215; Christian Apologist, missionary theologian to the Hellenistic (Greek cultural) world. Polycarp - Greek bishop of Smyrna who was the leading 2nd-century Christian figure in Roman Asia. IGNATIUS (d. c. 110, Rome), bishop of Antioch, Syria, known mainly from seven highly regarded letters that he wrote during a trip to Rome. The letters have often been cited as a source of knowledge of the Christian church at the beginning of the 2nd century. Quadratus - (fl. early 2nd century), the earliest known Apologist for Christianity. With only a fragment of his Apology for Christianity still extant, preserved in the Ecclesiastical History of the 4th-century scholar Eusebius of Caesarea, Quadratus has not been clearly identified. Justin Martyr - (b. c. 100, d. c. 165), one of the most important of the Greek philosopher-Apologists in the early Christian church.]

Craig claims that if the resurrection did not happen it is incomprehensible that “a dozen men, poor, coarse, and apprehensive, turn[ed] the world upside down...” – the apostles would not have been able to persuade others of the truth of their belief, and have it as widely accepted as it in fact became. *Reply:* This forgets the impact that Jesus had on people while he was still alive. The apostles were not starting from scratch. It is precisely that impact, together with the general knowledge that Jesus believed in resurrection (and may have predicted his own resurrection), that gives the impetus for the story of the resurrection to appear and become accepted.

Craig says that the Gospels describe Jesus being buried by one Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin. Since the Sanhedrin was a kind of supreme court, its members were the leading men of Judaism. Such a story could not be invented about so prominent a person. *Reply:* The Sanhedrin contained the seventy-one greatest Jewish scholars. Since the position of a leading national scholar is usually achieved at an advanced age, the turnover on the Sanhedrin must have been fairly rapid. Imagine the story being invented thirty years later. At the rate of only five replacements per year, we have 221 candidates. As a comparison, how many of the present members of the U. S. Supreme Court can you name?

Concerning the 500 witnesses, Craig says:

“I think this appearance is not related in the gospels because it probably took place in Galilee. As one puts together the various appearances in the gospels, it seems they first occurred in Jerusalem, then in Galilee, and then in Jerusalem again. The appearance of the 500 would have to be out of doors, perhaps on a hillside outside a Galilean village. Since the gospels focus their attention on the appearances in Jerusalem, we do not have any story of this appearance to the 500, because it probably occurred in Galilee.”

Comment: This is a very remarkable admission. From the text of the Christian scriptures it is not clear where the appearance to the 500 is supposed to have occurred. This means, as we pointed out in the text, that any audience to whom the story is told can assume that it took place in some other location. Then the audience has no reason to assume that, if it really occurred, they would have known of the event. They have no reason to search for the remainder of the 500 witnesses and question them – they have no idea where they are supposed to be. In addition, Craig here admits that the number and order of the appearances is speculative. Considering the crucial role that verifying the resurrection has in making Christianity credible, it is very surprising that there is no precise record of the appearances. [One should also note the statement of the papal spokesman that the various accounts of “appearances” may be varied reports of a single event – see below in the text of this Appendix.]

Craig quotes the great NT scholar of Cambridge University, C. H. Dodd concerning the 500 witnesses of the resurrection: “There can hardly be any purpose to mentioning the fact that most of the 500 are still alive, unless Paul is saying, in effect, ‘The witnesses are there to be questioned.’” Craig concludes that Paul could never have said this if the event had not occurred. *Reply:* This assumes that Paul really did say these words. But they could have been added to the story later. Furthermore, as we have seen, the location of the appearance to the 500 is uncertain. Thus Paul could have made his statement in a place distant from the appearance so that his audience could not check with the supposed witnesses.

Craig says that the belief in the resurrection originated in Jerusalem – the very city in which the event is supposed to have occurred. This could not have happened if the story were not true, for, if it were indeed not true, the tomb could have been opened and the body displayed. Since this did not happen, the story must be true. *Reply:* Craig cites no evidence that the belief did in fact originate in Jerusalem. But if it did, then we face the dilemma posed in the text: Why did not the belief become instantly universal? Showing

the empty tomb and pointing out that the authorities were not able to produce the body could instantly silence any doubt. The slow growth of Christianity contradicts the origin of the belief in Jerusalem.

Craig cites the conversion of Jesus' brothers to the faith: "On the one hand, it seems certain that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him during his lifetime. On the other hand, it is equally [sic] certain that they became ardent Christians, active in the church....Can there be any doubt that the reason for this remarkable transformation is to be found in the fact that 'then he appeared to James?'" *Reply*: First, this takes for granted that the facts are as reported. Even Craig can only say that it "seems certain" that the brothers did not believe during Jesus' lifetime. Second, a proof that rests on speculation about what makes people do what they do is necessarily speculative. Our grasp of human psychology is not secure enough to give great confidence in such evidence. Recall Swinburne's refusal to count the growth of early Christianity as miraculous.

Craig cites the immense change in the life of Paul, who began as a vigorous opponent of the new belief, and then became its ardent supporter. This change, says Craig, was wrought by the (auditory) appearance of Jesus to Paul outside Damascus, after Jesus' death. This could not be a hallucination, says Craig, since the text says that the men accompanying Paul also heard the voice. Thus they must have experienced Jesus after his death. *Reply*: The change in Paul's life could be the psychological effect of a powerful internal vision. The part about the companions hearing the voice could have been added later. The companions are unnamed, so there would be no way to check this part of the story.

Craig quotes Professor A. N. Sherwin-White, a historian of Greek and Roman times, who says that the sources for historical events in that period are usually one or two generations removed from the events themselves. This allows for legends to creep into the accounts. By contrast, the belief in the resurrection and others of Jesus' miracles is in place so soon after the time of the events themselves, the rate of legendary accumulation would be "unbelievable" if the stories were not true. *Reply*: First, the fact that the "sources" are one or two generations after the events does not mean that the legendary material was added only then. The sources may be preserving legendary material that entered the story even earlier. Thus we have no basis to determine how quickly legendary material can be added to a story. Second, as we saw in the text, Professor Huston Smith points out that the time of Jesus abounded in miracle stories concerning contemporaneous figures. Those stories were generally believed. It is true that those stories did not become as widely accepted as did the Christian stories. But that alone does not imply that they are true – stories become believed for many reasons unrelated to truth.

Craig argues that the belief of the apostles in the resurrection [assuming there was such a belief – D. G.] cannot be explained by the influence of Christianity since there was not Christianity yet. *Reply*: This ignores the effect of Jesus' preaching during his lifetime, including his own prediction that he would be resurrected. [Craig takes the accounts of that prediction as factually correct.]

Similarly, Craig argues that the belief of the apostles in the resurrection cannot be attributed to the influence of Jewish sources. The reason is that Jewish sources have no concept of the resurrection of an individual during the course of this period of human history. There are accounts of *resuscitations*, but that is a return to normal physical life. The resurrection was to heavenly life. *Reply*: Jewish tradition contains resurrection to normal life as part of present history, and resurrection to heavenly life at the end of history. It is not a great extension to combine the two ideas and arrive at resurrection to heavenly life even during this period of history.

Craig argues that the appearances of Jesus after his death cannot have been hallucinations. The reason is that hallucinations are always projections of material that is already in the mind. But Craig feels he has shown that there is no source for this material in the minds of the witnesses – there are no Jewish or pagan sources and Christianity did not yet exist. *Reply*: In addition to the last two replies, we should note that Craig's assumption that hallucinations are limited to what is already in the mind is completely without evidence.

Let us note finally that the evidence claimed by Christianity from the resurrection is not at all similar to the evidence for Judaism from the application of the Kuzari Principle to national miracles. The stories of Christian miracles never assert that they were witnessed by an entire nation. A few thousand people observe them at most. As we argued in detail above, if you are making up the story at a later time, the audience will not be able to say that they should have known about the event independently. They have no reason to think that their ancestors observed it. They also have no reason to think that an event witnessed by a few thousand would create a national tradition. See Smith, pp. 320-1,324:

“A New Testament scholar comments that ‘despite the difficulty which miracles pose for the modern mind, on historical grounds it is virtually indisputable that Jesus was a healer and exorcist.’ He could have been that – indeed, he could have been ‘the most extraordinary figure in...the stream of Jewish charismatic healers,’...*without attracting more than local attention.*”.... “Almost all of his extraordinary deeds were performed quietly, apart from the crowds...Moreover, *other writings of the time abound in miracles, but this did not lead witnesses to deify their agents.*” [My emphasis.]

Craig presents general criteria for believing one among a group of competing hypotheses. They include possessing credibility superior to rival hypotheses – greater explanatory power and scope, greater plausibility and less ad hoc, and less disconfirmed by accepted beliefs than rival hypotheses. He then argues that his survey of the evidence shows that the belief in the resurrection satisfies these criteria. *Reply:* Belief in a miraculous event requires more than merely superior credibility. As we pointed out in chapter VII, to introduce the category of miracle into an otherwise naturalistic worldview requires very strong evidence – a large excess of credibility over the nearest competitor. Craig has not shown this for the belief in the resurrection.

Thus the claim that the stories would not have been believed if the events had not occurred is false. The writings of the time “abound in miracles” – false stories of miracles – that were nevertheless believed. People believed these stories precisely because they knew that, even if the miracle had occurred, they would not necessarily have heard about it. In the same way, the early followers of Christianity knew that the miracles described in Christian texts could have occurred without them knowing about it, and thus they were able to accept those stories. This being so, it is clear that KP does not apply. The principle applies only if the later audience would be convinced that if the event had happened they surely would have known of it. In this case the audience would not have been convinced.¹⁰

The same general analysis can be applied to other stories of Christian miracles. As an illustration, we will consider the stories of feeding thousands of people with a few loaves of bread and a few fish. Leaving aside the details that vary in different sources,¹¹ the core of the stories is that after a day of preaching to multitudes and healing the sick, Jesus feeds (four or five) thousands of people from a few loaves of bread and fish. These stories are presented as accounts of public miracles that could not have been invented. The reason it is claimed that they could not have been invented is the large number of people described as witnessing the events.

¹⁰ We should note that Judaism does not need to deny that Christian miracles took place. Firstly, the Torah says (Deut. Chapter 13) that there may be *false* prophets who will do miracles. Miracles alone do not prove the truth of the message. Thus, even if the Christian miracles took place, a Jew need not admit that Christianity is true. By contrast, belief in the truth of Judaism is *not* based upon the words of a person whose credibility is solely that he did miracles. It is based rather on the public revelation at Sinai. Indeed, God speaks to Moses in a manner that the whole people can hear the speech precisely in order that Moses will remain credible forever – see Exodus 19: 9. See Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah, chap. VIII.

¹¹ Matthew 16 and Mark 8 state explicitly that there were two such incidents. From Matthew 14 and 15 it is clear that Matthew 16 is referring to one at the Sea of Galilee and the other in a desert area. Earlier in Mark there is mention only of a desert incident. Matthew 14, Mark 6 and Luke 9 describe a desert incident in which 5000 people are fed by five loaves and two fish, with twelve baskets of leftovers. Mark 8 describes a desert incident in which 4000 people are fed by seven loaves and “a few” fish with seven baskets of leftovers. Matthew 15 describes a Galilee incident in which 4000 people are fed with seven loaves and a few fish with seven baskets of leftovers. John 6 describes a Galilee incident in which 5000 people are fed by five loaves and two fish with twelve baskets of leftovers.

First let us examine the stories in a little more detail. The food is distributed by the disciples who complain at first that so little food cannot possibly feed so many. There is no indication that *the thousands of people who ate the food examined the original amount and saw the miraculous expansion of the food*. In fact, in all sources but one, no reaction on the part of the thousands is mentioned at all – no surprise, no acceptance of Jesus as divine, no thanks to G-d – nothing. It would be possible to read these sources as follows. The disciples saw that the food was too little, and they alone saw that it was miraculously expanded. The thousands of recipients just saw the basket go around and each knew that when it reached him it still had food in it. Thus the story asserts that actual miracle was witnessed only by the disciples.

Only one source, John 6, adds the words: “Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.” It would be reasonable to suggest that these words are a later addition to the basic story represented by the other five sources. If so, we do not have a story of a public miracle at all.

But let us assume that the original story was understood as a public miracle. We can still apply the same argument that was used for the story of the resurrection. Imagine the story is first publicized 35 years after the event is supposed to have taken place. The five thousand are not identified in any way. Even the locality of the event does not help since in some sources the people are supposed to have followed Jesus from afar.¹² The story is written in Greek documents describing events that occurred to a population that spoke Aramaic. Would the reader of the document reason that, if the event really had occurred, he should already have known about it? Should he assume that the events took place to his ancestors, and all the ancestors of his nation, or even his city? Nothing motivates such a conclusion. Therefore, the audience cannot carry out the

¹² All three sources for the desert incident – Matthew 14, Mark 6 and John 6 – say only that the people came from their cities. No more information is given about their places of residence. Mark 16 and John 6 describe the Galilee incident by saying that multitudes came to Jesus. Where they came from is not mentioned.

reasoning that is crucial to KP. Thus we can easily see how such a story can come to be believed even though it is not true.

I have argued that the evidence presented by Craig is not sufficient to justify believing that the resurrection took place. This conclusion could be questioned in the following manner. Perhaps my argument is based on an unreasonable standard of evidence. Swinburne [2] argues that certain circumstances reduce the evidence we need to justify a belief. In particular, if we already have an independent reason for thinking that an event will or may occur, that reduces the amount of evidence we need to justify believing that it did occur. Here is how he puts the point and applies it to belief in a divine revelation:

I shall consider whether humans have reason for expecting a revelation and what kind of revelation we might expect a God (if there is a God) to provide. In so far as there is good reason to expect a revelation, we need less strong detailed historical evidence to show that it has occurred. If a well-established scientific theory leads you to expect that stars will sometimes explode, then some debris in the sky of a kind which could have been caused by an exploding star, but which (though improbably) just might have some other cause, may nevertheless be reasonably interpreted as debris left by an exploding star. But if a well-established theory says that stars cannot explode, you will need very strong evidence that the debris could not have had another cause before interpreting it as debris of an exploding star. Similarly, how strong we need our historical evidence to be depends on how likely it is a priori that God will give us a revelation. [P. 2]

So if there is evidence which makes it quite likely that there is a God, all-powerful and all-good, who made the earth and its inhabitants, then perhaps it becomes to some extent likely that he would intervene in human history to reveal things to them; and claims that he has done so require a lot less in the way of historical

evidence than they would do otherwise. I am assuming here as I have argued elsewhere¹³ that there is much evidence from other sources that there is an all-powerful and all-good God. [P. 70]

Swinburne applies the same argument to the resurrection. Suppose that we have a general argument for the existence of an all-powerful and all-good God. Swinburne argues that such a God could very well have reason to incarnate himself as a human, die, and be resurrected. Given the existence of God and a reason for him to do so, we have some reason to expect such an event to happen. Then the evidence we need to justify believing that such an event actually did occur is considerably less than we would need without such a reason. In Swinburne's words:

If the content of the Christian revelation has some prior probability, then the background evidence gives some reasonable support to the view that the Resurrection took place. This historical evidence is the records of the Gospels and the Epistles, with their various different writers, of the death of Jesus, of the empty tomb, of the appearances of Jesus to the disciples after that, the evident failure of the Jewish or Roman authorities to produce the corpse of him who the disciples claimed to be risen; the conviction of the disciples as to these things and what they signified being shown by the effect on their lives, their missionary activity, and willingness to die for their faith....if the background evidence is fairly strong, as I have suggested that it is, we do not need too much in the way of historical evidence to make it on balance probable that the Resurrection took place. [P. 112]

The strength of the background evidence depends upon two factors. One is the general argument that an all-powerful and all-good God exists. The other is the argument that such a God would have reason to cause the

¹³ In [1].

resurrection. Let us accept Swinburne's conclusion that the first argument succeeds in showing that the existence of God is more probable than not.¹⁴ Let us see how the second argument goes. Here is Swinburne's account in [1] (pp. 239-41):

Suppose that men so abuse their freedom that they teach others evil and not good. They do not altogether know which actions are right and which are wrong, and they conceal from themselves even what they do know. They show little interest in where they came from (e.g. whether they have a creator to whom thanks and service are appropriate), nor in whether their existence has any point and their race any destiny. They do not care for their fellows, but live for self....one kind of response God has reason to make is the following. He might conclude that things had gone so wrong that an atonement was needed; that the human race ought by sacrificial action to show to its creator and to itself its contrition. Yet he might conclude that it was not in the capacity of a fallen race to make this kind of atonement; and if that atonement was to be made, it would have to be made on behalf of the race by a man preserved from the bad influences to which humanity was subject. Yet it would not be right of God to single out one man to make such a sacrifice. God could insist on the sacrifice of none other than himself. So God has a reason to bring about an incarnation of some kind of himself as man in order that atonement might be made....For these reasons, given the stated assumptions, if there is a God and if man's condition falls low, we may well expect there to appear among men a man who lived a humble and sacrificial life and suffered the evil that men do to men (e.g. by suffering an unjust death at their hands) who taught great moral and religious truths, and who even suggested that he was God, and who founded a society to continue his work. He might manifest the divine compassion by healing, and the divine power by violating natural laws in order to do so. He might show to men that his atonement availed and that it

¹⁴ [1], p. 291.

was possible for them in his society to reform the world, by natural laws being violated in the supreme way by his resurrection from the dead.¹⁵

By this reasoning one might hope to avoid my critique of Craig's historical evidence for the resurrection. Yes, when considered in isolation, the historical evidence for the resurrection is too weak to justify belief. But taken in conjunction with the background evidence perhaps it is strong enough.

We must examine this argument with care. Swinburne is surely right that background evidence plays an important role in justification. But the *weight* of that evidence may vary very greatly. To use his own example, if we think it impossible for stars to explode, we are going to ignore all but the very strongest evidence for such an event. Now suppose we come to believe that, contrary to what we used to think, it is possible for stars to explode, but that this will happen only for one out of 10^{20} stars. Then, since current estimates hold that there are approximately 10^{20} stars in the entire universe, it is still extraordinarily improbable that we will ever discover an exploded star. This change in the background evidence will have at best a negligible effect on the strength of evidence we need to conclude that we have found the debris of an exploded star.

On the other hand, suppose we come to believe that stars explode fairly often (as in fact we now believe). Then the evidence that we have found an exploded star need not be very strong at all.

Thus everything depends upon the weight the background evidence contributes to the probability of the event we are investigating. Given the argument that there exists an all-powerful and all-good God, how much support does the argument concerning what God has reason to do lend to the beliefs in revelation and resurrection?

¹⁵ It should be noted that in this passage Swinburne is concerned to make the opposite argument – that evidence the resurrection occurred provides evidence for the existence of God. Both arguments turn (in part) on showing that God would have reason to bring about the resurrection.

The answer to this question turns on a fine point of probability reasoning. Let us take a simple example.¹⁶ Suppose you are quite sure that Paul is at the party – you would say the probability he is there is .9. You also know that Eleanor almost always attends the parties that Paul attends – you would say the probability is .9 that she is there if Paul is. What then should you say is the probability that Eleanor is at the party?

The *right* thing to do is multiply the probabilities – the probability that Eleanor is at the party is .81. This correctly registers the fact that both the background evidence (that Paul is at the party) and the likelihood of your conclusion given the background evidence (that Eleanor is at the party if Paul is) are less than certain. Therefore the conclusion (that Eleanor is at the party) inherits the uncertainty of both, and is therefore less certain than each. And this reasoning can be repeated. Suppose you believe that the probability of Jim being at the party if Eleanor is there is .8. Then you may conclude that the probability of Jim being at the party is .648.

The crucial point for us is this: The more intermediary steps there are in the reasoning, the lower the probability of the final conclusion. Even if the probability of each step is very high – say .9 – in seven steps the probability drops below .5. If the probability of each step is .8 it takes only four steps to fall below .5. Thus it is crucial to identify all the steps in the reasoning, estimate the probability of each, and multiply. In particular, the *wrong* thing to do is to say: Since we are quite sure Paul is at the party – we gave that .9 probability – we can take that for granted. The probability that Eleanor is at the party given Paul's attendance is .9; we are quite sure of this as well, so we can take this for granted also. Now the probability that Jim is there given Eleanor's attendance is .8, so we may conclude that the probability Jim is there is .8. The mistake here is the "taking for granted." Anything that is less than certain will contribute some doubt to the conclusion. This doubt is registered by multiplying the probabilities.

¹⁶ This point is made with all rigor, and applied to various aspects of Swinburne's argument, in Plantinga, pp. 272-80. I am presenting only an abbreviated and simplified version of his argument.

Plantinga applies this logic to Swinburne's project as follows.¹⁷ In order to assess the probability that the resurrection took place, we start with facts accepted by all parties to the debate. This is "background evidence," labeled K. Now Swinburne presents an argument that the facts of our world support the existence of an all-good and all-powerful creator (T). Swinburne concludes on the basis of this argument that the truth of T is *more probable than not*.¹⁸ That is, the probability of T on K is greater than .5 – somewhere between .5 and 1.¹⁹

Now we consider the probability that, given K and T, God would reveal Himself in some way (A). Plantinga considers that quite likely – between .9 and 1. Next comes the probability that Jesus' teachings were such that they could be sensibly interpreted and extrapolated to the main Christian teachings (B), given K, T and A.

This Plantinga estimates as between .7 and .9.

¹⁷ In fact, Plantinga's target is the probability of the major teachings of Christianity, using an argument like Swinburne's. I am applying Plantinga's reasoning only as applied to the resurrection. That will be enough to make my point. But it is worthwhile to see Plantinga's conclusion:

...in our attempt to estimate the power of a historical argument for G [the basic beliefs of Christianity – D. G.], an argument that doesn't rely on faith or any special theological assumptions, what we can say is only that this probability is at least high enough not to be a whole lot less probable than its denial....the conclusion to be drawn, I think, is that K, our background knowledge, historical and otherwise isn't anywhere nearly sufficient to support serious belief in G. If K were all we had to go on, the only sensible course would be agnosticism....[P. 280]

Thus Plantinga, a profoundly committed Christian believer, and a life-long philosophical defender of Christianity, concludes that our background knowledge makes G not much less probable than its denial. That means that G *is* less probable than its denial. Thus on the basis of the background knowledge we certainly should not accept G as true. If this is Plantinga's conclusion, it is reasonable for non-Christians to take the same position. Thus Swinburne's evidential support for the basic teachings of Christianity can be denied by the alternative positions. Thus it is not selective evidence in favor of Christianity.

¹⁸ [1], p. 291.

¹⁹ For the sake of continuing the argument with the most generous possible estimates, Plantinga resolves to take this probability as .9. His conclusion is that even with such an unreasonably high estimate, the probability of the main beliefs of Christianity will be much too low to compel belief. Since I am going only as far as the resurrection, I will take Swinburne at his word and apply Plantinga's logic to Swinburne's own estimate.

Finally, we need to estimate the probability that, given all of K, T, A and B, that the resurrection took place (R). On the basis of only purely historical evidence (together with K, T, A and B), Plantinga finds this last probability the subject of vast scholarly controversy.²⁰ Explaining that he is erring on the side of generosity, Plantinga sets this probability between .6 and .8.

Now we are interested in the probability of the resurrection given the probabilities of the steps leading up to (R). As above, we need to multiply the probabilities. Thus all we know is that the probability of R, given K, T, A, B is somewhere between .19 and .72. thus all we know is that the probability of the resurrection – taking into account both the background evidence of G-d’s existence, revelation, Jesus’ teachings, and all the historical evidence – is more than .19. Such a low probability gives excellent reason to reject the belief altogether. Even if we take the midpoint (in stead of the lower bound), we have only .46 – less than a fifty-fifty chance. Even on Swinburne’s very lenient criterion for belief (any probability greater than .5), we would not be justified in believing the resurrection.²¹

We conclude that it is not possible to use Swinburne’s logic to rehabilitate Craig’s defense of the resurrection. Even taking into account the effect of the argument for theism and the reasons God may have for revealing Himself and causing resurrection, the historical evidence will not produce a probability high enough to justify belief.

²⁰ As we saw above, even Craig admits that there is a school of thought among Christian theologians that the resurrection did not take place.

²¹ Plantinga points out that if we estimate the probability of a proposition as .51, we cannot sensibly believe it. Recognizing that the probability is that low *prevents* us from believing it. Thus Swinburne’s claim that a probability greater than .5 suffices for belief is mistaken. I am inclined to agree with Plantinga here. But even without this point, we see that Swinburne’s method cannot possibly justify believing in the resurrection.

The Catholic Encyclopedia offers the following summary of evidence for the truth of Catholic Christianity.²²

(b) These motives of credibility may be briefly stated as follows: in the Old Testament considered not as an inspired book, but merely as a book having historical value, we find detailed the marvellous dealings of God with a particular nation to whom He repeatedly reveals Himself; we read of miracles wrought in their favour and as proofs of the truth of the revelation He makes; we find the most sublime teaching and the repeated announcement of God's desire to save the world from sin and its consequences. And more than all we find throughout the pages of this book a series of hints, now obscure, now clear, of some wondrous person who is to come as the world's saviour; we find it asserted at one time that he is man, at others that he is God Himself. When we turn to the New Testament we find that it records the birth, life, and death of One Who, while clearly man, also claimed to be God, and Who proved the truth of His claim by His whole life, miracles, teachings, and death, and finally by His triumphant resurrection. We find, moreover, that He founded a Church which should, so He said, continue to the end of time, which should serve as the repository of His teaching, and should be the means of applying to all men the fruits of the redemption He had wrought. When we come to the subsequent history of this

²² The Catholic Encyclopedia is on line at <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=4554> . The quote is from the article entitled "Faith."

Church we find it speedily spreading everywhere, and this in spite of its humble origin, its unworldly teaching, and the cruel persecution which it meets at the hands of the rulers of this world. And as the centuries pass we find this Church battling against heresies schisms, and the sins of her own people—nay, of her own rulers—and yet continuing ever the same, promulgating ever the same doctrine, and putting before men the same mysteries of the life, death and resurrection of the world's Saviour, Who had, so she taught, gone before to prepare a home for those who while on earth should have believed in Him and fought the good fight. But if the history of the Church since New-Testament times thus wonderfully confirms the New Testament itself, and if the New Testament so marvellously completes the Old Testament, these books must really contain

what they claim to contain, viz. Divine revelation. And more than all, that Person Whose life and death were so minutely foretold in the Old Testament, and Whose story, as told in the New Testament, so perfectly corresponds with its prophetic delineation in the Old Testament, must be what He claimed to be, viz. the Son of God. His work, therefore, must be Divine. The Church which He founded must also be Divine and the repository and guardian of His teaching. Indeed, we can truly say that for every truth of Christianity which we believe Christ Himself is our testimony, and we believe in Him because the Divinity He claimed rests upon the concurrent testimony of His miracles, His prophecies His personal character, the nature of His doctrine, the marvellous propagation of His teaching in spite of its running counter to flesh and blood, the united testimony of thousands of martyrs, the stories of countless saints who for His sake have led heroic lives, the history of the Church herself since the Crucifixion, and, perhaps more remarkable than any, the history of the papacy from St. Peter to Pius X.

(c) These testimonies are unanimous; they all point in one direction, they are of

every age, they are clear and simple, and are within the grasp of the humblest intelligence. And, as the Vatican Council has said, “the Church herself, is, by her marvellous propagation, her wondrous sanctity, her inexhaustible fruitfulness in good works, her Catholic unity, and her enduring stability, a great and perpetual motive of credibility and an irrefragable witness to her Divine commission” (Const.

Dei Filius) . “The Apostles”, says St. Augustine, “saw the Head and believed in the Body; we see the Body let us believe in the Head” [Sermo ccxliii, 8 (al. cxliii), de temp., P.L., V 1143]. Every believer will echo the words of Richard of St. Victor, “Lord, if we are in error, by Thine own self we have been deceived- for these things have been confirmed by such signs and wonders in our midst as could only have been done by Thee!” (de Trinitate, 1, cap. ii).

The argument presented here for the truth of Christianity consists of seven points:

1. The record in the Jewish Bible of miracles, G-d’s general nature, and hints of a divine/human messiah.
2. The New Testament record of Jesus’ birth, life, and claim to be G-d, plus his miracles, teachings, death and resurrection that prove his claim.
3. He predicted the permanence of the church – the spread of Christianity and the stability of the Catholic Church fulfilled this prediction.
4. The Church spread in spite of its other-worldly message, humble origin and persecution.
5. The Church battled against heresy, schism etc. yet remained the same.
6. Therefore the Jewish Bible and the New Testament contain divine revelation.
7. Therefore the messiah foretold in Jewish Bible and described in the new Testament must be Son of God, and church must be guardian of his teaching.

Points 6 and 7 are conclusions drawn from the previous five, thus we must direct our attention to 1-5.

Point 1 may be based upon the evidence that Judaism is true, and may therefore be accepted. Since it is only claimed that the Jewish Bible contains “hints” of a divine/human messiah, this cannot be taken as serious evidence. Indeed, even those “hints” are a matter of considerable controversy in textual interpretation. This point provides no selective evidence in favor of Christianity.

Point 2 relies upon the New Testament account of Jesus’ life. It is open to the adherent of an alternative point of view to simply deny that these events took place. We saw that this can be done even for the story of the resurrection. This point provides no selective evidence in favor of Christianity.

Point 3 claims evidence from the fact that he made a prediction concerning the future of the church, and that prediction came true. This will be evidence only if it is improbable that this prediction should come true. Therefore the weight of this point is determined by points 4 and 5.

Point 5 is very much a matter of dispute. The Catholic Church comprises approximately half of world-wide Christianity.²³ The other branches do not agree that the church has remained faithful to the original teachings of Jesus. Since this point is denied even within Christian ranks, it is certainly possible for the adherent of an alternative point of view to deny it. This point provides no selective evidence in favor of Christianity.

Point 6 concludes on the basis of 1-5 that the New Testament must be divine revelation, and point 7 goes on to infer that therefore everything in the New Testament must be certainly true.²⁴

²³ According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, as of mid-1997 Catholics were 54% of the world Christian population.

²⁴ As we shall see below in Kelemen’s correspondence with the papal spokesman that this is not the position of the Catholic Church [in 1995].

Thus everything hinges on point 4. Is the fact that the church spread in spite of its other-worldly message, humble origin and persecution evidence of its truth, or that its spread must be attributed to divine assistance?

We saw above that Swinburne answers this question negatively. Swinburne is not prepared to cite the growth of the early church as a miracle, even though he is committed to the truth of Christianity.

This answer can be supported by comparing the origin of Christianity with the origin of other religions. Consider Buddhism. The Buddha started his career by giving up his position as a prince and becoming a wandering ascetic. He studied mysticism under two renowned teachers but was unsatisfied. After years of his own asceticism and meditation he began to teach his own principles. He announced them as the highest truth. What was the probability of his success? India abounded in acetic mystics. The general tenor of his position was familiar to his audience, though his message different in important particulars. One might have expected that he would become another revered teacher expounding his own system. No one could have predicted that his ideas and practice would survive 2500 years after his death and his followers number 353 million people [in 1997].

It is true that there is no parallel in Buddhist history to the persecution that Christianity suffered in the second century. On the other hand, the message of Christianity was vastly more attractive in the Roman Empire than was Buddhism in India. Christian morality was clearly superior to Roman morals, and the promise of eternal life after death could not be matched by any Roman creed. There was a vast qualitative difference in belief. Buddhism was another form of the familiar creed of mystical meditation.

The only clear difference left is the numerical superiority of Catholicism – approximately one billion people in 1997. However, no Christian will suggest that size alone validates his belief, especially since the majority of the world population still reject Christianity.

The conclusion is that if the items cited in point 4 count in favor of the truth of Christianity, then the history of the origin and development of Buddhism count equally in favor of the truth of that religion. Since

no Christian wants to count Buddhism as true, he will have to admit that point 4 does not provide selective evidence in favor of Christianity.

What then is the real explanation for the spread of both Buddhism and Christianity? It is no different from the spread of ideas generally – religious, social, political, economic, artistic, philosophical and so on. People – individuals and groups – face various challenges. They use ideas to understand the world and guide their actions in meeting those challenges. From time to time an idea is found to be extremely successful and thus spreads. In time, the challenges change and thus the ideas are modified. Eventually most ideas are abandoned. Some are successfully changed again and again so that the new forms can still be useful in the new context. Very rarely an idea remains useful in its original form and thus is preserved intact. Many religions have ceased to exist. Those that have remained, such as Buddhism and Christianity, have modified their ideas considerably so as to meet new challenges.²⁵ The growth and survival of those religions pose no problems for naturalistic explanation.

As stressed in the text, it is precisely here that Judaism differs. It has existed essentially unchanged in a wide variety of environments over thousands of years. If usefulness were the explanation, it should have been modified many times, and modified in different ways in the different environments. Since this did not happen, the naturalistic explanation given for the spread of Buddhism and Christianity will not apply to Judaism.

²⁵ Consider again Rabbi Kelemen's correspondence with the papacy. The position expressed by the papal spokesman is vastly different from the position of the church historically, and even different from the position of the Catholic Encyclopedia quoted above.

For an indication of the position of Catholicism the truth of the Christian scriptures, let us consider the correspondence between Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen and the papacy in December 1995.²⁶ Rabbi Kelemen addressed three questions to Pope John Paul II (1) The Gospels record the resurrection as occurring in Jerusalem and in the Galilee – where did it actually take place? (2) There are two different genealogies for Jesus. What is the truth of the matter? (3) How is Jesus a descendent of the male line from King David if, according to the doctrine of virgin birth, he had no human father?

A spokesman for the Pope provided the following answers. (1) The location of the resurrection in the Gospels is the result of the authors attempts to fit the stories of Jesus' life into a consecutive narrative. They are not the product of exact historical records. Thus the statements concerning the location of the resurrection cannot be regarded as historical fact. (2) The genealogies were never meant as historical statements. Descent from King David was necessary to be the Messiah. Since the early Christians took Jesus to be the Messiah, "a Davidic genealogy was fashioned for him." (3) The virginal conception of Jesus "is not primarily a biological statement." It was intended to reveal spiritual insights. The early Christians might have taken the idea from pagan mythologies but never have intended that they be taken literally. The truth might even be that Jesus was an illegitimate child. This papal spokesman says that this could be understood according to normal Christian theology.

According to the papal spokesman, then, the Gospels are not completely true. The locations of the resurrection are the speculations of the authors, and at least one is incorrect. The genealogies and the virgin birth are likely false, if taken in their literal sense. Thus the Gospels contain elements that seem to be historical description, but in fact may be intended only symbolically. Which statements are to be taken literally and which symbolically is not entirely settled even now, since the papal spokesman couches his

²⁶ Kelemen, Appendix III, "The Catholic Church's Response to Our Critique of Christian Credibility."

explanations in speculative terms.²⁷ Indeed, there is debate among Christian theologians concerning whether anything more than the religious teaching of the Christian scriptures should be regarded as true.

For an indication of the status of argument and evidence in favor of the principles of Christianity, let us consider the controversy over the position of Aquinas on this issue. Jenkins²⁸ presents and refutes the views of those who interpret Aquinas as allowing argument and evidence as the source of Christian faith. His target is the supporter of what he calls the naturalist interpretation (NI):

The NI holds that Aquinas thought that, at least in the case of some persons, the individual assents to the articles of the Christian Creed because he accepts a cluster of arguments from natural theology. Such a person is convinced, by metaphysical arguments of natural or philosophical theology, that God exists. Subsequently he believes on the basis of testimony and other evidence that there were miracles and signs in Biblical times and in the history of the Church. From these beliefs he is led to the conclusion that God has made revelations in history, and that the essence of these revelations is contained in the Christian Creed as this is defined by the Church. [P. 163]

²⁷ Rabbi Kelemen points out that the papal spokesman did not make use of an oral tradition that could specify which statements in the Gospels are meant to be literally true and which not. Rather, the spokesman is himself speculating. This is in stark contrast to the continuous Jewish oral tradition that performs this function for the Jewish Bible.

²⁸ Pp. 163-75. My thanks to professor David Burrell of the University of Notre Dame for this reference.

Jenkins [P. 165] cites Terence Penelhum (a supporter of NI) as asserting that, according to Aquinas, “the believer does have enough evidence to convince him beyond a reasonable doubt.” Thus, although grace is needed for assent without reluctance [i.e. for *psychological certainty* – D. G.], the prospective believer “will not need it because of any inconclusiveness in what he hears.” He cites Hick as holding that credibility arguments are compelling to anyone whole has natural intellectual powers and is not prejudiced.

As against NI, Jenkins provides the following quote from Aquinas:

But with respect to ...the assent of a human person to those things which belong to faith, two causes can be considered. One is that which leads externally: as a miracle which is witnessed, or the persuasion of another human leading [one] to faith. Neither of these is a sufficient cause, for of those who witness one and the same miracle, or hear the same speech, some believe and some do not. And therefor we must posit a further interior cause, which moves a human being internally to assent to what belongs to faith....For because a human being who assents to what belongs to faith is elevated above his nature, it must be that this occurs in him from a supernatural principle moving internally, which is God. [P. 166]

Jenkins comments that in this passage Aquinas clearly denies that evidence and argument are sufficient to compel assent.

Jenkins cites against NI the fact that, according to Aquinas,

“the conclusions of arguments of natural theology are significantly less certain than the beliefs of faith. In the *Scriptum super libros sententiarum*...Aquinas writes: ‘And to the objection that one is not most certain in this doctrine, we say this is false: for one assents more faithfully and firmly to what belongs to faith than [one does]even to the first principles of reason.’ And in the *De veritate*, regarding the firmness of the conviction of the assent of faith, he says ‘faith is more certain than all understanding...’ Since the first principle of

theoretical reason is the principle of non-contradiction, these passages imply that the faithful hold the articles of faith with greater conviction than the principle of non-contradiction. [Pp. 167-8]

Finally, Jenkins comments on a discussion of Aquinas' position on the faith of devils [Pp. 171-2]:

Aquinas's response is to distinguish the faith of devils from the faith of Christian believers. He writes: 'the will's moving the intellect to assent can happen in two ways. In one way, from the order of the will to good; and believing in this way is a laudable act. In another way, the intellect is convinced by the considerations which are presented that what is put forward is to be believed, but it is not convinced through evidentness of the thing itself....It is to be said, therefore, that among Christianity's faithful, faith is laudable according to the first mode. And faith is not present in devils in this way, but only in the second way.' There are, then, two ways in which the will can move the intellect to the assent of faith. The first of these is laudable and is found in the Christian faithful; the second is not and is found in the devils. The first is due to the "order of the will to the good"; the second is due to the fact that 'the intellect is convinced...that what is put forward is to be believed.' The first then is due to the desire for the good; the second to the compulsion of evidence on the mind....the devils' faith is due simply to the influence of the credibility evidence on their...intellects, but human faith is not: 'Faith which is a gift of grace includes a human being to believe in accordance with some affection for the good, even if it is unformed. Hence faith which is in devils is not a gift of grace; rather, they are to a greater degree forced to believe from the perspicacity of the natural intellect.'*because the angels have cognitive abilities superior to humans', and because they have access to certain revealed truths which humans do not have, they can, through the evidence of signs, be intellectually convinced of certain truths in a way in which humans cannot be.*²⁹ That is why devils do not need a good will in order to come to faith, and

²⁹ My emphasis.

hence their faith is not laudable: ‘the faith of devils is forced by the evidence of the signs. And therefore it does not accrue to praise of the will of those who believe.’”

According to Jenkins’ presentation of Aquinas, human beings *cannot* have adequate evidence to believe Christianity. Thus arguments such as those of Craig and Swinburne must fail to justify belief in Christianity.

Plantinga is concerned to defend Christian belief against a particular sort of critique:

This is the sort of challenge that goes as follows: “I don’t know whether Christian (or theistic) belief is *true* – how could anyone know a thing like that? But I do know that it is irrational or rationally unacceptable or unjustified or without warrant (or is some other way epistemically challenged).” If my argument is right, no objection of this sort has any force. [P. 169]

The heart of Plantinga’s argument is the existence of an inner faculty called the *sensus divinitatus* that produces beliefs about G-d that are *basic*, i.e. are justified without receiving support from any other beliefs.

On this model, our cognitive faculties have been designed and created by God; the design plan....is a blueprint or plan for our ways of functioning, and it has been developed and instituted by a conscious, intelligent agent [i.e. God – D. G.]. the purpose of the *sensus divinitatus* is to enable us to have true beliefs about God; when it functions properly, it ordinarily *does* produce true beliefs about God. These beliefs therefore meet the conditions of warrant; if the beliefs produced are strong enough, then they constitute knowledge. [P. 179]

Of course, the only reason to believe that we have the inner faculty of the *sensus divinitatus* is that Christianity says so. Therefore, one cannot appeal to that faculty to show Christianity true. But that is not Plantinga's aim. Rather, he argues that one cannot divorce the question of rationality of Christian belief from its truth. If Christianity is true, then we possess this faculty, and then the belief in Christianity will indeed be warranted. If Christianity is false then we do not possess this faculty, and then Christian belief may very well be unwarranted. Here is how he puts it:

You may think humankind is created by God in the image of God – and created both with a natural tendency to see God's hand in the world about us and with a natural tendency to recognize that we have indeed been created.... Then, of course, you will not think of belief in God in the typical case a manifestation of any kind of intellectual defect....It is instead a cognitive mechanism whereby we are put in touch with a part of reality.... It is in this regard like a deliverance of sense perception, or memory, or reason....On the other hand, you may think we human beings are the product of blind evolutionary forces; you may think there is no God and that we are part of a Godless universe. Then you will be inclined to accept the view according to which belief in God is an illusion of some sort, properly traced to wishful thinking or some other cognitive mechanism not aimed at the truth (Freud) or to a sort of disease or dysfunction on the part of the individual or society (Marx)....If the warrant enjoyed by belief in God is related in this way to the *truth* of that belief, then the question whether theistic belief has *warrant* is not, after all, independent of the question whether theistic belief is *true*. [Pp. 190-1; see also p. 285]

Thus the critic cannot attack the rationality of Christian (or theistic) belief without arguing head on that those beliefs are false. He cannot do so because, if those beliefs are true then they do indeed have warrant and they may constitute knowledge.³⁰

How does this defense of Christianity bear on the project of this book? We are attempting to fulfill the responsibility to be realists – to base our beliefs on the truth. We are looking for evidence of truth. In particular, we are looking for *selective* evidence – evidence that will count for some alternatives and against others. Only selective evidence enables us to make a decision which of the various alternative positions we should adopt. Is Plantinga’s defense of Christianity selective in this way?

No, it is not. Indeed, Plantinga is careful to point out that the very same defense could be offered for a wide variety of theistic positions:

Well, probably something like that [like Plantinga’s defense of Christianity – D. G.] *is* true for the other theistic religions: Judaism, Islam, some forms of Hinduism, some forms of Buddhism, some forms of American Indian religion. Perhaps these religions are like Christianity in that they are subject to no *de jure* objections [that they are unwarranted – D. G.] that are independent of *de facto* objections [that they are not true – D. G.] [P. 350]

As I have argued throughout this book, however, it is an enormous assumption to think that belief in God or, more broadly, the larger set of Christian (**or Jewish or Muslim**)³¹ beliefs of which belief in God is a part, is in this respect like a scientific hypothesis. Not only is this assumption enormous, it is also false. The warrant for

³⁰ This means that these beliefs are what we may call self-confirming. See pp. 350-1 where Plantinga argues that the naturalistic/scientific world-view is *not* self-confirming in this sense.

³¹ My emphasis.

these beliefs, if they have warrant, does not derive from the fact (if it is a fact) that they properly explain some body of data. For most believers, theistic belief is part of a larger whole (a Christian or Muslim or Jewish whole); it is accepted as part of the larger whole and is not ordinarily accepted because it is an *explanation* of anything.... [P. 477]³²

This admission is crucial for us. Plantinga's defense of Christianity is profound, innovative, argued with great care, skill and rigor. But it is equally available to many theistic positions. It therefore cannot help us choose which of them we should accept. In particular, it gives no support for Christianity that could not be provided for Judaism as well. It therefore does not weaken the conclusion of chapter V that Judaism alone possesses selective evidence of truth.

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³² In this I disagree with Plantinga. The whole argument of this book is that the belief in Judaism is warranted because it is the only adequate explanation of a wide array of data. My only interest in this passage is that it asserts again that Plantinga's defense of Christianity is equally available to other theistic positions.

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