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RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND VALUES

William P. Alston

Receptivity to Christian or other religious proclamations is powerfully influenced by one's value orientations. I distinguish five contrasts in such orientations that illustrate this point. 1. Finding "worldly" values most deeply satisfying vs. a sense that something that transcends those would be most fulfilling. 2. Extreme stress on human autonomy vs. a positive evaluation of deference to God, if such there be. 3. A sense of thorough sinfulness vs. a thoroughly positive self image. 4. A willingness to accept outside help to transform oneself vs. a sense of the unworthiness of such dependence. 5. A readiness to treat others' well being as important as one's own vs. an exclusive focus on looking out for number one. The above reflects the deeper fact that value commitments are an essential part of Christian belief, treatments of which must take account of this.

i

This paper is proffered as a contribution to the epistemological segment of the philosophy of religion. But it takes a rather circuitous route thereto. Most of the paper will be concerned with developing the thesis that value orientations have a powerful influence on one's readiness to accept a religious proclamation. The bearing of this on epistemology will emerge later.

I approach my central concern by mentioning a salient feature of religious belief on which I believe my main thesis throws light. The field of religious belief is distinguished by extreme oppositions between opposing parties. In many cases both believers and unbelievers feel completely confident of their positions, so confident that they may find it difficult or impossible to understand how any reasonable person can think otherwise. We also find many on each side who are less confident, but there are more than enough of the former sort to give rise to a need for explanation. This feature is by no means unique to religious belief. It is also found in many ethical, aesthetic, and political oppositions. Indeed, I shall be seeking an explanation for the religious version in the importance of evaluative issues there. But it does suffice to distinguish religious controversy from (many of) those in science, history, and even philosophy, where the incredulity at opposition is not so marked.

The attempt to understand this phenomenon naturally gives rise to the idea that some not purely cognitive, or not purely factually cognitive, factor is at work in some people and not others, and that this helps to explain



the sharply different reaction of people to the religious proclamations. This is the idea I will develop in this paper.

My concern here will not be with the bare theism on which so much discussion in the philosophy of religion is focused, but rather with systems of religious belief that form the cognitive core of concrete religions. And rather than try for neutrality across religions, I will focus on a specific religion, the one I know somewhat from the inside, viz., Christianity. I believe that my central thesis will also apply to other high religions, though, of course, the details of the application will differ widely.

My central thesis in this paper is that one's response to the Christian gospel depends to a considerable extent on one's value orientation. Depending on this orientation one will be more or less likely to take seriously the possibility that the Christian story is true; one will be more or less likely to take Christian belief (and the form of life that is intimately connected with it) as a live option.

Just what do I mean by 'value orientation'? I have deliberately chosen this rather squishy term because I want it to cover a variety of examples that have nothing obvious in common except for all involving evaluations in one way or another. As we shall see, some of them just are evaluations, but others also involve factual commitments in ways that are inextricably connected to evaluations. That will come out in the traversal of my list, to which I now turn.¹ Here, then, are some "value orientations" the possession of which are conducive to taking the Christian gospel seriously, along with their most prominent contrasts, which have the opposite tendency. It will be noted that the non-Christian side of the contrast in most cases constitutes the default position for people in our culture, and perhaps in most other cultures as well. This suggests that the Christian gospel embodies a strongly counter-cultural thrust.

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(1) I begin with an obvious example — the contrast between (w1) *finding "worldly values" like possessions, success, status, and wealth to be most deeply satisfying* and (c1) *a sense that something beyond this, something that transcends our usual preoccupations is what would constitute complete human fulfillment.*² Christianity proclaims and promises such a transcendent fulfillment - eternal loving communion with God and with one's fellows, and here and now and more immediately, a life of self-giving service to others that constitutes gaining one's life by losing it. None of this is likely to appeal to one for whom "worldly" values are unsurpassable. But one who does not find those values to be completely satisfying and feels a hunger for something beyond is thereby more likely to be intrigued by the Christian proclamation and look further into it.³

A strong attachment to "worldly values" is almost guaranteed by the typical socialization in our culture. One who neglects or downplays the quest for success, wealth, status, or recognition is likely to be branded as shiftless, irresponsible, lacking in ambition, "drive", or social worth. Hence the low esteem accorded the religious, especially members of contemplative communities, who devote their lives to prayer and meditation. "They

aren't really doing anything" is the popular response.

Before proceeding further with my list, I should issue what is partly an apology and partly an explanation of my use of 'worldly' in this connection. The basic contrast is between goods that do and do not depend for their status on any relation to an object of religious devotion, or to the kinds of fulfillment that are most distinctively stressed by Christianity and other high religions. 'Worldly' is not a wholly felicitous term for the non-Christian side of these contrasts, primarily because the term might suggest that Christian values have nothing to do with this world, with the creation. Whereas Christianity takes this world, and the sort of life one leads in this world, with the utmost seriousness. 'Worldly' has to be understood here in the sense of 'purely worldly', limited to what is available within this world, apart from its relation to a transcendent source, governance, and providence. It embraces values that are at home in a "naturalist" or "humanist" orientation, which constitutes the most prominent alternative to theistic religion in our society.

I should also make explicit that "worldly" values in my sense are not confined to the less than unqualifiedly admirable ones listed above - possession, success, status, and wealth. It also includes more lofty values such as loving relationships, commitment to worthy causes, the search for knowledge, and artistic creativity and enjoyment, *where these are undertaken and pursued outside a religious context*. Thus in contrasting "worldly" values and (distinctively) Christian values, I do not mean to suggest that the former are not genuinely valuable, much less that they should be totally avoided. The Christian life is not necessarily an ascetic one. The point is that Christianity proclaims that values connected with one's relation to God are supremely valuable, the key to the fullest human fulfillment.

(2) Another relevant contrast is that between (w2) *a stress on the autonomy of the human person, his right and duty to make his own choices, shape his own life, choose his own values, develop his own take on the world, and (c2) a recognition that (at least if there is a God such as Christians believe in) the proper, right, and ultimately most fulfilling attitude to take toward Him is one of dependence, obedience, submission to His will, worship, letting Him decide what one's vocation in life is, what sort of life one should lead and what sort of person one should seek to become.*⁴ (w2) is especially characteristic of the modern period in western civilization where autonomy, individual rights, freedom from any external constraints, has defined the spirit of the age and, from a Christian perspective, has run riot to an alarming degree. A revisionist Anglican priest and theologian, Don Cupitt, has even suggested that the more profoundly religious attitude is to deny the real existence of a transcendent creator just because that is incompatible with complete human autonomy, the supreme religious value!⁵

Clearly a willingness to accord obedience and even worship to a supreme being is necessary to taking the Christian proclamation with complete seriousness. For, according to that proclamation, the "first and greatest commandment" is "to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind". (Matthew 22:37) That just doesn't go with unqualified human autonomy. If God tells you to do X, obeying that commandment would be incompatible with your responding,

"I'd better determine how it fits in with my plans, preferences, and projects before deciding whether to do X". If one is not prepared to surrender ultimate control to God, one can hardly regard Christian faith as a live option. The inaccessibility of the full Christian life to "control freaks" is reflected in the emphasis in the Christian tradition on *pride* (construed not in terms of an inflated opinion of oneself, but in terms of putting oneself in the center of life and demanding complete control) and in the idea embodied in the Garden of Eden story that disobedience to God and the attempt to usurp God's place as Lord of one's own life is the primal sin.

I must guard against a misunderstanding of (c2) that the commentators on an ancestor of this paper fell into - taking (c2) to favor *replacing* one's own will with God's will, becoming a robot controlled from the outside, taking no part in making choices as to how one's life is to be led. This is far from my intention. (w2) is to be understood as a radical insistence on autonomy in which the person rejects any authority outside oneself in matters of values, direction of one's life, choices of goals, vocation, or distribution of time and energies - even the authority of God. (c2), as a contrast with this, is not a reduction to robot status, but a situation in which one retains all one's human powers and exercises them, but, to the extent that one fully realizes (c2), in an interpersonal relation to God in which one is prepared to give unconditional obedience, obeisance, worship to God.

(3) Another key contrast is between (c3) *a realization of one's own deeply rooted sinfulness and that of other people* and (w3) *a tendency to cover this up, ignore it, take one's behavior to be "not so bad after all", "no worse than the average Joe's"*. (c3) involves not just an intellectual assent, but also taking sinfulness seriously by feeling uncomfortable about it, perhaps to the point of finding it intolerable, and feeling that one is in desperate need of some fundamental change. Whereas (w3) involves accepting oneself as one is, trying, with some success, to "feel good about oneself" and others, to take the "I'm OK, you're OK stance", to dismiss gloomy Gus talk about sinfulness with a "that's just the way the world is" shrug. It's clear from the phrases I've been citing that (w3) is the dominant view in our culture. It has been a widespread view in 20th century America that a healthy personality "accepts oneself fully", has a "positive self-image", doesn't dwell on past faults and misdeeds but strives to put all that behind one and approach the future with a positive attitude. A sense of sin is rejected as "morbid", "unhealthy", "counterproductive".

All this is incompatible with a positive attitude to the Christian gospel. The heart of the Christian message, as with many other religious messages, is that something is fundamentally wrong with the present human situation, for most or all people, and that we are in dire need of a transformation of our current condition. According to the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus began his ministry, he "came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel". (1:14-15) This is a very concise sermon, but it contains the essentials. "Repent" you of your deeply rooted sinfulness and believe in the gospel (the good news I am bringing you), and you will be delivered from your miserable condition by entering into "the kingdom of God". Taking a wider conspectus, William James in his *Varieties of*

Religious Experience writes: "...there is a certain uniform deliverance in which religions all appear to meet. It consists of two parts: - 1. An uneasiness; and 2. its solution. 1. The uneasiness, reduced to its simplest terms, is a sense that there is *something wrong about us* as we naturally stand. 2. The solution is a sense that *we are saved from the wrongness* by making proper connection with the higher powers." (498)

It should be clear how (c3) is more conducive to taking the Christian message seriously than (w3). One hearkens to the bringer of a message of salvation only if one takes oneself to be in a condition from which one needs saving. If there is no itch, why scratch? As Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." If one has thoroughly internalized the "I'm OK; you're OK" attitude, the gospel will make little appeal.

When introducing my category of "value orientations", I said that it covers both pure evaluations and mixed attitudes that also include factual elements. My first two items were of the first sort, but with 3. we have factual and evaluative components intimately interrelated. (c3) involves the conviction that one has deeply rooted sinful tendencies that one is powerless on one's own to alter in a radical way. That includes alleged facts about oneself, especially the rootedness and the inability to make a fundamental change on one's own, but these are facts with an essential evaluative component. To dub one's condition as a sinful one is to make a certain kind of negative evaluation of that condition. It is not a "purely factual" judgment.

(4) In presenting (3) I pointed out that Christianity stresses not only the overriding seriousness of the human sinful condition but also our inability to change that condition on our own without divine help. Hence the next contrast. (c4) *Human beings are so thoroughly mired in sin that they are unable to make the moves that are required to extricate themselves.* To move from self-centeredness to self-giving it is necessary to "love one's neighbor as oneself" and to be willing "to save one's life by losing it"? But how is that possible for one whose thoughts keep wandering back to "what's in it for me?", "how will this affect my prospects?", "will this disturb my comfortable routine?", and the like? One can *resolve* to be concerned primarily with reaching out to others in need, but between the resolve and the deed there's many a slip. And according to Christianity, the typical human has so internalized the overriding self-concern that it effectively blocks attempts to act on such a resolve. Given this helplessness in the face of one's own sinfulness, if there is to be a hope of release, one must be willing to swallow one's pride and self-sufficiency, confess one's condition to God, ask for forgiveness, open oneself up to the Holy Spirit, and accept whatever help is forthcoming from divine grace. By contrast we have (w4). *Self-reliance, doing it yourself, is the way of the mature, developed person (the "manly" attitude, as we used to put it in the old male chauvinist days). "I am the captain of my fate. I am the master of my soul." It is a cringing, snivelling, self-pitying attitude unworthy of human dignity to admit that one is helpless and cannot make fundamental changes without relying on outside assistance. One should not give in to counsels of despair. One should do the best one can to live up to one's highest ideals, and if one fails, there is at least the consolation of knowing that one gave it one's best shot.*

Again, it is obvious that (c4) is much more conducive to taking the

Christian story seriously than (w4). Indeed, that is an understatement. So long as one's stance is (w4) one cannot take it seriously. Any tendency to do so is successfully blocked. If I consider any admission of helplessness and any appeal for outside help to be unworthy of me, I am in no position to accept the Christian offer of divine grace. Whereas (c4), having been tailored to the gospel message, is naturally conducive to a positive response.

The exposition of (c4) may give the impression that the contrast here is a purely factual one and that we have left evaluative differences completely behind. But the above presentation of (w4) serves to highlight the evaluative component. (c4) differs from (w4) not only in the estimate of human powers to effect fundamental personal changes, but also in whether it is an *acceptable*, *permissible*, or *worthy* thing to make such changes, even if it requires dependence on others. I have stressed the factual component in presenting (c4) and the evaluative component in presenting (w4), but both components are present in both attitudes. (c4) also embodies the idea that it is perfectly right and proper, given the human condition, to admit a deep incapacity to change and to cry for help. And (w4) also involves a much rosier assessment of human capacities to change than (4c). Otherwise its denunciation of admitting helplessness and calling for help would be mere posturing.

Again, we can see the w side of this contrast as pervasively present in our culture. The proliferation of "self-help" manuals testifies to this, as does the "macho" orientation of much popular culture. Abusive husbands and parents persistently resist suggestions that they need psychological counseling. As with the other contrasts, the Christian call for repentance, confession, and opening oneself to divine grace goes against strong cultural pressures.

(5) My final contrast is suggested by the fact that the second great commandment, like unto the first, is to love your neighbor as yourself. (c5) *Other people's needs are at least as important as one's own enjoyment or ease. It is eminently worthwhile to make a sacrifice of some of one's creature comforts, interrupt one's pursuit of pleasure, in order to give of one's time and energy to assist those less fortunate than oneself. This is the way to achieve ultimate self-fulfillment.* (w5) *Everyone should take as one's top priority, looking out for "number 1". If I don't look out for me, who will? I've worked hard to get where I am, and why shouldn't I enjoy it to the full? Why should I give up any of this to reach out to those unfortunates who haven't worked so hard and, as a result, are not so well off? That doesn't make sense. That's not the way to get as much as possible out of life.*

Again, it's obvious that the Christian message, which emphasizes love of one's neighbor, and which tells us that he who loses his life will save it, can hardly be taken seriously by one who approaches life in the spirit of (w5). While (c5) is tailor made to that message and will render one maximally receptive to it.

Here too the w side of the contrast is strongly engrained in our culture. One who "heedlessly" gives of him/herself without counting the cost is thought to be foolish or worse. While the person who takes full advantage of opportunities to lead "the good life" is given credit for "knowing how to live". The person who succeeds in "having it all" is the model most of us most want to imitate. However I must confess that the cultural prevalence of (w5) is significantly less than with the other w orientations. Many peo-

ple with no religious commitment of any sort lead lives strongly marked by self-giving to others.⁶

I could add to the list, but this should be sufficient to give a concrete sense of the kind of attitudes that, I suggest, make a difference to how seriously one is likely to take the Christian story.

iii

At this point I need to make explicit several respects in which the contrast between (c) and (w) orientations are less stark than the above exposition might lead one to suppose. (1) The possession of a given orientation is a matter of degree. One can be more or less self-centered or other-centered, more or less attached to worldly values. (2) Correspondingly, how completely one is involved in the Christian (or other) form of life is also a matter of degree along many dimensions. It is a truism of the study of spirituality that there are various stages along such a path. (3) There are gradual changes over time in a person's spiritual condition. Indeed, people oscillate from day to day, or from hour to hour, in the strength of a given orientation. (4) Each side of each of my five contrasts is itself a package of "atomic" orientations. And with respect to each macro-orientation people will differ in the relative strength of different components; and this too can vary over time with the same person. Furthermore I did not attempt to give a precise, "closed" list of components of each package, and this lack of precision in characterization must be kept in mind. (5) Finally, and this is crucial, although the pure opposites clearly exclude each other, human beings are not so thoroughly integrated as to be immune to holding beliefs, attitudes, and desires that are in conflict. Even where logical incompatibility is involved, people notoriously sometimes hold mutually contradictory beliefs. And where some weaker mode of conflict is involved, as with my contrasting pairs, psychology from Freudian psycho-dynamics to Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance has amply documented the possibility of opposed attitudes held together in a single psyche.

These complexities have an important influence on the way the above contrasts appear in real live human subjects. The degree character, as well as the instability of possession (to a given degree) from time to time, affects the "visibility" of the contrasts. Though A may be mostly on the c side of one or more contrasts and B mostly on the w side, if these orientations are possessed in each case to a rather low degree and/or inconstantly, it may not be obvious that such a contrast is being displayed. My last complexity - the possibility of mixed cases - affects visibility even more radically. If A is partly (c1) and partly (w1), whereas B is pretty thoroughly (c1), they may not seem to exhibit this contrast at all. And the point about the variability in the composition of a particular orientation blurs some applications still further. Both A and B may be predominantly on the w side of the (1) contrast, but if their (w1)'s are made of up of quite different worldly values, they may seem to have little in common. Finally, because of all this, my contrasts should not be construed as a basis for sorting people into groups, much less just two groups (Christian and worldly). It is rather a delineation of a variety of ways in which people's value orientations can differ

in ways that affect one's receptivity to the Christian gospel.

Despite all this, it still seems clear to me that these contrasts, properly understood, reveal something important about what is responsible for differences in reactions to the Christian message, and, as I shall go on to argue, something important about the content of that message and about what is relevant to its assessment.

First, the point that the (c) sides of these contrasts are strongly counter-cultural is a vivid testimony to the difficulty of taking Christianity as a live option. This judgment may seem to conflict with the undoubted fact that Christian congregations are filled with extremely conventional folks who clearly exhibit the (w) side of one or another of my contrasts. But that just shows the necessity for distinguishing between "nominal" Christians and those who are whole-heartedly into the Christian form of life, or at least are sincerely committed to becoming so. It is the latter with whom I am concerned here. My thesis is that attitudes on the (c) side of my contrasts are required to taking seriously a heartfelt, deeply rooted commitment to Christian belief and practice.

In this connection consider the strong counter-cultural elements in the New Testament, elements that are widely neglected in favor of more socially acceptable bits like "God is love". A reading of the gospels will reveal Jesus calling on his followers to "leave the dead to bury their own dead", and saying "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters...he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 24-26). The parables tell us of laborers that are paid the same regardless of how many hours they have worked, of the righteous who are less in the sight of God than a repentant sinner, and of the returned prodigal son who is more honored than the faithful son. Jesus enjoins us to seek the lowest rather than the highest seat at a banquet and, when we give a party, not to invite our friends and associates and rich neighbors, but rather "the poor, the maimed, the lame, and blind". To follow such a leader one must be prepared to go against the dictates of society in fundamental ways.

Having rendered my central thesis more concrete, it is time to nail down the point that this thesis contributes to the explanation of the phenomenon with which I opened the paper - the extremity of the oppositions vis-a-vis religious belief. My thesis throws light on this just because this is the way evaluative oppositions typically work. There too opposed parties tend to find it incredible that their opponents take the position they do. If value commitments play a crucial role in one's attitude toward religious claims, that goes some way toward explaining a like feature of religious belief.

Though this discussion has been limited to Christianity, I suggested at the outset that similar points could be made for other high religions. I don't have space to go into this properly, but I will make a brief comment about Buddhism. Buddha proclaims the universality of suffering. "Birth is suffering, age is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; contact with what we dislike is suffering, separation from what we like is suffering, failure to attain what we crave is suffering - in brief, all that makes bodily existence is suffering." The cause of this terrible condition is *craving, desire*. And so the only cure is the extinction of desire. It hardly needs

mention that this diagnosis and the attitudes it calls for are radically opposed to the dominant ethos of virtually every human culture.

iv

There you have the central thesis of this paper. What remains is (A) to further elucidate it, removing misunderstandings of its thrust, and (B) to make explicit the general character of the thesis, its relations to various concerns, and some of its implications. The former will occupy me in this section, and the latter in the next.

(1) My list of contrasting evaluative orientations could give one the impression that I am preaching a sermon or engaged in evangelism, rather than doing philosophy of religion. I am not averse to the former activities, and in a different setting I might engage in them. But that's not what I mean to be doing here. Rather than exhorting you to adopt the (c1-5) attitudes, I am engaged in a philosophical reflection on one sort of factor that encourages or discourages serious consideration of the Christian alternative. I seek to bring out the importance of these orientations for the acceptance or rejection of the Christian gospel. And this, I claim, is important for understanding both the character of that gospel, and how it is properly assessed epistemically. In the next section I will bring out how it is important in these ways.

(2) Since I am stressing the role of values in Christian belief, one might suppose that I align myself with those who seek to minimize or even eliminate the factual claims of Christianity, and construe Christian faith as primarily or wholly a matter of committing oneself to a certain evaluative stance, perhaps following Braithwaite, who represents Christian faith as consisting in taking the Christian story to be nothing but an illustration of certain moral values. But nothing could be further from the truth. I do, indeed, stress the importance of evaluations in Christian faith, but I do *not* suggest that this is the whole story. Though one's scale of values has much to do with whether one takes the Christian message seriously, what these values are conducive to taking seriously contains many factual elements. Whether the physical universe owes its existence to a supreme spiritual being is not an evaluative question. It is not a question about what is more or less good, important, worthwhile, or admirable. It is a straightforward question of fact. The same is to be said for the question of whether God exercises providential care over us, whether Jesus Christ died to save us from sin and death, and whether God enters into communion with us. I am *not* saying that these are easy questions to answer, nor do I deny that there are thorny issues concerning their proper interpretation. But they fall on the *fact* side of the *fact-value* distinction.

(3) The exposition up to this point could well give the impression that I'm alleging a fixed temporal order in the response to the gospel, *viz.*, that one must have the right attitudes before the gospel has a chance to evoke a positive response. If so, I'm in trouble, for the phenomenon of the gospel precipitating a change in orientation from the (w) side to the (c) side is well documented. But though a change in attitudes often precedes conversion, I had no intention of unqualifiedly generalizing this order. I conducted the

discussion in terms of that sequence because it is a good way to present the basic point, which is this. *So long as one persists in the (w) orientations there is little chance of a positive response to the gospel. Some at least incipient beginning of (c) attitudes must accompany a positive response, either as an antecedent condition, or as something that is evoked simultaneously with that response.* The fundamental point is the *compatibility* of (c) attitudes and a positive response and the *incompatibility* of (w) attitudes and such a response. The temporal organization can vary widely.

v

Now for some points about the general character, status, and implications of my thesis.

(1) In the previous section I defended the philosophical character of the paper in the face of an imagined supposition that it was a bit of evangelism. But even if it is philosophical, is it epistemological? Isn't it just a point about what renders one susceptible to religious belief, what "softens one up" for it? And even if I am right about that, what does that have to do with the epistemic status of those beliefs - their truth value, their justification, warrant, or rationality, whether they count as knowledge, and the like?

This challenge deserves an answer. To bring out the epistemological relevance of my thesis, I must point out that the role of the value orientations I have been presenting is not merely a matter of "softening up" a potential convert. More fundamentally (for philosophy) it tells something about the *content* of Christian (and other religious) belief. It tells us that Christian belief contains an ineliminable value component. Just as I maintained in section iv that such belief is not purely evaluative, so here I must insist that it is not purely factual. The point that one's value orientation powerfully affects the likelihood that one takes the Christian message seriously as a possibility for belief is an indication of the deeper point that the message is irretrievably committed to positions on value. In effect, that was brought out by my list of contrasting orientations. In some cases I introduced or motivated the contrast by alluding to, or presupposing, a Christian commitment that the (c) side of the contrast mirrored. Thus, (c2) is conducive to taking Christianity seriously *just because* Christianity proclaims the surpassing *value* of submission to the divine will, of recognizing worship of and obedience to God as a supreme value for human beings. Again, (c1) (taking something beyond worldly values to be supremely fulfilling) is conducive to a positive response to the gospel *just because* that gospel tells us that worldly goods do not satisfy our deepest needs and that the service of God's kingdom and eternal loving communion with God and one's fellows is what most completely fulfills us.

Thus my central thesis holds *because* the Christian faith would not be what it is without containing commitments to certain positions on values. It is part of the essence of Christianity to hold that worship of and obedience to God is a *good* thing, that the supreme human *fulfillment* lies beyond worldly goods, that the recognition of deeply rooted sinfulness, followed by confession and repentance, are necessary for human *flourishing*, that willingness to accept help in the project of personal transformation is the only

way to attain *salvation*, and that unstinting self-giving is superior to any alternative for human life. If those commitments were not integral to the Christian faith, then the fact that the (c) attitudes are conducive to taking Christianity seriously *would* be just a matter of "softening up" the potential convert. But since they are integral, it is of deeper significance than that. The paper was mostly taken up with the evaluative conditions for taking Christianity seriously rather than with the deeper point that evaluations are crucial to the content of the Christian faith, because I felt that the former provides an intuitively compelling background for the latter.

Now for the final turn of the screw. Since the Christian faith contains ineliminable value judgments, an adequate epistemology of Christian belief cannot treat it as posing only factual questions. It is typical of philosophers to treat questions about the existence and nature of God as properly decided solely on the basis of evidence or reasons in generically the same way as factual questions in science or every day life. To be sure, philosophers of religion typically restrict themselves to "bare" theism and avoid dealing with the doctrines that distinguish one religion from another. But even those who undertake the latter enterprise not infrequently approach the task in the same spirit. Christian "apologetics" is much concerned with "evidences" for the reliability of the scriptures, with defending the reality of miracles and of providential divine care, and with explaining the evil in the world. I have no wish to denigrate any of this activity, much less to brand it as irrelevant or misguided. My point here is that neither philosophy of religion nor traditional Christian apologetics have much to say about the value commitments of Christianity. They generally give no hint that they think that the viability, rationality, or justification of Christian belief depends, in part, on the epistemic status of its evaluative component. If my central thesis is correct, this is an important epistemic lack in these treatments. And if the justification of Christian belief is partly a matter of defending its value commitments, that is an important epistemological point about Christian belief, and hence an important epistemological implication of my thesis.

(2) This discussion leads to the question of whether the evaluative orientations I have presented have any further role vis-a-vis Christian belief. For a suggestion as to how they might, let us look at Wainwright 1995. Early on he states his view as follows: the evidence for religious belief "can be accurately assessed only by men and women who possess the proper moral and spiritual qualifications." (3) Depending on how those "qualifications" are specified, this sounds as if it is in the same ball park as the thesis of this paper. The difference between the positions primarily hangs on the relation between "taking seriously the possibility that the Christian story is true" and "accurately assessing the evidence" for it. These are clearly different, but they are also closely related. To indicate how they are I will point out that the support for Christian belief is not such as to wear its force on its sleeve. It is not the sort of thing that carries conviction to any intelligent, reasonable person, no matter how else that person is disposed. To indicate the kinds of supports I have in mind and how persistently controversial they are, here is a brief list:

1. Natural theological arguments for the existence and essential nature of God.
2. The testimony of the scriptures.
3. The authority of the church and, more generally, of the tradition.
4. The experience of the presence and activity of God in one's life.
5. What are taken as providential acts of God.
6. The transformation of the individual in leading the Christian life.

It hardly needs argument to make the point that none of these is such as to carry a conviction of probative force to any normal, intelligent person who considers them.

That being the case, it seems plausible that whether one finds any of them to tell significantly in favor of Christian belief will be strongly influenced by whether one takes seriously the idea that Christian belief is true. If the prior disposition is to reject it out of hand, one is not likely to give evidences of the above sort a sympathetic hearing. If one finds the Christian story plausible, the reverse is likely to be the case. Hence differences of the sort on which I concentrate in this paper tend to carry with them differences of the sort on which Wainwright concentrates in his book. Thus we may reasonably suppose that my c-orientations also tend to lead a person to give more credence to supports for Christian belief like the above. A Christian will put this by saying that they enable the person "to appreciate the force of the supports", while an opponent will confine himself to saying that they lead a person to suppose the supports to have some weight (or perhaps something much less favorable). In any event, this is a further epistemological relevance of my thesis.

Let me briefly illustrate this with a couple of the putative supports just listed.. Consider the way things pan out in leading the Christian life. It is obvious that one who has been leading such a life has a much more concrete idea of how it pans out than one who has not. And though this by no means guarantees that the person in question will make a sound judgment as to whether and how much this supports Christian belief, at least that judgment will be informed by an insider's sense of what the panning out consists in. A similar point can be made concerning the veridicality of putative experience of God's presence and activity in one's life. One who has actually had such experiences has much more to go on in considering this question, in one crucial respect (what these experiences are like), than the person who has not. To connect this with my value orientations, if they are conducive to taking the Christian alternative seriously, that will presumably lead, in some cases, to entering onto the Christian form of life, which will in turn enable the person to take an insider's rather than an outsider's approach to questions like the two just mentioned.

(3 How is my thesis related to the familiar point that Christian faith is not just a matter of propositional belief but also essentially involves attitudes like trust and faith, as well as an active commitment to leading a certain kind of life? They seem to be connected somehow, but just how? Something like this. The value commitments on the (c) side are, so to say, the "ideological" basis of the attitudes and active participation that are often said to be an essential part of Christian faith. The c-orientations set things up intellectually for the active aspects of faith. These orientations naturally flow into those aspects if given their head.

(4) I introduced this paper by presenting a feature of religious belief to the explanation of which my central thesis was designed to contribute - the extreme oppositions between believers and unbelievers. At the end of section iii I indicated briefly how the thesis, if true, goes some way toward explaining it. Now I want to consider the possibility that there are other features of religious belief to the explanation of which it may contribute. It seems to me there are. First, there is the fact that arguments for the truth of doctrines, and other evidence that might be offered in support of them, typically play an insignificant role in conversions. This is something that often puzzles philosophers. But if this paper is on the right track, it is only to be expected. If conversion hangs to a large extent on changes in one's scheme of values, it is hardly surprising that it is not particularly sensitive to theoretical considerations. Radical changes in one's values typically stem from the cumulative impact of a variety of life experiences, together with reflections on this, reflections that resist being put in an argumentative form. It would be surprising if one's scheme of values were to be substantially altered by explicit argumentation.

Second, my thesis can also contribute to the explanation of the fact that propositional belief is not at the center of the picture in a typical full-blooded Christian faith. That is not to say that such belief is not essential. Unless one accepts certain doctrines as true one could not be a fully committed Christian in the traditional sense. But it remains that reflection on doctrines does not bulk large in the Christian life of most sincere believers. They spend relatively little time thinking about the doctrines or wondering whether they are true or how they relate to other things they believe or whether the reasons they have for them are sufficient. As serious Christians they tend to focus more on how they can achieve a closer communion with God, what they need to do to follow Christ more closely, how Christ's injunctions and, more generally, his teachings apply to their own lives and to the situations they find in the world around them. All this is quite understandable if value commitments occupy as important a place in Christian faith as is claimed in this paper.

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NOTES

1. In distinguishing *factual* and *evaluative* I am not suggesting that evaluative commitments are not "cognitive" — that they cannot be assessed as true or

false, rational or irrational, justified or unjustified. Nor do I mean to imply that there is no objective "fact of the matter" as to what is more or less good, valuable, or morally obligatory. As I use these terms, an evaluative commitment carries with it some pro or con attitude vis-a-vis what it is about. It carries with it a tendency to favor or to act for or against what is evaluated. Whereas a purely factual commitment does not have this kind of force.

2. I will label the Christian values 'c' and their contrasts 'w' ('w' for 'worldly').

3. In Taylor 1989 there is the interesting suggestion that the increased attention to "proofs" and "evidences" of Christianity in the early modern period is connected with the greater attention to worldly goods (he used the term 'ordinary life'), which may in turn reflect the increasing dispersal of wealth in the population with the growth of commerce and with domination of the rest of the world by western Europe. As Taylor says, this higher evaluation of ordinary life resulted in less of an "affective" motivation to accept Christianity, and compensatory greater emphasis on a purely intellectual motivation. This is along the same lines as the present point.

4. The Christian opposition to complete human autonomy does not imply that Christianity is opposed to, or neglects, human freedom — the capacity and responsibility of human beings to make various choices on their own.

5. See Cupitt 1981.

6. And, of course, this is also true of adherents of other religions. But since I have been confining myself to contrast between a Christian orientation and orientations of religious unbelievers in our culture, this latter is no relevant to my present concerns.