

IN SEARCH OF
THE
BEGINNING

REVISED AND EXPANDED
IN SEARCH OF
THE
BEGINNING

A Seeker's
Journey to
the Origin of
the Universe,
Life, and Man

DEAN DAVIS

REDEMPTION  PRESS

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2nd Printing in 2007.

3rd Printing in 2009.

4th Printing in 2010.

Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022

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ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-030-8

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2004195526

DEDICATION

This book is gratefully dedicated to
The Unknown God—and to seekers everywhere
who hope to meet him at the beginning

I want to know how God created the world. I am not much interested in this or that phenomenon in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know his thoughts. The rest are details.

—Albert Einstein

Seek and ye shall find.

—Jesus of Nazareth

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is much uncertainty attached to modern cosmology, but of one thing we may be absolutely sure: Scientific laymen trained in the humanities rarely write books about the origin of the universe, life, and man. That I have dared to do so is testimony to the invaluable help supplied by many dear friends, colleagues, and loved ones. I wish to acknowledge them here.

First, I want to thank my new friends at Redemption Press for their sincere, timely, and generous efforts to get this book back in print. My hope and prayer is that the Lord will richly bless you as you embark upon this fresh adventure in Christian publishing.

My indebtedness to the many professional teachers and scientists who have written for laymen like me will become crystal clear in the pages ahead. Here, however, I would especially like to thank four new friends: Doctors John Byl, Gerardus Bouw, Philip Stott, and Robert Sungenis. These busy men—and Dr. Byl in extra measure—were kind enough to patiently answer my many questions, make substantive suggestions, and encourage me in my labors. They would not, of course, agree with all of my conclusions, so I alone am responsible for what you will find in the pages ahead. Nevertheless, *much* of what is good in those pages has reached me (and you) through them. I am exceedingly grateful for it.

XII · IN SEARCH OF THE BEGINNING

Thanks also to my old and faithful friend Steve Carver, who worked his usual magic on the computer to create the various diagrams and tables that you will find in the text.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my father, Don Davis, who has faithfully supported me in this and other literary ventures. Dad, you have shown yourself a true patron—in every sense of that rich and venerable word.

Finally, heartfelt thanks to my dear wife, Linda. Honey, I will never forget how you pulled me through those two terrible midnight hours when I thought I had erased four-fifths of my book from the new computer. It was only one of your many expressions of love and support. No, I will never forget.

Introduction

THE TEST, THE TEACHER, AND THE BEGINNING

This is a book about the great themes of cosmology—the origin, structure, purpose, and destiny of the universe. But it is especially about the one theme that serves as seed for all the rest: the beginning—the origin of the universe, life, and man.

It is also a book written specially for seekers—people who believe, or at least suspect, that there is more to the universe than the universe; people who sense that there is an ultimate spiritual reality behind all things, a reality about which they are curious to know more. If you fall into this category, you will find in the pages ahead something you may have been looking for: a meditation on the cosmos that is attentive not only to natural science, but to philosophy and theology as well.

Finally, this is, as it were, a book within a book. It was first conceived as a humble chapter, part of a much larger work, now completed, called *The Test: A Seeker's Journey to the Meaning of Life*. In time, the one chapter became two, two became four, and four became the volume you now hold in your hands. What produced this literary cell division, I do not quite know. Perhaps it was my keen interest in the subject, or its boundless philosophical importance, or its rich (and sometimes maddening) complexity, or the controversy that has often surrounded it, never more so than today.

In any case, my “chapter” has at last reached full stature and I am eager to introduce it to you. However, for the meeting to go well, I feel it is important that you know a little more about its mother. Permit me then

to break with literary protocol by devoting the lion's share of a lengthy introduction, not so much to the present book, but rather to a summary of the book from which it sprang—*The Test*.

I should forewarn you here that these philosophical preliminaries may seem at first to be of little relevance to cosmology, so much so that you are tempted to skip them altogether. I urge you to resist the temptation. Why? Because sooner or later the best cosmologists realize that their *first* order of business is to resolve certain fundamental questions concerning the proper source(s) of trustworthy knowledge about the universe. Here is a sampling of their perennial favorites:

Is it possible to know *with certainty* the truth about the origin, structure, purpose, and destiny of the universe?

If so, exactly *how* can we arrive at such certainty? Does it come to us strictly through the use of scientific method? Does philosophy have a role to play? Could personal mystical experience—or even communications from spiritual beings living on other “planes” of reality—be of any help?

And what about divine revelation? Is it possible—as *many* have insisted down through the centuries—that a personal creator god has spoken to us on cosmological matters? And if he has, how shall we know *which* god, *which* prophet, and *which* holy book(s) to trust?

Again, these are the kinds of questions to which thoughtful cosmologists find themselves repeatedly driven. As such, they are the kinds of questions that wise seekers will ask from the very get-go. And they are precisely the kind of questions that I address at considerable length in *The Test*.

So then, please join me for a short day-hike here in the lowlands of *epistemology*—the study of the possibility and sources of trustworthy knowledge about the great “questions of life” in general, and about cosmological questions in particular. Having done so, I trust you will find yourself in far better shape for a challenging cosmological climb that will follow soon enough.

Life: A Mess or a Test?

The Test is structured as a spiritual journey in which the first step is to experience a fundamental change in perspective. To this end, I begin by reminding my readers of a fact most of us know very well but sometimes try to avoid: Each of us has a heart full of questions. Here I especially have in

mind what are sometimes called life's "ultimate questions"—the distinctly religious and philosophical problems that have ever occupied the deepest thoughts and concerns of the human race.

In *The Test*, I identify an irreducible core of nine such questions:

1. What is the ultimate reality?
2. What is the origin of the universe, life, and man?
3. What, if anything, went wrong? Why are evil, suffering, and death in the world?
4. What, if anything, can be done about them?
5. What is the meaning of life?
6. How should we live? What are the proper motives and standards for human conduct?
7. What happens when we die?
8. Where is (cosmic) history heading?
9. How can we find trustworthy answers to the questions of life?

Pondering these questions, we soon realize that they display several interesting and significant characteristics.

First, they are *universal*. As a study of world religion and philosophy will quickly show, people of all times and all places have wrestled with them. This may not seem surprising, but in a way it is. Why should all people, and not just some, think about these high level questions? Could it be that such questions somehow belong to human nature itself? And if so, how did they get there?

Secondly, they are *existentially urgent*. By this I mean that we care, and care deeply, about finding the answers. Indeed, I think most of us would admit that our own sense of personal well-being depends heavily upon discovering the truth about one or more of the questions of life.

Thirdly, *they take in reality as a whole*. That is, they are philosophically comprehensive. They address everything that philosophers could ever think to address: things above and things beneath; things past, present, and future; things without and things within; things physical and things spiritual. In short, reality as a whole.

This brings us to our final observation, namely that these questions are *closely related to what philosophers call our worldview*. In fact, a worldview

may be precisely defined as *a way of looking at reality as a whole, based upon a particular set of answers to the questions of life*. The prominent place of religion and philosophy in human experience testifies to the fact that most of us actively seek a worldview. Furthermore, any old worldview will simply not do: What we really want is the *one true worldview*. Question by question, answer by answer, step by step, we would ascend to that intellectual vantage point from which alone we can at last see all of reality as it really is. And we do this not only because we desire to *see* reality, but also because we desire to *relate to it* as it really is. Deep in our hearts we sense that finding the one true worldview is a very special kind—indeed, the ultimate kind—of coming home.

But there is a problem. For though we all have a heart full of questions, we do not all have a heart full of answers. The answers we want and need are not self-evident; if they were, we would not be seeking them. To use a humble illustration, we find that our hearts are rather like an incomplete wooden jigsaw puzzle: The questions of life are the spaces, but the answers that fit into the spaces are nowhere in sight.

And so, in an effort to fill the voids, some among us have stepped forward with answers, often quite dogmatically.

Consider, for example, the question of the ultimate reality. Some today claim that the ultimate reality is the “time/space/energy-matter continuum,” so that all of the things that we call things are simply an embodiment of this one primordial substance. This is the view of the *philosophical naturalist*.

Others, however, argue that the ultimate reality is an impersonal divine Mind or Spirit that, in the ongoing experience of billions of sentient beings, has somehow slipped into a cosmic dream. We *think* that we are souls, inhabiting bodies, living in a real material world. But that is an illusion. The truth is that we are simply tiny bubbles of consciousness, arising in the infinite ocean of Big Mind. Here is the view of the *pantheist*.

Meanwhile, still others assert that the ultimate reality is an infinite personal god—a god who formerly created and now sustains all things but remains metaphysically separate from them. This is the view of the *theist*.¹

We see, then, that people hold different views of the ultimate reality. And what is true for the question about the ultimate reality is true for the other questions of life as well: There are always several possible answers, each answer differing significantly from the others. Thus, poor seekers

after truth are in a quandary. They have a heart full of existentially urgent questions, but when they look around for truth they find a world full of contradictory answers! This situation is scandalous. Deep down we feel it ought not to be. But it is—and never more so than today, when sophisticated media have brought every conceivable answer and worldview directly to our doorsteps. How, then, are we to understand and respond to a philosophical situation such as this?

I see two basic possibilities, two perspectives.

First, there is what I will call *the mess perspective*. Sometimes referred to as postmodernism (and previously called skepticism), this view holds that life—religiously and philosophically speaking—is a mess. In other words, there is no such thing as objective truth or absolute values. The fact that different worldviews *do* exist proves that no one true worldview *can* exist. We are all stuck in our heads. The way we see things is relative to our language, history, imagination, culture, and perhaps even to our biology, all of which differ from place to place and time to time. Accordingly, religions and philosophies must be seen as big, all-encompassing stories or “meta-narratives”—culturally determined word pictures designed to help people get a handle on the world around them. Now in the past, say the postmodernists, such intellectual handles may have had some survival value, but in today’s shrinking world we dare not take them too seriously. Even if we cannot learn the truth, at least we can learn to get along. Let us therefore come of age. Let us abandon our quest for true answers to the questions of life. Let us surrender our hopes of ever finding the one true worldview. Let us simply live and let live, tolerating and respecting each other’s stories. In sum, however disappointing or frustrating it may seem, let all the family of man accept and get used to the fact that life is mess.

Does this take on the human condition depress you? If so, good! That means you are an excellent candidate for a second and far more hopeful point of view. I call it *the test perspective*.

According to this view, life is a test placed before us by an unknown god. He himself has put the questions of life into our hearts, along with an abiding hope of finding the answers. But for wise reasons he has not made those answers self-evident. Moreover, he has also allowed a certain measure of religious and philosophical error to creep into his world. Thus, he has set the stage. What will his human creatures do now? Will they listen to their hearts and begin sorting through the various philosophical options till

they find the truth? Or will they use the existence of options as an excuse not to seek truth but to do what they want? As each of us decides, this god is watching. If we seek, he will help us. If we find, he will reward us. The test is on. Our part is as simple as it is important: We must love the truth enough to seek it, and we must keep seeking it until we find it.

Now most folks would agree that this is indeed a more hopeful way of looking at life. They would like to know, however, if there are any good reasons to believe it is true. Here are a few that seem compelling to me.

First, there is *the lesson of natural hunger and thirst*. In the natural world there is an objective reality that corresponds to our hunger: food. There is also an objective reality that corresponds to our thirst: drink. Interestingly, we often have to seek out food and drink, and can usually find them if we want them badly enough. Do these simple facts of daily life have a message for us? Is the natural world teaching us something important about the spiritual? Does our hunger for truth also correspond to an objective reality? Does it imply that truth exists? And does it imply that truth will supply both nourishment and pleasure if and when we seek and find it?²

Second, there is *the amazing makeup of the human mind*. How is it that we are all endowed with intellect, intuition, conscience, language, and curiosity? How is it that we often intently focus these faculties on the questions of life? And how is it that we are surrounded by other minds with whom we may readily discuss those questions? Viewed from one angle, it certainly looks as if we humans have been equipped for a search for truth. The tools are in us and around us. Our part, it would appear, is simply to use them.

Third, there is what I like to call *the manageable messiness of the religious/philosophical world*. The idea here is that our spiritual condition is not nearly so messy as our postmodern friends would have us believe.

We have already seen, for example, that the questions of life are relatively few—about nine in number. What’s more, they are easy enough to understand. Children and youth ask them all the time, even if we adults cannot answer them all the time.

Also, the possible answers to the questions are few and easy enough to understand. For example, to the question, “What happens when we die?” religion and philosophy repeatedly return to three basic options: The lights go out (the view of the naturalist), the soul reincarnates (the view of the pantheist), or the soul goes immediately to heaven, purgatory or hell (the

view of the theist). We may not like some of these answers or find them equally plausible, but no one can say they are too numerous or too difficult to comprehend.

Of special interest here is the fact that the possible worldviews are very few, and also relatively easy to understand. Indeed, I would argue that there are really only three basic worldviews (naturalism, pantheism and theism), and that the shape of each one of them flows logically from their respective understandings of the ultimate reality. Yes, some confusion arises because there are quite a number of spokesmen for each worldview, each with his or her unique twist. But in the end, nearly every religion or philosophy is easily identifiable as a species of naturalism, pantheism, or theism. Please reflect on this situation carefully. The more you do, the more you will find the paucity of worldviews to be a richly significant and deeply heartening fact of philosophical life.

THE PROBATIONARY ORDER

I. A SPIRITUALLY EQUIPPED HUMAN BEING...

- A. Intuition
- B. Reason
- C. Language
- D. Community and communication
- E. Conscience
- F. Hope

II. CHALLENGED BY THE QUESTIONS OF LIFE...

- A. Innate questions
- B. Curiosity about the answers
- C. Existential urgency

III. IGNORANT OF THE ANSWERS...

- A. The answers are not within
- B. To find them we must look without

IV. SITUATED IN A MANAGABLY MESSY RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL WORLD...

- A. The questions are few and easy to understand
- B. The possible answers are few and easy to understand
- C. The possible worldviews are very few and easy to understand

V. AND FREE TO SEEK THE TRUTH OR NOT!

Let the Test begin!

Now in light of all this evidence I, for one, must conclude that mankind does not live in the midst of a philosophical chaos after all. To the contrary, it appears that human existence—though philosophically burdensome—is nevertheless *ordered*. Could it be, then, that just as we live in a natural order and a moral order, so too we live in a *probationary order*? Could it be that a rational supreme being—an unknown god—really is putting us to the test?

The thought that we are all on spiritual probation can be intimidating, for it is only natural to wonder what will happen if we should fail the test. On the other hand, the same thought can be profoundly encouraging, for it means that while our life may indeed be difficult, it is definitely not absurd. As a matter of fact, from within the test perspective a previously messy life is suddenly revolutionized—charged with new meaning, adventure, and hope. The meaning of life—or at least its highest meaning—would be to seek, find, and respond to the truth. The adventure would be to face and overcome every obstacle standing in the way. And the hope would be not only to find the truth, but—just perhaps—the divine Tester as well!

Hints of a Heavenly Hope

Spiritually hungry souls—and especially souls entangled in post-modern despair—would doubtless rejoice to know that life is a test. But are there any further reasons to believe that an unknown god exists, and that he has indeed situated us in a probationary order? Again, I believe there are. And interestingly enough, the reasons largely consist of two more orders. Let us briefly look at both.

First, there is *the natural order*: the universe, life, and man. The more we ponder this order, the more we discover certain characteristics that not only point to an unknown god, but also reveal to us something of his nature.

For example, the universe and all things in it are marked by *dependency*. Their existence, cohesiveness, and motions—as well as the mystery of “life” within its many life forms—all seem to depend upon a power that lies beyond themselves. But what, or who, is that power?

Again, the physical universe is marked by *order*. From the tiniest atoms to the largest clusters of galaxies, nearly all things display structure, complexity, and beauty. And this is true not only of the forms of things, but also

of their motions, behaviors, and relationships. It is counterintuitive in the extreme to hold that “nature” produced an asparagus fern, or a hummingbird’s feathers, or a human brain, or an ecosystem, or a solar system, or the cosmos itself—all by accident. Inescapably, order in the universe evokes within us an awareness of a divine Orderer—an intelligent, powerful, and profoundly artistic unknown god.

Then too there is the *goodness* of the natural order—the tendency of all things not only to sustain life but also to contribute to its pleasure. Think, for example, of the sun, the air, the soil, the rains, the abundance of delicious foods in the world, and of all the materials suitable for building shelters or clothing bodies. Think of the hidden powers and principles of nature—mechanical, chemical, gravitational, electromagnetic, or nuclear—and how, by technological advance, they have all enriched our lives.

Yes, there is natural evil in the world: sickness, injury, famine, pestilence, earthquake, hurricane, and more. Such brute facts are problematic for any worldview, causing us to ask the third question of life, “What (if anything) went wrong?” It must be observed, however, that as a general rule goodness predominates in human experience. Moreover, goodness, rather than its opposite, is our instinctual expectation. I have yet to hear anyone ask, “What went right? Why is there so much goodness, pleasure, and life in the world?” So here—in nature’s goodness and in our expectation of it—we again catch a glimpse of the unknown god, a good god who delights in giving good things to all living beings, and especially to the sons and daughters of men.

Summing up, then, we find that the dependency, order, and goodness of the natural world all work together to unveil to human hearts an unknown god—a god who is personal, powerful, rational, and good.

Secondly, there is *the moral order*. Unlike the natural order, this order is spiritual rather than physical, invisible rather than visible. Nevertheless, all of us are well aware of its existence and of its mighty power to influence our lives for good or ill.

The several elements of the moral order press themselves upon our consciousness daily. We all know, for example, that there are certain universal *moral laws*: We ought not to commit murder, steal, lie, etc. Rather, we ought to love, serve, be faithful, courageous, industrious, etc. By and large, all peoples agree about the content of the moral law,

as any survey of world religion and philosophy will show. And even when they do not, this need not mean that the moral law does not exist, only that its hold upon some of us has been weakened—perhaps even dangerously so.

Next, there is *moral obligation*, an objective spiritual reality which somehow makes itself known to the subjective faculty we call conscience. Together with conscience, it speaks to us inwardly, urging us to live up to the moral law or to reconcile ourselves to it when we break it or fall short of its demands. Moral obligation may be invisible, but millions will testify that it is as real as any mountain they have ever climbed.

Finally, there is *the law of moral cause and effect*. Our innate awareness of this law assures us that good will ultimately triumph over evil; that we will always reap what we sow; that righteousness will bring reward and evil will bring retribution, if not in this life, then surely in the next.

Again, the moral order is spiritual rather than physical, but no less real or objective than the natural world itself. Like the wind, we cannot see it, but we can see its effects. Every day we observe people relating to it: striving to honor it, warring against it, stumbling over it, longing to be reconciled to it. It is just as pervasive, complex, powerful, and beautiful as the natural order. And like the natural order, it too manifests design and points to a person with a purpose. It too reveals a personal god who created it and sustains it. Here, however, we learn something different about this god: He is a holy, sovereign, and righteous judge—and he would have us live before him accordingly.

The natural and moral orders are, then, two powerful “hints of a heavenly hope,” solid evidence for the existence of an unknown god. I say “unknown,” yet because of these orders it appears we can actually know quite a bit about him: that he is personal, powerful, intelligent, wise, artistic, good, holy, sovereign, a respecter of our choices, and a rewarder of those who use them well.

And there is one thing more: He certainly seems to enjoy creating orders!

Could it be, then, that there really is a probationary order, and that the god of the natural and moral orders is its author as well? With so much evidence for an orderly god before our eyes, this certainly seems to be the case.

In Search of the Teacher

Now suppose that in contemplating these three orders someone awakens to the existence of an unknown god who is holding them all together. Suppose he concludes that life is—or is very likely—a test. Suppose he decides to search out the answers to all the questions of life, and to learn all he can about the divine Tester. What then? How, practically speaking, is he to proceed?

To begin with, he should proceed by rejoicing, for now a seeker has been born, and a great journey—with great promise of great reward—is about to begin. If the test perspective is true, such things are a joy not only to man, but also to the unknown god himself.

But after the rejoicing, then what? What first baby steps is the newborn seeker to take?

In a sense, the answer to that question is already within him. For is it not the case that all of us, even from our childhood, seek truth at the feet of a teacher? Perhaps we turn to a parent, or to a pastor, or to a trusted professor. Whatever the case, it seems that we humans are “wired” to look for the truth outside of ourselves; to look for an authoritative “someone” from whom we can hear those special words that we know will bring us life.

Interestingly, this inclination makes excellent sense from within the test perspective. If we really believe that life is a test, then we also know—or at least strongly suspect—that the divine Tester is on our side. But if he is on our side, then surely he must have made some provision for us to find the answers we need in order to pass his test. In other words, he must have sent us some kind of teacher, or at least be planning to in days ahead. The seeker’s next step, then, is to begin looking for what I will call *god’s appointed Teacher*—the phenomena, disciplines(s), person(s), or institution(s) authorized by the unknown god to bring us his true answers to the questions of life.

Now let us assume for the moment what is very likely the case, that such a teacher has *already* come into the world. How shall we find him (or them, or it)? And how shall we be certain that we have found him when we do? In asking these questions, the seeker’s search begins.

As a rule, it also begins with some dead ends.

Soon enough, for example, a newborn seeker will realize that *nature* is not god’s appointed Teacher. Now nature, as we just saw, does indeed tell us

a few things about the unknown god, but not nearly enough. Nature does not tell us god's name (if he has a name). It does not tell us all we want to know about his character, or his plans for the cosmos. It does not tell us how evil entered the universe, or if, how, and when it will be removed, etc. And what is true of the natural order is true of the moral order as well: Neither is god's appointed Teacher, for neither fully discloses to us the answers to the questions of life.

Similarly, it will not be long before the seeker realizes that *natural science* is not the Teacher. This only makes sense, since natural science is limited to the study of nature—the physical world—whereas the questions of life have to do with what is spiritual, or at least with what is invisible and immeasurable.

With what physical tools, for example, shall scientists ascertain the nature of the ultimate reality, whether it is spirit or matter? With what instruments shall they observe the origin of the cosmos? With what experiments shall they discover the meaning of life or the moral laws by which we should live? What kind of scope will permit them to scope out the afterlife or to behold the end of the universe? Now it is all too true that some scientists try to lend the prestige of science to their philosophical opinions, asserting, for example, that there is no god, or that man has no soul, or that the universe will one day become a lifeless dust-bin. But such affirmations are completely unscientific, for the truth about these matters lies completely beyond the reach of their disciplines, as indeed many honest scientists will frankly admit.

And so, because of its limited focus and methods, we must conclude that natural science is not and cannot be the Teacher sent by god. Aspiring cosmologists, hoping to discover a truly comprehensive “theory of everything,” should ponder this fact with utmost care.

But what of *philosophy*? Surely in this time-honored discipline we have an excellent candidate for god's appointed Teacher. After all, what is philosophy supposed to do if not supply solid answers to the questions of life?

And yet it cannot. Such, in any case, was my own conclusion when, after devoting four years and thousands of dollars to the study of philosophy, I graduated from a major American university without a single conviction concerning even one of the great questions of life. My alarm and dismay were exquisite.

Interestingly, not a few professional philosophers have reached the same melancholy conclusion.

Diogenes Laertius (ca. 300 A.D.) quotes Socrates as saying, “One thing only I know, and that is that I know nothing.”

Montaigne agreed, asserting that “Philosophy is doubt.”

Henri Bergson confessed, “Intelligence is characterized by a natural incomprehension of life.”

R. D. Hitchcock concedes, “A modest confession of ignorance is the ripest and last attainment of philosophy.”

John Seldon, adopting the same minimalist approach, opines, “Philosophy is nothing but discretion.”

A story is told of the pessimistic German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer who, while visiting a greenhouse in Dresden, became so absorbed in contemplating a plant that his peculiar behavior elicited the concern of an attendant. “Who are you?” the attendant asked suspiciously. Schopenhauer replied, “Sir, if only you could answer that question for me, I’d be eternally grateful.”

Similarly, someone once asked English philosopher Bertrand Russell if he would be willing to die for his beliefs. “Of course not,” Russell replied. “After all, I may be wrong.”³

Now all of this would be funny if it weren’t so sad. How is it possible that the one discipline charged with discovering answers to the questions of life can fail so completely in its mission? Are the post-modernists right after all? Is the greatest discovery of the “lovers of wisdom” that wisdom is not discoverable at all?

The test perspective, as we have already seen, supplies important answers to these urgent questions. It teaches us that man is indeed imbued with the philosophical spirit: Sooner or later we all want to know the truth about the questions of life. But it also teaches us that the answers are not innate; that they are not accessible by means of introspection or logic. And this is just as true for philosophers as it is for all the rest of us. All people—philosophers included—need a teacher sent by god.

The history of western philosophy only confirms these important conclusions. And yet, by surveying it for just a moment, we are encouraged to find that it does indeed supply a hint of a more fruitful road to travel.

Think of this history as a sandwich.

The bottom layer is the age of Greco-Roman philosophy (ca. 500 B.C. to 300 A.D.). It began when certain Greek philosophers cast off traditional mythological responses to the questions of life and sought to find answers through the use of unaided reason. Not surprisingly, as the years unfolded some of them turned to naturalism, others to pantheism, and still others to theism. In the end, however, they could not agree. Accordingly, as this period drew to a close, Greco-Roman philosophy was in a shambles, characterized by skepticism, cynicism, mysticism, and despair. The world was ripe for a new way of doing philosophy, a way that would not only revive the philosophical spirit, but also somehow satisfy it at last.

The middle layer of the sandwich is medieval Christian philosophy (ca. 300 A.D. to 1600 A.D.). During this era most people believed that a new way had indeed come. Philosophy thrived. Yes, there were differences of opinion, say between traditional Catholics and various reformers. Nevertheless, all Christendom was united by a common philosophical culture. That culture was based on a common faith. All believed that God had revealed the answers to the questions of life by speaking to mankind through Christ and the Bible. For Christians, these two authorities were God's appointed Teacher. Men may have disagreed about how to interpret the words of this teacher, but they did not disagree that the words had come from the one true god. Accordingly, this lengthy middle season in western philosophy was marked by creativity, contention, and even occasional confusion. But it was never marked by skepticism or despair. Because they had found a trusted spiritual teacher, philosophers—and the philosophical spirit—were alive and well.

The top layer of the sandwich is modern philosophy (ca. 1600 A.D. to the present). For reasons we shall discuss later, this period began with a loss of confidence in the Bible, and indeed with a rejection of the very possibility of divine revelation. The battle cry of the so-called Enlightenment was "Reason, not Revelation!" Men felt that in casting off revelation they were casting off superstitions that had trammled the mind and hindered its search for truth. Like the Greeks and Romans of old, they were determined to turn away from the ancient Hebrew myths and turn instead to science, logic, and introspection. Here alone was the way to discover whatever answers they might need—including the answers to the great questions of life.

Four hundred years of intellectual history now enable us to see what the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment could not—that their new way was actually an old way, and a counsel of despair as well. In taking the path of the Greeks and Romans, they arrived at the same destination as the Greeks and Romans. Just as before, some turned to naturalism, others to pantheism, and still others to speculative theism. And just as before, they could not agree. And so, beginning in the 1950s, many philosophers finally gave up on the “modern” quest for truth—the quest for truth apart from divine revelation. Note carefully, however, that most of them did not turn back to revelation. Instead, they inaugurated the so-called postmodern era, an era in which philosophy now courts its own destruction by abandoning the idea of truth itself. Some have hailed this as a great discovery. History shows, however, that it is simply the age of modern philosophy ending like the age of ancient philosophy—in a shambles characterized by skepticism, cynicism, mysticism, and despair. And among some, at least, it is also characterized by a desperate longing for a new and life-giving way of doing philosophy.

So again, in this briefest of surveys we find that the history of Western philosophy confirms exactly what the test perspective teaches: The answers to the questions of life are not innate, so that all men need a divine revelation, a teacher sent from the unknown god. Accordingly, seekers cannot turn to philosophy—or *at least not to any philosophy that spurns divine revelation*. Rather, they must acknowledge the truth of G. K. Chesterton’s words, who said that the mind is like a mouth: It is meant to bite down on something hard. That something is revelation. Revelation is the philosopher’s true food. Just as the natural scientist was meant to feast on nature, so the philosopher was meant to feast on revelation. He can try to bite down on the world of nature, or on the contents of his own mind and emotion, but that will only hurt his teeth. What’s more, if he continues to do so, he will starve. Here, then, is the philosopher’s true wisdom: Feast on revelation and live.

The Rough Road of Revelation

A seeker’s journeys into all these spiritual *cul de sacs* can be deeply frustrating, but they need not be in vain. All that is necessary to make them

profitable is for him to learn the lesson they teach: In his search for god's appointed Teacher, he cannot avoid traveling *the rough road of revelation*. In other words, no matter how daunting the prospect may seem, he must now begin to look for the person or group of persons through whom the unknown god may have been pleased to reveal his truth to the world.

Now concerning this final phase of the search, there is both good news and bad.

The good news is that there is lots of revelation in the world. For example, we have much *theistic revelation*—revelation purportedly given by an infinite personal god. Included prominently in this category are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, along with their many sectarian offshoots.

Then too there is *pantheistic revelation*—revelation supposedly coming from spiritually enlightened men, or possibly from disembodied spirits living on spiritual planes beyond our own. In this category we have the teachings of Hinduism, Taoism, and Buddhism, as well as revelations coming to us through various New Age “channelers” or spiritists.

The bad news, of course, is that these revelations are largely irreconcilable. In other words, they consistently offer conflicting answers to some, most, or all of the questions of life.

Now if logic counts for anything, this situation necessarily involves three possibilities: One of the revelations may be true, some of them must be false, or (god forbid!) all of them could be false.

For mystics, however, logic doesn't count for much. It is, as Emerson famously said about consistency, the hobgoblin of little minds. Accordingly, the mystic sees another possibility: that world religions only *appear* to be contradicting each other; that in fact they all are “really” saying the same thing; and that it therefore doesn't much matter which religion we practice, so long as we practice it sincerely. In short, since all roads lead to Rome, one road is pretty much as good as another.

If this viewpoint seems attractive, it is because there is an element of truth in it. All religions—to the extent that they acknowledge a spiritual ultimate reality—do indeed seek to understand and relate to that reality. They have glimpsed the unknown god and are attempting to establish a closer connection with him. But even if all religions share this common goal, it does not follow that all religions succeed equally well in achieving it. For example, one religion may tell us the true name of the unknown

god (assuming he has a name), while another may tell us that he has no name or that he has many. One religion may describe him as he truly is, while another describes him as it thinks he is or as it wants him to be. One religion may enable seekers to establish a lasting connection with the (formerly) unknown god, while another may promise to do so yet continually leave them in shadow and frustration. In sum, one religion may actually be a dependable revelation in which a personal god reaches down to man, while another may be an undependable speculation in which man—peering through the semi-darkness of nature and conscience—falteringly reaches up to god. The result is that all religions may be one in aspiration yet not be one in attainment.

Observe also that the mystic's understanding of religious diversity is always based on a pre-existing religious commitment, and that that commitment is nearly always pantheistic. How does the mystic "know" that all religions are really saying the same thing? It is because he "knows" that pantheism is true; that just as there is one Big Mind back of all (seemingly different) things, so there is one Big Mind back of all (seemingly different) religions. And why does the mystic smile condescendingly at seekers who carefully compare and contrast the teachings of different religions, hoping to find the one that is true? It is because he already "knows" that comparing and contrasting them is futile; that the discriminating intellect is actually an enemy; that common sense, reason, language, and even conscience all tend to *divide* reality into (the illusion of) multiplicity, whereas the true spirit of religion tends to *dissolve* all things into (the reality of) oneness.

The seeker, however, has made no such religious commitment and therefore "knows" nothing of the kind. In particular, he is not at all certain that pantheistic revelations are true. Accordingly, he cannot agree that all religions are "really" expressions of the one "perennial philosophy"—pantheism. Indeed, he finds it both interesting and important that we must do great violence to the actual teachings of the theistic religions in order to pull pantheistic rabbits out of theistic hats. Reason, joined with careful study, persuades him that on nearly every question of life the theistic and pantheistic worldviews stand opposed; and from the test perspective he has learned to listen hard to the voice of reason. He knows it is important equipment from the unknown god, vital in his search for truth. How, then, can he follow

the mystic by casting aside reason—and all the rest of his discriminating faculties—as useless obstacles in the pursuit of spiritual reality?

But if mysticism is not the way, what is? Again, it appears there is only one answer: Seekers must turn to the rough road of revelation. Yes, human fallibility and duplicity have doubtless littered the spiritual landscape with religious refuse. And yes, it is even possible that evil spirits have contributed to the confusion as well—for nearly all world religions acknowledge the existence and deceptive activity of evil spirits. But none of this precludes the possibility that one of the religions is indeed god's truth, and none of it releases us from the obligation of finding out whether such is the case. Therefore, taking the rough road of revelation, the seeker must begin diligently to sort through all the competing revelations until, god willing, he finds the one that is true. If he wants it badly enough, he will.

Getting Started

But how exactly is a seeker to proceed in this search? What principles should guide him? And perhaps most importantly, where in the world should he begin?

By way of response, let me draw from my own experience in this area to suggest some assumptions that a seeker won to the test perspective may reasonably make.

First, he may reasonably assume that the Teacher's identity will not clobber him over the head. From within the test perspective this assertion makes perfect sense, for if the unknown god made finding his Teacher too easy, the test would not be a test. Thus, a seeker should brace himself, understanding that a significant amount of effort will likely be required. In particular, he must plan to dig deep—deep enough to uncover any evidence by which the unknown god may have been pleased to identify this or that teacher as his own.

But secondly, a seeker may also assume that the Teacher's identity will not be too obscure. This too makes sense. After all, the divine Tester is on our side. If he has sent us a teacher, it is because he wants us to find him. Yes, his Teacher may superficially resemble other teachers, just as wheat superficially resembles chaff or gold resembles pyrite. But in the end, anyone who really wants to find him can, even the simplest among us.

This assumption has practical ramifications. It means that god's appointed Teacher is likely to be a public person rather than a private, a herald rather than a hermit. It means that he will offer the kind of credentials that average people can respect; that he will use the kind of words average people can understand, and that he will make the kinds of demands with which average people can comply. In short, seekers may reasonably assume that god's appointed Teacher will not make himself available only to intellectual or spiritual giants, but to every honest soul, great or small, who is simply willing to keep his eyes open for truth.

Thirdly, a seeker may reasonably assume that the unknown god will direct us to his Teacher by means of supernatural signs. A little reflection reveals why such a method is to be expected. If a powerful, personal god who is also a divine Tester wanted to get our attention, how better than to use the unusual? If he desired to draw us to a particular teacher, how better than to surround that teacher with the miraculous? Furthermore, if he desired to test our love of the truth, how better than to use phenomena which the lazy or rebellious could easily shrug off as fraud or superstition, but which the diligent and open-hearted—*after careful investigation*—could finally recognize as the handiwork of heaven?

Again, seekers already understand that the natural, moral, and probationary orders all point to an infinite personal god—precisely the kind of god who *could* use supernatural phenomena to direct us to his Teacher. Believing this, they therefore have at their disposal an excellent way to begin their search: They should keep their eye out for a teacher who is surrounded by supernatural signs.

Finally, a seeker may reasonably assume that if the Teacher has already come into the world, he will be surrounded by a large number of spiritually satisfied disciples who have followed the signs to his feet. How could it be otherwise? For if indeed this is god's appointed Teacher, he will surely have brought to mankind all the truths and all the spiritual experiences for which the unknown god has prepared the human heart. And if seekers have truly found such things at this one's feet, why would they want to leave in search of another? They are seekers no more, but finders—finders who have come home. So then, those who have not yet come home do well to keep their eyes out for those who have.

Now before continuing to the next section, please take a moment to ask yourself the following important question: Who among all the world's religious teachers that you are familiar with best fulfills these criteria? Who, above all others, had a notably public ministry, connected well with the common man, was surrounded by supernatural signs, gained a large and committed following, and claimed to be bringing to the whole world god's answers to the questions of life? Think about it, write down your top two or three choices, and then read on to see how one of your fellow-seekers answered this question many years ago.

Window on a World of Signs

By and large, rumors deservedly have a bad reputation. Yet we must also admit that rumors are often true and occasionally of great importance. Indeed, in a world such as ours the unknown god himself may not be above starting an occasional rumor if he thought it could help a poor seeker to find his Teacher. He knows people talk. And he knows there is nothing like a few signs to get them talking—and moving toward the one whom he has sent.

So it happened with me back in the early 1970s. In those heady days of widespread spiritual inquiry I had become a seeker. I was deeply absorbed in the questions of life, especially the question of the ultimate reality. Through nature and conscience I had caught a glimpse of the unknown god. I had concluded that natural science and modern philosophy were indeed dead ends; that down those roads I would find no ultimate answers at all. And so my thoughts began to turn toward world religion. I realized that I must now journey down the rough road of revelation. But where in the world was I to begin?

As a matter fact, I began with what was then much “in the air”—Eastern religion. In my first year alone I studied and practiced Tibetan Buddhism, Hindu yoga, and Zen Buddhism. But it was not long before something caught my eye, something supernatural. As I considered the teachings of my gurus and Zen masters, it began to dawn on me that there was one teacher who somehow stood out from all the rest: Jesus of Nazareth. Though I had taken little religious training as a child and no biblical instruction at all in college, I had heard enough rumors about Jesus to sense that he was

unique. After all, had he not performed many astounding miracles? Had he not predicted the future? Had not the common people received him gladly? Was he not revered as the wisest of teachers and the best of men? And did he not have a large and enthusiastic following even to this very day, even in Santa Cruz, California, where I lived?

And then there was the most amazing rumor of all—the story of his resurrection from the dead. Already I had read a great many “yogi books” about enlightened masters and god-intoxicated men. But never had I read or heard about any guru or teacher who had risen from the dead and then ascended bodily into the sky!

So, alerted by all these signs, I decided to go to where they pointed. I decided to learn more about Jesus and more about what he taught. This meant, of course, that I had to read the Bible. And so, for the first time in my life, I opened one up. When I did, I found to my amazement that I had actually opened a window—a window on a world of signs.

In a moment I will tell you more about the signs I saw. But first, for the sake of those who are unfamiliar with it, I want to offer a few introductory words about the window itself, the Bible.

The Bible is actually a book of books, sixty-six of them. It was written by about forty different Jewish authors (plus Luke, a Gentile doctor), in three different languages, in seven different literary genres, over the course of some 1600 years (from about 1500 B.C. to about A.D. 90). Importantly, the stories it tells reference hundreds of different historical persons, places, things, and events. For these and other reasons, the Bible displays a very great diversity.

Yet it also displays an extraordinary—some would even say miraculous—unity. For example, all of the books speak of *one god*. In the Old Testament (OT), he is called *Elohim*, the majestic creator and sustainer of the universe. There he is also called *Yahweh*, the covenant-keeping LORD of his people Israel. In the New Testament this same god is in view, but is further unveiled by Jesus and his apostles as a holy trinity, a three-in-one god eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Together, the books tell *one unfolding story*—a story of the *creation* of the universe, life, and man; their *fall* into evil, suffering, sickness, and death because of the sin of the first man, Adam; and their final rescue and restoration (i.e., *redemption*) by the triune creator turned redeemer. Needless

to say, a story built around such themes should be of the greatest possible interest to seekers since it definitely touches on the questions of life!

Very importantly, the biblical books also affirm that the cosmic redemption is to be accomplished through *one central character*—the Messiah (or, in Greek, the Christ). This title means “The Anointed One.” It is a term first used by the OT prophets to declare that God, in days ahead, would anoint the promised redeemer with his Spirit, thereby enabling him to accomplish his great work of saving the world (Isaiah 42:1f, 61:1f).

As to his nature, the Bible teaches that the Messiah is both human and divine.⁴ He is, in the picturesque language of the early Greek theologians, the *theanthropos*, the God-Man. More particularly, he is at once the human son of David (an ancient prototype of the royal Messiah) and the divine Son of God (Mt. 22:41-46, Rom. 1:1-6). This, the mystery of the Incarnation, is one of the great themes of NT theology. Over and again, the apostles marvel that God the Father has sent his divine Son into the world through the womb of a virgin, so that her human offspring, Jesus of Nazareth, might become the Last Adam; that in behalf of God’s chosen people he might do all the first Adam failed to do, and undo all he did; that he might live, die, and rise again to redeem and re-create a whole new cosmos (Mt. 1:18-23, Luke 1, John 1:1-18, Romans 5:12f, Phil. 2).

Concerning his work, the Bible portrays the Messiah as a cosmic redeemer who accomplishes his mission by occupying three offices familiar to Israelites of OT times: prophet, priest and king. As a *prophet*, he brings God’s truth not only to Israel but to all nations, thus redeeming them from ignorance and error (Deut. 18:15-19, Isaiah 2:1-4, 9:2, 49:6). As a *priest*, he offers himself as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people, thus redeeming all who trust in him from divine wrath and condemnation (Psalm 110, Isaiah 53, Zech. 6:12-13). And as *king*, he rules from heaven in God’s stead over the faithful of all nations, thus redeeming them from their sinful rebellion and autonomy (Psalms 2, 110, Isaiah 9, Dan. 7:9-14). One day the king will descend from heaven to redeem the material universe itself!

For the NT writers, the person and work of the Messiah are the central themes of all divine revelation. On this view, the primary characteristic of the so-called Old Testament books is that they look forward to the Messiah’s coming. The primary characteristic of the New Testament books is that they celebrate his arrival in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, even as

they continue to look forward to his return at the end of the age, when he will consummate God's redemptive plan by raising the dead, judging the world in righteousness, and renewing the entire cosmos.

And so, because of this amazing, multi-layered, Christ-centered unity, Christian interpreters see the sixty-six books as one book, *the book*, the Bible. They also see it as the most important cosmological document ever written.⁵

But there is more. For the Bible also discloses *one (very large) body of supernatural signs*—signs attesting that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the promised Messiah. And just here we find something to perk up the ears of every alert seeker. For if these signs are credible, would they not suggest that the unknown god and Israel's God are one and the same? Would they not also identify Jesus as his appointed Teacher? And if, after all this, Jesus actually *claimed* to be the Messiah, would he not be identifying himself as the supreme Prophet—which is to say, the god-appointed Teacher—of the entire human race?

All of this brings us back to the window and to what I saw when I first looked through it: I saw the *one body of Messianic signs*. Much indeed could be written about them (and has). Here, however, I want simply to list them, adding no more than a few explanatory notes. In so doing, I hope to give you a feel for their abundance, diversity, supernaturalness, and, most importantly, their amazing convergence in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. I also hope that they will impress you as much as they did me.

Note carefully that there are actually hundreds of signs, but that they readily fall into the following eight categories.

Signs Surrounding Jesus' Birth—These include angelic visitations, his birth to a virgin, a revival of the spirit of prophecy among certain devout Jews of Jesus' day, and the God-inspired journey of the Persian wise men to the place of his birth.⁶

Angelic Visitations and Testimony—These include angelic annunciations of Jesus' soon-coming birth, angelic ministry to Jesus in the wilderness and in the Garden of Gethsemane, and angelic appearances at his tomb and on the mountain near Jerusalem from which he ascended into the sky. Under this heading belong also the terrified confessions of demons—fallen angels with whom Jesus did battle in the days of his ministry to Israel.⁷

Theophanies—A theophany may be defined as an outward manifestation of God in which he sensibly displays his presence to men. During Jesus' earthly ministry, God thus showed himself twice: once at Jesus' baptism and once again at his transfiguration on a high mountain in Galilee. The apostle Peter was present at Jesus' transfiguration when God manifested himself both visibly and audibly. Writing of this experience toward the end of his life, Peter commended it to his fellow Christians as one of the outstanding proofs that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the God-authorized Teacher of the human race.⁸

Miracles—Miracles may be defined as extraordinary happenings that are designed by God to reveal his glory (i.e., the radiant beauty of the divine character) and help his people. According to the apostle John, Jesus performed so many miracles that all the books in the world could not contain them! These include healings, exorcisms, resuscitations of the dead, acts of power over nature, clairvoyance, and numerous predictions of the future. The New Testament authors speak of numerous miracles performed through the apostles, and also assume that at least some of Jesus' disciples will be empowered by Christ to perform them until his return at the end of the age.⁹

The Resurrection—Here is the most unusual and important of all biblical miracles—that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again from the dead after three days. His was not a mere resuscitation. The biblical authors record that after his resurrection he showed himself to hundreds of eyewitnesses over the space of forty days and then ascended visibly into heaven. In other words, they affirm that Jesus rose to eternal life. Not surprisingly, his followers attached great importance to the resurrection, citing it often as the preeminent sign of God's favor upon their master. For them, it was the single most important reason why seekers of divine truth should turn, come, listen, and learn at Jesus' feet.¹⁰

Old Testament Messianic Types—The Old Testament consists of the thirty-nine biblical books written before Jesus' coming. The work of many different authors over the course of about 1100 years, these books contain numerous Messianic types. A Messianic type (Greek, *typos*: form or figure) is an OT person, place, object, event, or institution that symbolically points ahead to the Messiah and to the events of his life. Jesus and his disciples

firmly believed that he was the promised Messiah, and that the OT types all found, or will yet find, their fulfillment in him.

A single example will give a feel for the nature of such types. In the OT book of Numbers we learn that the Israelites, recently escaped from Egypt, were grumbling against God in the wilderness (Numbers 21). As a result, God judged them by sending poisonous serpents into their camp. When the people cried out to God for mercy, God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and suspend it on a pole. Looking upon it, those stricken by the serpents would be healed. Jesus saw this entire episode as a type of himself and his work. Like the serpent, he too would be lifted up on a pole, bearing the sins of his people, so that all who look upon him in simple faith may experience forgiveness, spiritual healing, and eternal life (John 3:1f).

The NT authors find many such types in the OT, while Christian interpreters down through the centuries feel sure they have unearthed many more.¹¹

Old Testament Messianic Prophecies—These are explicit OT predictions of the person and work of the coming Messiah. Again, both Jesus and his disciples affirmed that the Messianic prophecies have been, or will yet be, fulfilled in him. Christian interpreters argue that *the entire course of Jesus' life was foretold in OT prophecy*: his divine preexistence as the Son of God, his virgin birth, his birthplace, his miraculous ministry to the downtrodden, his death on the cross, his resurrection, his ascension, his reign in heaven, and his coming again in power and glory at the end of the age. Note that OT types and prophecies point not only to Jesus but also to the divine inspiration of the biblical books in which they have been preserved.¹²

The Church—Jesus called his followers his Church, promising that they too would become signs. Their words, supernaturally transformed character, good works, growing numbers, and perseverance in the face of persecution and martyrdom would point seekers everywhere to the master whom his followers knew and loved. The book of Acts records the birth and early history of Jesus' Church. Two thousand years of Church history record the rest. Here, then, is a unique sign, for it is seen not only through the window of the Bible but also down through the centuries and around us in the world today.¹³

As I said earlier, in my first reading of the Bible (and especially of the four Gospels) I was deeply impressed by all these Messianic signs. I did

not, however, fully appreciate their importance. Enjoying now the benefit of years of further reflection, let me conclude this section with three observations that should be of special interest to seekers.

First, seekers should understand that *the Christian faith is altogether unique in commending its truthfulness to the world by signs*. All religions claim to be true. Some even ascribe supernatural phenomena to their founders. But none—with the exception of Christianity—issues its truth claims, cites a wide variety of supernatural evidences in their support, and then explicitly challenges people to examine them. Interestingly, Jesus himself laid down this very pattern (John 5:1f), while the New Testament reveals that his disciples faithfully followed it. So too have Christian preachers and teachers down through the centuries. In so doing, all have operated on the assumption that life is a test of our love of the truth, and that pondering and following the signs granted by Israel's God is one of the best ways to discover what that truth is.¹⁴

Second, *the biblical signs create a reasonable presumption that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed god's appointed Teacher*. This important conclusion follows logically from the very great abundance of signs, their amazing diversity, their having been spread out over some 6,000 years of human history, their appearance in numerous old and highly credible historical documents, and, above all, their marvelous convergence in one man, Jesus of Nazareth. This phenomenon is unprecedented and unparalleled in all religious history. If, as Christian philosopher Os Guinness has written, Jesus is the world's greatest magnet for seekers, it is because those seekers are drawn by the world's greatest collection of signs.¹⁵

Finally, Jesus confirms the implication of the signs by explicitly identifying himself as God's appointed Teacher. Here, the last piece of the puzzle falls into place: The signs create a rational presumption that Jesus is the Teacher; Jesus confirms this presumption by declaring that he is indeed the Teacher.

His own words leave no doubt about his views on this crucial matter. Let us look at just a few of them.

First, Jesus saw himself as *a unique teacher*, "a greater than Solomon" who was sent into the world to unveil mysteries that the ancient prophets longed to see and hear (Mt. 12:42, 13:16-17).

Next, he saw himself as a teacher who was culminating God's revelation to man, telling his disciples that he had given them God's own words (John 17:6-8), and that in days ahead he would teach them "all things" (John 15:15, 14:26). In this confidence he also proclaimed that his words were henceforth to be the one rock upon which men may safely build their lives (Mt. 7:24-29, 28:18f). Indeed, henceforth men of every generation *must* keep building on them, even to the end of the age, when at last those same words will become the judge of all (John 12:48).

Very importantly, Jesus saw himself as bringing this revelation not only to Israel, but also *to all mankind*. Thus, echoing the ancient prophecy of Isaiah, he declared to the citizens of Jerusalem, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12, Isaiah 49:6). On another occasion, when a Samaritan woman said to Jesus, "I know that the Messiah is coming...he will declare all things to us," Jesus replied, "I who speak to you am He" (John 4:25-26).

Similarly, when Pilate interrogated him about his claims to royalty, Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" (John 18:36-8). Here Jesus sought to bring God's truth to a Gentile—a Gentile who refused to hear his voice because he was not "on the side of the truth" (John 18:37, NIV).

Finally, and quite mysteriously, Jesus saw himself as God's appointed Teacher *even to the end of the age*. This is reflected in his final words to his disciples. For example, Jesus warned them, "Do not be called Rabbi, for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers...And do not be called leaders, for One is your Leader, even Christ" (Mt. 23:8-12). Here we see that Jesus identifies himself as the Christ, and that as such he intends to be the Teacher of his people right up to the time of his return (Mt. 28:20). Elsewhere in the NT we learn how he plans to accomplish this spiritual feat: After his return to heaven, he will send the Holy Spirit, through whom he (Jesus) will enable his apostles to complete the written revelation of God's truth. After that he will send the Spirit to all the rest of his disciples, so that they in turn may be able to understand it (John 14:15-18, 25-26, 16:12-13, 15; see Luke 24:45). Through the one Spirit, the one Teacher will teach them all.

Summing up, we find that Jesus of Nazareth saw himself as a unique teacher sent from above to bring a new and final revelation of God's truth;

a revelation that would complement and complete all previous revelation; a revelation that was therefore now ready to go out to all mankind; a revelation that he himself would enable his apostles to receive and write down, and the rest of his disciples to recognize, preserve, understand, obey, and delight in, even to the end of the age.

A testimony like this, confirmed by so great a wealth of supernatural signs, is a bright and shining star in the sky of world religion. It can hardly fail to turn a seeker's compass toward Nazareth.

At the Feet of the Teacher

On the strength of the signs, it is certainly reasonable for a seeker to begin his search for divine truth with Jesus of Nazareth. And on the strength of his testimony about himself, it is all the more reasonable to assume that Jesus is—or is very likely—god's appointed Teacher.

Yet despite all the evidence, one vital step remains. For though all the world were filled with signs, a seeker could never be fully satisfied until he knew that Jesus had answered all or most of the questions of life, and that he had answered them well. Thus, the seeker's next logical step is to come, sit at Jesus' feet, and hear and evaluate what he has to say.

Concerning this climactic stage of the journey, several important points may be made.

First, it is evident that any evaluation of Jesus' teaching must be undertaken with great thoughtfulness and deep humility. The reasons are many. We have already seen, for example, that mankind apprehends spiritual truth with considerable difficulty and that our thinking is vulnerable to error and bias. Thus, in the case of a supernaturally attested teacher like Jesus, the path of wisdom is surely to doubt one's own views before doubting his. This is all the more true when we step back and look at things in historical perspective; when we see how mankind's philosophical and scientific opinions are "in" one day and "out" the next, while in every generation Jesus' teachings continue to find skilled defenders and a large, devoted following. In short, many factors warn the wise against a rush to judgment.

On the other hand, despite the perils, we must also understand that critical investigation is absolutely necessary. For again, the seeker's ultimate goal is to find the truth and to see that it is true. How, then, can he avoid

hearing and evaluating what purported truth-tellers have to say? On the premise that life is a test, the perils of judging god's appointed Teacher cannot possibly preclude an honest evaluation of his teaching since the test perspective positively demands it.

The necessity of such evaluation contributes richly to the drama of being human. Yes, our poor faculties may be wounded, perhaps far worse than we realize. And yes, in the process we may feel ourselves to be spiritual and intellectual midgets. Yet despite all that, we must still go forward, trusting that he who created our limited faculties will help us to use them effectively, if only we will do so humbly, honestly, and persistently. In short, Jesus may indeed be god's appointed Teacher, and any human evaluation of his views a kind of folly. But if the divine Tester has ordained careful investigation as part of the test of life, then it is a sublime folly and ready to receive its just reward.

But how, precisely, is a seeker to go about evaluating Jesus' teachings—or the teachings of anyone who presumes to bring us a revelation from god?

Here again we are much helped by the test perspective. For if life really is a test of our love of the truth, then we may be sure that the unknown god has adequately equipped us to weigh the truth claims of different teachers and religions. Indeed, from within the test perspective we suddenly begin to see the wonderful workings of our minds as the appointed means to this very end. We see ourselves as having been fitted with certain "truth monitors"—faculties designed by the divine Tester for the express purpose of pondering and evaluating different answers to the questions of life. Ours is simply to use those faculties as best we can; his is to enable us to see the truth as we do.

But what exactly are these truth monitors? Thus far in my own journey, I have identified a closely related set of four: intuition, reason, conscience, and the human inclination to hope for the best. Accordingly, I would argue that a true revelation about cosmic origins, or any other question of life, must be:

1. *Intuitive*—That is, it must not offend but rather win the assent of our most basic intuitions about reality. Human intuitions may, of course, be flawed or weakened, which means that we cannot follow them uncritically. Nevertheless, on the premise that we are creations of

an unknown god with a mandate to seek out his truth, it would be strange indeed for us not to listen to our intuitions, since they are not only given to us by god, but integrally involved in every religious and philosophical judgment we are called upon to make. In short, we may reasonably expect true answers to the questions of life to resonate with what might be called our “spiritual common sense.”

2. *Reasonable*—This criterion is actually three-fold. It means that a trustworthy divine revelation must be: a) *understandable*, b) *logical*, (i.e., it cannot contradict itself, but must obey the laws of sound thought), and c) *supported with an abundance of good evidence*. All this does not, of course, rule out “mystery,” in the sense of truth that is hidden from our sight or from our complete understanding. It does, however, rule out mysticism, by which I mean any approach to discovering truth that disparages our god-given faculties (i.e., reason, language) in favor of irrational spiritual experience.
3. *Right*—That is, it must not violate our conscience, but rather commend itself to our distinctly ethical intuitions as being consistent with the good and holy god who created and sustains the objective moral order.
4. *Hopeful*—That is, it must awaken hope; not only the hope of finding trustworthy answers to the questions of life, but also of laying to rest the spiritual longings and anxieties associated with each one of them. In other words, a true revelation must not only affect us intellectually, but also existentially. It must offer us peace of mind, both for this life and the life to come.

The Journey Before Us

With this we come, at long last, to the book you now hold in your hands. For *In Search of the Beginning* is, as I said earlier, a much-expanded chapter taken from that portion of *The Test* in which I introduce my readers to Jesus’ teachings on the nine questions of life, and then go on to evaluate them in light of the four criteria just mentioned. Needless to say, it’s a big job. Moreover, in working at that job, I soon discovered that one part was bigger than all the rest: the part that concerns the beginning—the origin of the universe, life, and man.

The difficulty here stems largely from the historical situation in which we now find ourselves. There was a time not long ago when, throughout much of the world, Jesus' view of things cosmological was pretty much taken for granted. That time is past. Today—and for at least the last 100 years—the dominant view of origins among the western intelligentsia has been what I will hereafter call *cosmic evolution*. Indeed, many of us (myself included) were brought up hearing no other, simply taking it for granted that this was the truth. If, therefore, cosmic evolution is *not* the truth, I feel quite certain that millions of modern seekers like me will require a good deal of persuading to become convinced that such is the case.

Here, then, is my main reason for turning a single chapter into an entire book, and also for offering the extensive introduction that I have: I now believe that Jesus' cosmology is *very* much worth a respectful hearing; yet I also know from painful personal experience how difficult it is for him to get it. Modern seekers will never be shaken from their evolutionary slumbers—nor from their skepticism about creationist perspectives—apart from an outstandingly clear, thorough, and persuasive defense of the traditional biblical cosmology. A few have already been written. My goal in this book is to join that special little choir by adding one more voice.

In our epistemological ramble through the lowlands, I have already labored much toward this very end. In particular, I have set out a concise case for the existence of an unknown creator god. I have shown that in things cosmological, we need his help; that we cannot rely exclusively, or even primarily, upon empirical observation and scientific theorizing, but that we need a trustworthy divine revelation if we are ever to find answers to the great questions of cosmology. Moreover, I have tried to show why it is reasonable to believe that this unknown god and the God of Israel are one, and that Jesus of Nazareth and the Bible are his appointed teachers. In short, my goal has been to persuade seekers of cosmological truth that Jesus of Nazareth definitely deserves a seat—indeed, a seat of honor—at their investigative table.

Having done all this, we are now ready to begin our journey to the origin of the universe, life, and man. My approach will be as follows.

In Chapter 1 I set the stage, drawing from personal experience to put my readers in touch with their own innate desire to behold the beginning, and to awaken in them a lively faith that they really can.

In Chapters 2 and 3 I critically examine naturalistic views of the beginning, focusing at length upon the currently regnant hypothesis of a Big Bang followed by billions of years of cosmic evolution. Naturalists do not, of course, present their cosmology as a divine revelation, since naturalism by definition is an atheistic worldview. Nevertheless, they do present it as truth, or at least as the most reasonable approximation of truth that we now have. And perhaps, despite their atheism, there is some truth in what they say. Therefore, even if a seeker disagrees with a naturalist's atheism, he still will want to examine his claims in order to see just how trustworthy they are. This is all the more necessary in view of the tremendous influence that naturalistic cosmology has had upon modern thinkers, pantheists and theists included.

In Chapter 4 I go on to examine two views of special interest to spiritually minded people—the cosmologies of classical Hinduism and the modern New Age movement. These pantheistic versions of the universe are still much in the air. The latter in particular has attracted a large following, since it seems to invest the widely assumed cosmic evolution with spiritual significance and hope. Careful seekers will want to know, however, if these pantheistic cosmologies really do meet the the high standards of a trustworthy divine revelation.

In Chapters 5 and 6 we reach the climax of our journey, examining in some detail Jesus' views on a wide variety of cosmological themes: the identity of the creator; the origin and purpose of his creation; its spiritual and physical components; the origin of natural and moral evil in the universe; God's redemptive response to both; and the goal and eternal future of the cosmos. Also, in my critical evaluation of Jesus' teaching I discuss at some length two of the most fascinating and controversial aspects of biblical cosmology: the radical geocentricity of the universe, and its "young" age of some 6,000 years.

Finally, in Chapter 7 we examine some of the distinctly spiritual factors that contribute to the controversy surrounding cosmology today. Then, reflecting upon my own failures as a seeker, I conclude by suggesting a five-fold way by which lovers of cosmological truth can make a satisfying personal journey to the beginning, where, at long last, they can see it—and all it involves—for themselves.

It remains only to add that I have included in the pages ahead a number of anecdotes taken from my own spiritual journey. These are largely drawn from a four-year period of intense spiritual searching that began immediately after my graduation as a philosophy major from the University of California at Santa Cruz (1970-1974). During a portion of that time I studied Christianity under the tutelage of a Franciscan priest, Father Gabriel Barry. During most of it, however, I assiduously believed and practiced various Eastern religions, especially Zen Buddhism. Reading the present book, you will no doubt guess how my journey ended. To know the whole story, however, you must first finish this book (no skipping ahead!), and then read *The Test*.

NOTES

1. Throughout this book I use the word “god” when referring generically to the Supreme Being, the object of mankind’s inquiries and speculations about an ultimate spiritual reality. On the other hand, I use the word “God” when referring to the god of the Bible. In so doing, I am using the word as the Bible does (and as we in the West have traditionally done)—as a proper name, the English equivalent of the Hebrew *Elohim* and of the Greek *Theos*. Thus, God is the god of the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures. Though a bit irksome at first, this distinction will prove quite helpful in the pages ahead.

2. C. S. Lewis, in the following excerpt, concludes from the experience of natural hunger that our spiritual hunger for something like heaven is a good sign that heaven exists. So too with our hunger for truth.

Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire; well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire that no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world

See C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*
(Harper San Francisco, 2001).

3. These quotes were included in an article by Dr. George Fox, entitled “The Philosopher’s Dilemma!” It appeared in *The Grace Messenger Newsletter*, (Fall, 2000). Contact Grace School of Theology, 40 Cleveland Road, Pleasant Hill, CA 94523.

4. Christian interpreters find both hints and explicit affirmations of the divine nature of the Messiah throughout the OT. See Psalms 2, 110, Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7, Jer. 23:5; Dan. 7:9-14; Micah 5:2; Mal. 3:1.

NT passages affirming or implying the deity of Jesus of Nazareth include Matthew 1:23, 11:25ff, 22:41-46, 24:30-31, 28:20; Mark 2:1-12; John 1, 5:16-33, 6:44, 8:46, 8:58, 9:35-36, 16:30, 15:5, 20:28; Philippians 2, Col. 1, Hebrews 1-2, Revelation 1-3. The NT doctrine of the trinity is seen vividly in Matthew 3:13-17, 28:18ff, John 14:15-19, 23-24, 16:13-15, 17:20-21, 2 Corinthians 13:14, 1 Peter 1:1-2.

5. For many Christians, the Christ-centered unity of the Bible is the supreme proof of its divine origin and trustworthiness. How, they ask, could some forty different authors, writing over the course of 1600 years, manage to create a single story, about a single god, administering a single plan of salvation, through a single redeemer (the Messiah), who is attested by a single set of supernatural signs, and who is worshiped by a single people, according to a single (and eminently satisfying) worldview? Such intricate, multi-layered unity seems to permit but one answer: A single divine Author must have superintended not only the creation but also the preservation, recognition, and final collection of the 66 books that we now call The Book, the Bible.

The unity of the Bible, so compellingly supernatural, also supplies a basis for much that Christians believe about the character of their Book. They say, for example, that the Bible’s unity entails its divine *inspiration*—for how, apart from such inspiration, could its several authors have produced its many-faceted oneness (2 Timothy 3:16-17)? But if the Bible is inspired, then it must also be *inerrant* in all it affirms—for how could a divinely inspired book be in error (John 17:17)? And if the Bible is inerrant, then it must also be *complete*—for both Christ and his apostles (inerrantly) taught that through themselves, and themselves alone, God was at last completing his divine revelation and sending it to all nations (Matthew 28:18f; Ephesians 2:19-20; Jude 1:3; Revelation 22:18-19). It is, then, because of the Bible’s

astonishing unity that many Christians embrace it as the very Word of God. For a chart summarizing these points, see Appendix 1.

See also Dean Davis, “One Shot, One Book, One God,” *Journal of the Christian Research Institute*, (December, 2004).

6. See Isaiah 7:10-14; Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1 and 2; Matthew 2:1-18, 4:3, Mark 3:11.

7. See Luke 1, 2, 22; Matthew 28, Acts 1.

8. See Matthew 3; John 1; Matthew 17, Luke 9, 2 Peter 1.

9. See John 21:25, Acts 2:22, 3:1-10; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.

10. See Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 53:11; Hosea 6:2; Mark 9:31, 10:34, John 2:18-25; Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20, 21; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

11. See appendix #2.

12. Here are some key OT passages describing the Person and Work of the Messiah: *Divine Pre-existence* (Isaiah 7, 9, 48-49); *Virgin Birth* (Isaiah 7); *Birth Place* (Micah 5); *Miraculous Ministry to the Poor* (Isaiah 35, 61); *Atoning Death by Crucifixion* (Psalm 22, 69, Isaiah 53); *Resurrection* (Psalm 16, Isaiah 53); *Ascension* (Psalms 16, 24, 68, 110); *Heavenly Reign* (Psalm 2, Isaiah 52, Daniel 7); *Coming Again in Glory* (Isaiah 11, 63, Malachi 3).

13. Acts 1:7-8.

14. We have a striking example of this pattern in Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost. Seeking to win his Jewish brothers to faith in Jesus, Peter declared:

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him in your midst...this man you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put to death. But God raised him up again.

—Acts 2:21f

Here, Peter commends the truth of Christianity to the Jews on the basis of Jesus’ miracles and resurrection, and then goes on to cite several OT predictions

of those very events. In all of this, Peter was simply following in the footsteps of his master, who had himself cited both his miracles and the OT scriptures as proof that the Father had sent him into the world as its authorized prophet (teacher), priest, and king. See John 5:31f; Acts 10:34-33, 17:22.

15. Many biblical scholars reject the virgin birth, angelic visitations, theophanies, miracles, and the resurrection of Jesus as myths and legends. They do so, however, not because solid historical evidence leads them to that conclusion but because they themselves do not believe that such things are possible. One among them, Rudolph Bultmann, declared flatly, “The continuum of historical happenings *cannot* be rent by the interference of supernatural, transcendent powers. Therefore, there is no ‘miracle’ in this sense of the word.” Thoughtful seekers, however, find such dogmatic skepticism impossible to embrace. They have glimpsed a personal god behind the natural, moral, and probationary orders. If such a god exists, why should he not be able to act supernaturally if he so desires? Indeed, it is only reasonable to expect that he *will* act supernaturally—for if life is a test, then supernatural signs are just the thing to lead us to the god-authorized Teacher who can help us pass.

We must, of course, be duly cautious in evaluating the world’s miracle stories, for some miracles may indeed be legendary, while others may be historical in nature but demonic in origin. Still, we cannot simply rule out miraculous signs altogether. Rather, on a case-by-case basis, we must try to determine if there is credible historical evidence to support the sign, and also if this sign nourishes hope and stimulates godly living. The prospect of having to make such evaluations may seem daunting, but if the unknown god has in fact granted true signs we can trust him also to grant sufficient outward evidence and inward illumination for us confidently to distinguish the true from the false. The only condition is that we want to (John 7:17).

For more on the historical credibility of the New Testament Jesus, see Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nelson, 1999), especially Parts 2 and 3. Also, Dean Davis, *The Test: A Seeker’s Journey to the Meaning of Life* (Pleasant Word, 2009), Chapter 7.