"NOT DONE IN A CORNER": HOW TO BE A SENSIBLE EVIDENTIALIST ABOUT JESUS[1]

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> "So then, King Agrippa . . . I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles".
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> At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defence. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane".
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> "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner." (*Acts* 26: 19–26 (NIV))

Warranted Christian Belief completes Alvin Plantinga's warrant trilogy.[2] In it, he uses the externalist epistemology of his 1993 *Warrant: the Current Debate* and *Warrant and Proper Function* to undergird a Calvinist "model" of how Christian belief can have warrant. In so doing, he also returns to the critique of evidentialism that he and other Reformed epistemologists mounted in the 1980s. In that earlier phase, 'evidentialism' designated the assumption that belief in God needs inferential evidence to avoid being irrational. Against all evidentialists (those defending theism as well as those attacking it), Plantinga urged that it can be "entirely right, rational, reasonable, and proper to believe in God without any evidence or argument at all".[3] Such belief can instead be "properly basic", by virtue of its grounding in the immediate deliverances of a *Sensus Divinitatis* implanted in us by God. In *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga expands this earlier view in three dimensions. He broadens it by considering not just belief in God, but also belief in the central claims of the Christian gospel, claims regarding creation, the fall, redemption, and the person and work of Christ. He deepens it by investigating what is needed to make these beliefs not only 'rational' but also *warranted*, drawing here on the distinction central to his earlier two volumes. And he lengthens it (so to speak) by elaborating a

1. I am grateful to my colleagues at Calvin College for their helpful comments on this paper.
2. Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford, 2000): in what follows, page numbers for quotations from Plantinga will refer to this volume unless otherwise indicated. The two earlier volumes of the trilogy, published in 1993, are also from Oxford University Press.
3. Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', in Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Faith and Rationality* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 17. Here Plantinga uses the term 'evidence' in its narrow sense of *inferential* evidence. In a broader sense, the deliverances of the *Sensus Divinitatis* are evidence, comparable to those of memory or the senses.

model on which the central claims of Christianity are grounded in a *Sensus Spiritus*, the "Internal Instigation and Testimony of the Holy Spirit".[4] Given the proper-functionalist theory of warrant of his earlier volumes, he argues, this can suffice to make Christian belief *warranted*—warranted enough, indeed, to constitute knowledge.

In its positive features, I find Plantinga's account very valuable. Especially important, I think, is his discussion of the effects of the Holy Spirit on our affections and will as well as on our beliefs and cognition. My worries concern what we might call the negative features of his account. For alongside this stress on the importance of the Holy Spirit, Plantinga intertwines a case for the unimportance or dispensability of ordinary evidence for the claims of Christianity. This is particularly striking for his treatment of the resurrection of Jesus. On his model, as we shall see, even the claim that Jesus rose from death acquires all the warrant it needs from the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, he says (p. 259), belief in the resurrection "floats free" of all historical considerations and evidence. The resurrection happened in real history; but our way of knowing it happened, on his model, "swings free" of our ordinary ways of knowing historical facts.

In taking this view, Plantinga finds considerable support in the Dutch Calvinist tradition. But here, I worry that Dutch Calvinism may be deeply flawed. In the passage from Acts quoted above, the apostle Paul is bold before King Agrippa because, he says, the events he proclaims were "not done in a corner", and so "have not escaped the notice" of Agrippa. The gospel thus makes claims upon Agrippa—claims to being both "true and reasonable"—because its historical components engage ordinary ways of knowing. Paul also, to be sure, appeals to the Spirit-inspired prophets, but he does this in synergy with appeal to our ordinary means of knowing. If a model of Christian warrant is to preserve this synergy (as I believe it should), Dutch Calvinism may here need to learn from Scottish Calvinism,[5] from Calvin himself, and

4. Plantinga does not use the term *Sensus Spiritus*: *sensus* is perhaps misleading if taken too literally, for the "Internal Instigation of the Holy Spirit" is not by way of any specific faculty in us. I use it as a surrogate for his acronym IIHS.
5. A glimpse of the divide on these matters between Dutch and Scottish Calvinists can be seen in Princeton scholar B. B. Warfield's discussion of the Dutch Calvinist Abraham Kuyper. While praising many aspects of Kuyper's thought, Warfield also saw in him a striking instance of

> heroes of the faith who deprecate apologetics because they feel no need of 'reasons' to ground a faith which they are sure they have received immediately from God. Apologetics, they say, will never make a Christian. Christians are made by the creative Spirit alone. And when God almighty has implanted faith in a heart, we shall not require to seek for 'reasons' to ground our conviction of the truth of the Christian religion. We have tasted and seen, and we know of ourselves that it is from God. Thus, the sturdiest belief joins hands with unbelief to disparage the defences of the Christian religion.
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> From *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol. 2, ed. John E. Meeter (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973), p. 95.

from a more whole-hearted application of Plantinga's own externalist theory of warrant.[6]

1. Plantinga's Aims, Strategy, and Model

1.1 Like his earlier 1980s work, *Warranted Christian Belief* seeks both to defeat 'evidentialism' and to provide an alternative to it. In *Warranted Christian Belief*, evidentialism takes the form of (as I shall call it) the *Demure De Jure Objection* against Christian theism. Those who level this objection demurely profess to have no idea whether Christian theism is *true*; nevertheless, they charge, acceptance of Christian theism is—due to its lack of evidence—deeply epistemically defective. An objection so combining ontic modesty and epistemic severity is not in itself incoherent: sometimes it is exactly the right thing to say.[7] But could it be the right thing to say about Christian theism? Plantinga thinks not: such critics, he thinks, fail to see that in this case, there are deep and fundamental links between the ontic and epistemic issues, between whether God exists, and whether believing in God in a 'basic' way (rather than on the basis of inference) could be reasonable and warranted. Appreciating these links, he thinks, is also essential for Christians seeking to understand faith as a species of knowing.

For both ends, Plantinga proposes his model of the thesis that Christian theistic belief has warrant. In essence, a 'model' is a story spelling out one imaginable way in which Christian belief might get warrant. Plantinga claims two things of his model. First, the story is "epistemically possible": given what we have to go on, we have no reason to reject it so long as we take the "demure" stance (my term) toward the truth of Christian theism. Second, if the story is true, then Christian belief does have warrant. These modest claims are enough, he thinks, to refute the demure de jure objection, for they entail that for all we know, Christian theism has warrant. Plantinga also claims that if Christian theism is true, then his model or something in its near neighbourhood is true; it is thus (p. 170) "a good way for Christians to conceive the warrant of Christian belief".

1.2 How then does his model go: on it, how does Christian belief arise, and what gives it warrant? It arises from two main sources. First, on the model

6. I have argued elsewhere that externalism helps put evidentialism regarding theism in a more sensible and challenging form. See my 'Toward a Sensible Evidentialism: On the Notion of 'Needing evidence", in William Rowe and William Wainwright (eds.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion, 2nd Edition* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), pp. 426–437. See also 'Externalism, Proper Inferentiality, and Sensible Evidentialism', in *Topoi*, vol. 14 (1995), pp. 107–121. The present essay attempts to put this 'sensible evidentialism' in a form appropriate to the key historical claims of the Christian gospel.
7. Imagine meeting some group of people with passionate convictions about intelligent extraterrestrials. After a few hours of discussion, you see how their convictions arose from experiences while on LSD. You might rightly find yourself thinking: 'I have no idea whether there *is* such life somewhere in the universe (it's a mighty big place, after all); but *these* nuts are entirely irrational in their conviction that this is so.'

God has created all humans so that they have a built-in natural disposition to form beliefs about God when triggered by various common stimuli. These beliefs about God, however, fall short of what humans need to know if their lives are to be restored to proper relation with God. Hence, God has graciously provided a special supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit, both in inspiring the Holy Scriptures, and in enabling humans to see the truth of their central proclamations. These proclamations include, he says:

> the affirmations that God created the heavens and the earth; that he created humans in his own image; that human beings fell ruinously into sin, from which they require salvation; that in response God sent Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, who took on our flesh (became incarnate), suffered, and died as an atonement for our sins, and rose from the dead, thus enabling us fallen human beings to have eternal life with God. (p. 302)

On Plantinga's model, then, it is the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit that produces Christian conviction about these affirmations. Here his model importantly brings out the relation between our affective and cognitive lives. We fallen humans, on the model, have hearts whose central rebellious desire is to live autonomously from God. This central desire colours and distorts all our affections, and this in turn distorts our cognition, giving us an inveterate tendency to "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). The Holy Spirit's activity, however, renews the heart and its affections; in so doing, it removes the affective barriers to belief. But more importantly, on his model the Holy Spirit plays the positive role of directly "instigating" these beliefs, bringing the mind to a state of conviction by giving an "inner secret testimony" to the proclamations of Scripture. On Plantinga's model, this instigation is immediate and non-inferential. It is not that the Holy Spirit produces some experience that functions as evidence for the belief. Instead, Plantinga says (p. 250), it might go this way: a person simply hears or reads or encounters some teaching of Scripture (say, that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself", and then, due to the Holy Spirit's inner causal activity, she finds herself thinking: "Right; that's true; God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself".

And on Plantinga's model, the Spirit's instigation is the proper source not just of beliefs about the theological significance of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, but also of beliefs about the historicity of these events themselves. Our warrant for believing that Jesus rose from death has no dependence on our ordinary means of access to historical events. On the model, Plantinga writes:

> I don't *need* a good historical case for the truth of the central teachings of the gospel to be warranted in accepting them. I needn't be able to find a good argument, historical or otherwise, for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . . On the model, the warrant for Christian belief doesn't require that I or anyone else have this kind of historical information; the warrant

floats free of such questions. It isn't required to be validated or proved by some source of belief other than by faith, such as historical investigation. (p. 259)

It is to be noted that Plantinga's point here is very general: the warrant of belief in the resurrection floats free of any 'source of belief' other than the Spirit's internal instigation. 'Historical investigation' is cited as one example; but it also floats free of our ordinary disposition to believe on the testimony of other humans. Of course, on his model the Holy Spirit uses, as the *occasion* for instigating belief in the resurrection, words that in Scripture are portrayed as testimony from Jesus' followers. But these words do not make their epistemic claim upon us by functioning as historical testimony (that is, by engaging our ordinary dispositions to believe what other people tell us by way of testimony) or by engaging any other ordinary faculty. It is this general point that lies behind his model's aloofness toward historical studies, so far as the positive source of warrant for belief is concerned. And it is not just the individual, but the Christian epistemic community as a whole, that enjoys such aloofness. The Holy Spirit, as he puts it, gives us:

> a source of warranted true belief, a way of coming to see the truth of these teachings, that is quite independent of historical studies. By virtue of this process an ordinary Christian, one quite innocent of historical studies, . . . can nevertheless come to know that these things are, indeed, true; furthermore, his knowledge need not trace back (by way of testimony, for example) to knowledge on the part of someone who does have this specialized training. Neither the Christian community nor the ordinary Christian is at the mercy of the expert here; they can know these truths directly. (p. 374)

1.3 How does the Holy Spirit provide this knowledge about historical events? It is not, on his model, that the person apprehends that the Holy Spirit is testifying to some event, senses the integrity of the Spirit, and accordingly accepts this testimony as true. Rather, his model here embodies the staunch 'externalism' developed in *Warrant and Proper Function*. On this externalist theory, the believer, to be warranted, need not *realise* that the Holy Spirit is producing some conviction, just as an ordinary person, to be warranted in some visual belief, need not realise that the action of photons on chemical photo-receptors is producing that belief. What is needed for warrant, on Plantinga's general theory, is that the beliefs be produced by faculties or processes that are functioning in accord with a successful alethic design plan. So if there is a God who has designed us to form beliefs when triggered in this way by the Holy Spirit (or photons), then beliefs produced in this way do have warrant. And the warrant accrues from the 'external fact' that they are so produced; it does not rest on whether the subject holding the belief has any realisation or recognition of this fact.

At bottom, as Plantinga thus sees it, the demure *de jure* critics are wrong because they think evidentialism toward Christian theism is *world-view neutral*.

They suppose that the proposition that God exists or that Jesus rose from death is intrinsically the sort of proposition that needs an inferential case in order to be warrantedly or reasonably believed. But this is not world-view neutral at all. For if Christian theism *is* true, it is entirely possible—entirely *epistemically* possible—that when we are functioning properly, we can reliably form true beliefs about God and the Gospel without relying on anything like inferential evidence. And this is something anyone should see with a little thought; so all demure *de jure* evidentialist critics of Christian belief should henceforth lay down their arms and bury their hatchets. If they are agnostic about the truth of Christian belief, they should be equally agnostic about whether such belief has warrant. Evidentialist defenders of Christianity should also repent, for if Christian theism is true, the model or something close to it is true. How then can one embrace Christian theism while thinking ordinary evidence is essential for knowing its truth? If we have the Holy Spirit, what need have we of evidence?

2. Scriptural Cues from Calvin

To answer this question, I shall sketch an alternative to Plantinga's model. The alternative model will propose a broadly evidentialist story of how warrant accrues to Christian belief in the resurrection.[8] At the same time, it will avoid the more extreme versions of evidentialism, and preserve many positive features of his specific model of Christian belief and his general 'proper functionalist' theory of warrant. Of this model, I make two claims, parallel to his claims for his model. The first is that if we have no good reason for rejecting the truth of Christian theism, then we have no good reason to think the model is false. The second is that if Christian theism is true, we have reason to see this model as being somewhat closer to the truth, somewhat more verisimilitudinous, than is Plantinga's model. This is because it comports better with some key passages of Scripture. Since these motivate our model, I shall begin with them.[9] In discussing them, I shall also attend to the exposition of them given by Calvin, for this provides valuable cues even if his own general views deviate from our model.[10]

8. Our evidentialist model will not say that all the components get warrant in the same way. What makes it evidentialist is that it sees ordinary evidence as a *part*, but a crucial or *essential* part, of what confers warrant on *some* of them. At the same time, it embraces as necessary and vital (but not normally sufficient) the non-inferential sources stressed by Plantinga's model.
9. The appeal to Scripture here is consonant with Plantinga's dictum (p. 200) that taking Scripture and theology seriously in a book on philosophy is "no more scandalous than the ingression into philosophy of scientific ideas from (for example) quantum mechanics, cosmology, and evolutionary biology".
10. Though the model takes cues from things Calvin himself acknowledges in discussing the above Scriptures, the model does not purport to capture Calvin's overall stance on these matters. As Plantinga says of his own model (p. 173): "Whatever Calvin thinks, however, it's our model."

2.1 To begin, consider II Peter 1:16–18, which grounds the apostolic proclamation in things to which the apostles were "eyewitnesses". In Calvin's translation, the passage reads:

> For we have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him on the holy mount.[11]

In his commentary, Calvin notes, first, that Peter aims to set forth "the certainty of the gospel", that the faithful may know they "labour in a matter which is certain", and so "persevere" with no fear that they are "beating the air". It is to this end, Calvin thinks, that Peter stresses the grounding of the gospel in events to which the apostles were "eyewitnesses". And in citing the transfiguration of Jesus, Peter is choosing but "one memorable example out of many" by which "Christ displayed his divine majesty". Of this particular miracle, Calvin says:

> Three only were then present, but they were sufficient as witnesses; for they had through many miracles seen the glory of Christ, and had a remarkable evidence of his divinity in his resurrection.

Noting Peter's emphasis on being an "eyewitness" to the transfiguration, and relating this to his witnessing of the resurrection and other miracles of Jesus, Calvin urges that "he alone is the lawful minister of Christ, who knows the truth of the doctrine which he delivers". Peter's knowing and ministering, for Calvin, was thus grounded in the evidencing power of the events he had witnessed, events taken not in isolation but as a whole. These events are seen as crucial both to the apostles' own knowledge of the Gospel, and to their being in a position to deliver this Gospel authoritatively to subsequent generations, including us.

Calvin goes on to clarify a difference between the epistemic situation of the apostle and ourselves. The apostle's certainty rested in substantial measure upon the evidencing power of events he had witnessed himself. But our situation is different, for:

> . . . not that all obtain certainty in the same way; for what Peter says is that he himself was present. . . . But we now obtain certainty in another way; for though Christ has not risen before our eyes, yet we know by whom his resurrection has been handed down to us.

11. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen, in Calvin Translation Society, *Calvin's Commentaries* (22 volumes), Vol. 22 Part II, (Baker Book House, reprinted 1999), p. 381. All quotations from Calvin upon this passage are found on pages 381–3.

In stressing that our certainty is obtained by knowing "by whom his resurrection was handed down to us", Calvin is of course not saying it is independent of the certainty of Peter and the apostles, for it is precisely their testimony that has been handed down. But there is also a chain of transmission of this testimony. The precise details of this chain may not be fully clear, but evidently this does not, for Calvin, preclude knowing enough to have confidence in the reliability of the transmission. (This may, indeed, often be the case for historical knowledge.) In any case, the Christian's certainty today regarding things of the gospel, on Calvin's account here, rests in no small way upon historical events to which we have access by ordinary means of perceptual and testimonial faculties.

This is not to say that for Calvin, the Holy Spirit plays no crucial role here. Indeed, Calvin immediately goes on to affirm the importance of the Spirit. His idea, however, is that these two sources are complementary. As if to forestall a false dichotomy between the ordinary and, the extraordinary sources of certainty here, he continues:

> And *added to this* is the inward testimony of conscience, the sealing of the Spirit, which far exceeds all the evidence of the senses. *But* let us *remember* that the gospel was not at the beginning made up of vague rumors, but that the apostles were the authentic preachers of *what they had seen.* (Italics mine)

So for Calvin, our knowledge of the Gospel has two roots: it is rooted in our ordinary ways of knowing by perception and testimony, and to this is *added* "the sealing of the Spirit". And even while stressing the latter as more excellent, he immediately adds that this should not lead us to forget the former: "But let us *remember* that . . . the apostles were the authentic preachers of *what they had seen*".

2.2 But how, on our new model, are these two sorts of sources to be related? If we turn to Calvin's commentary on the Johannine letters, we find suggestions that the Holy Spirit's testimony is not a mere cumulative addition to ordinary sources of belief like the senses and testimony, but something that works in intimate synergy with them. Calvin quotes I John 1:1, noting how the writer stresses the apostle's role as eyewitness:

> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, the Word of life. For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness to it.[12]

Here, comments Calvin, the apostle seeks to raise our thoughts to "the chief and only true happiness which God has conferred on us". "The greatness of the subject," Calvin says, "requires that the truth should be certain, and fully

12. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, Vol. 22 Part II, p. 156. All quotations from Calvin upon this passage are taken from pages 158–9.

proved"; but "how difficult it is for us to believe, every one of us knows too well by his own experience". It is fitting, then, that the apostle, appealing to knowledge gained by the senses, "heaps so many things together in confirmation of the gospel", to show that "he taught nothing but what had been really made known to him".

Calvin thus gives considerable weight to John's stress that his witness is to events known via the senses. But can we plausibly claim that such events, known through the senses, constitute evidence for his heady theological claims about who Jesus is, or about the source of his power? Calvin considers just this objection:

> It may seem, however, that the evidences of the senses little availed in the present subject, for the power of Christ could not be perceived by the eyes nor felt by the hands.

Such an objection might lead one to reject any evidential appeal to historical testimony regarding Jesus' miracles as evidence as to who he was. But Calvin firmly rejects this objection. He notes that the gospel of John, like the Johannine letters, makes the same evidential appeal to Jesus' "visible works". Calvin writes:

> To this I answer, that the same thing is said here as in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, "We have seen his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father;" for he was not known as the Son of God by the external form of his body, but because he gave illustrious proofs of his Divine power, so that in him shone forth the majesty of the Father, as in a living and distinct image.

Calvin thus sees the miracles of Jesus, known via the testimony of the apostles to events known through the senses, as crucial to our knowledge of who Jesus is. At the same time, however, he does not (nor will our model) divorce this evidencing role of Jesus' "visible works" from the inner testimony of the Spirit. That the resurrected Jesus was accessible to the senses is part of what gives the facticity of the resurrection its claim upon the disciples and (through their testimony) upon us. But the Spirit's role is particularly crucial in disclosing the inner meaning of Jesus' messiahship, of his relation to the Father, and of his extraordinary significance for our own lives. Commenting later on the apostle John's proclamation (I John 4: 14) that "we have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world", Calvin thus says (p. 243),

> And by seeing, he does not mean any sort of seeing but what belongs to faith, by which they recognized the glory of God in Christ, according to what follows, that he was sent to be the Saviour of the world; and this knowledge flows from the illumination of the Spirit.

2.3 A similar account of the synergistic relation between ordinary sources and extraordinary sources of warrant can be found in Calvin's commentary on the opening verses of Luke's gospel, where Luke explains to Theophilus his purpose in writing. Calvin's version is:

> Forasmuch as many have undertaken to compose a narrative of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of the Word; It seemed good to me also, having carefully examined all things from the beginning, to write to thee in detail, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mayest acknowledge the certainty of those things whereof thou has been instructed.[13]

Luke's words here seem to highlight the importance of ordinary historical credibility to our certainty about the gospel. Commenting on Luke's apparent emphasis on providing a reliable narrative of what was believed "among us", Calvin again considers the objection that the writer of Scripture places inappropriate weight on knowledge by ordinary human faculties. Such a critic, Calvin notes, would fault the writer of Scripture because he

> appears to make faith rest on a weak foundation, its relation to men, while it ought to rest on the Word of God only, and certainly the full assurance of faith is ascribed to the sealing of the Spirit (I Thess 1: 5; Heb 10: 22).

But, as before, Calvin finds the objection faulty for driving a wedge between these two sources of warrant. He thus continues:

> I reply, if the Word of God does not hold the first rank, faith will not be satisfied with any human testimonies; but, where the inward confirmation of the Spirit has already taken place, it [faith] allows them some weight in the historical knowledge of the facts. By historical knowledge I mean that knowledge which we obtain respecting events, either by our own observation or by the statement of others. For, with respect to the visible works of God, it is equally proper to listen to eye-witnesses as to rely on experience.

Our knowledge, Calvin goes on to stress, has a two-fold source of warrant, neither of which must displace the other:

> Besides, those whom Luke follows were not private authors, but also *ministers of the Word*. . . . It is a great matter that he affirms them to have been

13. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, Vol. 1, trans. Rev. William Pringle, in Calvin Translation Society, *Calvin's Commentaries* (22 volumes), Vol. 16 Part II, (Baker Book House, reprinted 1999), p. 3. All quotations from Calvin upon this passage are taken from pages 3–7.

eye-witnesses, but, by calling them ministers, he takes them out of the common order of men, that our faith may have its support in heaven and not on earth. . . . It is thus evident that God has employed every method to prevent our faith from being suspended on the doubtful and shifting opinions of men. . . . But let us attend to the remarkable distinction[14] which our Lord has laid down, that foolish credulity may not insinuate itself under the name of faith.

Both in Scripture and Calvin, it thus seems to me, we find suggestions that in a full account of Christian warrant, our ordinary faculties and the role of the Spirit need to be, not sundered, nor merely conjoined, but synergistically linked. Such linking is also implicit in Jesus' own promise (John 14: 26) to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples to "remind you of everything I have said to you", thus working in synergy with the ordinary cognitive faculty of the disciples' memory.

3. A Sensible Evidentialist Model

Having mined Calvin for cues, what, now, does our evidentialist model of Christian warrant say? Well, like Plantinga's model, it affirms that God the Father sent his only begotten Son into the world to reconcile and restore fallen humanity and to inaugurate a new kingdom; and it also includes much of what Plantinga's model says about the *Sensus Divinitatis* and the Holy Spirit. But instead of making these the sole source of warrant, our model goes on to stress that God, in sending his Son, also performed through him certain miraculous "visible works of God", both to attest to his Son's special status, and to manifest the character of the new kingdom. On the model here proposed, these visible works have divinely-intended evidencing and disclosing functions. To fulfil the intended function, these "visible works of God" performed through Jesus were "not done in a corner"—as Paul puts it to King Agrippa (Acts 19:31); rather, they were seen by many people, and testified to by those intimate disciples of Jesus who not only observed their factual side, but also (through the work of the Holy Spirit) came to discern their significance.

14. The "remarkable distinction" is, I take it, between Luke's affirmation of the apostles as "eyewitnesses" to events fulfilled, and his affirmation of them as "ministers [or servants] of the word". It is not entirely clear what Calvin means, in stressing that attending to this distinction is necessary to avoid "the danger of foolish credulity . . . [insinuating] itself under the name of faith". But one possibility is that he thinks we are especially vulnerable to such credulity if we wrongly neglect the first source of warrant—the "great matter" to which Luke affirms the apostles "to have been eye-witnesses". (A gospel that made extensive detailed claims about past events based entirely upon a supernatural revelation would be less like the Christian gospels, and more like the Book of Mormon given to Joseph Smith by Moroni.) To be sure, he might also mean the opposite: resting confidence on the human witness alone would be "foolish credulity". But we favour the former, and once again, as Plantinga says (p. 173), "Whatever Calvin thinks, it's our model".

On our model, then, God's design plan for us entails an incarnational epistemology paralleling his incarnational ontology: he intends our knowledge of God to take ordinary flesh even as God himself did. By the resurrection and other "visible works" of Jesus, God means the gospel to engage the ordinary faculties of fallen humans like Agrippa. On the model, this adds a dimension of epistemic accountability to our response, for it now behoves us to reflectively ponder and wrestle with the gospel proclamation using our ordinary cognitive powers.[15] At the same time, God provides the Holy Spirit to those who would receive this proclamation, in part by working in a synergistic concurrence with these ordinary belief-forming processes. On the new model, the Gospel proclamation does not 'swing free' from our ordinary ways of knowing historical events. Instead, it derives a crucial part of its warrant from the fact that the resurrection and other evidencing 'visible works' of God came within the perceptual access of Jesus' followers, and within the testimonial access of those coming after them.

4. Plantinga's Objections Considered

On Plantinga's model, we have seen, Christian belief 'swings free' or 'floats free' of the historical considerations, at least so far as the positive source of its warrant goes.[16] On the alternative model I've sketched, the core Christian proclamation of the resurrection depends crucially for its positive warrant upon our ordinary means of historical knowing. I now turn to some considerations Plantinga gives against such a dependence. Some of these apply only to extreme versions of evidentialism, which he associates with John Locke, Richard Swinburne, and unnamed evangelical thinkers.[17] Others, however, are relevant to the more moderate evidentialist model given here, and a consideration allows us to develop that model more fully.

4.1 One version of the historical model grants the Holy Spirit a function in changing the affections, but proposes that once this work is done, our ordinary noetic faculties are sufficient "to enable us to see the truth of the message of the gospel". Against this, Plantinga objects that if knowledge of the gospel truths were "by virtue of the ordinary faculties employed in historical investigation", then "only a few people" would acquire this knowledge, and it would

15. Many other passages of Scripture are relevant here. Before the Athenians, for example, the apostle Paul urges that the special status of Jesus is something whereof God has "given assurance to all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). And even in the midst of the Holy Spirit's dramatic work at Pentecost, the apostle Peter reasoned with those present that Jesus of Nazareth was "approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves know".
16. Plantinga does not of course mean that it is in principle impossible for historical considerations to provide defeaters against Christian belief: see *Warranted Christian Belief*, Ch. 11.
17. This version is extreme in requiring inferential evidence for all the claims of Christian theism, in using evidence for the resurrection to secure virtually all of Christianity, and in wanting (on some variants at least) not to have, as he puts it "any truck with special faculties or supernatural belief-producing processes" (p. 268).

require "great time and effort" on their part (p. 270). Here, however, we must make a distinction. It is one thing to say that knowledge of Gospel truths depends upon the ordinary faculties that historical investigation also employs. It is another thing to claim that such knowledge depends upon detailed sophisticated historical investigation and inference itself.[18] We shall see shortly that the former claim is central to the evidentialist model proposed here. But for the sake of argument, suppose the latter claim were central. Would the objection be damaging?

I do not think so. The objection assumes that according to the evidentialist, if an individual's belief has warrant by virtue of specialised inferential evidence, then that individual him- or herself must possess and process this evidence. Some evidentialists do speak this way, but in so doing they err. We can see this by reflecting on claims that we, almost all of us, would agree have their warrant by virtue of inferential evidence—the claim that electrons exist, for example, or that Jupiter is farther away from us than Mars. The warrant of my belief in such propositions depends on inferential evidence; but it is not necessary that I myself, as an individual, possess this evidence. A sensible evidentialism about (say) electrons must be 'communitarian', recognising that in science, and elsewhere, each of us properly learns, believes, and knows many things by virtue of belonging to an epistemic *community*, so that warrant accrues by specialised inferential tasks discharged by specialised members of that community. My belief about electrons needs inferential evidence, to be sure; but this evidence can be something possessed and processed not by me, but by others with the requisite skills, time, and resources.

So also for evidentialism about religious claims, like the proclamation that Jesus was resurrected from the grave. If the evidentialist holds that the individual's belief gets warrant by virtue of specialised historical evidence, this need not involve the extravagant 'Robinson Crusoe' assumption that each individual must himself possess this specialised evidence. The sensible evidentialist will instead be a communitarian, recognising that epistemically as well as in other ways, we are each members of a body. When inferential evidence is essential to the warrant of one of my beliefs, what is essential, typically, is that this evidence be possessed and processed by appropriate members of community, who have the requisite skills, time, and resources for the specialised inferential tasks.[19] Sensible evidentialism is communitarian, not individualistic.

Interestingly, such an evidentialism makes especially good sense given an externalist perspective on warrant like Plantinga's. If warrant depends only on what falls within one's cognitive access, as internalists claim, then it is indeed hard to see how the warrant of your belief can depend on whether,

18. And it is, we shall see later, yet a third thing to claim that it depends upon there being a consensus among experts possessing Ph.D.'s in New Testament studies, or in other disciplines that purport to know how to conduct such investigation properly.
19. It is also necessary, of course, that there be an appropriate connection between my believing, and the work of these experts. For a fuller explanation of 'sensible evidentialism', see the two essays cited in note 6.

unknown to you, certain experts have successfully discharged certain evidential tasks. But this suggestion becomes a live option given an externalist perspective. So Plantinga would, I hope, consider our type of evidentialism the more serious contender, and embrace it himself as a way of explicating what it *means* to be an evidentialist about those beliefs (e.g., that electrons exist) that even he thinks do "need evidence". This way of explicating the issue does not, however, dissolve the issue with respect to Christian or theistic belief. In *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga makes clear that he is opposing not an just extravagant Robinson Crusoe evidentialism about Christian theism, but this more sensible and challenging evidentialism as well. My point here is that so far as I can see, his first objection applies only to extravagant evidentialism: it affects sensible evidentialism not at all.

4.2 Plantinga objects, secondly, that if Christian belief derived its warrant from testimonial evidence, it would be shot through with uncertainty. This is because:

> What is being taught, after all, is not something that chimes straightforwardly with our ordinary experience. It isn't like an account of an ancient war, or of the cruelty of the Athenians to the Melians. . . . That sort of thing would be easy enough to believe. What we have instead, however, is the claim that a certain human being—Jesus of Nazareth—is also, astonishingly, the unique Son of God who has existed from eternity. Furthermore, this man died, which is not uncommon, but then three days later rose from the dead, which is astonishing indeed. Still further, it is by way of his atoning suffering and death and resurrection that we are justified, that our sins are forgiven, and that we may have life and have it more abundantly. This is heady stuff indeed, and the mere fact that some ancient authors believed it would certainly be insufficient for a sensible conviction on our part. (pp. 270–1)

The main strand in Plantinga's objection here is essentially Hume's argument: an event like a resurrection has a very high antecedent improbability. Because of its lack of analogy with ordinary experience, it is, antecedent to testimony, an event of the most improbable sort; and such staggering antecedent improbability effortlessly defeats any positive evidence that might be provided by testimony. I see this as a serious challenge; indeed, dissatisfaction with standard evangelical responses to it led me, for many years, to distrust a historical-evidential apologetic, despite the key role played by that approach in my own early Christian pilgrimage as a college student.[20]

Without going into detail, I now think that the Achilles' heel of Hume's argument is that it estimates antecedent improbability entirely on the basis

20. See my youthful 'The Problem of Miracle in the Apologetic from History', in *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, 30 (1978), pp. 154–163. The suggestions made by Clark Pinnock in his reply (pp. 158–9) now seem to me to be very promising, and I draw on them here.

of considerations 'from below', by essentially statistical considerations of how often the event (when classified under a certain type) has been observed to occur. Such considerations are not irrelevant, but equally relevant to evaluating testimonial evidence are considerations 'from above', where we consider how expectable the event might be in the light of larger theoretical and metaphysical considerations, bringing these to bear upon the full historical context of the alleged event.[21]

And here, the sensible evidentialist greatly benefits by incorporating some of the central positive insights of Plantinga's own model. She will allow that a *Sensus Divinitatis* can ground a warm and living theistic belief, that the Holy Spirit can awaken the heart to a sense of God's holiness and love, and that this can make the story of God's work with Israel a living option. If this background knowledge is then brought to bear upon the testimony to the resurrection, our model claims that the antecedent improbability loses its defeating power. The resurrection remains antecedently highly improbable, to be sure. But its improbability becomes more like the improbability of my wife's winning the Michigan lottery (or, perhaps, being struck by a meteorite), and less like the improbability of her being kidnapped by space aliens. Such improbabilities no longer effortlessly defeat ordinary testimony, so the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus can begin to appear in its true colours—as far more impressive, on our model, than the testimonial evidence for most other events of ancient history, on which we routinely form historical beliefs.

There is also another strand in the above passage: a historical approach, Plantinga urges, will leave us in uncertainty because the Christian proclamation involves such "heady" doctrines about the Trinity, the eternal pre-existence of Christ, and so forth. These larger doctrines, indeed, give rise for Plantinga to an "argument from dwindling probabilities" against the cool-rationalist model, which seeks to rest the entire system of Christian doctrine on historical evidence for the resurrection. But our model here aspires to nothing so overweening. In our earlier discussion, we saw that the teachings of Scripture (and of Calvin), while prizing the way our ordinary faculties give access to the resurrection of Jesus, are relatively restrained in what they see this event as 'proving'. Perhaps the strongest claim is made by Paul in the opening of Romans, when he says that by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, God "declared him to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness". And even here, the disclosure of the meaning of the event is closely tied to the Spirit's witness. Though most of the church's emerging doctrine will eventually impinge on our interpretation of the event, such doctrine is not logically extracted from the event itself. There is thus no long line of claims to be factored in accord with the multiplication axiom of the probability calculus. Our model answers Plantinga's Dwindling Probability Objection by emulating this restraint.

21. For this reason, evidence of a massive meteorite impact wiping out the dinosaurs is not at all neutralised merely by the fact that so massive a collision has never occurred in recorded human history.

5. The Lack-of-Consensus Problem

I turn, finally, to a third objection Plantinga directs against a historical-evidentialist model on which our knowledge of (say) Jesus' resurrection is "by virtue of the ordinary faculties employed in historical investigation". Plantinga urges that if our belief that Jesus rose from death depends for its warrant on the merits of the "historical case", then our estimate of the probability of this event should be in some way commensurate with the degree of consensus among the "experts". Given the deep discord that we find among the experts here, this view will be unable to assign any substantial probability to the resurrection. He writes:

> What is this probability (of the resurrection)? . . . Even if you had a fine command of the literature and thought there *was* a rather good historical case here, you would presumably think it pretty speculative and chancy. . . . Given all the controversy among the experts, we should probably declare this probability inscrutable, that is, such that we can't really say with any confidence what it is. (p. 276)

The problem raised here is especially pertinent given the communitarian dimension of the 'sensible evidentialist' model proposed here. Earlier, I illustrated this communitarian dimension by referring to our belief that electrons exist or that Jupiter is farther away than Mars. These are typical cases of beliefs where the warrant of my belief can depend on inferential evidence possessed and processed by others with specialised expertise. But in these cases, there is a sizeable consensus among the experts that the evidence gives strong support to the propositions, and this does indeed seem very relevant to why my belief can have warrant. In the case of the resurrection, however, there is no such consensus among those experts whose academic training and vocation is the historical investigation of the New Testament documents. Does this not mean that on an evidentialist model, especially a communitarian evidentialism, it is implausible to think the ordinary Christian's belief in Jesus' resurrection has warrant "by virtue of the ordinary faculties employed in historical investigation"?

5.1 Meeting this challenge requires us to elaborate the evidentialist model in several ways. We can best begin by reflecting more carefully on the idea that according to this model, our knowledge of Jesus' resurrection is, as Plantinga phrases, it by way of "the ordinary faculties employed in historical investigation" (p. 270). Earlier, we distinguished two ideas here. The first is that Christian warrant regarding Jesus' resurrection rests on the same ordinary faculties as those employed by historical investigation. The second is that it rests on historical investigation itself—either with or without requiring compliance with the dictates of current modern research programs. Focusing on the first idea first, let us ask this: what are 'the ordinary faculties employed in historical investigation'?

On one hand, they are (in large part at least) the same faculties as are involved whenever humans acquire knowledge of the past by way of testimony.

Most of us, for example, have beliefs about some events in the lives of grandparents or great grandparents.[22] We have gained these without the benefit of expert historians; but in so doing, we rely on ordinary faculties and dispositions that historians also rely on. And when early Christians like Theophilus (to whom Luke writes his gospel) hear accounts of Jesus' life and believe them, it is not implausible to think the same dispositions are being engaged. A central claim of our model, similarly, is that engagement of these ordinary dispositions plays an important role in grounding the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection, contributing to the claim that proclamation has upon us, and (when it is accepted) to its warrant.

This, by itself, leaves open whether such warrant rests on the 'ordinary faculties employed in historical investigation' in the second sense, which is perhaps one closer to that intended by Plantinga (and the historical apologists he criticises). It leaves open whether Christian warrant depends on the expert skills and procedures and body of considerations and evidence that modern academic scholars deploy in investigating an ancient document in order to evaluate its authenticity and reliability and meaning. The idea that resurrection belief gets a crucial part of its warrant by virtue of the ordinary dispositions for learning about past events is not quite the same as the idea that this event can be inferentially established by experts using the 'expert procedures' of their craft. In fact, it is not even near to being the same idea. Accordingly, our evidentialist model of Christian warrant must distinguish them, and try to illuminate the place of each in the warrant of resurrection belief.

5.2 For the model proposed here, I have said, it is the first of the two above ideas that is really central. The centre of the model is thus *not* the picture of a trained investigator carefully sifting the evidence and using the tools of an academic discipline to make inferences from it. Indeed, when we consider how we acquire most of our ordinary historical beliefs,[23] such evidential sifting (whether our own or others) plays a rather small role. You believe, say, that Lincoln was shot dead in Ford's Theater around 1865. This is a historical belief—one, presumably, with a fairly high degree of warrant. Nevertheless, you—if you are like most people—have never weighed the original testimonial evidence for it, or inferred it from that testimony. Indeed you have few beliefs about what this testimony even is; and those you do have, are based on your beliefs about how he was assassinated, rather than the other way round. Your belief arises from testimony alright, and gets warrant by way of testimony. But it is not, typically, that your beliefs about the testimony function as premises for inferences.

22. I believe, for example, that my maternal grandfather came to America on a ship on which he worked as a seaman, that in New York he illegally 'jumped ship' and made his way to Michigan, and that his fiancée, my grandmother, left home with her parents' disapproval and joined him there, beginning their new life together in abject poverty. This belief arose from the testimony of my grandparents to their children, who passed it along to their children.
23. I use the phrase 'historical beliefs' as shorthand for beliefs about past events acquired and held in the way that most of us hold such beliefs.

What then is the nature of that process? And what place does expert inference have within it? To answer this, I shall first characterise the ordinary process in two ways, one broad, and the other narrow.[24] I will then note how it resembles and differs from the processes which, on the model here proposed, are essential to the warrant of Christian historical beliefs.

On a broad characterisation of how historical events produce beliefs by virtue of testimony, we can distinguish three stages or moments. Stage one is the emergence, from testimony and other direct evidence, of the first standard portrayal or portrayals of the event. For events like Lincoln's assassination, this may occur in the immediate aftermath of the event. What happened in Ford's Theater was the occasion[25] for various perceptions, testimonies, interpretations, and the like on the part of those close to the event, as well as for its physical detritus (the body of Lincoln, the smoking pistol, etc.). From all this, as processed by reporters, police, and others, there emerged an account or family of accounts of the event transmitted to the immediate wider culture.

Stage Two is an ongoing or recursive process whereby each succeeding generation processes this initial portrayal anew, modifying or nuancing it in the light of new information as well as their own emerging interests, perspectives, and presuppositions. This re-processing can occur through activities of many types, not just academic scholarship; it can occur through a Warren Commission report or a popular film by Oliver Stone. The role of academic scholarship may be minimal, or it may be massive.

Stage Three is the process by which such activities are actually transmitted and received in a given generation. In our age, this includes the process of producing textbooks used to induct school-children and others into their historical beliefs about this event, as well as the portrayals in television, and popular as well as scholarly literature. Since I am including 'receivers' in this stage, it would (in the Lincoln case) include myself and Plantinga as 'receivers' of a transmitted portrayal of the death of Lincoln, acquiring our beliefs in our pre-school or elementary school years.

Let us call this three-staged process the process of ordinary testimonial induction. Here 'induction' is used to highlight that the process is one by which persons are 'inducted' into historical beliefs. Such induction often occurs well before the 'receivers' reach intellectual maturity, so the activity of analytically sifting inferential evidence plays a rather small role in the overall process, occurring mostly in the work of teachers and scholars within the second stage. But such activity does not seem at all necessary for the process

24. Externalist epistemologies face an option between characterising belief-forming processes narrowly, in terms of the processes going on within the skin of the cognitive agent, so to speak, or broadly, where part of the process involves causal chains outside the agent's skin. Plantinga tends to go for the narrow option; glitches in the process more widely considered then get identified as having to do with the circumstances or mini-environment rather than with the belief-forming process. What I say here could be transposed into this idiom, but I think it is useful to look at the problem from the view of the broader way of characterising the processes.
25. Here we do not want to neglect the role of construction that social scientists tell us is crucial to perception, memory, and testimony.

of testimonial induction to be warrant-conferring. As noted earlier, most of us have warranted beliefs about the lives of grandparents; testimonial induction has produced these beliefs without the benefit of the intervention of expert historians. And Plantinga's theory of warrant gives one account of why this is so: because the process is at each of its stages functioning properly, functioning in accord with a successful alethic design plan for the formation of historical beliefs.[26]

5.3 With these three broad stages in mind, we can now ask how, on the model, one might think about the warrant of Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection. At the first stage, the model says that Jesus' resurrection, like Lincoln's assassination, was a real event that occasioned the perceptions, testimony, interpretations and the like of those closest to it. Thence arose a family of accounts which, within the lifetime of the disciples, became the standard portrayal of the gospel narratives. In the second stage, succeeding generations then both embraced that portrayal, and processed it in the light of further evidence, interests, and perspectives. And these enriched portrayals then generated the accounts by which the events have been disseminated to each generation. The belief in Jesus' resurrection can thus be seen as grounded in an ordinary process strongly similar to that producing our beliefs in Lincoln's assassination. If our general epistemology gives its blessing to the latter (as I think Plantinga's externalist epistemology may neatly do), there is no immediate obstacle to giving it also to the former.

There are also differences, however, and we must ask what their import is here. At the first stage, it is clear that for Jesus' resurrection, but not Lincoln's assassination, there have been rival portrayals from the outset: the gospels thus report the Roman allegations that the disciples stole the body of Jesus, and then prevaricated about his resurrection. At the second stage, it is clear that much modern historical scholarship has also driven a deep wedge between the 'Christ of faith' and the 'Jesus of history,' between the 'canonical Jesus' of the Gospels and the 'historical Jesus' who actually walked the roads of Palestine. This has meant that at the third stage, the cultural dissemination process is itself thoroughly contested, at least for those who go through a modern university with their ears open. This brings us back to Plantinga's objection from the lack of consensus among the experts. But we are now tackling the problem from an externalist perspective on historical knowledge, in accord with our model's aspiration to be more wholehearted in applying Plantinga's own general epistemology.

5.4 So we can now put the problem this way. When characterised broadly and from the outside, ordinary historical beliefs arise from causal cultural processes by which events lead to beliefs in later generations through the medium of perceptions, testimony, interpretation, and the like. The beliefs have warrant when the processes are working in accord with a successful alethic design plan

26. I am taking some liberties here in transposing his theory so it applies to processes characterised in the 'broad' way discussed in the last footnote but one.

in circumstances covered by that plan. And for our evidentialist model of resurrection-belief, so far so good. But how does disagreement among the experts factor in here? When does it matter, and when doesn't it, and why? To get at this, we also need to characterise the process more narrowly and from the inside. As belief-formers ourselves, what epistemic principles are involved when we form beliefs about the past in the way we ordinarily do?

Here we can profitably genuflect toward that patron saint of Reformed epistemology, Thomas Reid. As Reid saw it, when we believe in the ordinary way by transmission of testimony, this is in the first place by virtue of the prima facie credentials of the testimony. Suppose I am parking my car on Cameron Street in Chapel Hill, when someone walks up and tells me she is a university employee, and that I am parking in a no-parking area. I look the person in the eye; I see an obvious earnestness with no sign of joking or malice; her words have a ring of truth to them. And so, though I do not see any no-parking signs, I form the belief that she is who she says, and that parking here is illegal. I form my belief by a kind of discerning trust in testimony.[27] Reid refers to the disposition producing such beliefs as "the principle of credulity", and in his account of this disposition, Plantinga leans heavily on Reid.[28] The really central point is that testimony, like memory and perception, has its own prima facie warrant-conferring epistemic power: its warrant is not a result of its first being independently validated by other faculties. And we must not suppose that the sophisticated historian has outgrown this principle of credulity, replacing it with some practice of never accepting ostensible testimony until one has first independently proven its authenticity and reliability. If we gave testimony no prima facie epistemic power, we could never get the historian's enterprise off the ground.

But this means that the ordinary person who reads (say) the gospel of Luke, grapples with what it says, and eventually takes it to be what it purports to be, is already forming her belief in a way that contributes to its having warrant. Of course, she probably knows that what she reads is not Luke's original writing; she realises she is reading something laboured over by generations of translators. (The title page of her Bible tells her that much.) So she knows that she is depending on the labours of translators, so that she is receiving this testimony by a tradition. But the tradition also claims to have diligently passed down Luke's testimony. And this too is testimony, which Plantinga's Reidian theory allows us to see as having its own prima facie 'epistemising power'. The crucial upshot of the Reidian perspective, I am suggesting, is that when beliefs get warrant in the ordinary way from a testimonial tradition, the warrant does not arise primarily from the inferential activities of academic historians. It arises instead from the 'proper functioning' of the entire process. This makes historical beliefs arising from testimony of witnesses somewhat

27. In using the phrase 'discerning trust', I was helped by conversation with Stephen Evans. In challenging the modern project of separating the Christ of faith from the Jesus of history, Evans discusses, more than I can here, how basic world-views may rightly colour such judgements of personal trustworthiness. See his *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith* (Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 335 ff.

28. See *Warrant and Proper Function*, Ch. 4.

different from beliefs that electrons exist and the like, for the latter are anchored not in original witnesses, but in the inferential activities of specialised experts, whose consensus thus plays a crucial role in generating warrant.

5.5 In the light of this, we can seek more clarity about why the expert investigations of trained historians are relevant at all to ordinary historical beliefs resting on testimonial induction. This relevance arises, it seems to me, in two main ways. First, there are many historical questions the answering of which depends primarily on types of historical evidence other than testimony. Second, even for convictions resulting from a testimonial tradition, these convictions can conflict (or cohere) with conclusions based on historical investigation of other sources of evidence. If a testimonial tradition is authentic and reliable, then conclusions based on it should ultimately be sustained and enriched by these other types of evidence. For example, if Luke's gospel is the relatively early document that it purports to be, then we would not expect the experts to find a large body of external evidence indicating that it is (say) the product of some group in 200 AD, creating stories about Jesus to solve problems in the church at that period. If expert investigation did actually show this, there would exist a significant defeater to resurrection belief arising from the alleged testimonial tradition. The defeater would mean, indeed, that such believing lacked warrant all along, for although the act of trusting in the apparent testimony may have been in accord with a design plan, the larger process of transmission would not be in accord with this design plan. The credulity disposition would have been functioning in what Plantinga calls a defective "cognitive environment".[29]

Now this may seem to return us to Plantinga's lack-of-consensus objection. For over the last hundred and fifty years, the tendency of much New Testament scholarship is just along these lines. Many scholars claim to have uncovered potent defeaters to the testimonial tradition concerning Jesus, and the scholarly community has not, as a whole, arrived at a consensus that resolves these so as to vindicate the tradition. Does not this lack of consensus mean that belief arising from trusting the testimonial tradition has defeaters, and can no longer have warrant? Doesn't Plantinga's objection still go through?

I don't think so, for Plantinga's objection is quite different from the legitimate defeater issue we are now envisioning. Plantinga's original objection, as I read it, supposes that on an evidentialist model, the warrant of beliefs about Jesus depends on consensus among the experts much as the warrant for beliefs about electrons does; it is this that made lack of consensus a severe problem. Once an evidentialist model embraces a Reidian perspective on testimonial evidence, this problem largely dissolves, for testimonial warrant does not require expert historians at all. What is left, as a kind of residue, is a different matter: that testimonial warrant can be 'defeated' if there is in fact a glitch in the testimonial chain, making for a faulty 'mini-environment'. But

29. See *Warrant and Proper Function*, Ch. 2.

here, lack of consensus among experts is not by itself tantamount to the existence of such a defeater.[30] For as Plantinga himself stresses, in New Testament scholarship we find competing research programs animated by prior commitments of a deeply metaphysical and even ideological character. Even if the alleged defeaters are entirely spurious, we might well expect this battlefield to show wild disparity about their worth. The fact of such disparity—that is, the actual lack of scholarly consensus—thus gives us scant reason to think this testimony has real defeaters. Of course, it does not give us reason to conclude that the testimony is authentic and reliable either. But on a Reidian perspective, we do not need reason to *conclude* this: for the epistemising power of testimony does not arise from inferential consensus among scholars in the first place. Instead, testimony has its own inherent epistemising power.

5.6 Though lack of consensus among the experts does not by itself impugn warrant, the evidentialist model proposed here allows that it may be relevant to ordinary resurrection-belief in other ways. For some people, for example, such lack of consensus may cause problems for their reflective beliefs, i.e., for their second-order beliefs about whether their beliefs about Jesus have warrant. For even if such beliefs enjoy great warrant, their grasp of the scholarly dissensus may leave them in a poor position for reflectively ascertaining that this is so. Additionally, and perhaps as a result, it may significantly affect the *rationality* of their continuing to hold their beliefs. Thus, while sharply distinguishing these two issues from the issue of warrant, the model proposed here does not enjoin aloofness toward serious historical investigation.[31]

30. In this context, I am using the term 'defeater' in an externalist sense, roughly along the lines that the term is used by those who proposed defeasibility clauses in response to Gettier problems. A closer analysis would have to make clearer how claims about the existence of such defeaters in turn affect whether a first-order belief grounded in testimony is rational, and this in turn may affect the warrant with which he can hold the belief. In addition, we would need to attend more closely than I can here to the requirement that the design plan itelf may require that in certain cases, we evidentially 'inspect' the credentials of testimony before acquiescing in the promptings of our untutored credulity disposition. Cf Reid:

> And as, in many instances, Reason, even in her maturity, borrows aid from testimony, so in others she mutually gives aid to it, and strengthens its authority. For, as we find good reason to reject testimony in some cases, so in others we find good reason to rely upon it with perfect security, in our most important concerns. The character, the numbers, the disinterestedness of the witnesses, the impossibility of collusion, and the incredulity of their concurring in their testimony without collusion, may give an irresistible strength to testimony, compared to which its native and intrinsic authority is very inconsiderable".

From *Thomas Reid's Inquiry and Essays*, ed. Ronald Beanblossom and Keith Lehrer (Hackett, 1983), p. 97.

31. Neither, I should add here, does Plantinga's, since his model, like ours, allows that even Spirit-instigated warrant might suffer setbacks due to defeaters produced by historical investigation. Much work remains to be done in this area. In Chs. 9–12 of his *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith* (Oxford University Press, 1996), Stephen Evans usefully explores a somewhat different way of applying the distinction between 'knowing' and 'knowing that one knows' to these issues. My own account below has benefited from comments by Lee Hardy.

In this context, however, what is needed in order to 'defeat the defeaters'? Given the quasi-metaphysical character of the research programmes driving much New Testaments scholarship, requiring consensus seems too much. Instead, one might more modestly require the presence of 'counter-communities' which are able to defuse the alleged defeaters using the tools of scholarship with integrity. But when we look at the history of Biblical scholarship, this more modest requirement is often satisfied. For a small but instructive sample, consider how a small band of English scholars met the first wave of German higher criticism; the story is engagingly told by Stephen Neill.[32] As Neill tells it, Tübingen higher criticism, incubating across the channel for decades, exploded into England in 1860 with the publication of *Essays and Reviews*. Using the historical methods applied to other documents, the Tübingen school "questioned the dates ascribed by tradition to most of the New Testament books". And its own dating, says Neill, "brought them down to a period at which they must be almost without value in relation to Jesus Christ himself and to the earliest stages of Christian history". Christians in England, realising what was at stake, were "almost in a state of panic"; but what was needed, says Neill, was someone who would investigate the issues of dating fearlessly but "less hampered by presuppositions", so as to show "on the basis of minutely critical work that the answers given in Germany . . . were not the only answers that were compatible with the known facts".

"The hour," says Neill (p. 32), "brought forth the man": Joseph Barber Lightfoot, who in 1861 was—at 33 years old—appointed professor of divinity at Cambridge. Lightfoot became convinced that the Tübingen challenge could be met only by considering the New Testament "in relation to the whole Christian literature of the first two centuries". The key lay in the use of New Testament writings by the early church fathers, but in the confusion of spurious works, the dating of this literature was itself mired in confusion. Lightfoot thus set out to find an 'Archimedean point' that could be used to evaluate the dating assigned by the Tübingen school. Aided by Hort, Wescott, and others, he found it in the writings of Ignatius, Clement, and Eusebius, and when the critical work was done, says Neill, the Tübingen hypothesis "collapsed like a house of cards". Says Neill:

> Zahn and Lightfoot had done their work. They had identified the precise point at which the Tübingen theories were most open to attack; if the attack was successful here, the champions of the Tübingen school would have no power to defend themselves elsewhere. The theories had been killed stone dead. (p. 55)

And here Neill adds something. Lightfoot, he remarks, almost did the job too well. For his dating is now so taken for granted that theology students today have no idea that one of the greatest critical battles of the century was fought over it. As with Newton's *Principia*, says Neill:

32. Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861–1961* (Oxford University Press, 1964). Quotations in this paragraph are from p. 38.

> We all know the conclusions; who troubles himself today with those proofs which it took the great mind of Newton fifteen years to work out. This is a pity. . . . If I had my way, at least five hundred pages of Lightfoot's *Apostolic Fathers* would be required reading for every theological student in his first year. (p. 57)

Pity or not, we are here back to the communitarian dimension of evidentialism. Though the dating of the patristic writings is a taken-for-granted assumption of the theology student, the warrant of this assumption may still arise from the fact, unknown to him, that Lightfoot and his colleagues did the inferential detective work they did. And their work, rebutting the Tübingen critique and sustaining the traditional posture, helps us appreciate the warrant of our belief when we take Luke's gospel as what it purports to be. By using their historical expertise to meet the challenge of their time, our model affirms that Lightfoot and his colleagues also contribute something to the epistemic status of resurrection-belief today. They constitute, as it were, a 'counter-community' enabling us to see through an alleged defeater. And in so doing, their work helps discharge the exhortation urged by Calvin (section 2.2 above): "Let us remember that the gospel was not at the beginning made up of vague rumors, but that the apostles were authentic preachers of what they had seen."

6. Conclusion

Plantinga's model opens an important perspective on how Christian theistic belief might gain warrant, as I hope to have confirmed by drawing on much of it in the model presented here. What needs special scrutiny, however, is his thesis that warrant-wise, Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection 'swings free' of historical considerations, deriving no warrant worth mentioning from our ordinary means of access to historical facts. To facilitate such scrutiny, I have proposed a model which gives ordinary sources of warrant a more crucial role here. Such an evidentialist model, I have then argued, does not make such historical warrant objectionably contingent on *consensus* in the battlefield of modern and post-modern scripture scholarship.

Nor does our model preclude many of the roles of the Holy Spirit to which Plantinga rightly calls attention. Our stance toward the New Testament testimony inevitably makes huge claims upon our lives that have little parallel elsewhere: these claims engage the whole person in the depths of the person. Accordingly, on the model proposed here, our response to this testimony will not normally depend solely on the ordinary mechanisms of historical testimony. But neither does it float free of this. Instead, on the model, the Spirit typically takes up the historical mechanisms, and by working in synergy with them, enables them to have their proper effect in this total engagement. Here our model seeks an *incarnational* epistemology, finding light in Herman Ridderbos's remark that:

> . . . the Spirit's witness in the Scriptures takes place through the testimony of men. Rather than detracting from the character of the Spirit's witness,

however, this points the way to a more precise determination of the quality of that witness. The fact that this human witness was taken up into the power and work of the Spirit and that the Spirit gave that witness the stamp of His authority in no way diminishes the fact that *men* were witnesses, in a productive and receptive sense, of God's great works in Jesus Christ. Not only did the Spirit inspire men to speak and write what they had received from Him, but He caused them to speak and write what they as witnesses had seen and heard with their human eyes and ears. Therefore the written witness of the New Testament does not lose its human character. This is so not only because it is expressed in human language and writing but also because it is an eyewitness report and as such remains human, the fruit of a perception that was not infinite and of a reproduction that did not exceed the limits of human comprehension and memory.[33]

So Ridderbos, from a theological perspective, urges that in the witness of Scripture to Jesus, the Holy Spirit synergistically "takes up" the testimony of those closest to the events. If this is so, might we not be functioning less than properly if, in our response to that testimony, we make the Spirit's instigation a surrogate for the ordinary means by which beliefs get warrant by virtue of reliable testimony?[34] And if this defect is mirrored in our epistemological model, might we not be short-selling the claims that God intends the Gospel to make upon our ordinary means of cognition, so as to engage the attention, reflection, and assent of us His wayward children?

But here we enter the province where the epistemologist needs the theologian. This is in accord with Plantinga's dictum that epistemological issues about what is needed for warrant cannot be divorced from ontology—from questions about whether God is, who God is, and what God has done. In proposing this rival to Plantinga's model, I am thus leaning gratefully on his central insight that in these matters, epistemic and ontic issues are closely intertwined.

33. Herman Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1988) p. 63. Ridderbos presumably uses 'men' in the generic sense. For of course the New Testament accounts have women as the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, despite the fact that this would scarcely have enhanced its credibility in the patriarchal culture of that time.
34. If worked out theologically, our model would affirm that the work of the Holy Spirit 'restores' the historical mechanism of testimonial induction to approximate more closely the effect that it would have in an unfallen world. In such a world witnesses would report events, and hearers would receive them, without any of the distortions that result from our deadly desire to live in autonomy from God. But it could also affirm that the Holy Spirit's work gives an entirely distinctive source of warrant to belief in the resurrection of Jesus. For such belief, on a Christian understanding, brings about a fundamental change in our lives: we live because He lives. This would, on a full development of our model, add a dimension to Christian belief in the resurrection that finds no parallel in ordinary historical beliefs. But it would not mean that such belief floats free of historical considerations.

PLANTINGA'S *WARRANTED CHRISTIAN BELIEF* AND THE AQUINAS/CALVIN MODEL

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Alvin Plantinga's book, *Warranted Christian Belief*, represents the third phase in the development of his religious epistemology. Beginning in the seventies and early eighties, Plantinga argued that nobody had proven that belief in God is not properly basic, that is, nobody had proven that theistic belief cannot be epistemically proper (rational or justified) without evidence. This phase of Plantinga's epistemological program was primarily negative, aiming at showing that in the philosophical climate of the time, attacks on the epistemic propriety of theistic belief rested on evidentialism and classical foundationalism, both of which Plantinga found refutable. At that point, his suggestion that theistic belief *is* properly basic for many people was drawn mostly from Calvinist theology rather than from a positive theory of epistemic rationality, justifiedness, or warrant.

The more ambitious positive project was the task of the second phase of his program, the work of the late eighties and early nineties, culminating in the first two *Warrant* books. In this work Plantinga ingeniously developed a theory of "warrant" (what he calls the component of knowledge in addition to true belief) that had the consequence that theistic belief is warranted, and when warranted in a sufficient degree, constitutes knowledge. Briefly, he argued that what is required for knowledge is that a true belief be produced by cognitive faculties working properly in an appropriate environment according to a design plan aimed at truth. If belief in God without evidence is part of the design plan and there is a God, then those who believe in God without evidence can (with a few qualifications) *know* that there is a God.

In *Warranted Christian Belief*, the third and latest phase of Plantinga's religious epistemology, he employs the strategy he previously applied to theistic belief to distinctively Christian beliefs—beliefs in the trinity, incarnation, atonement, forgiveness of sins, resurrection, salvation, eternal life, and many others found in the Christian creeds. Plantinga wants to show that such beliefs can be properly basic, rational, and warranted. And since they can be warranted, they can, if true, constitute knowledge.

In my remarks I want to focus on Chapter 8, one of the most important chapters of the book. There Plantinga responds to those philosophers who claim that whereas Christian belief might be true, it is not rational to believe it (p. 242). He therefore sets himself the task of showing that *if* Christian belief is true, belief in it has all the kinds of epistemic value that philosophers routinely discuss: it is justified, internally and externally rational, and warranted. It follows that anyone who wants to attack the rationality of Christian belief has to attack the truth of Christian belief directly, presumably a much harder task (p. 285).