

Knowing vs. Showing: A Critique of William Lane Craig's on Our Knowledge of the Truth of Christianity

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ABSTRACT

William Lane Craig, in his book *Reasonable Faith* and several other works, offers a sharp contrast between *knowing* Christianity is true and *showing* it is true. He contends that the only way we know this truth is by a direct experience of the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit; while we *show* (but do not know) this truth by way of evidence and reasoning (apologetics).

I would respectfully submit that this thesis is wrong on several levels. It suffers from seven major problems.

(1) The Content Problem. The thesis attempts to explain how x ("Christianity") is known, but it is extremely vague about what x is. We see a critical dilemma here – If he allows Christianity to be defined in simple generalities ("I am saved", "God exists", etc.), he is not dealing with an adequate definition of Christianity. However, if he provides an adequate set of propositions which are known to be true by the Christian, his "top-down" derivation (from general to specific) seems to be impossible.

(2) The Island Problem. The thesis posits a sort of epistemological island which is immune from reason and evidence. Craig would have to agree that reason and evidence provide knowledge in the real world, and of analytical truths; that certain philosophical or religious assertions are known to be true and some false, that some philosophical and religious systems are provably false; that reason and evidence provide knowledge of many of the components of Christianity and of the fine points and nuances of theology. The only thing impervious to reason and evidence is whether Christianity is true.

(3) The Faith Problem. The thesis needlessly conflates "knowledge" with saving faith. It is demonstrably true that one can have saving faith without having a full knowledge of any adequate set of assertions regarding Christianity. It is equally true that one may have knowledge without saving faith. Accepting this distinction immediately solves many of Craig's problems (such as not limiting Christianity to the intellectual elite).

(4) Logical Problems. The thesis suffers from three logical issues. First, it makes Christianity unfalsifiable, since every argument against Christianity is to be rejected. Second, it appears to relegate reason to a rationalization role (for much the same reason). Third, it trades upon a false dilemma, viz. that the foundation for knowing Christianity is true could only be the witness of the Holy Spirit or evidence provided by the Lord, never a combination of both – and he simply jettisons the latter in

preference for the former.

(5) The Paradigm Problem. The thesis fails to recognize that personal experience and memory (properly basic beliefs) can be informed by external evidence, even in some cases over-turned by evidence. The core paradigm used to explain and defend the thesis does not ultimately support it.

(6) The Epistemological Problem. The thesis does not acknowledge degrees of knowledge, dimensions of knowledge. One does not simply either “know Christianity is true” or not know it. Rather, it is reason and evidence that lead to deeper and broader understanding of the subject matter.

(7) The New Testament Problem. This thesis ignores New Testament counter-examples. Craig appeals to scripture to support the point that the Holy Spirit provides genuine knowledge. However, he does not deal with the many counter-examples that not only pebble the NT but appeal to implicit underlying assumptions.

Introduction

The person seriously considering Jesus Christ has the right to a decent answer to the fundamental question, “Why do you think Christianity is *true*?” That is, “What *good reasons are there* for thinking this man is The One you claim him to be?”

Apologetics attempts to provide such good reasons. These reasons are commonly taken to provide or constitute *knowledge* that Christianity is true. Many of us who have come to find that Christianity is true have considered evidence and reasons, objections and counter-arguments, and wrestled with this hugely important subject over a course of years. And many of us thus believe we have a rational foundation for our faith which holds us secure.

William Lane Craig, in his book *Reasonable Faith* and several other works, disputes this common perception. He offers instead a sharp contrast between *knowing* Christianity is true and *showing* it is true. He contends that the only way we can *know* this truth is by a direct experience of the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit; while we *only show* this truth by way of evidence and reasoning.

Note the “only” here: To many students of apologetics, Craig’s thesis is characterized more by what it *denies* (that apologetics yields knowledge that Christianity is true) than what it asserts (the Spirit yields knowledge that Christianity is true).

So how do I know Christianity is true? Craig says, “Not through apologetics!” His contention is that apologetics does not provide or constitute knowledge that Christianity is true, but serves only ancillary purposes. To many of us this is a strange twist, and seems especially ironic coming from one of the world’s foremost Christian apologists. What is he getting at? Why does he say this? And is this a valid distinction?

The potential impact is tremendous: Do we need to tear up our foundations? Is our rational belief illusory? Do we believe the right things for the wrong reasons?

This paper will explore these issues. We will conclude that Craig's contention, while well motivated, is untrue, harmful, and unnecessary; and we will go on to suggest a better way forward.

CRAIG'S POSITION

Interestingly, at first glance Craig himself would seem to indicate that apologetics does indeed provide knowledge that Christianity is true (in *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview* and *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*). Notice these two points, which imply the third:

1. Craig says that apologetics "seeks to provide rational warrant for Christianity's truth claims." (*Answer*, p 19)
2. Craig also defines knowledge as [epistemologically] "warranted true belief." (*Foundations*, p 103)
3. Therefore, the logical conclusion ought to be that apologetics provides knowledge Christianity's truth claims are sound.

But his considered opinion is otherwise. We will begin with a set of key quotes in Craig's words.

How *do* I know that Christianity is true? In answering this question, I think we need to distinguish between *knowing* Christianity to be true and *showing* Christianity to be true. (*Reasonable*, p 31)

May I suggest that, fundamentally, the way we know Christianity to be true is by the self-authenticating witness of God's Holy Spirit? Now what do I mean by that? I mean that the experience of the Holy Spirit is veridical and unmistakable (though not necessarily irresistible or indubitable) for him who has it; 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; ... 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 condemned by God," "I am reconciled to God," "Christ lives in me," and so forth; that such an experience provides one not only with a subjective assurance of Christianity's truth, but with objective knowledge of that truth (*Reasonable*, p 31-32)

Thus, although arguments and evidence may be used to support the believer's faith, they are *never* properly the basis of that faith. ... A person who knows Christianity is true on the basis of the witness of the Spirit may also have a sound apologetic which reinforces or confirms for him the Spirit's witness, but *it does not serve as the basis of his belief*. (*Reasonable*, p 34, 36) (italics mine)

... such experience does not function in this case as a premiss in any argument from religious experience to God, but rather is the immediate experiencing of God himself (*Reasonable*, p 32-33)

Now the truth that the Holy Spirit teaches us is not, I'm convinced, the subtleties of Christian doctrine. ... What John is talking about is the inner

assurance the Holy Spirit gives of the basic truths of the Christian faith. This assurance does not come from human arguments but directly from the Holy Spirit himself. (*Reasonable*, p 33)

There are other passages which we will cite which confirm, reinforce, and clarify these statements. We will summarize Craig's most critical points now.

Role of the Holy Spirit – Knowing

- The Holy Spirit directly tells us that Christianity is true.
- This experience is the *only* proper "basis" for knowledge that Christianity is true.
- The Spirit's witness is both *necessary* and *sufficient* for knowing the truth of Christianity.
- This is an immediate experience and is not an inference or an argument (e.g. from religious experience).
- This is not only subjectively true but constitutes objective knowledge.
- The Spirit communicates to us that God exists, we are sinners, I am saved, Christ lives in me, and so forth – which entails core tenets of Christianity.
- The Holy Spirit in this experience does not provide the "subtleties of Christian doctrine."
- If arguments or evidence run counter to this witness, they must be rejected in favor of it.
- We know this with "confidence" and "deep assurance" (greater than mere probability)
- This is a self-authenticating witness, that is, it does not depend on any supplementary evidence.
- The person who refuses to come to Christ always does so by willful rejection and never because of lack of evidence or intellectual difficulties.

Role of Apologetics – Showing

- The Holy Spirit can *use* our arguments to *convince* the unbeliever of the truth of Christianity and to draw people to Himself.
- Argument and evidence may *support* Rational faith, but is can never be the *foundation* for it.
- Apologetics helps to create a suitable intellectual climate, an intellectually viable option; and can be a catalyst for the Holy Spirit's work.
- Apologetics can show the connection and relation between truths

Note that Craig is decidedly not *against* apologetics as such. In several places, and indeed in his life, he seems to regard apologetics in the "common-sense" way, of providing not only a formal defense but a basis for knowing. He agrees that the Holy Spirit is not against apologetics, but rather uses it to accomplish his work:

The Holy Spirit can use such arguments and evidence as a means of drawing people to himself. ... they serve as a sort of catalyst to faith, even if they do not become the basis of faith. Moreover, apologetic arguments can confirm the witness of the Holy Spirit, providing a valuable backup in times of spiritual dryness" (*Foundations*, p 20)

But the view just expounded enables us to hold to a rational faith which is supported by argument and evidence without our making that argument and evidence the foundation of our faith. (*Reasonable*, p 49)

"Is then apologetics an utterly trivial pursuit? [No], For apologetic arguments may be sufficient for rational faith, even if they are not necessary. ... The Holy Spirit can use such arguments and evidence as a means of drawing people to himself. ... they serve as a sort of catalyst to faith, even if they do not become the basis of faith. Moreover, apologetic arguments can confirm the witness of the Holy Spirit, providing a valuable backup in times of spiritual dryness" (*Foundations*, p 20)

And so, how do we resolve this apparent contradiction? In Craig's view, the answer may be that apologetics takes us right to the threshold of knowledge without actually providing it; or that it provides certain pre-conditions for knowledge to be accepted. However, Craig's statements about "knowing" and "showing" clearly contradict the impression that apologetics – whatever its role is – provides knowledge that Christianity is true. The Holy Spirit is the one who provides the sole basis for this knowledge.

Why is This Important?

Craig believes that this distinction is not only correct, but critically important, for the following reasons:

1. To be faithful to the New Testament, which teaches that the Holy Spirit lives inside us and teaches us
2. To be faithful to the Holy Spirit, who is the one who draws, convicts, and convinces

And, perhaps even more important, is the "otherwise":

1. Otherwise, many/most people would not have epistemic warrant, they would have no rational faith
2. Otherwise, Christ would only be available to the intellectually elite
3. Otherwise, we could lose our faith when confronted with counter-arguments we can't refute
4. Otherwise, we would only have probabilistic knowledge, not assurance/confidence
5. Otherwise, the apologist's skill and knowledge could determine someone's life choice.

Properly Basic Beliefs and Direct Experience

At the heart of this position is the conviction, best explained by Alvin Plantinga, that we can legitimately be said to "know" certain things even if we cannot give an account of how we know. For instance, Plantinga contends that we have "properly basic beliefs" about things within the purview of our own experience.

Craig takes this up by reiterating Plantinga's example of a person who knows he is innocent even though all the evidence says he is guilty. He knows this because he remembers being at another place and doing something else at the time in question. In this case, he *knows* one thing even though the evidence *shows* the opposite.

In this illustration, the person's own direct experience must take priority over any possible set of evidence. He possesses a "defeater of all possible defeaters." Let's take it to the next step. Presumably for him to achieve vindication, he would need to marshal evidence to convince *others* of his innocence. Therefore, he *knows* x in one way, but he shows it in an entirely different way.

Craig's point is that our knowledge of the truth of Christianity is based on direct experience, and that even though we can perhaps *point* to it via reasons, can create a congenial intellectual climate, can raise the issues, can appeal to the minds of our audience, and so on - at the end of the day, each person can only *know* the truth by experience of the Holy Spirit's witness. Let us try to understand what this means.

Plantinga and Properly Basic Beliefs

Craig appeals to Alvin Plantinga (*Warranted Christian Belief*), who is concerned to show that one may have epistemic warrant in believing something that he/she cannot prove. For instance, as in the previous example, one may know things through experience but not be able to make a convincing evidential case to prove it. These beliefs are "properly basic." Therefore, one is not irrational in holding Christianity to be true, for instance, on the basis of experience of the Holy Spirit.

However, Plantinga's view differs from Craig's in several ways. As there is no space here to consider Plantinga's view, we will continue to allow Craig to speak for himself.

The Holy Spirit's Witness - What Craig Does Not Mean

We must make sure we are clear about what Craig does, and does not, mean by the character and role of the Holy Spirit in telling us that Christianity is true.

1

One might assume that Craig is simply thinking of the Spirit as the general source of all knowledge and inspiration. After all, for a Christian, Jesus is the Logos (the discursive reason of God, and source of logic) and the Triune God is the ultimate source of all truth, goodness, and beauty; and so it is no surprise if the Holy Spirit constantly and actively affirms *all* truth to our minds and hearts. "All truth is God's truth." Just as we cannot draw a single breath without God's sustaining power, we cannot apprehend even the most mundane truth without the Spirit. In this sense, it's almost analytically true that the Spirit is the ultimate basis for knowledge (of all kinds).

2

Another possibility is he doesn't mean something quite this general, the scope is limited to communication of truth about God. He might be saying that when we hear preaching and presentation of apologetics, that even though we may use reason heavily to process and understand these concepts, ultimately it is God's Spirit who hammers the point home, who opens hearts and minds, and who enlightens our understanding. Is *this* what Craig is getting at, that all human forms of communication *about God* ultimately become knowledge only through the Spirit?

Craig is clearly *not* making either of these claims. Here's why. He is careful to distinguish our knowledge of core Christian beliefs (which are provided directly by

the Spirit) from the implications (“ramifications”) and nuances of Christian doctrine (which we must “think about” ourselves).

“Though the Holy Spirit gives us assurance of the *basic truth* of our faith, He does *not impart knowledge of all its ramifications and ins and outs* – for example, whether God is timeless or everlasting, how to reconcile providence and free will, or how to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity. Those are things we must decide *by thinking about them.*” (*Hard Questions*, p 37 - italics mine)

What Craig Does Mean

And so Craig’s scope is even more narrowly focused only on the truth of Christianity. What he seems to be getting at is a description of a divine encounter which yields “assurance of salvation”, and in which this assurance is somehow fleshed out into a knowledge of the fundamental truths of Christianity. Craig says this:

Sometimes we call this experience “assurance of salvation.” Now, clearly, salvation entails that God exists, that Christ atoned for our sins, that He rose from the dead, and so forth, so that if you are assured of your salvation, then you must be assured of all these other truths as well.” (*Hard Questions*, p 36)

... rather is the immediate experiencing of God himself; 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 condemned by God”, “I am reconciled to God”, “Christ lives in me”, and so forth; (*Reasonable*, p 32)

From this, we are not to suppose, I think, that the Holy Spirit simply whispers a laundry list of truths in our spiritual ear, but rather that there is some divine experience from which core propositions are somehow *seen* to be true. And so, this is the structure:

- First, we experience of the Holy Spirit
- This results in an assurance of salvation, or something similar
- From this, we somehow are able to conclude that “Christianity is true.”

Craig’s “Real” Apologetic

This brings us to an interesting issue. Craig has built a remarkable career by presenting evidence and arguments for the truth of Christianity. However, his “real” apologetic is decidedly not this – rather, it is the contention that we know Christianity’s truth by the direct witness of the Holy Spirit

He summarizes this view in the following way. If talking to someone who wants to know why he thinks Christianity is true, he would reply:

My friend, I know Christianity is true because God’s Spirit lives in me and assures me that it is true. And you can know it is true, too, because God is knocking at the door of your heart, telling you the same thing. If you are sincerely seeking God, then God will give you assurance that the gospel is true. Now to try to show you it’s true, I’ll share with you some arguments

and evidence that I really find convincing. But should my arguments seem weak and unconvincing to you, that's my fault, not God's. It only shows that I'm a poor apologist, not that the gospel is untrue. . . . But ultimately you have to deal, not with arguments, but with God himself." (*Reasonable*, p 48)

His *real* apologetic is simply his own personal experience of the Holy Spirit's witness (in the sense articulated above), with the recommendation that the seeker directly and personally engage the Spirit in like manner.

CRITIQUE

At first, one wants to object that this "knowing/showing" distinction just doesn't make sense: "What is the point of apologetics if it doesn't lead to knowledge that Christianity is true? If you *show* me x is true, don't I then have a right to say I *know* it's true? Why bother to 'show' me at all – why not, rather, just tell me directly how *you know it* and how *I can know it*?" These are fair questions.

There are several problems with Craig's thesis, which we will attempt to lay out. It is interesting to note that any one of these problems may be enough *by itself* to refute the thesis. The full set of problems is formidable indeed.

(1) THE CONTENT OF CHRISTIANITY IS NOT DEFINED, AND ANY ADEQUATE CONTENT CANNOT BE DERIVED IN A TOP-DOWN FASHION.

Craig's contention is that we know x ("Christianity", which is epistemological built from the core tenets of Christianity) is true based on this divine encounter, but we know that y (various other things) is true on the basis of reasoning. But what precisely *is* x? Surprisingly enough, Craig does not clearly say.

The Core Tenets

Note that Craig does not even provide us with a decent list of propositions which are known when Christianity is known –he only gives a very short list (such as "God exists," "I am condemned by God," "I am reconciled to God," "Christ lives in me,") followed by a wave of the hand ("and so forth"), as if we already know how this. In another passage, he merely tells us that this content is "the belief that one has been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, or some rough equivalent." (*Reasonable*, p 30) But our complaint is that his "rough equivalent" is far too rough and uncertain.

It is a severe fault in this thesis that it does not even attempt to provide a clear definition of what he means by "knowledge of Christianity", that is, the core tenets. I will try, however, to provide a working plausible definition of six "core tenets of Christianity" based primarily upon Craig's quotes. These would be the irreducible minimum set of propositions that one would assert if one were to claim that Christianity is true.

1. God exists
2. He became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth
3. Jesus died by crucifixion and rose from the dead
4. Jesus died to save us from sin and death

5. If we accept him, he will give us Life, both now and eternally
6. I have been reconciled with Christ, and he lives in me.

Deriving the Core Tenets from Assurance of Salvation

Of interest next is the question about how these core tenets could ever be derived from "assurance of salvation." How would that be possible? Even at first, it seems obvious that the proposition "I am assured of salvation" does not, in itself, logically entail anything about God's existence or Christ's atonement, much less Jesus' resurrection.

1

Consider that there are millions of people who reject most of the core tenets yet still feel assured of their salvation. Some believe they are "saved" just because God is good and saves everyone. Some believe they are saved because they were never lost. Hindus and Buddhists have their own concept of "salvation" which has more to do with escaping the wheel of reincarnation than in attaining fellowship with the Creator God.

2

And so, in order for "assurance of salvation" to entail the core tenets at all, we would need to *define* "assurance of salvation" as "assurance of salvation according to the core tenets of conservative Christianity", which is obviously circular.

The way out of this situation might be to say that the experience of the Holy Spirit must itself directly present these core concepts to the believer, packing "assurance of salvation" with the necessary meaning – fleshing it out into the core tenets. But then this seems to lead us back to the paradigm of the Spirit whispering a laundry list of truths into our spiritual ear. Is this really what Craig wants to say?

3

And if we are left with the "laundry list" scenario, it is not easy to see, experientially, that this is indeed the case. If you took, say, a thousand evangelicals, and put them in a room, and asked them to write down what the Holy Spirit told them when He assured them of their salvation, would they all write the same list? Indeed, the fact that Craig does not present us with his own list speaks volumes about the haziness of this whole claim.

We must conclude that the Core Tenets simply do not logically follow from "assurance of salvation".

Defining the Meaning of the Core Tenets

Even if some list of "core tenets" could be derived from this experience (via "assurance of salvation" or in some other way), it is still difficult to see how the proper interpretation, that is, meaning of the each tenet would be given in this way, for what is actually denoted by each of these core tenets can vary greatly.

1

Let's take Jesus' deity. What am I saying when I make the claim that Jesus is the Son of God, or God in the flesh?

- One person may think of this in a docetic manner, over-emphasizing deity and ignoring Jesus' humanity.
- Another may think of Jesus as something like a secondary, lesser God, as Jehovah's Witnesses do.
- Another may just be confused about what this means.
- One theologian will think that "incarnation" ("God was in Christ") means only that Jesus was a very good man
- Another is convinced that he enjoyed a uniquely close relationship with God, but is merely human.
- And another person might accept the claim that Jesus was both God and human.

Each of these would justifiably claim to believe in "Jesus' deity", but only the last would "know that Christianity was true" regarding Jesus' deity in the sense Craig wishes to maintain.

Again, concerning Jesus' resurrection,

- The unsophisticated may see this as similar to Lazarus' (a mere resuscitation).
- Some liberal theologians see this as Jesus' spiritual continuation on the heavenly plane (the "post-Easter Jesus" of Marcus Borg)
- Others see his appearances as vivid "apparitions" without commenting on the source
- Still others believe that some of Jesus' disciples had a flash of insight and renewal, and Jesus was "resurrected" in their hearts.
- And conservative Christians would say that Jesus' physical body came back to life, but enjoyed a new, transformed body.

Each of these would claim to believe in "Jesus' resurrection", but only the last would "know that Christianity was true" regarding Jesus' resurrection in the sense Craig wishes to maintain.

This analysis can, of course, be done on any of the other core tenets.

3

Is it possible Craig would maintain that the core tenets could find their *true* definition via the Holy Spirit's witness at the time of insight or conversion? After all, didn't Paul the Apostle learn his Christianity directly from revelation? Yes, he did, but is this the model for the typical Christian conversion or appropriation of the gospel?

It is even less plausible, for the typical Christian, to say that he/she receives a full understanding of the doctrines at the point of conversion. We should bear mind the multitude of confused ideas often held by the newly converted. Paul calls these people "babes" in Christ for good reason – they must learn over time what is meant by the deity of Christ and by his resurrection. This is done first by reading the testimony of Jesus' apostles and reflecting on them – asking questions, considering alternatives, and coming to understand what is claimed.

We must conclude that the Core Tenets are not completely defined in the Holy Spirit experience, but require external information to achieve full, accurate, and meaningful definition.

The Rest of Christianity

It gets worse. Note that we have, for purposes of discussion, reduced all of Christianity into six atomic propositions, what we conceive as the irreducible minimum definition of "Christianity." Craig states that we understand the "fine points of doctrine" using reason and evidence rather than the witness of the Spirit, but there is an extremely wide gulf between these six simple core truths and these "fine points." In fact, there is the "Rest of Christianity" – the bulk of commonly accepted propositions of historic Christianity – to consider. How does this relate to knowledge that Christianity is true?

Historically, one major way of defining Christianity has been to create creeds, most notably the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed. Remember that the latter asserts the following:

1. God exists, is all-powerful, and is the creator of the universe
2. Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, the Father's only Son, our Lord
3. Jesus was born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit
4. Pontius Pilate put Jesus to death by crucifixion, and Jesus was buried.
5. Jesus descended into hell
6. The third day he rose again from the dead
7. He ascended into heaven, and now reigns with God
8. He will come again to earth to judge all people, alive and dead
9. The Holy Spirit (is the third person of the trinity)
10. The universal fellowship of all believers exists
11. Our sins can be forgiven
12. At the last day, our bodies will be raised to eternal life.

Isn't any definition of "Christianity" without these fundamental truths too narrow, too sparse? After all, these statements make up some of the practical ways we recognize Christianity when we see it! - how we *distinguish* it from Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, New Age philosophies, atheism, materialistic reductionism, and other belief-systems. How can we leave these out of any claim to "know that Christianity is true"?

Top-Down and Bottom-Up

At this point we should take notice that Craig's epistemology is "top-down" - that is, atomic propositions (such as "Jesus rose from the dead") are derived from a higher-level assertion ("I am assured of my salvation") understood in context of a Holy Spirit experience. The essence of the Content problem is to ask how the core tenets which are constitutive of Christianity can be derived from more general assertions.

The fallacy of the top-down approach is that the specific and the comprehensive cannot be derived from the general and the simple.

In contrast to this, apologetics typically employs a "bottom-up" strategy (for good reason), starting with atomic facts of some kind – such as philosophical arguments, religious experience, historical events, and so on - and building toward a conclusion.

Conclusion

Craig's thesis fails, therefore, both to say what "Christianity" is, and to show how it can be known in such a top-down fashion.

(2) CRAIG POSITS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISLAND, IMPERVIOUS TO REASON AND EVIDENCE

The second task is to consider, per Craig's thesis, what knowledge can be provided by reason and evidence.

Kinds of Knowledge

1

It is clear, if there is any knowledge at all, that reasoning and evidence do provide knowledge of ordinary, real-world affairs. Also, it should be clear that we know that analytic truths are indeed true, whether their domain is in everyday affairs, or in philosophical discussions, or dealing with religious claims. That's pretty safe ground.

2

Next, I think Craig would agree that some philosophical statements or even religious claims can be known to be *false* based on reasoning and evidence. Certain philosophical positions are self-stultifying and therefore false. Certain world-views are internally inconsistent and therefore false. Certain religious positions which entail real-world claims that don't come true (such as the world ending), would also be known to be false. It is a short step to say that certain entire philosophical and religious positions can be proven to be false on the basis of reasoning and evidence, via internal inconsistency.

Would Craig then agree, given the above steps, that many philosophical and religious systems that are indeed false are, in principle, *provably* false? I believe he would; and therefore we can *know* in principle, by reasoning and evidence, that most *false* philosophical and religious systems are indeed false.

3

Similarly, is it possible to prove that certain philosophical arguments are *true*? I think (but am not sure) Craig would say that some arguments, such as the Kalam argument, are so strong that they amount to *knowledge*.

For example, taken along with the acceptance of the Big Bang theory, we can reason from the beginning of the universe to a source external to the universe. This cause has – by definition! – the attributes of God. Craig says,

On the basis of our argument, this cause would have to be uncaused, eternal, changeless, timeless, and immaterial. Moreover, it would have to be a personal agent who freely elects to create an effect in time. Therefore, on the basis of the kalam cosmological argument, I conclude that it is rational to believe that God exists. (*Truth Journal* (online), "The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe")

The Big Bang is said to have become one of the most well-established discoveries of science. Combined with the Kalam argument, this is probably one of the strongest philosophical arguments imaginable. If he denies knowledge to this, there's no reason to think we can have any philosophical *knowledge* at all.

4

It gets more interesting, when considering real-world events that appear to have religious implications. What if I were able to go back in time and live with Jesus and the disciples, and see his miracles and his crucifixion and his resurrection myself? – hear him talk about his Father, put my fingers in the holes in his hands and my hand in his side? Could I be said to know that these things really occurred? Certainly!

What if I couldn't witness these things for myself, but could interview and cross-examine the disciples and other eyewitnesses. Is there any reason this would not still yield knowledge about things which had happened? Certainly not.

And therefore, in principle, the only thing keeping me from being in the position of interviewing the disciples is the happenstance that I live now and not then, and therefore need to do a lot more work and analysis to reach these same conclusions. Is Craig somehow a skeptic of historiography? Is there something about this process of analysis which keeps knowledge at arm's length? No!

And so, in principle, *we can know* that the real-world events of Jesus' life (including the miracles and resurrection and his claims) truly happened, given the time, intelligence, and diligence necessary to examine the historical traces. Even concerning the resurrection, Craig seems to agree:

In particular, my own research concerning Jesus' resurrection has convinced me more than ever that this was a historical event, verifiable by the evidence. The Christian can be confident that the historical foundations of his faith stand secure. You can bet your life on it. (Online *Virtual Office*, "Rediscovering the Historical Jesus: Presuppositions and Pretensions of the Jesus Seminar")

Summing Up

In our thought experiment, Craig would hold that we can, in principle know many, many things. We can know:

1. analytic truths, including philosophical and religious propositions.
2. that many false philosophical and religious systems can be known to be false
3. that certain philosophical conclusions, such as "some kind of God exists", are true
4. that certain historical events actually occurred, even those of an extraordinary nature – including Jesus' resurrection.

This thesis posits an epistemological island immune from reason and evidence. Craig would have to agree that reason and evidence provide knowledge in the real world, of analytical truths; that certain philosophical or religious assertions are true and some false, that some philosophical and religious systems are provably false; that reason and evidence provide knowledge of many of the components of Christianity and of the fine points and nuances of theology. The only thing impervious to reason and evidence is apparently whether Christianity is true.

(3) CRAIG CONFLATES KNOWLEDGE WITH SAVING FAITH

Craig makes a critical mistake when he conflates “Knowledge that Christianity is true” with saving faith. It is important to realize that accepting this distinction immediately solves many of Craig’s concerns. For instance, he says:

[from evidential apologetic works such as McDowell’s *Evidence*] 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. (*Five Views*, p 27 - italics mine)

Here, as in other passages, Craig uses “foundation for faith” and “basis for knowledge” (that Christianity is true) interchangeably. But they are not the same. One can certainly have saving faith without “knowing Christianity is true”, and some have known that Christianity was true without having saving faith.

Saving Faith without Knowledge

Consider the thief on the cross. He didn’t have a lot of time or opportunity to evaluate the evidence. He based his plea on very limited knowledge! He presumably couldn’t have believed in Jesus’ resurrection (since it hadn’t occurred yet), and there is no evidence that he had a firm grasp of Jesus’ virgin birth, his deity, the sin-bearing nature of his death on the cross, or other main truths. He simply did not “know that Christianity is true”, even in the most primitive sense. However, he did see that there was *something* about Jesus, and he trusted Jesus to pull him through – somehow.

I think that Peter, sinking in the waves, is an excellent example of the condition of many, many converts. “Lord, save me, I’m sinking!” Jesus commended simple faith and accepts those who are muddled, confused, have weird beliefs, and otherwise are not even in a position to assent to the core tenets of Christianity. I am sure that these people are truly saved, are Christians, and Jesus lives in their hearts if they simply say “yes” to Jesus. I, with thousands of hippies like me in the late 60’s and early 70’s, committed my life to Christ and was “saved” with even less to go on than Peter had.

And so, a person who is thus a new Christian emphatically does *not* necessarily possess the “knowledge that Christianity is true”, if this means understanding and accepting a set of core propositions. He/she will certainly later seek to know more about Jesus and to understand his teaching, and thus *will come to deeper and broader knowledge*, but this knowledge is not always present at conversion. Ask anyone who is in that boat.

Knowledge without Saving Faith

On the flip side, it is equally clear that someone could have knowledge that Christianity is true without having saving faith. We may start by considering the demons, who *know* with certainty that Christianity is true, and tremble - but they do not have saving faith.

Second, there are those (as Craig himself tells us regarding his experience at Wheaton) who presumably had had “salvation experiences” but eventually fell away.

Without exploring the “eternal security” controversy, it still could be argued that they knew, at one point in their lives, that Christianity was true – but they also did not have saving faith.

Third, it is at least conceivable that there are people who in their heart of hearts *know* that the Lord is calling them and that the gospel is true. But they cannot, or will not, respond. They are so tied up in themselves, or so committed to their own pleasures or fears, that they can’t get outside that to make the right choice. If so, then they have knowledge without saving faith.

Summary

This is all very elementary, and I am sure that similar examples can be multiplied. If this distinction between Saving Faith and Knowledge is accepted, then much of Craig’s concern simply goes away! We have no paradox about Christianity being available only to the elite who “know” based upon reasons. The Christian is free to hold fast to Jesus even when the intellectual waters are troubled.

The solution, then, is not to de-couple rational warrant from evidential knowledge, but rather to de-couple *salvation* from this kind of knowledge.

(4) THE THESIS SUFFERS FROM THREE LOGICAL ISSUES

Unfalsifiable

One remarkable facet of Craig’s thesis is that no conceivable evidence or argument could possibly count against the truth of Christianity. He offers us an unassailable Christianity at the price of making it unfalsifiable. He is clear about this:

Should a conflict arise between the witness of the Holy Spirit to the fundamental truth of the Christian faith and beliefs based on argument and evidence, then it is the former which must take precedence over the latter, not vice versa. (*Reasonable*, p 36)

Unfortunately, the deck appears to be stacked. Craig is clear in other passages that when we encounter arguments against our Christian position, it is a good thing to face them squarely and overcome them if possible. And, while we are struggling with them, we must hold fast to that given us by the Spirit. This can all be agreed. But then he goes on to advise that when intractable problems are encountered, we must simply walk away from them – because nothing can be allowed to count decisively against the Christian position.

It is tremendously liberating to be able to know that our faith is true and to commend it as such to an unbeliever without being dependent upon the vagaries of argument and evidence for the assurance that our faith is true (*Reasonable*, p 49)

This kind of iron-clad position has been deemed technically meaningless because absolutely nothing is allowed to count against it. There is a great deal of literature surrounding this topic, and while it is not necessary to go so far as to deny *meaning* to Craig’s contention, still one does not have to be Karl Popper to see that “My

mind's already made up, don't confuse me with facts" is an extremely weak position to defend.

Rationalization

Citing Luther, Craig goes on to say that the "magisterial" use of reason must not be allowed to decisively influence our decisions about Truth. Rather, reason must be used as only a servant or tool to serve the gospel.

At first glance, this seems perfectly fine, and even pious. After all, God's thoughts and ways are not ours. Our reasoning is limited, and so it must take second place to God's secure revelation. However, this is not all as cut-and-dried as one would think. Don't we need to use reason and logic in order to form, interpret, and understand the very propositions that comprise truth?

Or is Reason something less rigorously defined, as "It just doesn't seem reasonable to me that God would want his four gospels to differ from each other"; or "No educated man believes miracles can happen in this day and age"? In that case, the answer should not be to reject or ignore "reason", but to *correct* it with real logic and better reasoning.

If the "magisterial" distinction is taken seriously, then we must only use reason and logic as tools which bolster beliefs held on the basis of something entirely different. We are, it appears, told to be propagandists, advocates for a view – rejecting out-of-hand any evidence to the contrary, and looking only for that which strengthens our case.

But isn't this the same as "rationalization" – that is, holding something to be true on *one* basis, and then trying to put together a rational case to bolster it?

Relegating the function of rationalization to the apologist, while fitting many of the secular caricatures of the same, does not do justice to this God-given task.

False Antitheses

One of the most damaging ways to spread confusion is to create a false antithesis between two concepts. Thus, for instance, the ability to reason is sometimes played off against the capacity to love. "Works" are made antithetical to "faith" (as if a "faith-full" life entails less care for others!). I'm sure you can think of many other examples.

One recent example that bothered me was the contrast between factuality and metaphor. Marcus Borg wrote,

Moreover, when what is said about the canonical Jesus is taken literally and historically, we lose track of the rich metaphorical meanings of the gospel texts. The gospels become factual reports about past happenings rather than metaphorical narratives of present significance. (*Reading the Bible Again*, p 191)

Do you see what he is doing? Traditionally, Christians have appreciated the meaning and symbolism and spiritual significance of the gospel accounts *because* they really happened! Borg turns this around, so that something like a causal relationship

becomes a relationship of *exclusion*. Now, he says, we can only grasp the significance of something by denying, or at least ignoring, the literal meaning.

In much the same way, I think that Craig contrasts two things which are not only complementary, but should be tightly integrated: reasons for faith, and the truths of the Spirit.

Let it be understood here that the burden of proof belongs to the one who wishes to contrast things that may be complementary – not the other way around. It is Craig's burden to establish clearly and decisively that we must *choose* between these two ways of knowing.

(5) "PROPERLY BASIC BELIEFS" CAN BE INFORMED BY EVIDENCE

As mentioned before, Craig uses Plantinga's illustration of a man who knows he is innocent of a crime because he remembers being elsewhere at the time the crime was committed – even though all the evidence points to his guilt. This illustration serves as paradigm of the "properly basic belief" the Christian possesses. To Craig, this is such a strong basis that all other basis of knowledge is excluded.

[from evidential apologetic works such as McDowell's *Evidence*] 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. (*Five Views*, p 27 - italics mine)

Testing the Paradigm

It certainly does seem intuitively obvious that one would generally trust his/her own memories over other purported "evidence." However, this is not always so. It is important to test this paradigm, and if it does not stand up to scrutiny, we should take additional caution before accepting the premise it illustrates.

Here is my example. I vividly remember seeing The Mandala (an R&B group, the most powerful band I have ever seen in my life) perform in 1966. I remembered that they presented the "Seven Steps to Soul." Over thirty years later, I was in contact with George Olliver, their lead singer, and he laughed and said, "No, there were only Five steps!" Now, do I cling to my memory or accept his? What if I talk to four other people who remember it George's way? I would reasonably allow my own memories, most of which were right on the money, to be supplemented by external evidence (George's testimony) and even *corrected* by it.

And so, even in mundane matters, since our direct experience is mediated by fallible memory, we sometimes do allow external corroboration to provide significant weight: to add context, to clarify and define, to relate to similar experiences ... even to overturn our alleged memory.

(6) CRAIG DOES NOT ACKNOWLEDGE DEGREES OF KNOWLEDGE

Strangely, Craig seems to think that either we know something or we don't. But this is manifestly false. Here's what I mean. In our everyday lives, do we either completely know something or else are completely ignorant? Doesn't knowledge admit of degrees? As we learn about something, don't we come to know more and more about it?

Dimensions of Content

As we discussed earlier, the definitional *content* of "Christianity" may vary – from core tenets, expanding to fundamental truths of "mere Christianity", and expanding even further to include more of the specific actions and teachings of Jesus. Thus, the definitional *breadth* of "Christianity" can increase as knowledge increases. It can be truly said – all other things being equal – that the person who understands the larger set of propositions has a wider, broader knowledge of "Christianity."

In a similar way, the *depth* of this knowledge can increase as I learn to understand what is meant by deity, resurrection, and other concepts essential to the truth of Christianity. The person who understands these things will obviously have a deeper knowledge of the subject.

Dimensions of Rationale

The reasons for holding something to be true may be called the rationale for this belief. A person who has only one reason for believing something enjoys less breadth of rationale than the one who has many reasons. That breadth, also, is strengthened when the reasons take the form of "converging evidence."

And again, as a person explores each reason in a deeper and more detailed way, he/she will increase his/her depth of rationale.

Dimensions of Confidence

The subjective confidence in one's knowledge may increase in two different ways. First, the *formal* confidence of my knowledge increases as reasoning is applied to evidence (including personal experience) and rationales are assigned probabilities. This is "formal" because it is a property of the arguments themselves rather than of my subjective feelings about them.

The second dimension is the subjective feeling of confidence. I call this *existential* confidence, which is apprehended by strength of feeling and demonstrated by my increased willingness to rely on this knowledge.

Conclusion

Why does this matter? I point this out because "knowing Christianity is true" is arguably not just a "yes" or "no" concept. One knows the truth of Christianity across several dimensions of knowledge – growing in understanding and knowledge, widening and deepening in content, rationale, and confidence. Reason and evidence have, I believe, a crucial role to play in just this growth of knowledge and understanding.

Craig appears to relegate this reason and evidence to roles such as "catalyst to faith" and "confirmation" and "backup", but never the "basis" for faith, or as providing

broad and deep knowledge. He commits an error when he ignores the dimensional character of knowledge.

(7) CRAIG IGNORES NEW TESTAMENT COUNTER-EXAMPLES

Craig, properly, turns to scripture, especially the New Testament teaching that the Holy Spirit lives inside us and teaches us. He appeals to 1 John ("you have no need that anyone should teach you"). John alludes to the more "sure word" than the apostolic testimony. However, he does not address the many clear statements – and fundamental assumptions – in the New Testament that show the relationship of reasoning and facts with knowledge. These examples go beyond simple proof-texting, by considering context and fairly analyzing the text.

Reasoning

There are certainly places in the New Testament where knowledge seems to be *explicitly tied to reasons*. The first is in the case of the Bereans in Acts. These new believers are typically used in sermons to illustrate that we should base our beliefs on the teachings of the Bible, because they "searched the Scriptures." But there is more to it. We should remember the context: Paul's strategy in the synagogues was to show that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah by reasoning from the Old Testament. In Berea, they were careful to look at these passages *to see for themselves* if these things were true (that is, to find out, to *know*).

Acts 17.1

In Thessalonica

When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said.

Acts 17.10

In Berea

As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day *to see if what Paul said was true*. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

Notice that because the Bereans followed the argument (which, by the way, referred to more than just the "core tenets"), they came to see for themselves (they knew) that this was so. This train of reasoning was in reality the *basis* for their belief. The knowledge they possessed was, as it were, *composed of facts* (the scriptures and Jesus' life), reasoning (rationally appreciating the correspondence), and conclusion (that Jesus was the promised Messiah).

The apostles reasoned from Scripture to produce knowledge.

Appealing to Facts

In the same way, the gospel of Luke begins with a very clear and straightforward statement of intent. He says that he personally investigated the stories about Jesus' actions and words, and wrote them out so that ... what? So that the reader can "know with certainty" the things that have been taught about Christianity. And the inference would follow that this is a component of knowing that Christianity is true.

Luke 1.1

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Even in the 1 John example, Craig's strongest illustration, while accepting that the Spirit gives a "more sure word" than the words of humans, note that John believes his readers *do* need to be taught, because he is writing this letter specifically to teach them core doctrines of Christianity (against the Gnostics or proto-Gnostics). He appeals to his own personal, everyday knowledge – touching, handling, seeing, hearing. He concludes with "See that what you have heard from the beginning [the apostolic testimony] remains in you." (1 John 2.24) This has to be construed as part of the very foundation of their faith.

1 John 1.1

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

1 John 2.22

Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son.

It is clear that the apostles appealed to real-world facts to produce knowledge.

Jesus' Appeal to Reasoning and Fact

We can see that Jesus himself often employed reasoning and facts when making his case.

Jesus did not expect everyone to believe in him just because he said so. He did not shrink back from appealing to his own miracles as witnesses. Even when John the Baptist was thrown into prison and asked for reassurance, Jesus did not tell him just to listen to the Holy Spirit's witness. He pointed to the evidences of his own life:

Matt 11.4

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

Jesus also *reasoned* from the scriptures. Immediately after his resurrection, he taught the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus:

Luke 24.25

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Luke 24.44

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Jesus' Legacy is supplemented by the book of Acts (from Luke), which recounts many of the apostles' exploits. Peter not only says, in effect, "we saw it all!", but appeals to *knowledge held in common* with his audience as well as reasoning from scripture.

Acts 10.37

You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

"We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

CONCLUSION

To sum up, what is wrong with the view that "*knowing* and *showing* Christianity is true are (radically) different" – the first granted by the witness of the Holy Spirit, and the second performed by the apologist? What's so bad about this?

The Flinch Test

First, on a personal level, what is it that bothers me so much about this view? It doesn't pass the "flinch test." When reading the knowing/showing chapter in *Reasonable Faith* on an airplane on the way to China, I was shocked that Craig had put this huge caveat in the middle of his otherwise excellent presentation on reasons to believe Christianity is true. It was as if he said, "All this apologetics is nice as far as it goes, but none of this means that Christianity is *true*, and you certainly can't come to *know* that it's true in this way. But aren't we clever and rational and reasonable? ... Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain." I said to myself, probably out loud: "Then what's the *point*?!!"

I have to admit that my first reaction was a feeling of betrayal. It seemed to me that Craig was taking back with one hand what he had just offered with the other.

And then I said to myself, hopefully silently, "But what about *my* reasons for thinking Christianity is true? When I became a Christian, I didn't know enough about the 'core tenets' to say whether they were *true* or not, I just loved Jesus and wanted to follow him. But now I think I have very good reasons, and these hold me to him like an anchor. Is he saying I am deluded in this?"

Well, to me this was as bad as a straightforward attack on Christian beliefs. It was as bad as saying the reasons I had for my foundation were *false*; he seemed to say that my foundation itself, made up of valid reasons, was *misplaced*. Just after I can gotten successfully settled into my chair, he had pulled it out from under me.

The Seven Problems

But we can't base our entire life on the Flinch Test. I believe it's important to try to understand what Craig is really saying and try to come to grips with it. I found seven problems with this thesis, and honestly cannot see how they can be overcome. Here they are:

(1) The Content Problem. The thesis attempts to explain how x ("Christianity") is known, but it is extremely vague about what x is. We see a critical dilemma here – If he allows Christianity to be defined in simple generalities ("I am saved", "God exists", etc.), he is not dealing with an adequate definition of Christianity. However, if he provides an adequate set of propositions which are known to be true by the Christian, his "top-down" derivation (from general to specific) seems to be impossible.

(2) The Island Problem. The thesis posits a sort of epistemological island which is immune from reason and evidence. Craig would have to agree that reason and evidence provide knowledge in the real world, and of analytical truths; that certain philosophical or religious assertions are known to be true and some false, that some philosophical and religious systems are provably false; that reason and evidence provide knowledge of many of the components of Christianity and of the fine points and nuances of theology. The only thing impervious to reason and evidence is whether Christianity is true.

(3) The Faith Problem. The thesis needlessly conflates "knowledge" with saving faith. It is demonstrably true that one can have saving faith without having a full knowledge of any adequate set of assertions regarding Christianity. It is equally true that one may have knowledge without saving faith. Accepting this distinction immediately solves many of Craig's problems (such as not limiting Christianity to the

intellectual elite).

(4) Logical Problems. The thesis suffers from three logical issues. First, it makes Christianity unfalsifiable, since every argument against Christianity is to be rejected. Second, it appears to relegate reason to a rationalization role (for much the same reason). Third, it trades upon a false dilemma, viz. that the foundation for knowing Christianity is true could only be the witness of the Holy Spirit or evidence provided by the Lord, never a combination of both – and he simply jettisons the latter in preference for the former.

(5) The Paradigm Problem. The thesis fails to recognize that personal experience and memory (properly basic beliefs) can be informed by external evidence, even in some cases over-turned by evidence. The core paradigm used to explain and defend the thesis does not ultimately support it.

(6) The Epistemological Problem. The thesis does not acknowledge degrees of knowledge, dimensions of knowledge. One does not simply either “know Christianity is true” or not know it. Rather, it is reason and evidence that lead to deeper and broader understanding of the subject matter.

(7) The New Testament Problem. This thesis ignores New Testament counter-examples. Craig appeals to scripture to support the point that the Holy Spirit provides genuine knowledge. However, he does not deal with the many counter-examples that not only pebble the NT but appeal to implicit underlying assumptions.

THE WAY FORWARD

In earlier versions of this article, at this point I wrote a rather lengthy explanation of how we should treat reason and evidence, and how it is right and good to integrate the concrete and the spiritual. Over time I came to see that this just made the article too long to read and detracted from the major point. If you are interested in my solution, I will just provide some comments here and you can read more on my web site.

Jesus is Evidence

C.S. Lewis once wrote that Jesus is not a theory which needs defending, but is actually one of those stubborn pieces of reality which any decent theory must face. He really lived, and said things, and did things. Jesus, himself, is evidence! And I think it is clear that Jesus intentionally left a Legacy, by gathering disciples and training them, and letting them tell the world about him. This Legacy is not necessarily “intellectual”; but it does provide evidence in the real world about who he is. We should not ignore this in favor of a spiritual experience.

Integration of the Concrete and the Spiritual

But how is the spiritual to be integrated with the physical? It is not that the spiritual just happens to co-exist side-by-side with the world, but that it lives within us in the real world. When we preach, or do apologetics, it is crucial to understand that the Holy Spirit does not merely *use* these activities (as Craig acknowledges) to accomplish his work, he goes on to *anoint* them.

Let me offer this illustration. In the 1970's I used to play "Jesus Music" with Calvary Chapel in Southern California. In playing music, we would typically say that we sowed seeds and God gave the increase. We gave God the glory.

One time, our guitarist was talking to a guy after a concert at the "Fire Escape" Christian coffee house. The guy said to him, "Man, you're really a great guitar player." The guitarist, humbly deferring to God's glory, replied, "That wasn't me playing, that was the Lord." The guy looked over at the electric guitar on its stand in the corner, and said, "Wow, let me see Him play something else!" (The scary thing is, I think he was serious.)

No, the Holy Spirit didn't actually perform the music. But even so, it wasn't either/or - either the Holy Spirit spoke to our audience *or else* we played music. He used the music in great ways to prompt people's hearts. Perhaps our music was often only the occasion for the Holy Spirit to work independently; maybe it simply directed peoples' attention to the Lord, which gave the Spirit a chance to be attended to. But I think He also sometimes spoke *through* the music, *anointing* it. After all, God invented music, called us as humans to write songs and play them for people, inspired the songs, drew people, spoke to them, and saved them.

So sure, it was the Holy Spirit who did the heavy lifting, but the music and the Holy Spirit *were not mutually exclusive*. In fact, I would go a step further and say that the Spirit's connection with his tool was even more intimate: he *inhabited* the praises of his people.

The lesson from this should be obvious. To play off the Holy Spirit against his tool is misleading and wrong-headed. If the Holy Spirit *uses* reasons and evidence, as Craig agrees, it seems clear that we should not divide the knowledge thus gained from the reasoning which led to this knowledge.

Responding to Craig's Concerns

Craig is at least partly motivated by the apparent absurdity of making Christianity available only to those people who have the intellectual capacity to develop an adequate apologetic for themselves. Our eternal life cannot depend upon the vagaries of human argument.

It is tremendously liberating to be able to know that our faith is true and to commend it as such to an unbeliever without being dependent upon the vagaries of argument and evidence for the assurance that our faith is true (*Reasonable*, p 49)

The vast majority of the human race have neither the time, training, nor resources to develop a full-blown Christian apologetic as the basis of their faith. ... According to the magisterial role of reason, these persons should not have believed in Christ until they finished their apologetic. Otherwise, they would be believing for insufficient reasons. ... The fact is that we can know the truth whether we have rational arguments or not. (*Reasonable*, p 37)

The second is "like unto it,":

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 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. (*Hard Questions*, p 26)

... 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. (*Five Views*, p 27)

Why is "Apologetics" so Complex?

This concern can be remedied just by acknowledging that "knowing Christianity is true" is not the same thing as having saving faith, as we discussed above. But we should also squarely face the apologetics issue he raises here.

1

First, it should be understood that apologetics is potentially complex for the same reason the universe is complex. The inquiring mind can take the exploration as far as he/she can stand to go.

2

But for these purposes a better reason has to do with "defensive apologetics." This task of answering objections has continued to grow over the years due to the fact that the objections themselves have grown exponentially. And to make matters more difficult, many (not all) of the purported refutations of Christianity have been characterized by innuendo rather than argument, obfuscation rather than clarity, accompanied by red herrings, false logic, specializing in half-truths and word games.

This is not to say that all arguments against Christianity are consciously fallacious, but that they do often appear to be tangled. Only the person who has faithfully tried to wade through an entire book of such attack can fully appreciate the daunting task of rebutting it.

A fundamental point must be made here, that the clearer and more straightforward the evidences for the truth of Christianity, the *fewer* clear and straightforward paths are available to the person who wishes to object. Therefore, the simpler the Christian evidences, the more inventive and tortuous the opposition must be, and thus the more complicated the *opposing* argument, the more rigorous the proper defense must be.

And thus we come to the highly ironic conclusion that, in a very real way, the essential simplicity and directness of basic Christian evidences has given rise to the complexity and difficulty of apologetics.

3

Retreat and Hold. The critic of Christianity, in my experience, sometimes finds himself beaten on the merits, and so is forced to "retreat and hold." For instance, if historical evidence supports the resurrection, then he can question the validity of historiography and challenge the Christian apologist to prove that we can really know

anything about past events. If that is not sufficient, the skeptic can take another big step back and challenge whether anything at all can be known. The intrepid apologist is thus forced to prove *everything*, which can be exhausting and complex.

Responding to Challenges

This brings us to the question, "In the academic world, when assailed and overwhelmed with the critique of Christianity, how is the Christian student supposed to maintain faith?" It is certainly true that the university setting takes the struggle up a notch – that the typical naïve Christian freshman wakes up one day at school only to find himself surrounded by arguments he can't rebut. And, as Craig points out, this is the sad fact of many Christian colleges as well.

Should we ourselves "retreat and hold"? Should we fall back to a position that is unassailable (unfalsifiable) and that reassuringly gives us the high moral ground (the "other side" is evil)? Not at all! The proper answer is first to agree with Craig that the simple Christian need not respond to these challenges at all (St. Francis of Assisi, for instance, did quite well without defending the historical reliability of the gospels, or drawing out the metaphysical implications of the Big Bang), but to disagree with him that the *only* way to know Christianity is true is through the inner witness of the Spirit, and to go on to *affirm* that the challenges can be overcome.

I clearly remember my "aha" moment, as I was facing certain issues and troubled by the complexity, when Bob Passantino enthusiastically and energetically advised (as only he could do), "That's why we have *Christian teachers!!!*" This is where the Christian apologist comes to the rescue. The student doesn't *have* to reinvent the wheel! Most of these issues have already been addressed satisfactorily.

This leads us to an important point – If you are smart enough to ask the questions, you are smart enough to hear the answers. If you see apparent contradictions or problems, you are certainly intellectually equipped to understand their resolution if you have the right guidance. And so, for the mainstream college student, guidance by Christian teachers such as Craig ought be sufficient to answer the most prevalent objections to Christianity. As the student's faith is bolstered by each success, her appreciation of God's truth is increased and understanding is developed.

Afraid of Reason?

Should we fear Reason? In Craig's example or similar scenarios, is it truly Reason that is in opposition to Christianity, or only the *appearance* of reason? I well remember my first Bible class at Pomona College. The professor there was talking about "the Bible as literature", and one timid student put his hand up. He said, "But my pastor says that this is the inspired word of God." The professor laughed and said that was the dumbest thing he'd ever heard and the guy was put in his place, humiliated. I had the unmitigated gall to follow up by asking, "But doesn't it matter whether these things are true or not?", and if memory serves me, he just stared at me with a withering look.

But did the professor discuss these issues at all? Present logical arguments to answer the questions? Certainly not! These legitimate questions were simply shut down - on authority. You can bet I didn't talk much after that.

Another example is working on what I call the “Metaphorical Gospel Theory”, where I was genuinely fearful that I would encounter arguments I couldn’t rebut. I wondered what I would do if these arguments really made sense. Would I change my belief? – I supposed that I’d have to. But as I read more, and thought more, and even corresponded with some of the scholars who hold that view, I saw the glaring weaknesses of the theory for what they were. And when there were no answers to obvious objections to the theory, I started to see that the Emperor had no clothes – there was nothing to be afraid of.

At least, this has been my experience over these many years. Have you found this to be the case, too?

Once we begin to see that the Christian Claim is something we can push on, probe, question, and it won’t automatically fall apart, we start to develop a real confidence, borne of these experiences. We come to realize that you don’t have to “*t*ry* to believe”, as if you could partition your mind to believe things you knew weren’t true. Instead of *trying* to believe, the right way is to inquire and learn!

Summary

Craig says, “It is tremendously liberating” to not be dependent on reasoning and argument to know that our faith is true – But I say, it is *truly* liberating to be able to see our faith as true and solid, so that we don’t have to make an effort to hold onto our faith by *sheer will power*, but can fearlessly deal with the issues as they arise.

If we are not troubled by challenges to Christianity, we are not obligated to respond to them. However, if we do feel called to respond, we have been given the tools we need. The student, overwhelmed by objections he/she can’t refute, must not take refuge in an unassailable, unfalsifiable “retreat and hold” position. This student, Christian or seeker, must instead turn to the resources available, and learn to stand.

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