

In Defence of Christianity

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What I want to do in this lecture is to try to show you some of the reasoning that can be used in *support* of the Christian faith. Now I'm perfectly well aware that reason is not the *basis* for faith. Christian faith is not *founded* on arguments. Most believers have either grown up and been nurtured in what have been called 'convictional communities' and have just found that religious faith and participation in religious life make sense to them, or else they have been precipitated into religious commitment and practice by some powerful conversion experience. Few people are actually reasoned into faith. And of course, for practising Christians, the actual foundation of faith, if indeed their faith is true, is God's action in revelation, incarnation, redemption and inspiration. The arguments which I intend to sketch are more like *buttresses* than foundations, reasons that can be given, as I say, in *support* of what Christians believe.

Reason can be shown to support or buttress faith in three ways. *Firstly*, there are a number of wide-ranging considerations which in no way presuppose faith, but which do, cumulatively, suggest theism, that is, belief in God, as offering the best explanation of the world in which we find ourselves. To that extent, these arguments are not restricted to the support of Christianity. Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs can appeal to them just as well. *In the second place*, there are a number of historical considerations to which appeal can be made in support of the claim that God has revealed himself to humankind. Such appeals, again, are not limited to Christian apologists. *In the third place*, reason can be deployed from within a particular faith such as Christianity to show its coherence and inner rationale, as, for example, when philosophical theologians attempt to demonstrate the logic of incarnational and trinitarian belief and the power of what Christianity has to say about redemption and the future of creation.

Belief in God as the best explanation for Our World

Let me say something, first of all, about the way in which theism - belief in God - makes best sense of things. This is the sphere of what has traditionally been called natural theology. Now, again, I have to acknowledge that belief in God is not ordinarily accepted just because it *explains* things. But the fact that such explanations do not form the *basis* of faith in no way means that we should disparage the claim that a theistic faith such as Christianity can find *support* from the argument that theism does in fact provide the best explanation of the world's

existence and its capacity to evolve mind, freedom, morality, art, philosophy and religion.

Natural theology poses the following questions: firstly, how do we best account for the existence of a universe endowed with just such properties and powers as we find this universe to possess, operating under just such fundamental laws of nature as we find hold here, when none of all this, apparently, had to be? Secondly, how do we best account for the capacity of the fundamental stuff of the universe - if I can call it that - to evolve not only life and consciousness, but also mind, intelligence and personality? Thirdly, how do we best account for the fact that our world is a moral world, that is, for the apparent objectivity and claim on us of the moral law? Fourthly, how do we best account for the universe's capacity to come up with Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe, with Mozart and Beethoven, and with all the products of human creativity and culture? Fifthly, how do we best account for the universe's capacity to come up with the philosophies of Plato, Leibniz, Kant and Hegel – to name but four? And finally, how do we account for the universe's capacity to come up with the religions of the world, with religious experience and with sanctity? What does it tell us about the cosmos that it evolves mystics and saints and opens itself up to spiritual penetration and becomes the vehicle of the sacred?

These are serious questions. The first one cannot be avoided by appeal to Stephen Hawking's theory of an unbounded, beginningless, self-contained quantum universe. Hawking himself once said, 'Although science may solve the problem of how the universe began, it cannot answer the question, Why does the universe bother to exist? I don't know the answer to that'. John Polkinghorne gives a very straight answer to Hawking's later question, 'What place for a Creator?', namely, 'Every place - as the sustainer of the self-contained spacetime egg and as the ordainer of its quantum laws'. You see, even if self-contained, the fundamental structures of the universe - the quantum fields and the laws of physics - still need explaining.

The other questions cannot be avoided by appeal to Jacques Monod or Richard Dawkins for the view that the theory of evolution has made the idea of design redundant. *Given* the properties and powers of matter and energy, and *given* the fundamental laws of nature, we can perhaps trace and explain the ever more complex stages of cosmic and biological evolution - though, it has to be said, there are still gaps in the story that may never be closed by science alone. But even if they were closed, evolutionary theory gives us no explanation whatsoever for the existence of a universe endowed with such astonishing properties and powers of complexification in the first place. This point holds, whether or not you have some sympathy, as I must confess I do, for the so-called 'anthropic principle' argument. The evolution of the conditions for life - and of life itself - apparently depends on

such a narrow range of parameters, improbable coincidences that have to obtain if life, and *a fortiori* intelligence, are ever to appear on the scene. It makes much more sense if it was meant and guided.

There is also an argument from consciousness and mind. Attempts by cognitive scientists to explain consciousness and mind in purely physicalist or even biological terms are extraordinarily unconvincing when you think of what it is that is being purportedly explained - the minds of Shakespeare and of Mozart. Much more plausible is the view of William Temple in his Gifford Lectures, *Nature, Man and God*, that the process which has led to the emergence of mind and spirit here on Earth is best evaluated in terms of its highest product, that is to say, by seeing mind as being at the heart of things. This is the basic argument behind all forms of idealist philosophy down the ages, east and west, including all forms of theistic metaphysics.

The moral argument is exemplified by Donald MacKinnon's Gifford Lectures, *The Problems of Metaphysics*. He wrestles there with the moral predicaments and conflicts displayed in the tragedies of Sophocles and Shakespeare. He comments: 'It is as if we are constrained in pondering the extremities of human life to acknowledge the transcendent as the only alternative to the kind of trivialisation which would empty of significance the sort of experience with which we have been concerned' - that is, in exploring the significance of Antigone and King Lear. The point being made is that moral facts point ineluctably to transcendence. When confronted with the moral law or with the moral significance of human life in situations of tragedy or of supreme goodness or radical evil, we find ourselves unable to subscribe to a naturalistic philosophy of value as just inter-subjective preference. And we have to try to make metaphysical sense of an evolving world, which has it in it to produce and include such values.

Nor is it just a question of moral values. These 'axiological' arguments, as they are called - arguments from value - include aesthetics too. Beauty, as well as goodness, raises the question of transcendence. I mentioned Shakespeare. Bernard Levin, writing of the ultimate pleasure of Shakespeare, spoke of 'the deep, sustaining realisation that his work is not only beautiful, thrilling, profound and funny, but, above all, true'. Clearly, it's not just a question of pleasure. As Levin's own words make clear, it is a question of 'realisation', perception, recognition of truth. But what kind of truth? The whole burden of objectivism in aesthetic theory is that what we perceive in the beauty of nature and the sublimities of artistic creation reveals something of the true nature of things. This point has been developed memorably by George Steiner in his book *Real Presences*: 'All serious art and literature, and not only music to which Nietzsche applies the term, is an *opus metaphysicum*' - a metaphysical work. I made the same point myself in one of my books: 'art and culture can and should be seen not just as products of human

sensibility but as clues to the meaning and worth of the whole cosmic process out of which we have evolved. It is the very nature of aesthetic, as of moral, value that belies materialism as a total world view, and provides one of the many starting-points for a cumulative argument for the existence of God’.

All this is to suggest that a theistic world view enables us, better than any other world view, to make sense of a natural world productive of finite spirit and of the values of goodness, beauty and truth. Such a world is best understood as the creation of infinite Spirit, itself supremely good, beautiful and true - the creative act endowing the universe with its given nature, its given powers and its ultimate meaning and destiny. Also, I might add, theistic metaphysics offers the best explanation for all the necessary features of the world - its mathematical expressibility, for example, its conformity to the laws of logic, the properties and abstract ideas it contains. For theistic metaphysics, mathematics and logic reflect the consistency and rationality of God's necessary being; abstract ideas and properties are God's creative ideas. So all the necessities in the created world - and indeed in any possible world - depend on either the nature or the will of God.

Christian theism is, of course, - as I acknowledged at the start of this lecture - much more concerned with faith, hope and love than with ‘best explanation’ metaphysics. But it does offer explanations too. And its rationality is, in part, shown by its ability to make better sense of the amazing world in which we find ourselves than do the secular, naturalistic, philosophies so widespread in our rather enfeebled culture today.

I must say at least something, however, about the principal difficulty which people find about a theistic worldview, namely, the problem of evil. Why does the creative process, whereby God fashions a world of finite persons and all the values of goodness, beauty and truth that the created world contains, have to be so costly in respect of suffering and evil? How can God allow such horrendous things to happen as the Nazi Holocaust or the recent natural disasters in Myanmar and China?

Jewish and Christian responses to the problem of evil tend to concentrate on what God inspires his creatures to do to bring good out of evil and on God’s promise of resurrection to a perfected new creation for all, including all life’s victims. But those points do not begin to answer the question why the horrendous evils are permitted in the first place. To answer that question, we have to investigate the necessities involved in the indirect and gradual formation, from below, of finite personal life, in and through a whole evolving universe.

Bertrand Russell wrote, in *The Analysis of Mind*: ‘there is no logical impossibility in the hypothesis that the world sprang into being five minutes ago, exactly as it then was, with a population that “remembered” a wholly unreal past’. But that, like much of what Russell wrote and said, is nonsense. ‘Human beings’,

posited in being five minutes ago with built-in 'memory' traces, would not be human beings. The suggestion is logically incoherent.

In fact, to be an adult human being, we have to have gone through a real process of growth and nurture and a real history of interpersonal relation in a real and specific culture. One can even suggest that it is necessary for the Creator to have fashioned us in and through a whole evolving physical universe. As Austin Farrer put it, 'if God wished to make no more than any single one of us, he would need to make half a universe. And why? Because no one of us would be the creature he is, if a thousand thousand lines of converging history, both physical and personal, had not met in him. Your life or mine is but a half-sentence in the book of the world. Tear it from its place, and it cannot be read; or if it can be read, it signifies nothing'. And, of course, it is the same law-governed energies and forces that make us and all the sensitivities and values of our human life and culture possible that also render us vulnerable to clashes and accidents and deprivations of often horrendous kinds. As with all animals, our own exposure to disastrous accident is a function of our physicality.

One might reply, granted that specifically human life is essentially bound up with its physical roots, both in terms of its evolutionary background and in terms of its many-levelled structure, did the creation of finite personal life as such have to be like this? But maybe there is a deeper necessity for some such grounding, some such formation from below, some such drawing of God's personal creatures out of nature into spirit. Maybe, in order to have any kind of finite personal creatures, with a being and nature of their own, the Creator has to place a kind of screen between his infinite glory and their creaturely selves. The material, evolving, universe would be just such a screen, begun with the most elementary organisation of energy, and gradually built up, level by level, till rational personal beings emerge, thoroughly rooted and grounded in what is fundamentally other than God. Maybe such rooting and grounding of God's creatures in a physical, evolving, universe, and letting the human world make itself precisely in and through the processes of evolution and history, are necessary conditions of the formation of any finite persons, with their own God-given being and nature, before ever they can be drawn into relation with their Maker and eventually immortalised.

Let me anticipate, at this point, what I am going to go on to say about revealed theology. One of Kierkegaard's most fruitful ideas was that of 'indirect communication'. There are good reasons why God reveals himself to us gradually, indirectly, in and through very messy human histories, to which all-too-human, albeit inspired, scriptures and traditions bear witness. I want to apply the logic of indirect communication to the logic of indirect creation and providence. At least during the formative phase of the creative process, we may suppose that the hand of God has to be hidden, the structures of the universe, like our freedom, have to be

respected. Not even omnipotence can create heaven directly. The structures are not rigid structures, of course. They are flexible structures, open both to our own free action and to God's grace and providence. But the structures themselves, in this formative phase, have to be respected, not overridden.

Historical Considerations in support of the claim that God has Revealed Himself

I now turn specifically to the rationality of appeals to revelation, both in the sense of appeals to historical facts that are best understood as mediating divine revelation and in the sense of appeals to the coherence, and the moral and religious power, of the doctrinal system of a developed world religion such as Christianity. I want to emphasise the point that revealed theology – theology that appeals to revelation – is just as open to rational scrutiny and explication as is natural theology. Bishop Butler once wrote: ‘reason is the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything, even revelation itself’. Such reasoning is not just a matter of analysis, singling out the different elements in the worldview of Christianity and explicating their logic and defending them independently. It involves that. But it is also a matter of exploring and defending the way in which the elements of Christianity, including its key doctrines, fit together and mutually support each other. This kind of reasoning has been called ‘synoptic rationality’. It involves informed, rational, *judgement* concerning the meaning and the interpretative power, both theoretical and moral, of the whole worldview of Christianity.

In exploring these matters, I want to show how considerations of natural theology and considerations of revealed theology come together to form what has been called a cumulative case suggestive of, and supportive of, the Christian faith. Indeed I hope to show how these arguments are not just cumulative, but mutually reinforcing.

That the rationality of revealed theology is not unconnected with the rationality of natural theology can be brought out by the following argument. A strong case for theism should lead one to *expect* revelation. We are informed by the media that the philosopher, Antony Flew, after decades of writing and lecturing on ‘the presumption of atheism’, became convinced that the fine tuning of the early universe, as discovered in contemporary cosmology, does, after all, suggest a creative intention behind the whole world process. (I should stress the fact that ‘fine tuning’ is not the only basis for a design argument. As I have already pointed out, the very capacity of the basic stuff of the universe to evolve intelligent, personal life is suggestive of design.) Flew's conversion to deism is a step in the right direction, but it does not get us very far. If there is indeed a creative mind behind the whole world process, then it is quite unreasonable to

suppose that that mind just sets the universe going and takes no further interest in it. As I say, natural theology should lead us to expect revelation, and indeed to take seriously the purported claims to revelation that we encounter throughout the history of religions. As has often been pointed out, one's assessment of alleged evidence depends very much on one's background beliefs. The theist is bound to read the history of religions differently from, and more favourably than, the atheist or even the agnostic.

The history of religions is the sphere to which the convinced theist will first look for signs of divine revelation. Indeed it is with the history of religions that natural theology begins to shade into revealed theology. Without necessarily disparaging other alleged channels of divine revelation, theists within the Judaeo-Christian tradition will appeal to the development, over time, of a special form of ethical monotheism in which a particular people came to see themselves as called to be a light to the nations, to embody the idea of redemptive suffering, and to look for some future vindication, both within history and beyond history, of God's promise and God's love. Christians, of course, see a singular culmination of that historical channel of revelation in the story of Jesus and his Resurrection, to which the Church's scriptures bear witness. Not that revelation need be held to stop there. Developing interpretation of those events and of that witness, and their effects in human life and history, provide continuing signs of God's providence and grace – and revelation - not least in the lives of the saints. I shall later go on to suggest that further signs of God's revealing providence may be found in the admittedly only partial penetration of world history by the values of God's Kingdom, namely, justice, mercy, freedom, peace and truth.

But the cumulative case for Christian belief includes not only appeal to these historical factors, the history of Israel, the story of Jesus, the emergence of the Church and its scriptures, the gradual and, as I say, all too partial gracing of society, but also in the rational exposition and justification of the Christian doctrines themselves that emerged in order to make sense of all this. Let me say just a word about the inner rationale of Christianity's key doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity in this connection.

The Inner Rationale of Christianity's Doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity

As I say, the convinced theist, expecting divine revelation, finds many deep, developed, revelation claims in the history of religions. Among them we find the claim that God himself has come amongst us in person, as one of us, in a prepared and necessarily particular religious context, in order to make himself known to us, to enact and demonstrate his forgiveness and his love, and to win our love in return. The force of Christian incarnational belief was beautifully

captured in Kierkegaard's story of the King and the humble maiden. In order to win the village maiden's love, the King had to put aside his royal panoply, dress as a peasant and go and live a peasant's life in the village. Only so could the maiden's love be won for its own sake in an unforced way.

I once had a Jewish student taking the philosophy of religion paper in our Theology course at Cambridge, and Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, in which this story is to be found, was one of the set texts. I remember him saying, as we discussed his essay, that reading Kierkegaard's parable of the King and the humble maiden had enabled him to see for the first time what Christians were talking about with their doctrine of the Incarnation. Previously it had made no sense at all to him.

But there is more to the doctrine of the Incarnation than that. The story of Jesus led to the cross. And in the passion and cross of Christ the Christian faith sees God in Christ taking the world's suffering and evil upon himself, accepting responsibility for the terrible cost, in sin and suffering, of the creation of a world of finite free persons. All this is what makes Christianity supremely a religion of redemption. As, again, Austin Farrer put the matter: 'What, then, did God do for his people's redemption? He came among them, bringing his kingdom, and he let events take their human course. He set the divine life in human neighbourhood. Men discovered it in struggling with it and were captured by it in crucifying it. What could be simpler? And what more divine?'

The moral and religious power of these doctrines of incarnation and redemption is very great. But so is that of the doctrine of Christ's Resurrection. For, according to the Christian faith, it is the Spirit of Christ crucified *and risen* that transforms humankind and takes God's personal creatures into the very life of God. Now there is no doubt that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead plays a key role among the evidences of Christianity. The story is there in the Gospels. What do we make of it? Well, remember the point about the difference made by background beliefs. We don't assess the evidence from a neutral uncommitted standpoint. Belief in God leads one to expect revelation. Belief in divine revelation might lead one to expect divine incarnation, once the moral and religious power of that doctrine is seen. Similarly it can be claimed that belief in incarnation and redemption makes little sense without the resurrection. So the evidence that it occurred is bound to be more favourably received by anyone persuaded by the prior stages in the cumulative case for Christianity. Of course Judaism had already developed a strong belief in a general resurrection in the end. That emerged from reflection on the steadfast love of God. It was – and is - a very proper and necessary theological belief, not a piece of anthropology or philosophy. As such, it helps to make its anticipation in the case of the incarnate one all the more credible. And the Resurrection of

Jesus Christ from the dead reinforces the general hope of resurrection in the end. I can only touch on that aspect of Christianity – its eschatology – here.

But I will add a word about the doctrine of the Trinity. There is no doubt that this doctrine arose in response to the growing conviction of the early Christians that in Jesus Christ they had to do with God made man, and that they had been given the gift of the divine Spirit. What they had to try to make sense of was belief that God had come to them in the form of a man who prayed to God, and that the Spirit not only dwelt within them, but interceded for them ‘with sighs too deep for words’, as St Paul put it in Romans 8. The result was an understanding of God as consisting of three internally related and interpenetrating personal subjects, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But there are purely rational considerations pointing in the same direction. For, when you come to think of it, there is a problem about any concept of God modelled on that of an isolated individual, especially if that God is held to be revealed as love. Such a God would have to create a world of finite persons in order to have an object for his love. Most forms of theism, certainly those of the religions of Semitic origin, have been very reluctant to accept the idea of creation being necessary. Creation has rather been seen as a matter of pure grace, reflecting or mirroring the divine love, not enabling it to have an object. This problem is overcome if the eternal God can be seen, in trinitarian terms, as already consisting in love given, love received and love shared still more. For these – and these alone – are the key elements in the very notion of love, as Richard of St Victor pointed out in the twelfth century.

This is not to suggest tritheism – belief in three gods. That would involve three finite ‘gods’ externally related. That’s the trouble with all artistic representations of the Trinity, including Rublev’s wonderful ikon of the three figures sitting round a table. Artistic representation inevitably involves finite images. But we are talking about the infinite. It is the one infinite God who is understood by Christians to be internally differentiated in three mutually interrelated, interpenetrating, subjects of love given, received and shared.

Let me sum up the positive cumulative case in support of Christian belief that I have sketched in the course of this lecture. Considerations of natural theology suggest that a universe that has it in it to evolve intelligent, personal life, society and culture – and saints and mystics - is best understood as the product of creative will and purpose. Divine revelation, then, is only to be expected. The world religions can, with good reason, be best interpreted as possessing revelatory, even salvific, significance. Among them, the Christian tradition, with its inalienable roots in Judaism, has come up with a theology of

incarnation and redemption, with its inevitable trinitarian implications, of great moral and religious power.

The Appeal to a Providential Reading of Universal World History

There is a further argument to be added to the cumulative case for Christian belief, namely an appeal to a providential reading of universal history as making most sense of the way world history has gone and is going. What might be expected if Christianity is true, is some historical evidence that Christ is indeed the centre of history and that, in God's providence, just as the history of religions, and the history of Israel, can be seen, among other things, to have led up to the Incarnation, so the Christian centuries can be seen, among other things, to have borne marks of the special salvific efficacy of the Christ event.

Clearly, this is no easy argument. World history, it might seem, is too various, too confused, too full of horrors, to bear out the supposition of its, even gradual, redemption since the time of Christ. It is a standard argument in Jewish apologetic to appeal to the evidently unredeemed nature of the world as evidence that the Messiah has not yet come. The rise of Islam six centuries after the Christ event, and its world-wide presence as a major factor in international relations today, make it very difficult to speak, in Hegelian terms, of universal history reaching a culminating phase either in Christianity or in western philosophy. Moreover the end of colonialism, the demise of Christendom, and the secularisation of the western world all make it hard to see the West as the spearhead and medium of the globalisation of Christian values. Indeed globalisation in its more popular sense, that is to say, globalisation of technology and trade, including globalisation of information technology, appears to have nothing whatsoever to do with the risen Christ or the Kingdom of God. And what have theories of universal history to say about the emergence of China, one third of humankind, as another major factor in the total world scene?

An immediate reaction would be to forswear theories of universal history, agree with Ranke or Butterfield that 'every epoch is immediate to God' or that 'every generation is equidistant from eternity', and appeal simply to the saints and to the Christian Church as evidence of the impact made in human history by the story of Jesus. Such appeals are indeed elements in the cumulative case for Christianity. Austin Farrer, in many of his sermons and papers, in addition to his stress on one's own experiential verification of the divine providence, appealed to the public evidence of the lives of the saints who, as he put it, 'prove the real connection between religious symbols and everyday realities not by logical demonstration but by life', and who 'confute the logicians, not by logic, but by sanctity'.

I should like, however, to contrast the view that it is only to the Church and to the saints that we should look and appeal for evidence of the redemption of the world with the view, expressed by a number of Christian thinkers, that the renewing work of the Spirit may be discerned not only in the lives of individual men and women of faith and in the Church that nurtures them, but also in the effect Christianity has had upon world history and upon the structures of society. The Dutch theologian, Hendrikus Berkhof, for example, asks us to consider the ways in which the Gospel, having entered the world, can be seen to have influenced cultures and structures both through and beyond the Church whose Gospel it is. If there is something like a sanctification of societal structures, Berkhof suggests that it should be possible to illustrate this from the difference between those areas where such influence has taken effect and the rest of the world.

The difference made by the Gospel's direct and indirect penetration is discernible, according to Berkhof, in the centuries of European, now Western, cultural history. Increasingly, this has deviated from what he calls 'the universal human pattern' in respects such as the following: care of the sick, the mentally handicapped and the poor; the dedeification of nature and of the state; an emphasis on labour and responsibility, and, over time, at least in principle, recognition of equality, the ideal of social justice, equality before the law, the separation of the executive and judicial branches of the government, compulsory education, universal franchise, freedom of religion, freedom of the press and democracy.

Another theologian who has argued along these lines is Oliver O'Donovan. Having located the rule of Christ first of all in the Church, O'Donovan goes on to speak of the redemption of society, tracing the effect of the Christ event through Christendom and after Christendom in the restraint of secular power within the parameters of justice. He echoes, with some reservations about talk of 'Kingdom values', the views of the Roman Catholic theologian, Enda McDonagh, who writes of the gracing of society and of political theology as being organised around the four 'Kingdom values' of justice, freedom, peace and truth. O'Donovan himself writes of freedom, mercy, natural right and openness to free speech as aspects of liberal political order, whose historical development 'bears the narrative of the Christ-event stamped upon it'.

The view that "*the secularisation of the European mind*," to use the title of Owen Chadwick's book, creates a problem for the view that Europe has a special role in the providential penetration of the world by 'Kingdom values' is easily countered. In the first place, secularisation may itself be the condition of the wider dissemination of such values. The point is well articulated by the German theologian, Eberhard Jüngel: 'The Church may be thankful', he says, 'that its

spiritual goods now exist in secular form. For example, the secular respect for freedom of conscience, the secular assertion of the inviolability of the dignity of the person, the secular commitment to protect handicapped human life, universal schooling and many other achievements of the modern constitutional state are secularised church treasures’.

Secondly, it may be urged that European influence too, despite its largely Christian provenance, has no exclusive claim on the values in question. Christian theology itself may be quite prepared to recognise ‘other lights’ as evidence of the Spirit’s penetration of world history.

Secularisation is a highly ambiguous phenomenon. Despite what Jüngel said about giving thanks for the fact of secularised church treasures in Europe and elsewhere, the question remains how far they are sustainable without their Christian or religious framework. Contemporary worries about the sustainability of the care of the retarded and the terminally ill in a purely secular culture suggest that secularised church treasures may cease to retain their hold on society’s, and the medical profession’s, commitment.

What I am suggesting is that, in the cumulative case supportive of Christian faith, there may well be a further element in the progressive penetration of human society and world history by values stemming from the Christ event. And I’m suggesting that all the appeals I’ve mentioned – to best explanation metaphysics, to the evolution of personality and culture, to the objectivity of moral and aesthetic values, to the history of religions, to the faith of Israel and the story of Christ and the Church, including its mystics and its saints, to the gracing of society – all these appeals add up to a strong set of buttresses helping to keep Christianity upright and firm. Moreover, they don’t just add up cumulatively. They reinforce each other. Best explanation metaphysics is much stronger if we find in reality what it leads us to expect, namely divine revelation. Divine revelation is all the more compelling if found in reality to culminate in a morally and religiously compelling religion of incarnation and redemption. And Christian faith finds confirmation in the lives of the saints and in the gracing of society.

Conclusion

So much for my cumulative case in defence of Christianity. But one thing remains to be said. I have said nothing about what might be held to be the lynchpin of the case, namely, the way in which the whole story finds final confirmation in our own experience. I have omitted this key factor because the appeal to experience does not itself form part of the public cumulative case. The

fact that many people do find inner experiential confirmation of the Christian faith is, of course, a public, objective, fact. Appeal to this fact is part of the appeal to the Church and its saints. But whether or not the faith takes root in one's own case cannot be part of the buttressing argument. However strong the cumulative case in its support, one's own faith is a private matter and can only be regarded as a gift.