

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Classical Apologetics

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In dealing with the question of methodology in Christian apologetics, one is, in effect, raising the age-old issue of the relationship between faith and reason. This is a problem which—if I may speak personally—remained very perplexing to me for many years of my Christian life. Raised in a non-evangelical home, I became a Christian my third year of high school, not through any careful consideration of the evidence, but because those Christian students who shared the gospel with me seemed to be living on a different plane of reality than I was. Their faith in Christ imparted meaning to their lives along with a joyous peace, which I craved.

Once I became a Christian, I was eager to share the truth of my newfound faith with my family and high school friends, and thus I soon became engaged in presenting arguments for becoming a Christian. As a young believer full of enthusiasm and faith, I went off in 1967 to study at Wheaton College. During the sixties Wheaton had become a seedbed of skepticism and cynicism, and I was dismayed to see students whose intellectual abilities I admired lose their faith and renounce Christianity in the name of reason. The prevailing atmosphere was one of theological rationalism (an epistemological view often misleadingly called evidentialism). In my theology courses I learned that none of the classical arguments for the existence of God is sound, and my Bible professors never discussed evidences for the reliability of the Gospels. Among the students, doubt was touted as a virtue of the mature Christian life, and one was supposed to follow unflinchingly the demands of reason wherever it might lead. I remember well one of my theology professors commenting that if he were persuaded that Christianity were unreasonable, then he would renounce Christianity.

Now that frightened and troubled me. For me, Christ was so real and had invested my life with such significance that I could not make the confession of my professor—if somehow through my studies my reason were to turn against my faith, then so much the worse for my reason! Thus, I confided to one of my philosophy teachers, “I guess I’m not a true intellectual. If my reason turned against Christ, I’d still believe. My faith is too real.”

So I went through a temporary flirtation with Kierkegaardian fideism—though my mind could not rest long in the position that I believe Christianity because it is absurd. As often happens in the lives of earnest students, the reading of certain books proved pivotal in my thinking and directed my life along a different route. The first was E. J. Carnell’s *Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, which convinced me that reason might be

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used to show the systematic consistency of Christian faith without thereby becoming the basis of that faith. The second was Stuart Hackett's *Resurrection of Theism*, which stunned me by its demonstration that there were, after all, persuasive, cogent arguments for God's existence. Hackett's book was part of an incomplete project, however, and left one with a sort of deism rather than Christian theism. But then, third, I became acquainted on a popular level with Christian evidences, particularly for the resurrection of Jesus, compiled, for example, by Josh McDowell in *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. It became quite evident to me that it was possible to present a sound, convincing, positive case for the truth of Christian theism.

Still I could not embrace the view that rational argument and evidence constitute the essential foundation for faith, for the fruits of that viewpoint had become forcefully clear to me at Wheaton. I put the issue on the back burner while I pursued other questions during my seminary and doctoral studies in philosophy, but it came to the fore again in 1977 when I was invited by Campus für Christus to deliver a series of lectures on apologetics to university students in Munich. My opening lecture was to be on faith and reason, and in meditating on this problem, I hit upon a scheme that has proved to be very helpful to me personally in illuminating the relationship between faith and reason—namely, the distinction between *knowing* Christianity to be true and *showing* Christianity to be true. It has been gratifying to me that what I grasped in a rough and superficial way has been confirmed by the recent work of religious epistemologists, notably Alvin Plantinga.

The methodological approach which I shall defend in this essay is that reason in the form of rational arguments and evidence plays an essential role in our showing Christianity to be true, whereas reason in this form plays a contingent and secondary role in our personally knowing Christianity to be true. The proper ground of our knowing Christianity to be true is the inner work of the Holy Spirit in our individual selves; and in our showing Christianity to be true, it is his role to open the hearts of unbelievers to assent and respond to the reasons we present.

Such a method, as it plays itself out in showing Christianity to be true, has been called “classical apologetics.” This approach is comprised of natural theology and Christian evidences. Among its practitioners are such great figures as Thomas Aquinas with his famous Five Ways of demonstrating God's existence and his appeal to the signs of credibility (miracles and prophecy) to validate Christian doctrines not demonstrable by reason alone; Hugo Grotius, the father of modern apologetics, whose *De Veritate Religionis Christianae* drew upon the traditional arguments of natural theology and inaugurated the historical approach to the truth of the Gospels; and one of my heroes, William Paley, whose *Natural Theology* is one of the most brilliant defenses of the teleological argument

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ever written and whose *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* was so impressive that it remained compulsory reading for every applicant to Cambridge University right up to the twentieth century.

KNOWING CHRISTIANITY TO BE TRUE

In this section I shall address the question, How does a Christian believer know that Christianity is true? In answering this question, I distinguish between the role of the Holy Spirit and the role of rational argument and evidence. I shall argue that the inner witness of the Holy Spirit gives us an immediate and veridical assurance of the truth of our Christian faith and that rational argument and evidence may properly confirm but not defeat that assurance.

Role of the Holy Spirit

I have elsewhere characterized the witness of the Holy Spirit as self-authenticating,¹ and by that notion I mean (1) that the experience of the Holy Spirit is veridical and unmistakable (though not necessarily irresistible or indubitable) for the one who has it

¹ William Lane Craig, *Apologetics: An Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 18. In what has become a standard article on this notion, Robert Oakes defines a self-authenticating religious experience as a “veridical experience of God which is sufficient to guarantee that the person having that veridical experience could never in principle have any justification for questioning its validity” (Robert Oakes, “Religious Experience and Rational Certainty,” *Religious Studies* 12, no. 3 [1976]: 311–18). I take this definition to express the idea of what Plantinga calls an intrinsic defeater-defeater (see below). Keith Yandell offers an interesting discussion and critique of the notion of a self-authenticating religious experience in his *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 166–75. On Yandell’s account, for a person *S* and a proposition *P*, *S*’s experience *E* is self-authenticating regarding *P* if and only if the following three conditions are met: (1) *S* has *E*, (2) it is logically impossible that *S* have *E* and *P* be false, and (3) *S* accepts *P* because *S* has seen both (i) that *S* has *E* and (ii) that it is logically impossible that *S* have *E* and *P* be false. This is a helpful account apart from clause (ii). I see no reason to think that a person enjoying a self-authenticating witness of God’s Spirit must be aware that (ii) is true, especially if that person is theologically untutored. Some of Yandell’s objections are simply inapplicable to the on-going witness of the Spirit, since they are based on the assumption that the experience in question was a once-for-all experience about which one might later have doubts or be mistaken. Again, if I understand Yandell correctly, when he objects that no religious belief is self-authenticated to anyone because one might have an experience that one mistakenly believes to be an experience of God, he seems to forget that the definition requires that *S* have *E*—that is, actually have the witness of the Spirit. It is not *P*, after all, that is self-authenticating, but *E*; hence, it does no good to consider cases in which *S* does not have *E*. Finally, as for Yandell’s objection that in order to know that one’s experience is self-authenticating, one must first know it is veridical, this objection is based on the false assumption that in order to have a self-authenticating experience, one must know that one has a self-authenticating experience. This is the unjustified driving principle of skepticism, that in order to know that *P* I must know that I know that *P*.

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and attends to it; (2) that such a person does not need supplementary arguments or evidence in order to know and to know with confidence that he is in fact experiencing the Spirit of God; (3) that such experience does not function in this case as a premise in any argument from religious experience to God, but rather is the immediate experiencing of God himself; (4) that in certain contexts the experience of the Holy Spirit will imply the apprehension of certain truths of the Christian religion, such as “God exists,” “I am reconciled to God,” “Christ lives in me,” and so forth; (5) that such an experience provides one not only with a subjective assurance of Christianity’s truth, but with objective knowledge of that truth; and (6) that arguments and evidence incompatible with that truth are overwhelmed by the experience of the Holy Spirit for the one who attends fully to it.

By way of procedure, I shall lay out in a nontechnical way my understanding of the biblical teaching concerning our assurance of Christianity’s truth and attempt to translate this into the parlance of contemporary religious epistemology. Now at first blush it might seem self-defeating or perhaps circular for me to supply scriptural proof texts concerning the witness of the Spirit, as if to say that we believe in the Spirit’s witness because the Scripture says there is such a witness. But it needs to be remembered that ours is an “in-house” discussion. Since all five authors do accept Scripture as the rule of faith, it is entirely appropriate to lay out what Scripture teaches on religious epistemology. In interacting with a non-Christian, one would simply say that we Christians do in fact experience the inner testimony of God’s Spirit.

As I read the New Testament, it seems to me that for both Paul and John the fundamental way in which a believer knows the truth of the Christian faith is by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. When I say “the Christian faith” I do not mean fine points of doctrine such as infralapsarianism or amillennialism, but rather the belief that one has been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, or some rough equivalent. Thus, Paul tells us that every Christian believer is an adopted son of God and is indwelt with the Holy Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6). It is the witness of God’s Spirit with our spirit that gives us the assurance that we are God’s children: “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom. 8:15–16). Paul does not hesitate to use the term *plērōphoria* (“complete confidence, full assurance”) to indicate the surety that the believer possesses as a result of the Spirit’s work (Col. 2:2; 1 Thess. 1:5; cf. Rom. 4:21; 14:5).

In popular Christian piety, this experience is known as “assurance of salvation,” and it is the right and privilege of every regenerate believer. But the assurance of one’s salvation entails that one entertains other more rudimentary beliefs, for example, that

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God exists or that Christ is the means of one's reconciliation. If we are assured of our salvation, then we can be assured of these other truths as well. The fact that one has assurance of the truth of such fundamental Christian beliefs does not imply that such beliefs are therefore indubitable. On the contrary, Paul teaches that we may quench the Spirit by repressing his working in our lives (1 Thess. 5:19) and grieve the Spirit through sin (Eph. 4:30). Therefore, we have the responsibility to walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16–17, 25; Eph. 5:18). It is a safe inference that the Christian who is living under the domination of the flesh might well doubt his salvation, including its entailments, such as the existence of God or God's self-revelation in Christ; and certainly Christian experience bears this out. Only as we walk in the fullness of the Spirit can we be guaranteed the assurance of which Paul speaks. Thus, the witness of the Holy Spirit is a veridical experience that will be unmistakable for the person who attends to that witness; that is to say, the person who responds appropriately to the Spirit's witness cannot mistake that witness for anything other than what it is. It would have been inconceivable for the apostle Paul to imagine that someone crying, "Abba, Father" through the witness of the Holy Spirit might mistakenly believe that he was not experiencing God.

Similarly, John repeatedly emphasizes that it is the Holy Spirit who imparts to the believer the knowledge that his Christian beliefs are true. In John's gospel Jesus tells his disciples that the Holy Spirit will teach them all things (John 14:26), and in his first epistle John underscores this fact by rejoicing that his readers have no need that anyone should teach them, since the anointing they received from God, which abides in them, teaches them about all things (1 John 2:20, 26–27). Similarly, in John's gospel, Jesus promises to send the Spirit of truth to abide in the disciples so that they might know that they are in Christ and Christ in them (John 14:16–17, 20). And in his first epistle John again underlines the reality of this promise: "This is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.... We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit" (1 John 3:24; 4:13). John uses his characteristic phrase "we know" to emphasize the confidence Christian believers have that our faith is true, that we really do abide in God and he in us. In fact, in a remarkable passage, John actually appears to compare the degree of certainty generated by the inner witness of the Spirit with that furnished by the historical testimony to the ministry of Jesus. He writes:

And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart (1 John 5:6–10).

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The “water and the blood” in this passage probably refer to the baptism and crucifixion of Jesus as marking the beginning and end of his earthly ministry, and “man’s testimony” to the apostolic witness to the events of that ministry.² John, who in his gospel lays such weight on the apostolic testimony to the signs of Jesus’ ministry in order “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31), now says that the testimony of the Spirit is *even greater* than the apostolic testimony. As Christian believers we have the testimony of God living within us, assuring us of the veracity of our faith. Although John is eager to present evidences for the truth of Christ’s claims, it is apparent that he does not consider such evidence necessary for knowledge of those claims.

I think it is evident that Paul and John are not talking about an argument from religious experience for the conclusion that Christianity is true, but about an immediate apprehension of its truth acquired in the context of the Spirit’s witness. Belief that one’s Christian faith is true is what epistemologists call a “properly basic” belief—that is, a belief which is not derived inferentially from any more foundational belief but which is rationally justified by being formed in appropriate circumstances. Belief in the Christian God is properly basic when formed in the circumstances of the witness of the Holy Spirit. It is only due to sin that persons under such circumstances do not form this belief. Moreover, the New Testament makes it clear that a person whose belief in the truth of the Christian faith is grounded in the witness of the Holy Spirit is not merely rational in so believing, but that he knows that the Christian faith is true.³

But what if this properly basic belief conflicts with a belief supported by evidence? In most cases the circumstances that ground a properly basic belief confer only a *prima facie* justification, not an *ultima facie* justification, to that belief. Such a belief is still subject to defeaters, that is, conflicting beliefs that have more warrant for the person involved than the original belief. In such a case if the person is to remain justified in his original belief,

² See James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM, 1970), 201–4.

³ What more is needed for such a properly basic belief to become an item of knowledge for him who believes it? Alvin Plantinga calls this additional element *warrant*; it is warrant that makes the difference between mere true belief and knowledge. Providing an adequate account of warrant has been a notoriously difficult task, to which Plantinga has devoted considerable effort (Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992]; idem, *Warrant and Proper Function* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993]). In his analysis the core of the vague idea of warrant is that warrant is a property of a belief that is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly in an appropriate environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at producing true beliefs. In the soon-to-be-released third volume of his trilogy on warrant, Plantinga will argue that specifically Christian beliefs are warranted because God has designed our faculties to produce such beliefs in the context of the witness of the Holy Spirit. Whether Plantinga’s specific analysis of warrant proves successful or not, he is surely in line with the teaching of the New Testament that our belief in the biblical God is not merely rational, but warranted, and therefore knowledge.

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then he must come up with a defeater of the defeater. But then one's properly basic Christian beliefs formed in the context of the witness of the Holy Spirit would seem to require rational argument or evidence to defeat their ostensible defeaters, if one is to continue rationally to believe. Since almost all intelligent adult Christians are bombarded throughout their education and adult life with multifarious defeaters for Christianity, it seems that for a great many, if not most, people, rational argument and evidence will be indispensable to the sustenance of their faith.

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Yet, a little reflection will show that such an epistemology is as religiously inadequate as theological rationalism (a.k.a. evidentialism). Consider, for example, a young German student of pietistic Lutheran upbringing who, desiring to become a pastor, goes off to the University of Marburg to study theology. There he sits under various professors of Bultmannian stripe and finds his orthodox faith in Christian theism constantly under attack. He casts about for answers but finds none either in his reading or in discussions with other persons. He feels utterly defenseless before his professors' criticisms, having nothing but the reality of his own Christian experience to oppose their arguments. Now, lacking a defeater for the defeaters brought against his Christian faith, such a student seems to be irrational to continue to believe in Christ; he has an epistemic obligation to give up his faith.

But surely this is unconscionable. How can one be obligated to ignore the witness of the Holy Spirit? How can anyone responding to the call of God himself upon his life be cognitively dysfunctional in so doing? Does not this view threaten to make being a Christian a matter of historical and geographical accident? Some persons simply lack the ability, time, or resources to come up with successful defeaters of the antitheistic defeaters they encounter. Are we going to deny them, on pain of irrationality, the joy and privilege of personal faith in God? If so, will they therefore be eternally lost for not believing in God? To answer affirmatively seems unthinkable; but to answer negatively seems contrary to the biblical teaching that all men are "without excuse" if they do not believe in God. So long as we require extrinsic defeaters for the defeaters brought against Christian faith, the sting of evidentialism has not been removed.

Finally, such a requirement seems in any case to make the proper basicity of Christian belief a matter of academic interest only. Belief that one's Christian faith is true will hardly be comparable to other basic beliefs, like "I see a tree" or "I had breakfast this morning," for it will have to be surrounded by an enormous and elaborately constructed citadel, bristling with defensive armaments to ward off the enemy. In such a case, little if anything has been gained by calling such a belief properly basic. Faith unattended by evidence will still be unwarranted and irrational. Such faith is a far cry from that spoken of by the New Testament writers.

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For this reason it is important to insist on the self-authenticating nature of the Spirit's witness. The claim that the Spirit's witness is self-authenticating entails that belief grounded in the witness of the Holy Spirit is an intrinsic defeater of the defeaters brought against it; that is to say, it is a belief enjoying such a high degree of warrant that it simply overwhelms any putative defeater. An intrinsic defeater-defeater does not directly refute the defeater in the sense of providing an argument to show that the alleged defeater is false or providing reasons to doubt that the alleged defeater has been proved to be true. Rather, an overwhelming defeater simply enjoys more warrant than the defeaters lodged against it. Plantinga provides an engaging illustration of someone who knows that he has not committed a crime even though all the evidence stands against him.⁴ Such a person is perfectly rational to go on believing in his own innocence even if he cannot refute the evidence. In the same way, asks Plantinga, why could not belief in God be so warranted that it constitutes an intrinsic defeater of any considerations brought against it? With this query, Plantinga moves in the same direction as the New Testament. The witness of the Spirit is available to all believers regardless of their situation or intellectual prowess. A believer who is too uninformed or ill-equipped to refute anti-Christian arguments is rational in believing on the grounds of the witness of the Spirit in his heart even in the face of such unrefuted objections. Even a person confronted with what are for him unanswerable objections to Christian theism is, because of the work of the Holy Spirit, within his epistemic rights—nay, under epistemic obligation—to believe in God.

Of course, it may be objected that many other faiths incompatible with Christianity also claim to have a self-authenticating witness of God's Spirit. Postmodernist antirealists like John Hick or radical pluralists like Joseph Runzo might see in such a situation justification for denying the exclusive truth of the Christian faith. But how is the fact that other persons claim to experience a self-authenticating witness of God's Spirit relevant to *my* knowing the truth of Christianity via the Spirit's witness? The existence of an authentic and unique witness of the Spirit does not exclude the existence of false claims to such a witness. People can have putative experiences of God which are in fact nonveridical. How, then, does the existence of false claims of the Spirit's witness to the truth of a non-Christian religion do anything logically to undermine the fact that the Christian believer does possess the genuine witness of the Spirit? Why should I be robbed of my joy and assurance of salvation simply because someone else falsely pretends, sincerely or insincerely, to the Spirit's witness? If a Mormon or Muslim falsely claims to experience the witness of God's Spirit in his heart, how does that undermine the confidence the Spirit of God does in fact inspire in me? Why cannot the Spirit-filled

⁴ Alvin Plantinga, "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," *Faith and Philosophy* 3, no. 3 (1986): 310.

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Christians know immediately that his claim to the Spirit's witness is true despite the false claims made by persons adhering to other religions?

Perhaps the most plausible spin to put on this objection is to say that false claims to a witness of the Holy Spirit ought to undermine my confidence in the reliability of the cognitive faculties which form religious beliefs, since those faculties so often mislead. The fact that so many people apparently sincerely, yet falsely, believe that God's Spirit is testifying to them of the truth of their religious beliefs ought therefore to make us very leery concerning our experience of God.

A couple of things may be said in response to this objection. First, as William Alston points out in an interesting discussion of this objection, the Christian need not say that all persons in non-Christian religions are simply mistaken.⁵ It may well be the case that they enjoy a veridical experience of God as the Ground of Being on whom we creatures are dependent or as the Moral Absolute from whom values derive or even as the loving Father of mankind. Second, the objection assumes that the witness of the Holy Spirit is not qualitatively distinct from religious experiences enjoyed by adherents of other faiths. But why should I think that when a Mormon claims to experience a "burning in the bosom" he is having an experience qualitatively indistinguishable from the witness of the Holy Spirit that I enjoy? Why should I think that the cognitive mechanism that enables me to form the belief that I am a child of God is the same mechanism that produced the psychological experience he mistakenly identifies as the witness of the Spirit?

When it comes to knowing one's faith to be true, therefore, the Christian will not rely primarily on argument and evidence but on the gracious witness of God himself given to all his children by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Role of Argument and Evidence

What role, then, is left for rational argument and evidence to play in knowing the Christian faith to be true? On the basis of what has been said, it is evident that the only role left for these is a subsidiary role. Here I have found Martin Luther's distinction between the magisterial and ministerial uses of reason to be quite helpful. In its magisterial use, reason stands over and above the gospel like a magistrate and judges its truth or falsity. We must weigh the evidence and arguments both for and against the truth of the gospel in order to adjudicate the issue without any reliance on the Spirit of God. It was reason in this role that inspired Luther's vitriolic attacks on it as "Aristotle's whore." But in its ministerial role, reason submits to and serves the gospel. Reason under the sovereign guidance of God's Spirit and Word is a useful tool in helping us to

⁵ William Alston, "Response to Hick," *Faith and Philosophy* 14, no. 3 (1997): 287–88.

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understand and defend our faith. Luther endorsed the ministerial use of reason, thus placing himself squarely in the Augustinian-Anselmian tradition of faith seeking understanding.

The New Testament teaching on the witness of the Holy Spirit implies that Luther was correct. Rational argument and evidence can be used to confirm in the believer's mind the truth witnessed to him by the Holy Spirit. What he knows immediately and unmistakably via the work of the Spirit, he may also know inferentially and defeasibly via argument and evidence. But the latter obviously will be of less importance to him than the former. If, due to the contingencies of one's life situation, confirmation by argument and evidence is unavailable, the basis of one's faith remains secure. Indeed, if the evidence in some situations actually turns against Christianity, the believer will not lose faith but will persevere in the hope and expectation that further evidence will once again tip the balance in favor of Christianity. In an ideal world the witness of the Spirit and the conclusions of rational argumentation would coincide in the beliefs produced, but in the real world the contingencies of history and geography may sometimes preclude this. Fortunately, God has not left us to our own devices to determine whether Christianity is true but has given us the testimony of his own Spirit.

By contrast, those who subscribe to the magisterial use of reason face severe difficulties: (1) They would deny the right to Christian faith to all who lack the ability, time, or opportunity to understand and assess the arguments and evidence. This consequence would no doubt consign untold millions of people who are Christians to unbelief. (2) Those who have been presented with more cogent arguments against Christian theism than for it would have a just excuse before God for their unbelief. But Scripture says that all men are without excuse for not responding to the degree of revelation they have (Rom. 1:21). (3) This view creates a sort of intellectual elite, a priesthood of philosophers and historians, who will dictate to the masses of humanity whether or not it is rational for them to believe in the gospel. But surely faith is available to everyone who, in response to the Spirit's drawing, calls upon the name of the Lord. (4) Faith is subjected to the vagaries of reason and the shifting sands of evidence, making Christian faith rational in one generation and irrational in the next. But the witness of the Spirit makes every generation contemporaneous with Christ and thus secures a firm basis for faith.

For such reasons, it seems to me that we must with Luther reject the magisterial role of reason in favor of its role as a minister of the Spirit of God. The proper basis of faith is the witness of the Holy Spirit, not rational argumentation and evidence, though the latter may serve to confirm the former. In times of doubt or spiritual dryness, it can be a tremendous encouragement to faith to have sound arguments for the existence of God

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and evidence for the credibility of the Gospels. When confronted with ostensible defeaters of one's Christian beliefs, it is an exhilarating and edifying experience to wrestle with difficult questions and come to an intellectually satisfying solution to the problem. Part of what it means to love the Lord our God with all our mind is to attempt to construct a Christian *Weltanschauung*. Such a project inevitably involves us in the task of rationally sorting through issues of apologetic significance for the Christian faith. The Christian faith is not a brain-dead, arational faith, but a faith that seeks understanding.

In summary, therefore, it seems to me that the biblical theist ought to hold that among the circumstances that rationally ground Christian belief is the witness of the Holy Spirit, and that that belief is so warranted that it is an intrinsic defeater of any potential defeater that might be brought against it. Moreover, insofar as cogent arguments and evidence for Christian theism are available, a mature believer ought to regard these, not as supplying the basis for his belief, but as a welcome and provisional confirmation of his properly basic and warranted belief in Christian theism.

SHOWING CHRISTIANITY TO BE TRUE

When we turn to the question of showing our faith to be true, the roles of the Holy Spirit and of rational argumentation and evidence seem to be almost completely reversed. Here I shall argue that the use of argument and evidence assumes a primary and appropriate role, while the work of the Holy Spirit plays no part in the demonstration proper but consists in opening the heart of the obdurate unbeliever to attend to and be persuaded by the argumentation. Again, I shall explain my understanding of the biblical position on this issue while placing my conclusions in the context of current philosophical discussions.

Role of Argument and Evidence

Turning first to the role of rational argument and evidence in showing Christianity to be true, we confront the difficult and controverted question of the relationship between general revelation and natural theology, a question that in the end may be biblically irresolvable. One school of thought interprets passages like Romans 1:19–20 to sanction natural theology by teaching that from the created order all persons are responsible for inferring the existence of the divine Creator. But an opposing school of thought regards the created order as the context that serves to ground belief in the Creator as properly basic. I think it is clear that the arguments of natural theology are not *identical* with general revelation; general revelation is the traits of the author reflected in his product, the fingerprints of the potter in the clay, so to speak, whereas the arguments of natural theology are the human products of men's rational reflection upon general revelation. That fact does not, however, settle the question whether the created order serves as the

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basis for inferring the Creator's existence or constitutes the circumstances in which belief in a Creator is properly basic.

It might be thought that Paul's saying that men are "without excuse" for not believing in God favors the basic belief interpretation, since all men could not be held to be without excuse for failing to hold to an inference, whereas they could be held responsible for a belief that is properly basic for all men. But this is to confuse proper basicity with degree of belief. As Mavrodes reminds us,⁶ an inferred proposition can be as deeply and irrefragably believed as a basic belief, and many properly basic beliefs may be lightly and defeasibly held. The defender of natural theology could plausibly maintain that the inference from creation to Creator is so evident at any level of inquiry, from the observations of the primitive savage to the investigations of the scientist, that the nontheist is inexcusable in failing to draw this inference.

Commentators often favor the basic belief interpretation without sufficient justification.⁷ The passage itself permits either interpretation. But the interesting phrase "*áorata ... vooúmena kathorátai*" (1:20) could very well indicate that inferential reasoning is involved in the perception of God's invisible nature in the creation, meaning something like "God's invisible nature is perceived through reflecting on the things that have been made." (Cf. Leenhardt's rendering: "ce qui de Dieu échappe au regard, [je veux dire] sa puissance éternelle et sa divinité, peut être contemplé quand on réfléchit à ses oeuvres.")⁸ This pattern of reasoning was characteristic of Greek and Hellenistic Jewish thought, and it is interesting that Paul's language bears the imprint of that influence: *aidios* is found in pagan Greek from early times and frequently in Philo, but only here and in Jude 6 in the New Testament; *theiotēs*, a Hellenistic term, is found only here in the New Testament; on

⁶ George Mavrodes, "Jerusalem and Athens Revisited," in *Faith and Rationality*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 214–15.

⁷ Wilckens, e.g., thinks that Paul cannot be referring to a *Rückschluss* from the works to the artisan because the perception of God in nature does not depend on intellectual ability or education (Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 3 vols., 2d rev. ed., EKK 6 [Köln: Benziger, 1987], 1:106). But as we have seen, the natural theologian could regard this inference as so natural and elementary that anyone could draw it, and he could see his cosmological and teleological arguments as simply more sophisticated versions thereof in response to sophisticated evasions. Schleier also asserts that Paul is not arguing from effect to cause because people's hearts, were they not clouded with sin, would be immediately open to and cognizant of God (Heinrich Schleier, *Der Römerbrief*, HTKNT 6 [Herder: Freiburg, 1977], 53). But nothing in the text precludes the interpretation that were people without sin, they would naturally and spontaneously draw the inference of a Creator, but because their minds are clouded by sin, they resist the conclusion and refuse to draw the inference, thereby condemning themselves.

⁸ Franz-J. Leenhardt, *L'Épître de saint Paul aux Romains*, CNT 6 (Neuchatel, Switzerland: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1969), 36; cf. p. 37. ("The things of God that escape our view, that is to say, his eternal power and deity, can be beheld when one reflects upon his works.")

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God's *dynamis kai theiotēs*, cf. *vis et natura deorum* (Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.18.44). A very close parallel to the Romans passage—so close, in fact, that some commentators have suggested that Paul had it in mind—is the Hellenistic Jewish work *Wisdom of Solomon* 13:1–9, where inferential reasoning is clearly in view, especially, verses 4–5, where we find *noēsatōsan ap'autōn ... analogōs*. Moreover, Acts 14:17 states that although God let the Gentiles go their own way, still he did not leave them *amartyron*, that is, without evidence or witness, which is constituted by the created order. These passages, which doubtless reflect a common approach to Gentile audiences, may be plausibly interpreted as a legitimation of natural theology.

From the pages of the New Testament it is evident that showing the Christian faith to be true was an enterprise in which both Jesus and the apostles were engaged. As the gospel writers portray, Jesus appealed to both his miracles and fulfilled prophecy as evidence of the veracity of his message. The miracles he performed were signs to the people of the coming of God's kingdom.⁹ His exorcism of demonic forces was particularly significant in this regard. He declared, "If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Luke 11:20). Jesus is saying that his ability to rule the spiritual forces of darkness shows that in him the kingdom of God is already present. John's use of Jesus' miracles, which he calls "signs," is particularly interesting because John places them, not in the context of the kingdom of God and its triumph over Satan (there are, for example, no exorcisms in John), but in the context of the authentication of Jesus' claims.¹⁰ Nicodemus reasons, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2), and John concludes his gospel, "These [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31). The Johannine Jesus refers to these signs as "works," and goes so far as to challenge men to believe in him, if not on his word alone, then on the basis of the works (10:38; 14:11). The sign of the healing of the blind man in John 9 is especially interesting because it displays John's attitude that while Jesus' signs did not compel belief, nevertheless, those who resisted them were completely unjustified and hardened in heart for doing so (vv. 30–33).

Jesus appealed not only to his miracles as evidence of his divine mission, but, as the Gospels portray him, also to fulfilled prophecy (Luke 24:25–27). In Jesus' response to John

⁹ For a discussion of the idea that miracles as signs are distinct from evidence, see William Lane Craig, review article of *Miracles and the Critical Mind* by Colin Brown, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 17D (1984): 473–85.

¹⁰ See helpful discussion in Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Anchor Bible 29–29A (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), appendix 3: "Signs and Works."

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the Baptist's question concerning his messiahship, these two types of evidence come together (Matt. 11:5–6; cf. Isa. 35:5–6; 61:1).

Similarly, the apostles, in dealing with Jewish audiences, appealed to fulfilled prophecy, Jesus' miracles, and especially Jesus' resurrection as evidence that he was the Messiah (Acts 2:22–32). This was probably also Paul's typical approach (Acts 17:2–3, 17; 19:8; 28:23–24). When they confronted Gentile audiences who did not accept the Old Testament, the apostles appealed to God's handiwork in nature as evidence of the existence of the Creator (Acts 14:17). Then appeal was made to the eyewitness testimony to the resurrection of Jesus to show specifically that God had revealed himself in Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30–31; 1 Cor. 15:3–8).

This latter passage reveals that the witnesses for the resurrection of Jesus played a special role in the earliest Christian apologetic. Pannenberg notes that in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 Paul is following the customary method of Greek historians, such as Herodotus, in proving a historical event, namely, the listing of witnesses.¹¹ Dodd further observes, "There can hardly be any purpose in mentioning the fact that most of the 500 are still alive, unless Paul is saying, in effect, 'the witnesses are there to be questioned.'"¹² Even Bultmann grudgingly concurs: "I can understand the text only as an attempt to make the resurrection of Christ credible as an objective historical fact."¹³ Although Bultmann characterizes such an attempt as "fatal" because it tries to adduce proof for the kerygma,¹⁴ he acknowledges that Paul does "think he can guarantee the resurrection of Christ as an objective fact by listing the witnesses who had seen him risen."¹⁵ Pannenberg concludes, "The intention of this enumeration is clearly to give proof by means of witnesses to the

¹¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Ist Jesus wirklich auferstanden?" in *Ist Jesus wirklich auferstanden? Geistliche Woche für Südwestdeutschland der Evang. Akademie Mannheim vom 16. bis 23. Februar 1964* (Karlsruhe: Evangelische Akademie Mannheim, 1964), 24.

¹² C. H. Dodd, "The Appearances of the Risen Christ: A Study in Form-Criticism of the Gospels," *More New Testament Studies* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1968), 128.

¹³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding I*, 6th ed., ed. R. W. Funk, trans. L. P. Smith (London: SCM, 1969), 83.

¹⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, "Reply to the Theses of J. Schniewind," in *Kerygma and Myth*, 2 vols., ed. H.-W. Bartsch, trans. R. H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1953), 1:112.

¹⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols., trans. K. Grobel (London: SCM, 1952), 1:295; cf. 1:305. Referring specifically to Acts 17:31 and 1 Cor. 15:3–8, he admits, "Yet it cannot be denied that the resurrection of Jesus is often used in the New Testament as a miraculous proof" (Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth*, 1:39).

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facticity of Jesus' resurrection.... one will hardly be able to call into question Paul's intention of giving a convincing historical proof by the standards of that time."¹⁶

And, lest we miss the forest for the trees, we should remind ourselves that in addition to individual passages of apologetic intent (such as Matthew's guard at the tomb account), there are whole books of the New Testament aimed at demonstrating the gospel's truth. One thinks immediately of Luke-Acts, an apologetic treatise *par excellence* for the Christian faith based on historical and prophetic evidences.¹⁷ The same project characterizes the Gospel of John with its repeated emphasis on witness and Jesus' miraculous signs.

Thus, against those who think that it is inappropriate to present arguments and evidence to show that the Christian faith is true stands the New Testament involvement in just such a project, both in the example of Jesus and the apostles and in entire books dedicated to this purpose. Indeed, we are actually commanded by Scripture to have ready an *apologia* to present to any unbeliever who asks us the reason for our faith (1 Peter 3:15).

Although we know our faith to be true primarily through the witness of the Spirit, we must show our faith to be true through rational argument and evidence. While we can and should tell our interlocutor that we have an assurance grounded in the witness of the Holy Spirit that our faith is true, that does nothing to show him that our faith is true. Consider again the case of the Christian confronted with an adherent of some other world religion who rejects Christ but also claims to have a self-authenticating experience of God.

¹⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. L. L. Wilkins and D. A. Priebe (London: SCM, 1968), 89.

¹⁷ In his study of the concept of witness in the New Testament, Allison Trites points out that Luke-Acts presents the claims of Christ against a background of hostility, contention, and persecution, which accounts for the large place given to juridical terminology and ideas drawn from the law court. The operative question for Luke, states Trites, is: On what grounds or evidence can people have faith?

Luke therefore wants to present the evidence, particularly that for the resurrection, which vindicates Jesus.... he seeks to provide evidence for the truth of the events which have transpired, thereby giving Theophilus "authentic knowledge" (*asphaleia*), ... the same word used by Thucydides in the preface to his historical work, 1.22) and vindicating his name as a historian.... He uses the historical material for the Book of Acts according to the standards of his time as they are expressed by such ancient historians as Herodotus, Polybius, Thucydides and Josephus, and certainly intends to offer evidence that will stand the test of the closest scrutiny (Allison Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977], 135; cf. pp. 128, 138).

Thus, we have in Luke-Acts a sophisticated, historical apologetic for the Christian faith centering on the event of the resurrection.

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Alston points out that this situation taken in isolation results in an epistemic standoff.¹⁸ For neither person knows how to find a common procedure for demonstrating to the other that he alone has a veridical, rather than delusory, experience. This standoff does not undermine the rationality of the Christian's belief, for even if his process of forming his belief is as reliable as can be, we have no idea what a noncircular proof of this fact would be. Thus his inability to provide such a proof does not nullify the rationality of his belief.¹⁹ But although he is rational in retaining his Christian belief, the Christian in such circumstances is at a complete loss as to how to show his opponent that he is correct and that his opponent is wrong in his respective beliefs.

How is one to break this deadlock? Alston answers that the knowledgeable and reflective Christian should do whatever seems feasible to search for common ground on which to adjudicate the crucial differences between competing views, seeking to show in a noncircular way which of the contenders is correct.²⁰ If, by proceeding on the basis of considerations that are common to all parties, such as sense perception, rational self-evidence, and common modes of reasoning, the Christian can show that his own beliefs are true and those of his interlocutor false, then he will have succeeded in showing that the Christian is in a superior epistemic position for discerning the truth about these matters.

In our day, of course, even the claim, much less the demonstration, that one's faith is objectively true is anathema to the politically correct mind-set. Postmodernist antirealists and radical pluralists deny that there is any objective and exclusive truth about these matters. But however fashionable such views may be in the Literature or Religious Studies departments at the university, the vast majority of philosophers have remained

¹⁸ William Alston, "Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 5, no. 4 (1988): 442–43.

¹⁹ Since Alston is talking about religious experience in general, rather than the self-authenticating witness of the Spirit, he assumes the Christian's interlocutor to have an experience comparable to that of the Christian and therefore to be equally rational in holding to the veridicality of his own experience even though he cannot prove to the Christian that he is in fact in an epistemically superior position to the Christian. On the view I have defended, the non-Christian, if he persists in his rejection of Christ, will be resisting the drawing of the Holy Spirit and therefore failing to form a properly basic belief in the appropriate circumstances. Since basic beliefs are among the deliverances of reason, he is therefore irrational. This difference, however, would not affect the standoff between the Christian and the non-Christian, since neither could prove to the other that the other is deluded. Once apologetics is allowed to enter the picture, the objective difference between their epistemic situations becomes crucial, for since the non-Christian only *thinks* he has a self-authenticating experience of God when in fact he does not, the power of the evidence and argument may, by God's grace, crack his false assurance of the truth of his faith and persuade him to place his faith in Christ.

²⁰ Alston, "Religious Diversity," 446; cf. 433–34.

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unconvinced. For such positions are obviously self-refuting: if they are true, then they are false. When a postmodernist like John Caputo intones, “The truth is that there is no truth,” someone should have the courage to say that the emperor is running around buck-naked.

Showing Christianity to be true is, of course, precisely the task of apologetics. Showing Christianity to be true will involve both defensive (negative) apologetics and offensive (positive) apologetics. It will involve proving that our *Weltanschauung* is both logically coherent and best fits the facts of experience. We shall be engaged not only in refuting objections that our view is incoherent or implausible in light of certain facts (defensive apologetics), but also in providing arguments and evidence that show that our view best explains the data (offensive apologetics).

This is an understanding of the methodology of apologetics that seems to mesh nicely with recent developments in religious epistemology. Plantinga, for example, does not object to the use of natural theology in *showing* one’s faith to be true; he only considers it improper as one’s basis for *knowing* his faith to be true. But he believes that “natural theology could be useful in helping someone move from unbelief to belief.”²¹ Similarly, Evans says that the story of how faith is grounded in the inner witness of the Holy Spirit “is the story that the Church tells when it is attempting to understand how Christians in fact gain the knowledge they claim to have. The evidentialist story is the story the Church tells when it is attempting to convince or persuade someone of what it takes to be the truth.”²²

EXCURSUS: Plantinga and Natural Theology

Plantinga’s attitude toward the arguments of natural theology is easily misunderstood. While skeptical of *proofs* of God’s existence, Plantinga is quite open to *probabilistic arguments* that show God’s existence to be more likely than not (Plantinga, “Reason and Belief,” 29–30, 70, 73; idem, “Self-Profile,” in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, Profiles 5 [Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985], 56). Indeed, he goes so far as to say, “... the ontological argument provides as good grounds for the existence of God as does any serious philosophical argument for any important philosophical conclusion” (Alvin Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” typescript dated October 1981, pp. 18–19. This paragraph was inadvertently omitted in the published version of “Reason and Belief,” which causes Mavrodes’s reference to it [Mavrodes, “Jerusalem and Athens,” 205] to refer to nothing. Fortunately, a nearly identical paragraph appears in “Self-Profile,” 71).

²¹ Alvin Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” in *Faith and Rationality*, 73.

²² C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 283–84.

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At first blush, this constitutes an extravagant endorsement of the arguments of natural theology. Commenting on this paragraph, Mavrodes marvels, “But if natural theology can be *that* good, as good as the best arguments anywhere in serious philosophy, good enough to provide sufficient evidence for belief in God, then ... why should we not put forward these powerful arguments as *proofs* of God?” (Mavrodes, “Jerusalem and Athens,” 205–6). Noting that Plantinga’s criterion for what constitutes a proof is extraordinarily restrictive, Mavrodes opines, “Plantinga is almost surely right in thinking that no piece of natural theology is successful in terms of this criterion, and that no other piece of serious philosophical argumentation satisfies it either. But so what?” (ibid., 207–8). We can define “proof” in this highly restrictive way if we want to, in which case there is no theistic proof, continues Mavrodes, or else we may make our definition less restrictive, in which case there may well be a theistic proof. The quarrel is merely terminological.

This enthusiastic endorsement needs to be qualified, however. Plantinga makes it clear that just as a person is entirely rational in accepting the key premise of the ontological argument—“Possibly, a maximally great being exists”—so a person is entirely rational in rejecting it (Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy [Oxford: Clarendon, 1974], 219–20; idem, “Self-Profile,” 70). If Plantinga holds that the premises and reasoning of the other theistic arguments are not significantly more perspicuous than the ontological argument’s, then in saying that there is sufficient evidence for God’s existence, he means sufficient merely for rationality, for being within one’s intellectual rights.

It may be thought that the key premise of the ontological argument is considerably more uncertain and epistemically turbid than the premises of the other theistic arguments and that accordingly it would be irrational for a sufficiently well-informed person to reject their conclusions. But in an unpublished lecture on theistic arguments, Plantinga, while endorsing two dozen or so of these, asserts that “these arguments are not coercive in the sense that every person is obliged to accept their premises on pain of irrationality.... an argument can be a good one even if it is not coercive—even if its premises are not such that any reasonable person would be obliged to accept them” (Alvin Plantinga, “Two Dozen [or so] Theistic Arguments,” paper delivered at the 33rd Annual Philosophy Conference, Wheaton College, 23–25 Oct. 1986, p. 1). That is why, to return to Mavrodes’s question, Plantinga does not put forward these probabilistic arguments as proofs even in a broad sense, for they only serve to make belief in God *permissible*. They serve to *confirm* one’s belief that God exists and to *convince* nontheists who accept the premises of one’s argument. But a nontheist who rejects a premise of one’s argument remains rational in doing so. On Plantinga’s view, then, theistic arguments would rank among the highest of philosophical arguments, but philosophical arguments in general have a low level of epistemic force.

But even this qualified position is not altogether clear. For what are we to make of Plantinga’s claim that theistic arguments make it probable, or more likely than not, that God exists? From the foregoing, we might expect him to mean that such arguments make God’s existence probable *for the one who accepts the premises*, but that these premises, like the key premise in the ontological argument, do not all present themselves to us as probably true. But this is not what Plantinga says. He states, “One could then give a probabilistic or inductive argument for the existence of God, thus showing that theistic belief is rational, or epistemically proper, in that *it is more likely*

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than not with respect to the deliverances of reason" (Plantinga, "Reason and Belief," 70 [my italics]). But if the argument shows that the conclusion is probable with respect to the deliverances of reason, then how can a normally situated person be rational in rejecting the argument? Similarly, in his Wheaton lecture, Plantinga grants that "perhaps in at least some of these cases if our faculties are functioning properly and we consider the premises, we are inclined to accept them; and (under those conditions) the conclusion has considerable epistemic probability ... on the premises" (Plantinga, "Two Dozen Arguments," 1). But in such cases, to reject one of the premises is to be dysfunctional, which in Plantinga's terminology is to be irrational. If a person in such a situation is to reject the argument's conclusion while accepting its premises and reasoning, it can only be because on Plantinga's understanding, it appears, it can be rational to reject conclusions one regards as probably true—and that (so far as I can see) without any independent reason for doing so.

But if my interpretation of Plantinga is correct, the Christian apologist is likely to respond with Mavrodes, "So what?" A person who rejects all theistic arguments may be said to be "rational" in this technically defined sense, but the fact remains that he rejects without justification a theistic conclusion that he knows to be probable with respect to the deliverances of reason. He thereby reveals his hardened heart and renders himself "without excuse" before God. If the Christian apologist can show Christian theism to be probable with respect to premises that are either deliverances of reason or themselves ultimately probable with respect to them, then his task is complete.

The methodology of classical apologetics was first to present arguments for theism, which aimed to show that God's existence is at least more probable than not, and then to present Christian evidences, probabilistically construed, for God's revelation in Christ.²³ This is the method I have adopted in my own work. By means of the *kalam* cosmological argument, I have endeavored to show that a Personal Creator of the universe exists.²⁴ By

²³ See, e.g., such classics as Philippe de Mornay, *De la vérité de la religion chrétienne* (Anvers: 1581); Hugo Grotius *De veritate religionis christianae* (1627); Jacques Abbadie, *Traité de la vérité de la religion chrétienne* (The Hague: 1684); Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (London: 1705) and *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation* (London: 1706); William Paley, *Natural Theology* (London: 1802) and *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, 2 vols. (London: 1794).

²⁴ See William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*, Library of Philosophy and Religion (London: Macmillan, 1979); idem, "Whitrow and Popper on the Impossibility of an Infinite Past," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 30, no. 2 (1979): 165–70; idem, "Wallace Matson and the Crude Cosmological Argument," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 57, no. 2 (1979): 163–70; idem, "The Finitude of the Past," *Aletheia* 2 (1981): 235–42; idem, "Professor Mackie and the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument," *Religious Studies* 20, no. 3 (1985): 367–75; idem, review article of *Time, Creation and the Continuum* by Richard Sorabji, *International Philosophical Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1985): 319–26; idem, "God, Creation and Mr. Davies," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 37, no. 3 (1986): 163–75; idem, "'What Place, Then, for a Creator?' Hawking on God and Creation," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 41, no. 4 (1990): 473–91; idem, "Time and Infinity," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1991): 387–401; idem, "The

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means of the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, I have tried to show that God has revealed himself in Christ.²⁵

Kalam Cosmological Argument and the Hypothesis of a Quiescent Universe," *Faith and Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (1991): 104–8; idem, "Theism and Big Bang Cosmology," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 69, no. 4 (1991): 492–503; idem, "Pseudo-Dilemma?" *Nature* 354, no. 6352 (1991): 347; idem, "The Origin and Creation of the Universe: A Reply to Adolf Grunbaum," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 43, no. 2 (1992): 233–40; idem, "God and the Initial Cosmological Singularity: A Reply to Quentin Smith," *Faith and Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (1992): 237–47; idem and Quentin Smith, *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); idem, "The Caused Beginning of the Universe: A Response to Quentin Smith," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 44, no. 4 (1993): 623–39; idem, "Graham Oppy on the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument," *Sophia* 32, no. 1 (1993): 1–11; idem, "Smith on the Finitude of the Past," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1993): 225–31; idem, "Professor Grunbaum on Creation," *Erkenntnis* 40, no. 3 (1994): 325–41; idem, "Creation and Big Bang Cosmology," *Philosophia Naturalis* 31, no. 2 (1994): 217–24; idem, "A Response to Grunbaum on Creation and Big Bang Cosmology," *Philosophia Naturalis* 31, no. 2 (1994): 237–49; idem, "Theism and Physical Cosmology," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. P. Quinn and C. Taliaferro, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy 8 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997): 419–25; idem, "In Defense of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument," *Faith and Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (1997): 236–47; idem, "Cosmology," in *Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. A. Hastings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); idem, "Personal Agency and the Origin of the Universe," in *Le vide*, ed. E. Gunzig and S. Diner (Brussels: Universite de Bruxelles, forthcoming); idem, "Design and the Cosmological Argument" in *The Design Hypothesis*, ed. William Dembski (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming); idem, "Theism and Creation," *Erkenntnis* (forthcoming); idem, "A Swift and Easy Refutation of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument?" *Religious Studies* (forthcoming).

²⁵ See my companion volumes, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus*, Texts and Studies in Religion 23 (Toronto: Edwin Mellen, 1985), and *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, Toronto Studies in Theology (Toronto: Edwin Mellen, 1989). For article length treatments, see idem, "The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus," in *Gospel Perspectives I*, ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1980), 47–74; idem, "The Guard at the Tomb," *New Testament Studies* 30, no. 2 (1984): 273–81; idem, "The Historicity of the Empty Tomb of Jesus," *New Testament Studies* 31, no. 1 (1985): 39–67; idem, "The Problem of Miracles: A Historical and Philosophical Perspective," in *Gospel Perspectives VI*, ed. D. Wenham and Craig Blomberg (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986), 9–40; idem, "Pannenberg's Beweis für die Auferstehung Jesu," *Kerygma und Dogma* 34 (April–June 1988): 78–104; idem, "On Doubts About the Resurrection," *Modern Theology* 6 (October 1989): 53–75; idem, "The Disciples' Inspection of the Empty Tomb (Luke 24, 12, 24; John 20, 1–10)," in *John and the Synoptics*, ed. A. Denaux, BETL 101 (Louvain: University Press, 1992), 614–19; idem, "From Easter to Valentinus and the Apostles' Creed Once More: A Critical Examination of James Robinson's Proposed Resurrection Appearance Trajectories," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 52D (1993): 19–39; idem, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994), 255–98; idem, "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?" in *Jesus Under Fire*, ed. M. J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 142–76; "John Dominic Crossan on the Resurrection of Jesus," in *The Resurrection*, ed. S. Davis, D. Kendall, and G. O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 249–71; idem and John Dominic Crossan, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?*, ed. P. Copan with responses by R. Miller, C. Blomberg, M. Borg, and B. Witherington III (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); idem and Gerd Lüdemann, *Visions of Jesus*, ed. P. Copan with responses by R. Gundry, M. Goulder, S. Davis, and R. Hoover (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming).

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What do I consider to be the force of these arguments? A good deductive argument will be one that is formally and informally valid and whose premises are both true and more plausible than their contradictories.²⁶ When judged by this standard, the *kalam* cosmological argument strikes me as a good argument. The force of the argument will depend on how much more plausible its premises are than their negations. It seems to me that the first premise of the *kalam* cosmological argument, that *whatever begins to exist has a cause*, is a metaphysically necessary truth and a properly basic belief. To deny this proposition is, therefore, for a normal adult, irrational. It is thus to be contrasted with the key premise of the ontological argument, which has for us the epistemic opacity of Goldbach's Conjecture: we know that it is necessarily true or necessarily false, but we have no noncircular way of discerning which it is. By contrast, the first premise of the *kalam* cosmological argument expresses the intuition *ex nihilo nihil fit*, which is so perspicuous that only an effete skepticism can deny it.

The second premise, that *the universe began to exist*, is much more controversial. It is supported by at least two independent philosophical arguments for the finitude of the past and enjoys confirmation in two independent lines of evidence drawn from astrophysical cosmology.

The two philosophical arguments are based on the impossibility of the existence of an actual infinite or on the impossibility of forming an actual infinite by successive addition. It is difficult to state precisely what force these arguments have or ought to have, chiefly because their cogency has a sort of ripple effect throughout one's philosophical system, which requires that the plausibility of the arguments be measured against the plausibility of the changes that they may force in the rest of one's web of beliefs.²⁷ But taken in

²⁶ See Stephen T. Davis, *God, Reason, and Theistic Proofs*, Reason and Religion (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 1–14, for a discussion of these criteria.

²⁷ The cogency of the first argument entails, e.g., that Platonism is incorrect with regard to abstract objects. This will give some philosophers serious pause. But this consequence seems altogether acceptable to me, since (1) we have no compelling argument, to my knowledge, that abstract objects exist, and (2) we have independent reasons to doubt their existence—namely, (a) it is not at all clear what an abstract object is (what, e.g., is an unexemplified property or a number?); (b) the paradoxes of naive set theory, which are avoided only at the expense of our not being able to say what a set is, ought to make us skeptical of Platonism; and (c) Platonism is theologically unacceptable because it compromises the aseity of God in positing infinite realms of reality that exist necessarily and independently of God. We may seek to elude these problems by trying to wed Platonism with theism as Christopher Menzel has recently tried to do (Christopher Menzel, "Theism, Platonism, and the Metaphysics of Mathematics," *Faith and Philosophy* 4, no. 4 [1987]: 365–82). But this attempt seems incompatible with a robust doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and in any case depends on breathtaking metaphysical acrobatics (a sort of divine logicism) and, even if successful, goes no further than proving the bare possibility of such a marriage, which does nothing to counteract the force of the *kalam* cosmological argument. Or again, the argument's cogency may force us to adopt a model of divine knowledge whereby God does not cognize an actually infinite number of

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themselves, the arguments seem to me extremely plausible and should so appear to any normal adult whose intuitions have not been jaded by the common textbook assertions that actual infinities are wholly unobjectionable.

As for the scientific confirmations based on the expansion and thermodynamic properties of the universe, these serve to show that the conclusion reached by philosophical argument alone also fits remarkably the facts of experience. It seems to me that naturalistic metaphysical hypotheses aimed at explaining the origin of the universe (for example, quantum fluctuations in some background space) enjoy no preferred status over a supernaturalistic metaphysical hypothesis and that, indeed, those proposed thus far are less plausible than theism.

On balance, then, it seems to me that on the basis of the *kalam* cosmological argument, a person who is sufficiently informed and whose faculties are functioning properly ought to agree that it is more likely than not that a Creator of the universe exists. This argument can thus serve as one link in the natural theologian's cumulative case for theism.

As for the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, we are here engaged in an inductive argument for a particular historical hypothesis. One model for sound inductive reasoning is known as inference to the best explanation.²⁸ According to this approach, we begin with the evidence available to us and then infer what would, if true, provide the best explanation of that evidence. Out of a pool of live options determined by our background beliefs, we select the best of various competing potential explanations to give a causal account of why the evidence is as it is and not otherwise. The process of determining which historical reconstruction is the best explanation will involve the historian's craft,

propositions. But William Alston has independently proposed a nonpropositional model of divine cognition that seems to me altogether acceptable (William Alston, "Does God Have Beliefs?" *Religious Studies* 22, no. 314 [1986]: 287–306; cf. William E. Mann, "Necessity," in *Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 264–70) and perhaps even helpful in avoiding certain paradoxes of omniscience (Patrick Grimm, "Truth, Omniscience, and the Knower," *Philosophical Studies* 54, no. 1 [1988]: 9–41). So although the cogency of the first argument may entail important consequences elsewhere in our system of beliefs, such changes as are necessary are neither *ad hoc* nor implausible, since there are independent reasons for adopting those positions anyway.

Similarly, the second philosophical argument implies an A-theory of time (that tense and temporal becoming are objective), and this might be a stumbling block to certain philosophers of time and space. But in my opinion the objectivity of tense and temporal becoming is so evident on the basis of intuition and argument that its denial ranks as a prime example of philosophical self-deception (see my companion volumes *The Tensed Theory of Time: A Critical Examination* and *The Tenseless Theory of Time: A Critical Evaluation* [Dordrecht: Kluwer, forthcoming]). Hence, the force of the philosophical arguments ought not to be too seriously diminished by such changes as are entailed by their acceptance.

²⁸ For an account see Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation* (London: Routledge, 1981).

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since various factors will have to be weighed, such as explanatory power, explanatory scope, plausibility, degree of being *ad hoc*, and so on.²⁹ Since the competing explanations may meet the various criteria to different degrees, the determination of which is the best explanation may be difficult and require a good deal of skill.

In my estimation the hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead” furnishes the best explanation of the historical data relevant to Jesus’ final fate (*das Geschick Jesu*). The inductive grounds for the inference of this explanation consist primarily in the evidence supporting three independently established facts: (1) the tomb of Jesus was found empty by a group of his women followers on the first day of the week following his crucifixion, (2) various individuals and groups thereafter experienced on different occasions and under varying circumstances appearances of Jesus alive, and (3) the first disciples came to believe in Jesus’ resurrection in the absence of sufficient antecedent historical influences from either Judaism or pagan religions. If these three facts can be historically established with a reasonable degree of certainty (and it seems to me that they can, as they are recognized by the majority of New Testament critics today) and if alternative naturalistic explanations for these facts are untenable (and the consensus of scholarship is that they are), then unless the resurrection hypothesis is shown to be even more untenable than its failed competitors (and my experience in debating the comparative merits of the hypotheses convinces me that it is not), the preferred explanation ought to be the one given in the documents themselves: God raised Jesus from the dead. The significance of this event is then to be found in the religio-historical context in which it occurred, namely, as the vindication of Jesus’ own unparalleled claim to divine authority. I think that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is such that a well-informed investigator ought to agree that it is more likely than not to have occurred.

Thus, using the methodology of classical apologetics, one seeks to show that Christian theism is the most credible worldview one can adopt. Of course, showing Christianity to be true will involve much more than the two arguments above: they are but two links in the coat of mail, and the positive case will need to be accompanied by a defensive case against objections. The apologetic task, then, is perhaps best seen as a collective project taken on by the believing community.

Role of the Holy Spirit

Finally, what about the role of the Holy Spirit in our showing Christianity to be true? As Pannenberg has emphasized, the work of the Spirit is not to supply the deficits in

²⁹ For discussion see C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 19.

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weak or unsound arguments.³⁰ Rather, his role is existential: he conveniently moves in the hearts of unbelievers to dissolve their sinful prejudices and open their minds to an honest consideration of the arguments and evidence. In the absence of the work of the Holy Spirit, our best arguments will fall like water on a stone, for the natural man suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:21). Plantinga observes that “a person might, when confronted with an arg[ument] he sees to be valid for a conclusion he deeply disbelieves from premises he know[s] to be true, give up (some of) those premises: in this way you can reduce someone from knowledge to ignorance by giving him an argument he sees to be valid from premises he knows to be true.”³¹ This is an apt description of natural man confronted with a Christian apologetic. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, he will do all he can to resist the argument, even adopting extreme and outlandish beliefs rather than yielding to the truth of Christian theism. But it is the role of the Holy Spirit to open the heart of the unbeliever and to use the arguments as a means of drawing people to himself.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have seen that a proper understanding of apologetic methodology involves making a fundamental distinction between our knowing and our showing Christian theism to be true. We *know* that our Christian beliefs are true because they are properly basic, warranted beliefs grounded in our veridical experience of the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Rational argument and evidence may confirm our Christian beliefs to us but cannot defeat them if we are walking in the fullness of the Spirit. We can *show* that Christian theism is true by presenting arguments for theism and evidences for a specifically Christian theism, which go to show, when coupled with defensive apologetics, that Christian theism is the most plausible worldview a sufficiently informed, normal adult can adopt. The Holy Spirit will then use such arguments and evidence to draw unbelievers to a knowledge of God by removing their sinful resistance to the conclusion of our arguments.

I have found this to be both an intellectually and experientially satisfying account of the matter. As I look back on my Wheaton days, I see now how infected with theological rationalism our community was and how perverse a concept I had of what it meant to be a “true intellectual.” It was the testimony of Christ’s Spirit within me that gave me the fundamental assurance that my faith was true; and my refusal to give this up in the face

³⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Einsicht und Glauben,” in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 223–36; for a critique of Pannenberg’s theological rationalism, see Craig, “Pannenberg’s Beweis für die Auferstehung Jesu,” 87–95.

³¹ Plantinga, “Two Dozen Arguments,” 1.

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of potential defeaters was not a *sacrificium intellectus* but was wholly in accord with the deliverances of reason. By understanding the proper basis for Christian belief, we are saved from all the deleterious consequences the magisterial role of reason would imply. On a very practical level, this understanding reminds us of the importance of daily yielding to the Holy Spirit, of striving to lead pure and sinless lives, and of engaging in spiritual disciplines like Bible study, prayer, meaningful worship, and personal evangelism. At the same time, we do not abandon ourselves to pure subjectivity and mysticism, for our beliefs are confirmed by, if not based on, rational arguments and objective evidence. In times of doubt, we should not only seek the face of the Lord, but also strengthen ourselves by recalling these arguments and evidences.

This account also permits us to commend our faith to unbelievers, not merely by proclamation, but also by rational persuasion. Our appeal is to the whole person, not only to the heart, but to the head as well. We can show unbelievers that the most reasonable thing they can do with their lives is to commit them to Christ. At the same time, we are not so naive as to think that we can argue people into the kingdom of God. Conversion is exclusively the role of the Spirit. But we can rationally commend our faith to others in the confidence that some, whose hearts he has opened, will respond to the apologetic we present and place their faith in Christ.³²

³² Craig, W.L. (2000). "Classical Apologetics". In S. N. Gundry & S. B. Cowan (Eds.), *Five views on apologetics* (pp. 25–55). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.