

A Short Introduction to
Christian Apologetics

CONTENTS

Introduction 3

Life's Big Questions 5

The Existence of God 8

- The Cosmological Argument 8
- The Argument from Design 10
- The Moral Argument 13
- The Argument from Desire 14
- The Problem of Evil 15

Christian Theism 20

- Who is Jesus? 20
- The Resurrection 24
- The Historical Reliability of the New Testament 28

The Essence of Christianity 35

Conclusion 38

Appendix A: A Short Critique of Atheism 39

Appendix B: Miscellaneous Issues 43

Annotated Bibliography 50

Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is to provide a brief defence of Christianity. I will only be looking at the central claims - those concerning the existence of God and the person of Jesus. Even in these areas I do not pretend to exhaust the evidence. What I give is simply an introduction. The reason I have written this booklet is two fold. Firstly, because I believe that Christianity is true. Secondly, because I believe that this truth is life-changing. Life throws up almost endless questions, but the answers are difficult to find. But I have found that in Christ the hungers of both the heart and the mind find satisfaction.

The structure that this booklet takes is as follows. First, we will have a look at the basic questions of life. These are the issues everyone faces, and that pose questions which every world-view must answer. After this we will take a look at the claims of Christianity, and at the person of Christ. At this point we will just be seeing what answers Christianity gives. Next we will see whether those claims can be sustained. To do this we will take two main issues, first the existence of God, second the person of Jesus. As a follow up we will also look at the issue of the reliability of the Bible. After this we take a more in-depth look at Christianity, and then draw out our conclusions. The booklet contains another two major sections however, which have been labelled as 'appendices'. Appendix A is a short critique of the atheistic world-view. Appendix B consists of a few short notes on various miscellaneous issues. These range from 'other religions', to 'omnipotence', from 'truth' to 'the Trinity'.

Life's Big Questions

As I said in the introduction, life throws up many big questions. Today the hunger for significance, and the search for meaning seem to be almost all encompassing. Very few people go through life without wondering what it's all about. All across the world, in every age and in every place, the questions are fundamentally the same.

- 'Who am I?'
- 'Why am I here?'
- 'Where am I going?'

The first is a question of *identity*. The second, a question of *meaning* and *purpose*. The third is a question of *destiny*. The first of these questions could equally be understood as a question of *origin*. The phrase "getting back to one's roots" reveals this. The question of who we really are is intimately tied with the question of where we ultimately come from.

Many, many systems of thought have looked at these questions. Answers abound, but the question of truth remains paramount. This complicates the issue. With an endless number of options where does one even begin?

I know that it sounds biased, but I think that it is actually very logical to begin with Christianity. Why is this? Basically because Christianity is so different from other world-views. Consider the following quote from Josh McDowell ...

Among the religious leaders who have attained a large following throughout history, Jesus Christ is unique in the fact that He alone claimed to be God in human flesh. ... Buddha did not claim to be God; Moses never said that he was Yahweh; Mohammed did not identify himself as Allah; and nowhere will you find Zoroaster claiming to be Ahura Mazda. Yet Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, said that he who has seen Him (Jesus) has seen the Father (John 14:9). The claims of Christ are many and varied. He said that He existed before Abraham (John 8v58), and that He was equal with the Father (John 5v17,18). Jesus claimed the ability to forgive sins (Mark 2v5-7), which the Bible teaches was something that God alone could

do (Isaiah 43v25) ... This fact separates Jesus from other religious figures. In the major religions of the world, the teachings - not the teacher - are all-important. ... However, at the centre of Christianity is the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus did not just claim to be teaching the truth; He claimed that He was the truth (John 14v6).

(From J. McDowell, *Answers to Tough Questions* (Here's Life, 1988), pg. 60-1.)

In nearly all other systems of thought you can remove the central figure, replace him with someone else, and the message will remain essentially unchanged. This is because what they offer is simply a way of life or a system of belief. Christianity is distinctive, for Christ Himself is the centre of Christianity. He didn't just claim to *give* answers to life's questions He claimed to *be* the answer. He didn't just claim to *know* the truth, He claimed to *be* the truth. His words are recorded for us in John 14v6, where He says, 'I am the way, the truth and the life'. No other religious leader ever made such startling claims.

This in itself is an interesting piece of evidence, but it certainly doesn't show that Christ is who he claimed to be. A large number of people have made large claims, the asylums are full of such people. Jesus is distinctive in that he is the only widely accepted religious leader to do this. The big question is whether those claims can be substantiated. This is the main subject of this booklet.

One of Jesus most outrageous claims is that of being 'the Son of God'. If this is true then it must be true that God exists. But does God exist? Could Jesus' claim be true? If God does exist, and if Jesus is His Son, then this will give us room in which to answer the big questions of *origin* and *identity*. In turn, this will provide a basis on which to answer the others. But numerous systems claim that God exists - Islam and Judaism, among others. So, to sustain the Christian perspective we will have to do more than argue for the existence of God. I will attempt two different approaches to this. The first will involve looking at the life and claims of Jesus. The second will involve looking at evidence for Jesus' resurrection. It is natural to think that if someone makes claims to be utterly unique then they will have to do something that no-one else has ever done in order to substantiate those claims. If Jesus really did rise from the dead then this would seem to provide that substantiation.

I realise that looking at the various arguments for and against the existence of God can seem a long way from finding the answers to life's questions. The debate can seem so dry and dull. Indeed an over-dose of argument often leads away from answers rather than towards them. This is not because argument is

inappropriate, but because the various arguments and counter-arguments often result in disorientation. We must, therefore, be careful as we approach these issues. But some amount of reasoning is inevitable, for the answers we seek must be found within the confines of truth. Furthermore, the question of the truth concerning the existence or non-existence of God seems pivotal. It was Ravi Zacharias who said that every serious question in philosophy ultimately boils down to two questions: First, does God exist? Second, if He does, what is His nature, what is His character?

The Existence of God

There are various arguments both for and against the existence of God. The arguments for the existence of God that we will look at are (a) the Cosmological Argument, otherwise known as the 'First Cause' argument, (b) the Moral Argument, (c) the Argument from Design, and (d) the Argument from Desire. We will only consider one argument against the existence of God, the Problem of Evil.

The Cosmological Argument

The cosmological argument has taken many forms. All of these arguments begin from some very basic feature in the world. They all argue from world to God. The argument that I will present is adjusted from the version given by Dr. Norman Geisler. (His version can be found in [3].) The formal structure of this argument might be given as follows.

- (1) Something exists.
- (2) What ever exists does so either dependently or non-dependently.
- (3) If something exists dependently then the thing upon which it depends also exists.
- (4) Not everything exists in this dependent manner.
- (5) Therefore, something exists non-dependently.
- (6) Such a non-dependent being would be unlimited in all its attributes.
- (7) It would, therefore, be all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good.
- (8) Such a being is appropriately called God.
- (9) Therefore, God exists.

[My defence of this argument will be brief since I don't want to get bogged down in the technicalities ... but the overall structure should be quite clear. After my defence I will also give the reader two different ways at looking at what are essentially the same issues.] The first premise is undeniably true. One can't deny one's own existence. In order to make such a denial one would have to exist - but if one

existed then the denial would be false. So premise (1) is true. (2) is also true, these are the only two ways of existing, dependently or non-dependently. (3) also seems trivial. (4) is a little more contentious. What does it mean to say that not everything exists dependently? What is it that this premise denies? It basically denies that there could be an infinite regress of dependent beings, each one depending upon another. It also denies that the relation of dependence could go round in a circle. On both counts the premise seems correct. We have, then an inference from these four premises to premise (5) something exists non-dependently. Now things start to get a little more complicated.

Why must (6) be true? Basically it is because if some really existing thing is limited it must be limited by something. But a being which is not-dependent upon anything couldn't be limited in this manner - what would it be limited by? It surely couldn't be limited by the beings which depend upon it. Neither could it be limited by those beings on which it depends, for there are none. But presumably it could not be limited by itself either. So (6) seems to be true. Now if (7) is true, then the argument has worked. For the next two stages are incontestable. But is (7) true? Well, it certainly seems reasonable. The world contains people, people are things which (a) have knowledge, (b) have some power to affect things and (c) are to some degree good. Now it is already evident that a non-dependent being must have some causal power, for in a sense it's a cause of the beings which depend upon it. But if it has some power it must be all-powerful, that is just what premise (6) says. Before we look at the rest of (7) let's look a little at the consequences of the non-dependent existence being 'all-powerful'. The main consequence is that there can only be one such being. If two beings were all-powerful then what would happen if they pitted themselves against each other? Neither could lose, but then neither would win, and this would seem to show that neither is all-powerful at all. Thus there is only one non-dependent being. Everything else which exists must depend upon this being. So what about the remainder of (7)? Well, it always seems reasonable to say that an effect cannot be greater than its ultimate cause. This means that the ultimate cause of knowledge, and goodness must possess both of these features. But again, by (6), if it possess these features it must do so in a non-limited way. Thus the non-dependent being must be all-knowing and all-good. But, as (8) says, a non-dependent being which is all-good, all-powerful and all-knowing is appropriately called 'God'. Therefore, God does exist.

A couple more things remain to be said. First it should be clear that the non-dependent being upon which everything else depends can correctly be thought of as the creator and sustainer of the world. Also this creator can be thought of as personal (or super-personal). Numerous reasons could be given for this. The first is

that He possesses attributes only had by persons (such as knowledge). Also we could have argued from personhood in the effect, to personhood in the cause - as we did for the other attributes.

This argument has some force. There are stages which could be disputed. Probably the stages that most people would struggle with are (4) and (6). But both these premises seem reasonable. I suspect that (6) is also the more troubling of the two. But even if the argument stops at (5), we still have an interesting conclusion. After all, here we are saying that there exists something upon which everything else depends. If we combined this with the design argument and the moral argument, one might infer that this being is also incredibly intelligent and perfectly good. But then we could rejoin the argument above at (8), and the argument would still go through.

After stating the argument I promised the reader a couple of alternative ways of thinking about the same essential point. The first is this: it seems clear that nothing comes from nothing. If nothing had ever existed then nothing would exist in the future. Therefore there must always have been something. What follows from this is that unless something exists there would not even be the real possibility of anything existing. Surely then there must be some kind of being whose existence just is, which is not dependent upon anything else already existing. This sounds very like God. The second alternative is provided by C.S. Lewis. He argued that nature when taken as a whole, cannot be correctly thought of as natural, so must be thought of as super-natural. This would imply that it has a super-natural cause. In *God in the Dock* Lewis wrote

If the 'natural' means that which obeys a norm, that which can be paralleled, that which can be explained by reference to other events, then nature herself as a whole is *not* natural, If a miracle means that which gives no account of itself but simply is, then the universe is one great miracle.

The Argument from Design

This argument is similar to the last in that it also argues from world to God. However, the features of the world from which it argues are less general. Principally the argument focuses upon the world's order, its structure. The thought being that in our experience these things don't just 'come about' but rather result from the activity of intelligent agents - the implication being that the order and

structure of the world around us is also the result of such activity. Put explicitly the argument's structure might be given as follows.

- (1) The world contains much order.
- (2) There are just two possible types of explanation for this
 - (i) Impersonal / Non-intelligent.
 - (ii) Personal / Intelligent.
- (3) The Personal / Intelligent explanation is the better explanation.
- (4) Therefore, it is probably the true explanation.
- (5) Therefore, there probably exists a personal / intelligent being whose existence explains the order of the world.
- (6) Such a being would have to be immensely powerful and intelligent.
- (7) Therefore, there probably exists an immensely powerful, intelligent being, whose existence explains the order of the world.

The first two premises seem undeniable. Perhaps (1) could be denied, but I'll come to that shortly. The most contentious premise seems to be (3). But let's suppose (for the moment) that (3) is true. Does the rest of the argument go through? (4) would certainly be right, as would (5). However, (6) could be debated. Couldn't the world be made by a number of intelligent beings all working together? Then none of them would need to be *very* intelligent or *very* powerful. This does seem a possibility. However, an explanation in terms of one being seems preferable - it unifies the phenomena a little more than the postulation of a number of lesser deities. Furthermore, I very much doubt that any critic would be seriously entertained by this alternative. A more serious criticism is that if the world's order needs explanation then why wouldn't the order of this intelligent being? If we reply that "it just doesn't" then why couldn't someone say the same about the world itself? The reply to this is fairly easy. It is that minds are 'self-ordering' in a way that the world as a whole is not. Matter does not just organise itself. But minds seem different. They do seem to be spontaneously self-ordering in a way that matter is not. Thus an intelligence is a better stopping point for explanation than the world is.

Now back to premise (3). Is a personal explanation better than an impersonal one? The answer to this will probably depend upon two things. First, the degree to which the world really is ordered. Second, the availability of rival hypotheses. If we were to take biological order as our starting point then

evolutionary theory would be a rival hypothesis. The very presence of this rival hypothesis might be thought to weaken the justification of (3). Indeed, to some extent it does. But evolutionary theory does have numerous problems. I don't have space to discuss them here, and I refer the interested reader to Michael Behe's book, *Darwin's Black Box* (Touchstone, 1996). However, there are other examples of order in the universe to which one could appeal in order to support (3). Consider the following quote from quantum physicist John Polkinghorne, president of Queens' College, Cambridge.

In the early expansion of the universe there has to be a close balance between the expansive energy (driving things apart) and the force of gravity (pulling things together). If the expansion dominated then matter would fly apart too rapidly for condensation into galaxies and stars to take place. Nothing interesting could happen in so thinly spread a world. On the other hand, if gravity dominated the world would collapse in on itself again before there was time for the processes of life to get going. For us to be possible requires a balance between the effects of expansion and contraction which at a very early epoch in the universe's history (the Planck time) has to differ from equality by not more than 1 in 10^{60} . The numerate will marvel at such a degree of accuracy. For the non-numerate I will borrow an illustration from Paul Davis of what that accuracy means. He points out that it is the same as aiming at a target an inch wide on the other side of the observable universe, twenty thousand million light years away, and hitting the mark! (Quoted in [5], pg. 169-170.)

This gives us an example of order which is presupposed, rather than explained by evolutionary theory. There are other similar examples. For instance the origin of life itself cannot be explained by evolutionary theory. Evolution can only get going once life is on the scene. But the probability of the emergence of life from non-life (known as 'abiogenesis') has been calculated to be very small - around 1 in $10^{40,000}$. (See [2] for more on this.) For practical purposes this probability is no different from zero. But if the odds are stacked against life then how come life has emerged? The hypothesis of intelligent design seems reasonable. Such a hypothesis would allow us to explain why the remarkably improbable actually happened.

The way that the universe seems to be 'fine-tuned' for life led Dr. Polkinghorne to say 'There is no free lunch, and only God has the resources to put in what was needed to get what we've got.'

The Moral Argument

Combined with the moral argument the design argument could show that the world's author is not only intelligent but good. However, the moral argument can also stand on its own.

It is a fact of experience that some things are morally good and others are morally bad. We cannot but condemn the rapist, the murderer, and the fraudster. People sometimes claim that morality is just an artefact of culture, and that we all ought to be tolerant of the moral standards of others. But no-one wants to tolerate intolerance. This simple observation allows us to realise that even those who say that there is no one true morality really believe otherwise, for they believe in the moral absolute of 'tolerance'. Furthermore, these people are quick to take sides in inter-cultural issues. If one *culture* attacks another without provocation then this is wrong. But why is it wrong if morality is just a *cultural* artefact? Morality, then, seems inescapable. But how does one explain its existence?

Morality seems to consist in commands. But what sense can we make of commands without a commander? But if there must be a commander, who will take that role? Why shouldn't each legislate for his or herself? But this would not be morality, it would be anarchy! Only God seems to be in a position to legislate for us.

Furthermore, morality seems to be predicated upon the fact that humans have value. But if humans are the products of a blind evolutionary process, then what value can they have? I don't see that they can have any value at all. But if humans have no value, then why should one respect them? Thus, once again, if God does not exist, morality becomes a free-for-all.

Before we can say what actions are good and what are bad we must first find out what life is really about. If there is no bigger picture in which our own lives and actions play a part, then it isn't clear that our lives and actions can have any significance at all. But if our lives and actions do have significance then there must be a bigger picture. But such a picture could only be painted by God. If God exists then we can make sense of morality. Furthermore, if Christianity is true then we are all made in the very image of God. Thus human life is infused with value. No-one is insignificant. Everyone matters.

It would seem then that if there is such a thing as morality this can only be accounted for by the existence of God. But there is such a thing as morality. Therefore, God must exist.

The Argument from Desire

The argument from desire is one of my personal favourites. There is little real literature surrounding this argument, but it's a good one nonetheless. The formal structure of it might be given as follows.

- (1) Every natural desire has a correlating object of desire.
- (2) We have a natural desire for God.
- (3) Therefore, God exists.

C.S. Lewis was the first to use this argument. (It is explicit in his 'The Weight of Glory', and more implicit in 'Surprised by Joy', and 'Pilgrims Regress'.) Its simplicity belies its strength. Many would dismiss the argument out of hand. But this is unwise. Premise (1) has very good support. Consider our natural hunger. Well, there is food which can satisfy that hunger. Consider our natural thirst. Well, there is water. For every desire that could plausibly be called natural, there is something in existence that could satisfy that desire. But if we look inside, many of us feel what seems to be a natural desire for 'something more', a desire, a yearning, which no earthly thing can satisfy. We know this because we've tried those earthly things - and they don't satisfy. So many people have achieved fame and found that it was a let-down. I'm sure that you could think of many examples yourself. Let me give you just two. About Kurt Cobain, John Smith wrote, "For Society in general, Kurt Cobain's death is a challenge. What is it that makes life worth living if not fame, fortune, creativity, a groovy wife and a beautiful young child?" Echoing these sentiments Malcom Muggeridge, who for many years sought fulfilment in the things of this world, penned these beautiful words.

I may, I suppose, regard myself as a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets. That's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough money to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Internal Revenue Service. That's success. Furnished with money and a little fame, even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of trendy diversions. That's pleasure. It might happen once in a while

that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time. That's fulfilment. Yet, I say to you, and beg you to believe me, multiply these tiny triumphs by millions, add them all up together, and they are nothing, less than nothing. Indeed a positive impediment measured against one drop of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are.

(Quoted in [5], pg. 223.)

The greatest hunger of the human heart is the desire to worship. In every age, in every country of every continent, ordinary, educated people have engaged in some form of worship. Each of them expressing their gratitude to a higher power. If God exists then this desire is not just a personal whim. Rather it expresses the law of our very being. We are made to be in communion with God. I believe it was Saint Augustine who said, 'You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.'

This completes my summary of the arguments for the existence of God. There are other arguments. For instance there is the argument from religious experience. There is the ontological argument. Also interesting is the argument from miracles. We will now move on to consider the problem of evil, the main argument against the existence of God.

The Problem of Evil

The problem of evil is really a very thorny issue. The basic structure of the argument might be given as follows.

- (1) The world contains much evil.
- (2) A perfect God would not allow such evil.
- (3) Therefore, no such God exists.

The existential force of the argument is undeniable. It is hard to believe in God when innocent children are seen to suffer. But I think that though the problem is a difficult one, we have already touched upon what is needed in order to make sense of the pain in our lives.

The reason the suffering, death and pain are so awful is that they seem to disregard everything that has value. Human life is not a mere accident that can be

wiped out without a second thought. But if God exists isn't this just what He does? Doesn't he allow much unnecessary suffering?

It is difficult to answer such questions without sounding harsh. My reply to this argument will involve numerous different things, none of which are intended to belittle the fact that life can be very difficult indeed.

Point 1

The problem of evil is unavoidably a moral problem. If it were not such a problem, the goodness of God could not be called into question. But we argued earlier that the validity of morality depended upon the existence of God. We also argued that unless God exists it is far from clear that any human life has intrinsic value. Thus rather than disprove the existence of God the fact of evil seems to require God's existence. Real evil can only be done to that which is really valuable. Also the judgement that there is real evil would be a moral judgement. But such judgements are only valid if God exists. Thus we could construct the following argument.

- (1) There is evil.
- (2) If there is evil, then there are things of real value.
- (3) If there are things of real value, then God exists.
- (4) Therefore, God exists.

(2) and (3) could be replaced by

- (2*) if there is evil, then there are real moral categories.
- (3*) if there are real moral categories, then God exists.

Both these arguments seem right. If they are right then we can only even make sense of the existence of evil within a theistic framework. That is the problem of evil cannot be solved by denying the existence of God. God must stay in the picture for us to even have a chance of making sense of evil. But perhaps we can't make sense of evil even within a theistic framework. The following few points are aimed at that very question.

Point 2

The question I intend to look at in this short section is: 'Does suffering serve any purpose?'. I believe the answer here is yes. It was when Kris Akabusi's wife gave birth to still born twins that he really began to think about life's big questions, and it was this questioning that ultimately led Him to Christ. Often we

can live out our lives as if the big questions are already settled. But pain and sorrow knock us off balance and cause us to take stock. When we and those around us are suffering we can't help but begin to ask what life is about. Not only this, but also we often learn important things through the hard times. Allow me to quote Muggeridge again

Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at that time seemed especially desolating and painful. I now look back upon them with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced ... my existence has been through affliction and not through happiness whether pursued or attained. (Quoted in [5], pg. 307-8.)

Point 3

The most popular line of defence against the problem of evil has always been 'the free will defence'. There is certainly something right about this. Do we want God to eliminate evil? If our answer is yes, then what do we want Him to do with us? Each of us has made mistakes. Sometimes these mistakes have been minor, and no one really got hurt. But other times our blunders can have huge effects - these can be both physical and emotional.

I suppose one might respond by saying that we haven't killed anyone or done anything serious like that. Well, true enough (for most of us). But the question remains - what does one want God to do about it? The thinkers of the world have come up with four basic options. First option - God could have created a world in which all people everywhere only do the right thing, a kind of *robotic world*. Second option - God could have created a world in which no choice we make has moral significance - a kind of *amoral world*. Third option - God could have created *no world* at all. Fourth option - God could have done just as he has done and create a world in which our choices do have significance - the *real world*. Which of these options seems good to you? It strikes me that if God is essentially a loving being, then He will want to love us and be loved by us. But what is love without the freedom to do otherwise? If love is enforced, is it really love? Love can bind itself, as in marriage, but it cannot be bound by another. Love, therefore, seems to demand a world like ours. A world in which choices can be made, a world in which those choices are significant.

Point 4

The Christian also has a hope beyond this world. This is an important fact. If all we have is this short life on earth, a life of much heart-ache, then perhaps a case can be made against the existence of God. But this is not what the Christian believes. In the book of Revelation (21v4) we read, 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.' Heaven is the place where all of life's imperfections are straightened out. The wrongs will be righted. The wounds will be healed.

Point 5

My final point on the problem of evil is that in the Christian scheme of things God has not remained aloof. He is not distant, nor is he unsympathetic to our pains. Consider these words from R.S. Thomas

And God held in His hand	On a bare
A small globe. Look, He said	Hill, a bare tree saddened
The son looked. Far off,	The sky. Many people
As through water, He saw	Held out their thin arms
A scorched land of fierce	To it, as though waiting
Colour. The Light burned	For a vanished April
There; crusted buildings	To return to its crossed
Cast their shadows; a bright	Boughs. The son watched
Serpent, a river	Them. Let me go there, he said.
Uncoiled itself, radiant	(Quoted in [6], pg. 186-7.)
With slime.	

Jesus came into the world as a man. In the words of Isaiah He was 'a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering'. Ultimately His life culminated in His death on the cross. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews was fully justified when he wrote that we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with us. This concept, of a God who enters into human pain and sorrow, isn't even intimated in other religions. E. Shilito puts the point well.

The other gods were strong, but You were weak.
 They rode, You stumbled, to Your throne.
 But to our wounds God's wounds can speak.
 And not a god has wounds but You alone.

[It may be worth making one final point on this subject. I do it in parentheses because I don't want this point to detract from the overall response to the problem of evil. This final point is for those who have been left uneasy by certain parts of that response. It may be that some readers are wondering whether Heaven can really be so perfect as I have made out. If free-will is a necessary part of love, and free-will makes evil possible then surely either Heaven will lack something essential or it may turn out not to be so perfect after all. This is a legitimate worry, but interestingly I've only ever known Christians to raise this question. Let me attempt an answer. I don't say that this answer is the only one available, nor that it is the best one available. I do however think that it shows that the problem may not be as insuperable as has been suggested. My answer will assume that Genesis 1-3 can be taken literally. Really all that is required is that the passage can be used to illustrate my point.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had freedom of choice. But what did that freedom consist in? It wasn't simply something about *them*, it was also about the world. God said not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. It was this that made their free choices morally significant. Without the option of disobedience they could not have expressed love for God. In this life our freedom is of this kind, we can make significant choices, for or against God. However, in Heaven we will already have made all our choices of that kind. Those prior choices will make the activity of Heaven meaningful. However, once in Heaven we will no longer be able to fail to 'choose' obedience and love for God, we may be able to make other choices but the one big choice that really matters will already have been made.]

Christian Theism

Having established that, at the very least, it is not just silly to believe in God, we must now move on to consider a further question: if God does exist, what is He like? Now it seems to me that unless God has revealed Himself in history then this question will be unanswerable. The question then is has God so revealed Himself? The Christian thinks that the answer to this question is yes. God has revealed Himself in history - principally in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ is the cornerstone of Christianity. Therefore, the following three sections have been devoted to the question 'Who is Jesus?' The first section tackles this question head on, looking at a few of His claims and how they should be understood. The second section looks at the resurrection, since if Jesus really did come back from the dead then this would seem to substantiate the claims He made. The third section looks at the issue of the reliability of the Bible. This is because the first two sections will, to some degree, presuppose that the Bible is a reliable historical document.

Who is Jesus?

For the Christian the person of Jesus is of vital importance. As was pointed out earlier, Christ is the very centre of Christianity and without Him it falls apart. But what is so special about Him? Who is Jesus anyway? The Christian believes that Jesus is 'God incarnate' - or as I recently heard, 'God in skin'. According to Christians, Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Such statements seem beyond belief - what could possibly motivate someone to believe this? Let's have a look. Earlier I quoted Josh McDowell on the claims of Jesus. Let me summarise those claims.

- He called himself the 'Son of Man' (Mark 14v61-64)
- He forgave sins (Mark 2v5)
- He received worship (Matthew 14v33)
- He said 'before Abraham was, I AM' (John 8v58)
- He said 'I and the Father are One' (John 10v30)

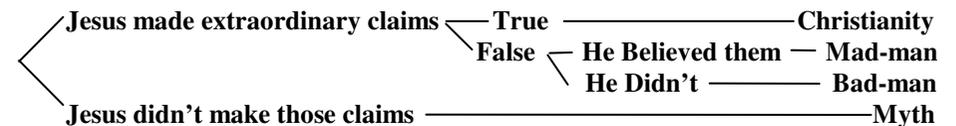
He made many more claims besides these, just open up the New Testament and see for yourself. But before I move on I should say a little about the importance of the

first two claims on this list. Why are these claims important? Well, the claim to be the 'Son of Man' harks back to an Old Testament passage - Daniel 7v13,14

I looked and there before me was one like a son of man, coming on the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

So, in calling Himself the Son of Man, Jesus was actually claiming to have a special authority possessed by no-one else. What of the second claim, why is that important? Well, think about it. If Simon steps on Suzie's big toe then she can forgive him, but it would be ridiculous for Steve to say that *he* forgave Simon. Only the person that an action is an offence against has the right to forgive the offender. In claiming to forgive sins - any sins - Jesus was, in effect, claiming to be the chief party offended in all wrong doing. But this is only something that we can say of God Himself. Thus Jesus was claiming to be equal to God. The other claims are obviously relevant: The Old Testament clearly teaches that only God is to be worshipped. Abraham existed around 1,500 years before Jesus was born - making the claim "before Abraham was born, I AM" seems like a claim to have always existed. Furthermore, 'I AM' is the special name that God used of Himself in Old Testament times (Exodus 3v14). The importance of the final claim is self-evident.

Now we are faced with a few stark choices. The choices seem to be as follows: First, either Jesus existed or He didn't exist. Second, If He existed, He either made the claims mentioned above or He didn't. Third, If He did make those claims then they were either true or false. Fourth, If they were false then He either believed them to be true or He didn't. Now, if they were false and He didn't believe them, then He must have been a deceiver. But if they were false and He did believe them, then He would seem to have had delusions of grandeur - indeed to have been mad. Finally, If those claims were true then the implication is obvious. We could summarise the options as follows.



Now the evidence of history shows that Jesus certainly existed. Not only does the Bible testify to this but many ancient historians (including Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger and more) also speak of Him. So Jesus certainly existed. But did He make the claims attributed to Him? The answer again must be yes. If we don't answer yes then one important thing becomes incomprehensible - the very origin of Christianity. If Jesus didn't make these startling claims then people (including His opponents) certainly thought He did. Why did they think this? No sensible answer can be given unless we attribute to Him these astonishing claims. This leaves us with three options. Now, I am not concerned here to argue for the Christian position over the other two. Rather I will let the reader decide this for themselves. Read the Gospels. Does Jesus seem to be a 'bad man', a con man, a deceiver? I think not. Most liars lie because they'll get something out of it ... but Jesus kept making these claims even when they would cost Him His life! Was He a mad man? Again I would suggest not, He presents himself as emotionally well balanced, and generally stable. But don't take my word for that - open the Bible and take a look for yourself. What must be pointed out is that there are only three real options. C.S. Lewis puts the point brilliantly ...

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (From [4], pg. 52.)

Even many non-Christians have found Jesus an irresistible figure. H.G. Wells said 'I am not a historian, I am not a believer. But this penniless preacher from Galilee is irresistibly the centre of history'. To round off the section let me quote James Stuart, who wrote of Jesus that

He was the meekest and lowliest of all the sons of men. Yet, he spoke of coming on the clouds of heaven with the glory of God. He was so austere that evil spirits and demons cried out in terror at His coming. Yet He was so genial and winsome and approachable that the children loved to play with Him, and the little ones nestled in His arms. His presence at the innocent gaiety of a village wedding was like the presence of sunshine. No-one was half so compassionate to sinners. Yet no-one ever spoke such red-hot scorching words about sin. A bruised reed He would not break, His whole life was love. Yet, on one occasion He demanded of the Pharisees how they ever expected to escape the damnation of hell. He was a dreamer of dreams and a seer of visions. Yet for sheer stark realism He has all of our self-styled realists soundly beaten. He was the servant of all, washing the disciples feet. Yet, masterfully He strode into the temple and the hucksters and the money changers fell over one another to get away from the mad rush and the fire they saw blazing in His eyes. He saved others. Yet at the last Himself He did not save. There is nothing in history like the union of contrast which confronts us in the gospels. The mystery of Jesus is the mystery of Divine Personality.

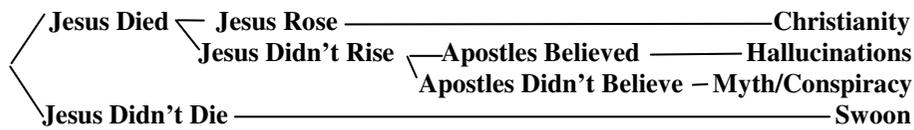
Jesus' claims, combined with His character, provide compelling evidence that Christianity is true. At the very least they provide compelling evidence that Christ is unique among all men. No-one else has ever made such startling claims while at the same time being considered to be not just sane, but positively sagacious. But perhaps some remain unconvinced - such big claims must rest on more than being a wise man. Surely to substantiate these *unique* claims Jesus must have done something that is utterly *unique*. This demand is fair. But I think that it can be met. In the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead we see something that no-one else has ever accomplished - victory over the grave.

The Resurrection

Did Jesus rise from the dead? This is a big question. The Apostle Paul thought that Christianity stands or falls with the answer to this. (See 1 Corinthians 15v12-32.) The resurrection of Jesus also offers a clue as to life after death. So, did Jesus really rise from the dead?

The evidence of history makes it clear that Jesus certainly went to the cross. No serious historian has ever denied that fact. We find it attested to by numerous ancient writers: by Tacitus and by Josephus, by Jewish history and by Babylonian scholars. But if Jesus certainly went to the cross this leaves us with four or five options as to what happened later.

Firstly if Jesus went to the cross then He either died there or He didn't. If He didn't die then this provides us with the basic material for a 'swoon' theory. If Jesus did die, then He either rose again or He didn't. Obviously if He rose, the resurrection really happened. If Jesus didn't rise, then either His apostles believed He did, or they didn't. If they didn't, then they must have made up stories about it. This leads to the 'myth/conspiracy' theory. But if they did believe it, then we have to explain why. The only plausible explanation is that the apostles had hallucinations of a risen Jesus: thus the 'hallucination' theory. The options could, therefore, be summarised by a 'tree' like the one below.



Did Jesus Die on the Cross?

Let's first look at the question of whether or not Jesus died on the cross. People are motivated to say that He didn't by the need to explain why people seemed to have seen Him later on, and to have been convinced that He was alive. If He had never died perhaps this would solve the problem.

First, let's have a look at what crucifixion involves. Before anything else Jesus would have been flogged. Alexander Metherell (MD, PhD) said

Roman floggings were known to be terribly brutal. They usually consisted of thirty-nine lashes but frequently were a lot more than that, depending on the mood of the soldier applying the blows. The soldier would use a whip of braided leather thongs with metal balls woven into them. When the whip would strike the flesh, these balls would cause deep bruises ..., which would break open with further blows. And the whip had pieces of sharp bone as well, which could cut the flesh severely. (From [1], pg. 195.)

The whipping would go all the way from the shoulders, down the back, the buttocks, and the backs of the legs. Many would die from such a flogging, and those who didn't would be in severe pain, and suffering from a serious loss of blood. This would also put incredible strain on the heart, as it tries to pump blood which just isn't there. Jesus would then have been moved to the site of crucifixion. There, nails were driven through his wrists and feet. The way the body is positioned on the cross means that a person would find it difficult to exhale. In fact Jesus would have had to push up on the nail through his feet in order to do this. Not only would this in itself be agony, but it would also force Him to rub his shredded back against the rough wood of the cross. The pain is unimaginable. Indeed the agony of crucifixion was so much that a new word had to be invented to describe it: *excruciating*, meaning *out of the cross*.

At this point one thing becomes obvious. Even if Jesus hadn't died on the cross, then after two nights in a cold tomb He certainly couldn't have (a) removed the stone from the tomb entrance, (b) over-powered any soldiers that may have been there, (c) walked all the way from Jerusalem to Galilee, and (d) after all that, when in a physically pitiful state, convince the disciples that He was the Prince of Life, and the victor over death. That would be preposterous and it never happened.

Jesus did die on the cross. The Gospel records confirm this. To speed up death, the Romans would often break the legs of those being crucified. This would prevent them using their legs to push up on the nail through their feet, and thus prevent them from exhaling, thus causing asphyxiation. But in John 19v31-33 we read that though the Romans decided to break the legs of the two thieves crucified either side of Jesus, they did not break His legs, because they saw that He was already dead. But if Jesus died on the cross, then the swoon theory is wrong.

Did The Apostles Believe that Jesus Rose?

This is an important question. It would seem that If the apostles didn't believe in Jesus' resurrection, then when they recorded it, they were either lying, or they were 'myth-making'. The first theory is known as the 'conspiracy theory', the second is known as the 'myth' theory. The myth theory is different from the conspiracy theory in that if it is true, the apostles didn't intend their stories to be taken literally, rather they would be more allegorical in nature. The myth theory then goes on to say that later on people mistakenly came to take the stories literally.

Neither of these theories really fits the facts. The obvious problem for the conspiracy theory is that it would mean that the apostles never really believed the stories they told. However, history reveals that many of the apostles were martyred for their faith. This would be remarkable if they knew that at root their faith was

based upon a lie. No-one dies for what they know to be untrue. Writing back in the 1650's Blaise Pascal but the point brilliantly

The hypothesis that the Apostles were knaves is quite absurd. Follow it out to the end and imagine these twelve men meeting after Jesus's death and conspiring to say that he had risen from the dead. This means attacking all the powers that be. The human heart is singularly susceptible to fickleness, to change, to promises to bribery. One of them had only to deny his story under these inducements, or still more because of possible imprisonment, tortures and death, and they would all have been lost. Follow that out.

(From Pascal's *Pensees*)

There are big problems for the myth theory too. Myths take time to develop. Only those who are around long enough after the events in question could believe such myths without open criticism. This is because there would have been many eye-witnesses around to contradict their version of the events. But the resurrection story clearly was taken seriously very soon after the event. In 1 Corinthians 15v3-8 Paul cites a creed that many scholars believe to have been formulated between 3 and 8 years after Jesus death. This does not leave us the time required. (This creed is discussed in the section about the reliability of the New Testament.) Another problem for this theory is that the Gospels don't read like a mythology. For instance one clearly mythological account comes in the so-called 'Gospel of Peter'. Here the 'resurrection account' includes men whose heads reach the clouds, and also coming out of the tomb, a walking and talking cross! By comparison the realism of the Gospel accounts is self-evident. The New Testament is not written in the style of mythology, and neither was there time for any mythology to develop. The only plausible theory is that right from the start the apostles believed the resurrection story to be true. But if they did believe it, an obvious question arises - why?

Did the Apostles Hallucinate?

Since the apostles were clearly convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead it becomes important to ask why they believed it. The Gospels put it down to the fact that they met with the risen Jesus. The only way that the apostles could have believed this, without it actually happening, was if they had suffered from hallucinations. But this theory, like the others faces numerous problems.

The first and most obvious one is that Jesus 'appeared' to several people at a time. The Gospels, and the creed from 1 Corinthians 15v3-8, point out that on

occasions He appeared to all the Apostles at once. But since hallucinations are essentially private things this clearly causes problems. The 1 Corinthians passage even says that Jesus appeared to more than 500 people on one occasion. It is also clear that this isn't just bluff since it is further remarked that many of them are still alive. The obvious implication being that one could find those people and ask them about it.

Second, the apostles often 'met with' Jesus for extended periods, even eating with Him, and touching Him. Third, where did Jesus' body get to? If it were still in the tomb, then the authorities could have produced it and put an end to the matter. The body was never produced because it wasn't there to be produced. The tomb was empty. But if the tomb was empty what happened to Jesus' body? Presumably, either someone moved it or Jesus rose. But who would have moved it? Neither the Romans nor the Jews would have had a motive, and if the apostles did it, we are back to the conspiracy theory, which we already know to be wrong.

The Resurrection

We are left with only one alternative, that Jesus actually rose from the dead. Only this theory can accommodate all the facts. It accommodates Jesus death, it explains the empty tomb. It also explains the firm conviction of the apostles. Not only this but it also explains their radical transformation. Between the death and resurrection of Jesus the apostles had become downcast at the loss of their leader, but they became fearless preachers of the Gospel who would die for their faith. No other theory can explain all these facts, the resurrection clearly does.

In Jesus' resurrection we have an impressive confirmation that He was who He claimed to be - The Son of God. Furthermore, we also know that if God can raise Jesus from the dead, then there is also a hope for us. Jesus is living with God forever, and because of Jesus, we can too.

The Historical Reliability of the New Testament

Is the New Testament a reliable historical document? For our purposes here 'reliability' is equivalent to 'the accurate reporting of events'. Since we have been particularly concerned with who Jesus is, our main question is whether the Gospels (and the New Testament generally) give us an accurate view of the historical Jesus. There are several tests which can be applied to any ancient document to test its reliability.

- Did the writers have access to the events they were writing about? Were the authors themselves eye witnesses, or did they get their information from eye witnesses? Obviously if we answer ‘no’ to both questions here, the reliability of the New Testament will be impugned.
- Did the writers intend to write an accurate history?
- How soon after the events were the New Testament accounts written? The longer the gap, the less reliable one would expect the accounts to be.
- Were the first written accounts reliably preserved for us? Are the documents we now possess, from which the New Testament is composed, simply copies of copies of copies of the originals? If they are, then it is natural to suppose that errors would creep in at each stage. This would lead to a ‘Chinese whispers’ effect where the original message is distorted through the chain and, in the end, emerges as something completely different.
- Does the New Testament have any external corroboration? There are two main types of such corroboration. First, we ask whether archaeology confirms the Biblical account. Second, we ask whether other ancient historians confirm the Gospel accounts in any way.

I will not say much about the fifth and final of these tests, since a sensible discussion of the issue is beyond the scope of this booklet. Suffice it to say that, though there are some difficulties, the reliability of the New Testament is confirmed by an almost overwhelming amount of external evidence. Australian archaeologist Clifford Wilson wrote, ‘Those who know the facts now recognise that the New Testament must be accepted as a remarkably accurate source book’. (Quoted in [1], pg. 107.) Drawing on all the available data from the ancient historians, E.M. Yamauchi says that even without the Bible

We would know that first, Jesus was a Jewish teacher; second, many people believed that he performed healings and exorcisms; third, some people believed he was the Messiah; fourth, he was rejected by the Jewish leaders; fifth, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius; sixth, despite this shameful death, his followers, who believed that he was still alive, spread beyond Palestine so that there were multitudes of them in Rome by AD 64; and seventh, all kinds of people from the cities and countryside - men and women, slave and free - worshipped him as God. (Taken from [1], pg. 87.)

So although going into the external evidence is beyond the scope of this booklet we can nevertheless say with confidence that the New Testament passes this test with flying colours. But what of the other four tests?

Eyewitness Evidence

Each of the four gospels was written by someone either with first hand eyewitness evidence or by someone with access to that evidence. Matthew was one of Jesus’ disciples. Much of the material in Mark was given him by Peter, and one gets the impression that Mark himself was witness to much of what he records. Luke obviously went to great lengths to ensure his account was based on eyewitness evidence, and he even says as much in his ‘introduction’. John, the writer of the fourth gospel, was also one of Jesus’ disciples. One might want to question that these people were indeed the authors of the Gospels. However, the traditional ascriptions are hard to fault. Why would anyone say that Matthew, Mark and Luke were the authors, if in fact they were not? Matthew was known to be a tax-collector, and to say that tax-collectors were not well respected is something of an understatement. Neither Mark or Luke were disciples of Jesus. Why would anyone falsely ascribe gospels to these three men? Surely one would at least choose a disciple, and one of the most respected at that. This is exactly what we find with the ‘Gospel of Peter’, and the ‘Gospel of Thomas’, both of which contain obvious mythological material, as does the impressively titled ‘Gospel of Truth’. This may be thought to cast doubt upon the authorship of the fourth Gospel. John was a disciple, indeed one of the ‘inner three’ (Peter, James & John). But though there is a slight question here, we can still be confident that John was the author. Consider the summary given by Irenaeus, writing in AD 180.

Matthew published his own Gospel among the Hebrews in their own tongue, when Peter and Paul were preaching the Gospel in Rome and founding the church there. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of Peter’s preaching. Luke, the follower of Paul, set down in a book the Gospel preached by his teacher. Then John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on his breast, himself produced his Gospel while he was living at Ephesus in Asia.

(Taken from [1], pg. 24.)

Geisler points out that the testimony of Irenaeus is important “because only one generation stood between him and John. [And] John’s disciple, Polycarp, was

among Irenaeus' Teachers." (From [3], pg. 310) We can be confident, then, that the Gospels are based upon eyewitness accounts.

The Intention Test

Having established that the Gospel writers had (access to) eyewitness evidence and so had to opportunity to write accurate reports, we must now ask whether that was their intention. Did the Gospel writers see themselves as recording history? The 'introduction' to Luke (i.e. Luke 1v1-4) suggests they did.

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 were first eye-witnesses 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.

Since Matthew and Mark follow Luke in both literary style and genre, it is reasonable to suppose that they too intended to preserve the truth. A close look at John 21v24 and 20v31 reveals that this was also John's intention. This is quite explicit in the former but in the latter needs to be made explicit. The text says "these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God". Now, if the reader is seriously expected to form this belief on the basis of reading John's Gospel then there must be an underlying assumption that his writing is historically accurate, else the beliefs formed on the basis of it would be unwarranted. 2 Peter 1v16 suggests that this is also true of the historical material found in the epistles.

Proximity to the Events

It should already be clear that the gospel accounts were written soon after the events they record. If this were not so they could not have been based upon eyewitness evidence, which they were. But even if they were not, if they were written soon enough after the events then there would have been (lots of) eyewitnesses around who could contradict the message they told, and so stop it from spreading. Thus, if we can establish that the documents were written soon after the events we can establish that what was originally recorded was an accurate history - since they simply wouldn't have got away with a 'dodgy' one. So just when were the gospels written?

Even liberal scholars would date the four gospels between AD 70 and AD 100. Mark is normally thought to be the earliest and John the latest. This is primarily because Matthew and Luke seem to draw on the work of Mark which must, therefore, have been around earlier.

There is good reason, however, to believe that these estimated dates are later than they ought to be: Luke and Acts form a two volume work. But it is clear that Acts ends very abruptly. Indeed there seem to be lots of 'loose ends' that never get tied up. The most obvious of which is the fate of St. Paul. At the end of Acts he is under arrest in Rome. However, we know that this period of arrest was ended by Paul's execution in AD 62. Why doesn't Acts record this? The obvious answer is that it hadn't happened yet. But if it hadn't happened when Luke 'finished' Acts, then Acts must have been written before AD 62. But if Acts was the second of a two volume work, then Luke must have been written around AD 60. But we said that Luke and Matthew both draw on the work of Mark. Thus Mark's gospel must have been complete by AD 60 or even the late 50's. This puts us within 30 years of Jesus death and resurrection (AD 30 or 33). Clearly this means that there would have been many eyewitnesses still around. Of course, this is also true on the 'liberal' datings, which give us a gap of well under 50 years.

Also relevant here are the epistles. Scholars are generally agreed that Paul's letters were written earlier than the Gospels. Since all current scholars agree that Paul wrote Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon; we can be sure that this material dates from before AD 62. Scholars generally date them from AD 49 on. It is important to note that even in these early letters Christ is spoken of as divine. There has been no time for such an idea to slowly creep into their talk about Jesus. There has been no time for 'mythological development'. In fact, through Paul's letters we can trace the belief in the resurrection to within a few years of the event. Close study of 1 Corinthians 15v3-8 reveals it to include a statement of a very early Christian Creed.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have [died]. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

This passage contains four clues to its being early. First, Paul introduces it with the words *delivered* and *received*. These are rabbinical technical terms indicating that he's passing on a holy tradition. Second, the form or style indicates that this passage is 'creedal'. Third, the text refers to Peter as *Cephas*, which is his Aramaic name, and indicates an early origin. Fourth, the text uses other phrases that Paul himself would not normally use, like 'the Twelve', 'the third day', and others. These points reveal that this wasn't Paul's own material. He was using a creed that was already in circulation. Now, 1 Corinthians is normally dated to around AD 55. We also know that Paul visited Corinth at around AD 50. So the creed must have been around before then, since that is, presumably, when he originally told this creed to the Corinthians. This is already less than 20 years on from the events the creed reports. However, many scholars think that it should be dated from between AD 32 and 38. This is because Paul clearly didn't formulate the creed. Indeed it would seem that he received it from one of the other apostles when in Jerusalem or Damascus. This would give put us only 3 to 8 years from the events.

I conclude that we can be certain that much of the material in the Gospels and also important material in the epistles was in circulation well within a generation of Jesus death and resurrection. Thus, for reasons given earlier, the material must have been accurate.

The Preservation of the Original Documents

Probably the most common objection to the historicity of the New Testament is that during the 1900+ years since it was written the text has been copied so many times that what we now have is nothing like the original. The thought is that with each copying new errors were introduced and that, as such, our present day version of the New Testament bears little resemblance, if any, to the original documents.

This, however, is a very crude caricature. Firstly, we can point out that we still have some very old copies of the documents. These copies would not be the product of such long chains of copying as is implied. Admittedly many of the oldest documents are mere fragments, consisting of little more than a few verses (e.g. The John Rylands Fragment which has only five verses of John, but dates from AD 117-138, if not earlier). However, we also have copies of the whole New Testament (and part or all of the Old Testament) dating from AD 325-350 (*Codex Vaticanus*, *Codex Sinaiticus* and others). In all there are over 5,500 Greek (the New Testament was originally written in Greek) documents and fragments of documents. From these we attempt to reconstruct the original text. Where there is agreement between the documents this suggests preservation. This is because it is unlikely that different copies should include the same errors. (That is, after all, how cheating is so often

discovered in schools.) This agreement is a particularly good guide to preservation if we know that the documents which agree are largely independent of one another. This would be evidence that they were co-dependent upon an earlier source. It is reasonable to suppose that a number are independent of others since many of the fragments were found in completely different places (countries/continents). We also have over 16,000 documents and fragments written in other languages (Latin Vulgate, Ethiopic, Slavic, Armenian) which are translations from the Greek. These too can offer help in determining what the original text said. Dr. Bruce Metzger surmises that out of the 20,000 lines in the New Testament, we are now only uncertain of what 40 of them (about 400 words) originally said. This amounts to saying that the New Testament has been 99.5% preserved. Surely the Christian's confidence is well placed.

Comparing the New Testament to other ancient documents only serves to highlight the New Testament's unprecedented reliability.

<i>Author</i>	<i>When Written</i>	<i>Earliest Copy</i>	<i>Time Span</i>	<i>No. of Copies</i>
Homer	BC 800	AD 150	950 yrs	650
Herodotus	BC 480-425	AD 900	1,300 yrs	8
Plato	BC 427-347	AD 900	1,200 yrs	7
Aristotle	BC 384-322	AD 1,100	1,400 yrs	5*
Caesar	BC 100-44	AD 900	1,000 yrs	10
Livy	BC 59 -AD 17			20
New Testament	AD 50-100	AD 130-200	150 yrs	5,500+
Pliny the Younger	AD 61-113	AD 850	750 yrs	7
Tacitus	AD 100	AD 1,100	1,000 yrs	20

* Of any one work. (Information taken from [1], [2], and [3].)

Such comparison with other ancient texts reveals that the New Testament is far, far better supported than any other book. Our earliest copies are much closer in time to the originals, and we have far more copies. We also know that when ancients have concerned themselves with history they would often be writing about events that occurred long before. For instance Craig Blomberg points out that "our two earliest biographies of Alexander the Great were written ... more than 400 years after Alexander's death in 323 BC, yet historians consider them to be generally reliable."

(Taken from [1], pg. 33.) It would be an obvious invocation of a double standard to say that the Gospels weren't at least as reliable.

We are forced to conclude, therefore, that the New Testament's reliability is not merely comparable to that of other ancient texts, but rather that it far outstrips them. Speaking of the Bible as a whole, Ravi Zacharias (in [6], pg. 201) says "The Bible is a book whose facts can be tested outside itself. The historical, geographical, archaeological and prophetic data can be verified from outside the Scriptures." He goes on to point out that the Bible includes sixty-six books covering a two-thousand year span, that they are written by approximately thirty-seven authors and yet they coalesce with singularity and purpose. The conclusion is obvious: the Bible is no ordinary book.

The Essence of Christianity

Having looked at the arguments, we are now nearing our conclusion. But it is important for us to remember where we started. We began with the recognition that each of us is searching for answers to three big questions. Those questions were

- 'Who am I?'
- 'Why am I here?'
- 'Where am I going?'

As I've gone through the various stages the answers to these questions have been touched upon. Let me now attempt to draw those answers out. We noted at the outset that the question of *identity* is tied to the question of ultimate *origin*. The longing to "get back to one's roots" in order to find out who one really is, comes about through a realisation of this. But in Christianity, as the Cosmological and Design arguments are intended to show, our ultimate origin is in God. Indeed, according to the Christian, we are created in the very image of God. Each of us has an essential dignity that cannot be taken away. We have that dignity simply and solely because of our unique position within the created order. Who we are is defined in terms of who God made us to be, and what God made us for.

We find an important clue to the answer of the questions of *meaning* and *purpose* in relationships. It has often been said that if we were to find out that the world was about to come to an end, the phone-boxes would be full of people wanting to tell their friends and family that they love them. Relationships are what we value most, and according to the Christian we were created to be in relationship with God. Earlier I quoted Augustine, who said "You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

The answer to the third question, that of *destiny*, flows from the answer to the second. Because of Jesus' victory over death the Christian has assurance in his hope that our relationship with God will last forever, past death and on into eternity. God's infinity means that there is always more of Him to know, and His goodness ensures that the journey of discovery will be filled with a sense of wonder and awe.

It should now be clear that Christianity does have answers to life's big questions. However, we need to dig a little deeper yet: It is worth doing something more than just answering life's big questions, we must also find out why we ask

them. So before I finish I'd like to look at the context from which life's big questions come.

In the Christian scheme of things we have a sensible answer to the question of why we ask these 'big questions'. The questions of life stem from a felt awareness of a problem, a sense of distancing from reality, a kind of alienation. This alienation isn't just an alienation from others but is also an alienation from ourselves. We seem to be out of kilter with reality in some important way. It is this sense of alienation that prompts us to ask the 'big questions' of *identity*, *purpose*, and *destiny*. One writer put my point something like this: we are not at peace with our neighbours because we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God. This is the Christian doctrine of sin. Sin is a state of separation from God caused by a wilful disregard for Him and His rule. And since sin is separation from God, it is also separation from the source of life. Although we don't like to admit it, the Biblical description is an accurate one: we are sinful. None of us even lives up to our own standards, let alone to God's. I remember raising this point in a meeting once. To my surprise one member of the group, in a serious voice, said that they had never done anything wrong. The whole group broke into laughter at the self-evident absurdity of the thought. Indeed, he was only joking: The Christian picture of man as sinful fits. Thus not only can the Christian answer life's questions, but he can also explain where they come from.

However, this point raises another question. If the questions of life were raised in response to a problem, then how is that problem resolved? If the problem is left unresolved, then whatever the answers we give to life's questions, ultimately the heart will remain unsatisfied.

The solution, I believe, is found at the cross. For the Christian, the cross is intimately connected with forgiveness. We cannot undo our sin. Neither can God simply ignore our sin, that would not only compromise His justice, but also ignore, rather than solve, the problem at issue. The answer cannot come in minimising sin, in making look okay. Sin must be taken seriously. The only answer is forgiveness. But forgiveness isn't cheap. On the part of the 'forgiver', forgiveness involves a willingness to look past the wrong doing, to the wrong doer, and to say, 'Despite how you have hurt and betrayed me, I still love you.' But the wrong doing must also be dealt with. We need not just the love, but also the justice. This is the wonder of the cross. At the cross God's love and justice meet. The price of justice had to be paid, and out of love God paid it Himself by sending His Son to die in our place. God's forgiveness means that we have the chance to start again. Consider the words of one school teacher:

He came to my desk with a quivering lip,
the lesson was done.
'Have you a new sheet for me, dear teacher?
I've spoiled this one.'
I took his sheet, all soiled and blotted
and gave him a new one all unspotted.
And into his tired heart I cried,
'Do better now, my child.'

I went to the throne with a trembling heart,
the day was done.
'Have you a new day for, dear Master?
I've spoiled this one.'
He took my day, all soiled and blotted
and gave me a new one all unspotted.
And into my tired heart He cried,
'Do better now, my child.'
(Quoted in [5], pg. 310-11.)

According to Christianity we are created to serve God and enjoy Him forever. In more day-to-day language, we were created to be in relationship with God. With this in mind the Christian perspective on life can be summed up in the following schema:

Creation - Separation - Forgiveness - Restoration - Relationship.

This schema allows us to see the Christian's answers on the questions of *identity/origin*, *meaning/purpose*, and *destiny* in their proper context. Who we are is tied up with where we come from. Thus in Creation we find an answer. The questions of meaning and purpose are understood in terms of the creative purposes of God. Thus we exist to live with and for God. If God's promise is true, then this will also be our destiny. When we look at this bigger picture we can also see why the Christian claims not just that Christ has the answer, but that He *is* the answer to life's questions. The opening of John's Gospel reveals that Jesus was intimately involved in the world's *creation*. We have also seen that *forgiveness* and the cross,

on which Jesus died, are intimately linked. Furthermore, we know that it is for a *relationship* with Jesus that we were made.

Conclusion

To round things up I'd like to look at the steps we've taken. We began with a brief outline of some of the things that Christians believe. We moved on from there to consider whether there is any reason to think those beliefs are true. In particular we looked at four arguments for the existence of God, at two arguments to do with the person of Jesus, and also at the reliability of the Bible. In each case we saw that the Christian perspective seems plausible. In the previous section we looked at the Christian description of the human condition and saw that it fitted, and that it explained why we ask the big questions about life that we do. In Appendix A, I argue that none of these questions can be answered within an atheistic framework. Here I simply note that they are answered within the Christian framework, indeed Christ Himself is the answer. God does exist, and His existence provides us with our definitions for life. Those definitions have been recorded for us in the Bible, which I encourage the reader to study. In particular I recommend the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection. In Jesus we find God's truths expressed not just 'propositionally', but personally. It is Jesus' death on the cross, after the living of a perfect life, that restores our relationship with God. And it is His resurrection from the dead that assures us of our hope of eternal life. To end let me repeat the conclusion of James Stuart who wrote 'There is nothing in history like the union of contrast which confronts us in the gospels. The mystery of Jesus is the mystery of Divine Personality.'

Appendix A - A Short Critique of Atheism

Implicit in the case for Christianity is the case against atheism. In this short section I'd like to make that implicit criticism explicit. My strategy is three-fold. First, I look at the logic of the atheistic position. Second, I look again at the atheist's main argument - the problem of evil. Third, I look at the logical and experiential consequences of atheism.

The Logic of Atheism

Several people have said that they are atheists and not Christians because they think that there isn't enough evidence for Christianity. Several things can be said about this. First, there is certainly some good evidence that Christianity is true, as has been shown above. Second, the question assumes that there is adequate evidence for atheism. If it doesn't assume this, then this kind of rejection of Christianity in favour of atheism involves an inconsistency: one position needs evidence, but the other does not. Why the difference? Third, the kind of evidence that atheism would require is of a particular sort which is hard to come by. Let me explain.

At the heart of the atheistic position is what philosophers call a 'negative existential'. There is a denial of existence, namely God's existence. Such denials are notoriously difficult to prove. How does one prove the non-existence of something? Stephen Gaukroger provides us with a nice example.

It is always harder to establish what is not, than to establish what is. Say, for example, I call downstairs to my wife in the morning telling her that I can't find my socks. She says, 'They're in the spare room.' I look for a few moments then yell downstairs, 'No they're not!' 'Yes they are,' she replies. It's much easier for her to prove her case. If she comes upstairs and finds them, she was right. Even if she can't find them straight away, she may still be right if they are found later. To prove my case I have to search every inch of the room, leaving absolutely no space unexplored. She will only have been proved wrong when I have done all this.

(From *It Makes Sense* (Scripture Union, 1987), pg. 8.)

Gaukroger goes on to point out that the same is true of atheism. To be certain that there is no God one would have to ferret out every bit of information and analyse it for traces of God. This would seem to require a virtually infinite amount of knowledge. But obviously no-one has this kind of knowledge (unless God does exist). It follows that atheism must be unproved, or at least very uncertain.

The Problem with the Problem of Evil

In the section on the question of whether or not God exists it was argued that if God doesn't exist there can be no such thing as moral good and evil. But it is clear that when the atheist raises the problem of evil they raise it in moral terms: How can there be a good God when there is so much of evil in the world? We looked at a few clues to the answer to this question earlier. For now it is only worth looking at the question itself.

If there is evil in the world, as there certainly is, then there must be some kind of moral standard by which we judge things to be evil. However, if atheism is true, then there is no such standard. If God doesn't exist, then our lives have no intrinsic purpose; they have only the purpose we give to them. But evaluations are always dependent upon purposes. A good watch is one which tells the time accurately - since that is the purpose of a watch. But if humans have not been created, then they cannot have a purpose. If humans have no purpose, then there is no such thing as a good human. If there is no such thing as a good human, there is no such thing as morality. But if the atheist must say that there is no such thing as morality how can he also say that the world contains evil?

He can't. The very starting point of the problem of evil involves an assumption which contradicts its intended conclusion. Only the theist can legitimately raise the question of why God allows evil. So the main 'proof' of atheism fails.

The Question of Ultimate Origins

The sections about the cosmological and design arguments showed that within a theistic framework we can make sense of the world we're in. We have answers to questions both of existence and of order. The atheist denies that there is an ordering mind 'behind' the universe. As such he must assert that the world's order is actually routed in a fundamental chaos. G.K. Chesterton had a good point when he said 'The world does not explain itself ... it is absurd for the [atheist] to complain that it is

unthinkable for an admittedly unthinkable God to make everything out of nothing, and then pretend that it is *more* thinkable that nothing should turn itself into everything.'

The atheist also denies that the universe has any ultimate cause or explanation. According to Bertrand Russell, the universe is 'just there'. But we know that the universe exists, *why* it exists is our question. This question must be left unaddressed by the atheist, for he has no answer. But remember that at the outset we pointed out that the answer to the question 'Who am I?' was tied up with the question of origins. Thus the atheist must also leave this fundamental question unaddressed.

Life's Meaning

Since what we mean when we say that life has a meaning is that it has an intrinsic purpose, the atheist must say that life is meaningless. Most atheists have realised this. For instance Bertrand Russell, the famous writer of *Why I am not a Christian*, wrote 'Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation, henceforth, be safely built.' So atheism is also unable to answer the question 'Why am I here?'. For the atheist there simply is no answer.

This is a tough blow, for as we have already seen, this means that the atheist must also jettison morality. But it seems odd that anyone should deny that life has a meaning. C.S. Lewis recognised this when he wrote that "A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing the world to when I said it was [meaningless]? ... Thus in the act of trying to prove that God did not exist - in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless - I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality - namely my idea of [meaning] - was full of sense. Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole world has no meaning we should never have found out that it has no meaning."

Ravi Zacharias points out that to meaningfully say that everything in life is meaningless is impossible. If nothing in life is meaningful then the very statement that that is so is also meaningless. Alternatively, if the statement is not meaningless, then life is not meaningless. But life is only meaningful if God exists. This leaves us with the question of what life's meaning is, and the short answer is brilliantly given in the shorter Scottish Catechism, 'to serve God, and enjoy Him forever'.

This signals a further issue, Immanuel Kant wrote that there are three basic questions in life 'What can we know? What ought we to do? and What can we

hope?’ The presence of the ‘forever’ in the previous quote embodies the Christian hope of living with God in heaven. But as the above quote from Russell reveals the atheist knows no such hope. So again atheism fails to give a satisfactory answer to one of life’s big questions, the question of destiny.

Conclusion

Within an atheistic paradigm none of life’s big questions find a satisfying answer. If God doesn’t exist, there is no ultimate cause of our existence, and we have no answers to the questions of origin and identity. If God doesn’t exist, the universe was not created for a purpose, and we have no answers to the questions of meaning and purpose. Furthermore, because atheism commits itself to rejecting the idea of life after death, there is no satisfactory answer to the question of destiny. The atheist seems to be faced with an insurmountable challenge: to explain how order came from chaos; to meaningfully express life’s meaninglessness; and to find hope in the face of despair.

In undermining the atheist’s main argument we have seen that the position is unjustified. In examining the logic of atheism we have seen that it is probably also unjustifiable. Now, in drawing out the logical consequences of atheism we see that it may even be contradictory, and that it is certainly unliveable.

Appendix B - Miscellaneous Issues

This section of the booklet deals with numerous questions that non-Christians commonly ask. My answers are by no means the last word on these issues, but I think they all at least suggest where the answers are to be found. I apologise if your question isn’t dealt with here.

Truth’s Exclusivity.

Many people seem to struggle with the way in which Christianity claims to be the only true religion. How can Christians say that everyone else has got it wrong? Isn’t that rather arrogant?

This is a natural reaction. With this set of questions a number of other questions normally come along: What do Christians think about other religions? Do all non-Christians go to hell? All these are good questions. But before I come to them, the issue of truth must be addressed.

It should be clear that not all religions can be true. They contradict each other. It may be replied that this doesn’t show that any religion is false but rather that the law of non-contradiction (which says that two contradictory statements cannot both be true) doesn’t apply in matters of religion. To support this view people often tell the story of the elephant and the blind men. The story goes roughly as follows: The king is discussing matters of religion with a friend and is explaining that all religions are true. To illustrate his point he has his servants bring in an elephant, and a group of blind men. The king then asks the blind men to describe the elephant for him. Since the men all have hold of different parts of the elephant - a leg, the tail, an ear, a tusk etc. - they all give different descriptions. Then the king says to his friend that, in a sense, they are all right. In just the same way, he explains, all religions are true.

The story is supposed to illustrate how arrogant it is for one person to say that they have the truth, and that any contrary claim is false. Rather we ought to say that we are *all* right. We have all simply grasped only a part of the truth.

But this will not do. How can anyone make this claim? The claim seems to be “We all grasp only a part of the truth - and that’s the whole truth.” Such a claim contains a built in contradiction. So perhaps the illustrations are best put aside. Why don’t we just say that the law of non-contradiction does not apply to religion and

leave it at that? The answer is simple. If I say that the law *does* apply to religion, all that you can do to show that I am wrong is to assert, or offer evidence for, the *contradictory* position. In other words, to show that I am wrong you must try and demonstrate that you are right. But this will not work unless you then employ the law of non-contradiction in order to make that move. Unless the law of non-contradiction applies you can't establish the falsehood of my position.

Furthermore, all positions claim exclusivity. By making any claim they are denying the contrary. Hinduism says that the Vedas are non-negotiable. Buddhism was born through its rejection of Hinduism. The Baha'i Faith made the noble, if paradoxical, move of attempting unification by excluding the exclusivists. Likewise, Atheism is the position that there is no God, that theism is false. To claim that Christianity is arrogant because it claims to be the only true religion seems short sighted. All positions claim to be true. If the advocates of these positions didn't think them true then they wouldn't be advocates of that position in the first place.

Other Religions

So what do (or what should) Christians think about other religions? First it should be clear that other religions needn't be seen as totally misguided. For instance atheism typically becomes naturalism - the doctrine that there are no non-natural (supernatural) entities. But just as Christianity denies this so too do many other religions. Christians can, therefore, say that other religions are 'part-right'. They cannot, however, say that they are completely right. Indeed, the centre of Christianity is Christ, and any religion which denies His key role must be wrong in an important aspect.

This raises the next question. What happens to non-Christians when they die? If Christianity is the only totally true religion, does this mean that no non-Christians go to heaven?

The Fate of Non-Christians

Do any non-Christians go to Heaven? The short answer is, I believe, yes. But this is clearly problematic. Jesus claimed to be *the* way to God, and that no-one gets to the Father except through Him (John 14v6). This does make it seem like only Christians could go to heaven. However, this need not be understood that this way. Rather we can say that Jesus is the only 'mechanism' by which people can get to heaven. Not that Jesus is a mechanism. He isn't - He's a person. But nonetheless, I

think that something like this is probably right. Just as my food continues to nourish me even if I know nothing of vitamins, just as my car runs smoothly even if I know nothing about engines, Jesus can save a person even if they know nothing about Him. It doesn't follow that they are saved by something else. It doesn't follow in just the same way as not knowing anything about vitamins doesn't mean that it isn't vitamins which nourish me. What does follow is that if it wasn't for Jesus one wouldn't be saved. So the big question now becomes 'what is it that gets us a place in heaven if it isn't being a Christian?' This is a difficult question. It is a question to which I can honestly say I don't know the answer. But I think that we can only be *certain* that we ourselves will go to heaven if we are Christians. I think that God will deal justly and fairly with everyone, but I don't profess to know just how that will pan out. Certainly not everyone will go to heaven - the Bible makes that much clear. The most helpful thing that I ever read on this issue was a throw-away line in C.S. Lewis' book *The Great Divorce*. He said that there are ultimately only two types of people in the world: there are those who, in the end, say to God, 'Your will be done', and there are those to whom, in the end, God says, 'Okay, Your will be done'.

Freud and Wish Fulfilment

Many people have objected to Christianity by saying that God is just a psychological projection. Our belief in him, according to this argument, is the product of wish-fulfilment: we want to believe in a father figure who is there looking after us; the thought is comforting. Therefore, religion is a mere 'wish fulfilment dream', an 'illusion'. This was the line of argument that Freud made in his paper 'The Future of an Illusion'. Several scholars preceded him in this, and many have followed. Unfortunately, the argument doesn't work.

The desire for God in no way disproves God's existence. In fact, as was argued earlier, it may well be evidence for God's existence. Also the argument commits what is known as the 'genetic fallacy'. It assumes that if a belief's origin is in some way suspect, it must be false. But even if the origin were suspect, this wouldn't follow. Imagine that the school teacher who taught you that $2+2=4$ were revealed to be an evil person. This wouldn't make the belief false, nor would it make it unjustified. To say otherwise is to confuse a belief's origin (or 'genesis', hence this fallacy's name) with its justification. Furthermore, one might think that one could criticise atheism in just the same manner. In fact, this is just what Paul Vitz has done in his brilliant paper 'The Psychology of Atheism.' Along with

others, he argues that atheism may result from a desire to divorce oneself from any father figure. Atheism may, in other words, be a form of projective denial: we don't want God to exist, therefore we believe that He doesn't. Of course, this doesn't prove that God does exist, rather it shows how poor the original objection to theism was.

The Euthyphro Dilemma

In relation to God being the source of moral value some have raised the age old question 'Are certain actions good because God approves of them, or does God approve of certain acts because they are good?' It is contended that if we say the former, then since God could have commanded anything, anything could have been good - including rape, murder and the like; whereas if we say the latter then goodness is somehow separable from God. Thus since the former seems obviously wrong we should endorse the latter. But if we should endorse the latter then the moral argument given earlier must have been wrong, because we could have morality without God.

Firstly, as Ravi Zacharias has pointed out (in [5], pg. 373), the dilemma is misplaced. We could just as well ask whether *we* approve of things because they are good or whether things are good because *we* approve of them. If we say the former then we have to explain where morality comes from, but if we say the latter then morality becomes dependent upon our arbitrary desires.

Secondly, the dilemma seems a false one. The theist is likely to say that it is not God's desires that fix what is good, rather His nature fixes what is good, and His desires flow from His nature. Thus the standard of goodness is not outside of God, but nor is it arbitrary since God's nature is infinite and immutable. The same could not be said of us.

Are Miracles Possible?

Many people these days seem to assume that not only do miracles not occur but they are impossible. This is because a miracle would have to be a violation of the laws of nature, and laws of nature (by definition) have no violations. If this is the correct definition of laws and the correct definition of miracles, then one would have to hold that there were no miracles. However, I doubt that they are the correct definitions. Let's look into this a little.

Imagine the following situation: Two billiard balls (call them A and B) are on the table. They are a short distance apart so that if one nudges ball A towards ball B, then A will hit B, and B will then move a short distance. Presumably there are laws which govern this. These laws would seem to make it inevitable that if I start that process, then the rest will all follow. In very broad terms, the law makes it true that under a certain set of circumstances a certain set of results will follow. But how should we understand this? Well, let's go back to the billiard balls. As a matter of fact it isn't true that if I nudge ball A towards ball B then it is inevitable (given the laws) that A will hit B and B then move a short distance. It isn't inevitable because I could start ball A moving but then stop it moving before it hits ball B. Alternatively I could hold on to ball B so it can't move, or I could move it out of the way so that ball A doesn't hit it. The basic message is that I could interfere. It is still true that under certain circumstances certain results follow. It is just that among the circumstances that are included in a statement of law is 'nothing else from outside interferes'. But this gives us a new way of defining a miracle. A miracle would be an event which cannot be explained using the laws of science unless we say that 'something from outside interfered'. Laws of science can't rule out such interference in the world any more that they can stop me interfering with the billiard balls. Certainly if God exists then I see no reason to suppose that He wouldn't interfere. Thus, even though there are laws of nature, there can be miracles.

Who Made God?

The question 'who made God?' has always been a common one for children to ask. But even philosophers have been known to ask it. The very question seems somehow amusing. At any rate, it has always amused me. The answer to the question is, in one sense obvious. In another it might be thought more difficult. Obviously the Christian believes that the correct answer to this question is 'nothing and no-one'. But this sort of answer seems problematic. This is because one of the main arguments for the existence of God has been the 'first cause' argument. This argument often begins with a statement like this: everything that exists has a cause of its existence. But this would obviously imply that God, if He exists, also has a cause. What follows from this is not that God does have a cause but that the first cause argument needs 'tweaking'. Rather we should say something like 'everything which exists, which *could be* caused to exist *is* caused to exist'. This wouldn't need to apply to God, because God could be (and indeed is) thought of as a being whose existence could not be caused. In fact, most theists would hold that God just isn't

the kind of thing that can be caused to exist. So asking ‘Who caused God?’ is like asking ‘what does yellow smell like?’. The colour yellow just isn’t (and indeed no colour is) the kind of thing that can have a characteristic smell. Neither is God the sort of thing that can have a cause.

The Trinity

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity (i.e. that God is three in one) is indeed mysterious. Many think that it embodies a flat contradiction. I have heard the doctrine of the Trinity called a travesty of counting. This seems hasty - but I fully understand the sentiment. I find C.S. Lewis’ comments (in [4], pg. 137-141) helpful on this issue. He asks us to imagine a group of people who live in a two dimensional world. Thus the only geometry they do is in two dimensions. They are familiar with lines, triangles, squares, circles and the like. But cubes and other three-dimensional figures seem to them to be incoherent. When a person tells them to try and imagine a cube they are bound to say that it consists of six squares, all joined together. This is, of course, true. But what are these ‘flat landers’ to imagine? I think that they would tend to do one of two things. Either (a) imagine the squares all lying next to one another - destroying their unity, or (b) imagine them all on top of one another - destroying their diversity. Neither conception is adequate. But nevertheless a cube contains *six squares in one figure*. The problem with the cube is not that it *violates* the ‘flat lander’s categories, but that it *transcends* them. Likewise, the Trinity could be thought of as transcending ours.

Paradoxes of Omnipotence

Numerous people have suggested that God can’t be omnipotent because the very concept of omnipotence is incoherent. This is supposed to be revealed by questions such as “Can God create a stone so heavy that even He couldn’t lift it?”

If He can’t do it, then there is something that He can’t do. But there also seems to be something He can’t do if He can create the stone, namely lift it. So, either way there is something that God can’t do. Therefore, the thought goes, God cannot be omnipotent.

But answering this is not difficult. The answer relies upon realising that that God’s omnipotence doesn’t extend to making contradictions true. It is not a limitation on God’s power to say that He can’t make contradictions true. Contradictory ‘things’ are not really things at all. Saint Thomas Aquinas pointed out

that it is no limitation on God’s power that He can’t create an uncreated being. Obviously God can’t do that, if He created a being it would not be uncreated. These seem like mere trifles. It isn’t obvious at first that asking God to create an immovable stone involves a contradiction - but it does. To see why consider the following case. Could there exist both an immovable object and an irresistible force? It seems that the answer must be no. It must be no because if these two things could be created, an obvious problem arises: what would happen if they were to come together? It would seem that if they did, then contradictory things would happen. If the immovable object really is immovable then it will have to resist the ‘irresistible force’. Similarly, if the irresistible force really is irresistible then the ‘immovable object’ will have to move. But this is clearly impossible! It is logically impossible that these two things co-exist. Thus it involves a contradiction to suppose that they could co-exist. But the case with God and the stone is similar. The only difference being that one of the two already exists - namely God. But then it would follow that since God exists an immovable stone logically cannot exist. But it is not then a limitation on God’s omnipotence that He cannot create what logically cannot exist. C.S. Lewis puts the general point well when he says that meaningless combinations of words don’t become meaningful just by prefixing them with the words ‘God can’.

Bibliography

[1] L. Strobel, *The Case For Christ* (Zondervan, 1998).

This book is a brilliant introduction to issues surrounding (a) the historicity of the New Testament, (b) the person of Jesus and (c) the resurrection. It involves Lee Strobel (former sceptic and also prize winning journalist) interviewing numerous Christian Biblical scholars, and generally putting lots of difficult questions to them.

[2] J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City* (Baker, 1987).

This book outlines the main arguments, both philosophical and historical, for the truth of Christianity. It may be a little heavy for some, but is a wonderful book.

[3] N. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1988).

This book includes material on the tests for truth that any world view must pass. It then critiques all major non-theistic world-views, and provides powerful arguments for Christian theism.

[4] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Fount, 1944).

This classic book opens with an superb statement of the moral argument. Lewis goes on to consider the person of Christ and other core doctrines of Christianity.

[5] R. Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God* (Word, 1994).

A brilliant book that any serious thinker should read. Though intellectually respectable, it focuses more on the existential struggles that we all face, and shows that within Christianity all of life's big questions find an answer.

[6] R. Zacharias, *Deliver us from Evil* (Word, 1996).

This book seeks to show that the evil in today's society can only be stemmed if we turn back to God, from whom our definitions for life must come. The book includes two excellent appendices on the authority of the Bible.

[7] R. Zacharias, *Cries of the Heart* (Word, 1997).

Again coming to the issues from the more existential side, Zacharias addresses the heartfelt questions of the believer and non-believer alike. The book includes brilliant chapters on loneliness, guilt, and suffering.