

CUMULATIVE CASE FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH:¹

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I. Introduction:

In this first presentation I will introduce the cumulative case method, consider 7 facts we need to remember as we do apologetics, summarize 12 steps that will be used in this approach, examine the first step of this model, and conclude with consideration our position in an immense universe.

A. C. S. Lewis once said:

“I believe in Christianity as I believe in the sun that has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” ~ *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*

1. Isn't that a beautiful quote? It is worth memorizing, isn't? Do you agree with the quote?
2. What if you were to share that quote with a stranger, maybe a neighbor, or a friend and that person sincerely responded to your statement with the following two questions?
 - a. Do you really believe that statement?
 - b. Give me solid evidence that Christianity is true in contrast to all the other world religions and ideas being claimed by well-meaning people?
 1. Do you find yourself at a loss?
 2. Are you even able to even offer a few lines of evidence?
 3. Do you find yourself only able to appeal to your conversion experience and feelings?
 4. While conversion experiences and feelings are important, other religions can claim the same.
 5. Thus, if that is your argument, as it is on its own, it places you at an impasse with other religions and movements that can claim the same.

B. In this presentation I'm going to introduce you to the cumulative case method for the Christian faith. This approach of evangelism, which finds its origins in the work of Christian philosopher, Richard Swinburne, is often used in debates by people like William Lane Craig. This approach offers a robust case for the Christian faith.

¹ Sources for this study include Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be An Atheist* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004); Norman Geisler, *Baker's Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999); Peter Kreeft & Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 1994); Kenneth Richard Samples, *Without a Doubt: Answering the 20 Toughest Faith Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 21-33; Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*; C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*.

1. In fact, of all the approaches I use in sharing my faith with others this model is perhaps the one method I use the most.
 2. This is informal approach is a strategy whereby it seeks to show that Christianity provides the best explanation of a broad range of data (holistic approach).
 3. This model appeals to the Christian faith like a great police detective or investigator attempts to build his case from a crime scene. Like my favorite TV detective, "Columbo," we take every individual argument made for God's existence, the reality, deity, and resurrection of Christ, and the reliability of the Bible and build a total case for the Christian faith. It is sort of like a pair of scales. With each coin added onto the scale, the more weighty one side becomes in contrast to the other. In the same way, as we build our case for the Christian faith, the other options or alternative ever so become less likely.
 - a. Each individual evidence and argument for God's existence, the reality of Christ, and the reliability of the Bible has a certain logical or evidential source on its own.
 - b. But if we build the strongest case possible, this approach takes the strengths of every evidential and logical argument and asks the question, which worldview is more likely? Christianity or _____ (e.g., naturalism, Hinduism, Islam, etc).
 1. Once again, the more weighty the evidence is, the more probable, the more factual, the more weighty our faith looks, especially in view of all the other truth claims being made by world religions, cults, philosophers, gurus, and sincere but mistaken people.
 2. As the case develops-we find that the Christian faith can be trusted all the more. In fact, in a world filled with belief systems making religious claims, this model offers a powerful approach by arguing in terms of probabilities or weighty evidence.
 - c. Some may call this an integrative approach for it draws from the strengths of all arguments and evidences to build a cumulative case for the Christian faith.
- C. Before and during the interaction whereby we present our case there are seven facts we need to always remind ourselves.
- 1st: People are not ignorant of God' existence.** As Romans 1 declares people are not ignorant of God's existence. At all times there are five witnesses that remind the non-Christian that God exists, there is right from wrong, and that we can know truth accurately.²

² For clarification sake I am using objectivity to mean accuracy. So many times I find that believers automatically assume Cartesian indubitability (exhaustive certainty) as a definition of objectivity. That is sloppy thinking. We rarely have exhaustive certainty in anything. Moreover, it is false to assert that if you don't have exhaustive certainty, you can't have objectivity. Rather, I can have accuracy because to claim

- a. Witness of Creation;
- b. Witness of Human Design;
- c. Witness of God-ward longing;
- d. Witness of conscience;
- e. Witness of consequences.

See you really have to be a fool to believe there is no God.

2nd: **Humans are never neutral with regard to God.** Either they worship God as Creator or they turn away from Him. Like Ronald Nash states in his excellent work, *Worldviews in Conflict*, “*Because their heart is so directed either toward God or against Him, pure theoretical thinking is never so pure, or autonomous as many would like to think.*”

3rd: “*People almost invariably arrive at their beliefs not on the basis of proof but on the basis of what they find attractive.*”--Blaise Pascal (17th century French philosopher). If you ask someone, whether Christian or not, why they believe what they believe, their answers can typically be broken into areas:

- a. Sociological reasons;
- b. Psychological reasons;
- c. Religious reasons;
- d. Philosophical reasons;
- e. Biblical truth (accurate exegesis and systematic coherence).³

4th: **Practice develops competence in sharing truth with others.** Not only is it necessary to have an accurately informed mind, but we need to see our interaction as an opportunity to sharpen our ability to effectively communicate and explain truth with others. See, so much is at stake: *The world needs the truth, reason demands the truth, and God commands us to do so.*

Regarding the command to do apologetics, consider the following passage: 1 Peter 3:15-16a:

- a. We are commanded to defend the Christian faith: 1 Peter 3:15-16a “**But in your hearts set apart** [hagiazō; consecrate, dedicate, make holy] **Christ as Lord. Always** [constantly, unceasingly, regularly] **be prepared to give an answer** [give a defense] **to everyone** [all] **who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness** [humility, meekness] **and respect** [clear conscience, ie., free from defilement].”

otherwise means I can't trust my faculties. In other words, I have direct epistemic access because that is the way God made me.

³ Adapted from: James Sire, “Why Should Anyone Believe Anything At All” in *Telling the Truth*, D.A. Carson, ed.

- b. “**Be prepared**” means to be ready/prepared to bear witness to the gospel (see also Eph. 6:15). This word is also used for being “prepared” for good works (Titus 3:1 cf. 2 Tim. 2:21) and “being ready” for the return of Jesus Christ (Matt. 24:44).
- c. “**Answer**” or “**defense**” (“*apologia*”) has two overlapping nuances in biblical Greek. (1) defend oneself, make formal justification (Ac 25:16 ; 2Co 7:11 ; Phil. 1:7 , 16 ; 2Ti 4:16 ; 1Pe 3:15) and (2) defense, the content of the answer or reply (Ac 22:1 ; 1Co 9:3). Here it is used to mean “speech in defense.”
- d. “**Reason**” [*logos*] is used here to mean reason, statement, or speech (adj.) cause for something (see also Mt 5:32; Ac 10:29; 1Pe 3:15). To understand how this particular nuance “*logos*” is used, Acts 10:29 states “I ask, therefore, for what reason did you send for me?”

5th: Remember the harmonious relationship between faith and reason:

- a. Evidence and reason bear on the believability of biblical truth; facts do not save; we can’t raise a dead man!
- b. God is the one who saves. Nevertheless, we are commanded to give reasons why we believe what we believe, reason with Paul like the apostle Paul did, demolish pretentious arguments, and refute false teaching—all with disposition of Christ-likeness.⁴

⁴ **Peter 3:15-16a:** We are commanded to defend the Christian faith:

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...

2 Cor. 10:5: We are commanded to refute false ideas:

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

1 John 4:1: We are commanded to discern false from true prophets:

Dear Friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Matthew 22:29: Jesus corrected error:

Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.”

Matthew 15:6-9: Jesus exposed false teaching:

Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’

Acts 17:16-17: Paul reasoned with people:

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.

1. Faith may be defined as the reliance upon that which you have reason to believe is true and trustworthy.
2. Reason may be defined as the guiding principle of the human mind in the process of thinking.

6th. Do not ever succumb to discouragement. Even if you can't answer a question posed to you, or you find yourself at an impasse and are not able to determine the appropriate response, or you find yourself being evangelized by the enemy (someone who is warring for your mind), please remember that we do have the very best answers to the deepest problems. Once you presented with something you can't answer, go back and study rather than become discouraged. We substantially grow by our defeats.

Did you know that even the atheist Will Durant said that though he doesn't believe in the supernatural elements of Christianity, he believed that Christianity offered the best worldview to human civilization?

7th: Every person is inherently valuable. As you share your faith remember that every person is made in the image of God. Since every person is inherently valuable, we are to respond to them as Jesus Christ Himself would. Your words, body language, and inner disposition, -every aspect of your life, is to reflect Jesus Christ. So, even if you are insulted by their comments or questions, they need to Jesus Christ. If you find yourself getting angry and you can't control yourself, you need to politely walk away and find a place of solitude and trace your anger to its root and deal with it with in prayer and personal reflection. You need to be dependent upon the Holy Spirit because your life is to imitate Christ who is the greatest living apologist.

Now that we have introduced the cumulative case method and considered seven facts we need to always remember, let's now begin by examining the first step I would use in this approach. But before I do so, let me first walk you through the 12 steps.

II. Cumulative Case for the God of the Bible.

"A good hypothesis, be it scientific or philosophical, is accepted because it possesses real explanatory power."⁵ Biblical Christianity provides a solid and consistent metaphysical foundation for explaining the important realities and phenomena encountered in life in the following 12 ways.

Titus 1:9: Paul refuted those who opposed the truth:

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

⁵ Kenneth Richard Samples, *Without a Doubt: Answering the 20 Toughest Faith Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 21-33. The * represents my personal additions to Samples' cumulative approach. This section is largely derived from this chapter.

The first 12 ways I will be sharing will be dealing with the God of the Bible. Then as each evidence and/or argument is given, we move closer to the person and work of Jesus Christ and the reliability of the Bible.

By first dealing with God's existence I am placing pressure upon on philosophical naturalism and Eastern cosmologies. Then as we proceed to the reality of Jesus Christ and the reality of the Bible we place pressure against other world religions and inclusive and relativistic alternatives. Most of the following evidence/arguments are derived from Kenneth Samples' first chapter of his book, *Without a Doubt*:

1. God uniquely accounts for the physical universe's beginning.
2. God uniquely accounts for the order, complexity, and design evident in the universe.
3. God uniquely accounts for the reality of abstract, non-physical realities.
4. God uniquely accounts for the reality of objective moral values.
5. God uniquely accounts for the reality of objective beauty.*
6. God uniquely accounts for the meaning, purpose, and significance that human beings sense and yearn for.
7. God uniquely accounts for man's sense of the divine.
8. God uniquely accounts for the enigma of man.
9. God uniquely accounts for miracles.*
10. God uniquely accounts for words and works of Jesus Christ.*
11. God uniquely accounts for the uniqueness of the Bible.*
12. God uniquely accounts for the meaningful realities of life.

A. God uniquely accounts for the physical universe's beginning.

1. Two powerful lines of scientific evidence lead to the conclusion that the universe had a beginning.
 - a. First, we have the big bang. According to prevailing scientific theory the universe had a singular beginning. All matter, energy, time and space came into existence and rapidly expanded from an infinitesimal volume. This hot big bang (which continues to expand in an extremely fine-tuned fashion) gradually cooled and diffused in such a way that it allowed for the formation of galaxies, stars, planets, moons, gases, etc.⁶
 - b. Second scientific evidence is the 2nd law of Thermodynamics provides further confirmation that the universe had a beginning. "This well-established principle indicates that the universe is being dissipated gradually and equally in all places. Thus, a time will occur, if nature takes its course, when "thermal equilibrium" (all locations in the universe manifest the same temperature) will inevitably result and all physical activity will cease. So, if the universe were eternal this halt would have already happened by necessity. Therefore, the principle of entropy supports the view that the universe has been in existence only a finite period of time.

⁶ Samples, *Thinking Through Questions About Faith in God*, 22.

2. In light of the compelling scientific evidence that the universe had a definite beginning, the question asked by philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) becomes all the more interesting: “*Why is there something rather than nothing? Why indeed?*”
3. Knowing the universe had a singular beginning a finite time ago makes it very difficult to ignore the simple but compelling logic of the following two logical arguments:

The Cosmological *Kalam* Argument:

Time cannot go back into the past forever, for it is impossible to pass through an actual infinite number of moments. If so, then time must have had a beginning. If the world never had a beginning, then we could not have reached now. But we have reached now, so time must have begun at a particular point and proceeded today. Therefore, the world is as a finite event after all and needs a cause for its beginnings.

- 1 . Whatever begins to exist has a cause for its coming into being.**
- 2. The universe began to exist.**
- 3. Therefore, the universe has a cause for its coming into being.**

The Cosmological Argument:

A Cause at the Beginning. The universe had a beginning caused by something beyond the universe (vertical argument):

1. **The universe had a beginning.**
2. **Anything that had a beginning must have been caused by something (someone) else.**
3. **Therefore the universe was caused by something (someone) else.**

4. Given both the basic cosmological arguments, it is logical that the cause or Creator would have to be transcendent, uncaused, eternal, and immutable. Now, the reason why we say this is because if the Creator wasn't transcendent, uncaused, eternal, and immutable, God would itself need a cause, for the very same reason this universe needs one.
5. Such a deity, by definition, matches the general description of the God of the Bible but not of most other religious conceptions of God. And the biblical creation narrative account in Scripture is consistent with science that states the universe had a singular being.
6. Are there possible explanations for the beginning of the universe that don't involve a divine Creator? Yes, and let's briefly consider them:

First Option: The universe somehow caused or created itself.

Response: This is irrational because in order to create itself the universe would have to exist before it existed. Let me put this way, 'something cannot both exist and not exist at the same time and in the same way.

Second Option: Universe popped into existence from nothing and by nothing (or from no one).

Response: This notion is irrational because something cannot be derived from absolute nothingness (e.g., no energy, no matter, no power, no mind, no reason, and so forth).

- a. An effect cannot be greater than its cause, and in this case, the cause would be nothing. The old scientific and philosophical maxim makes sense: FROM NOTHING, NOTHING COMES (*ex nihilo nihil fit*).
- b. To conclude otherwise is to violate one of the foundational principles of the scientific enterprise: causality. Causality is simply the principle of cause and effect: everything that happens must have a cause.

Third Option: Exotic, Quasi-Scientific view that there are multiple universes (sometimes called multiverse).

Response: This view suggests an eternal mechanism of physics actually pops universes into existence one after the other. This provocative view, however, is not based on any direct observable data, but instead on theoretical speculation. As a highly speculative and non-falsifiable hypothesis, this view offers no viable challenge to the notion that the universe had a beginning.

Fourth Option: Cosmologies of Other Religious Traditions, specifically of those of the East.

Response: The cosmologies of Eastern religion can be dismissed rather quickly for they are incoherent and are not consistent with the best scientific evidence concerning the origin of the universe. For example, some elements of Hinduism deny the very existence of the physical universe.

- 7. To return to the option that God is the person who brought the universe into being, the scientific evidence for the beginning of the universe harmonizes with the teachings of the Bible. “In the Beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

The Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* teaches that there was nothing but God (an infinite, eternal, personal spirit), and that God by means of his incalculable wisdom and infinite power alone brought the universe (all matter, energy, time, and space) into existence from nothing (for from any preexistent physical reality such as matter) and sustains its existence moment by moment (Rom. 4:17; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 11:3). The God of the Bible is therefore the infinite, Transcendent Creator of the Universe. God is the necessary explanation for the existence of a contingent, caused, dependent, unexplained universe.

III. Conclusion:

A. **Review:**

- 1. Commonly called the cumulative case method, this informal approach is a strategy whereby it seeks to show that Christianity provides the best explanation of a broad range of data. This is a holistic approach that asks what is more likely given the weighty arguments/evidences that are in its favor.
- 2. We began by offering two evidential arguments:
 - a. Big Bang.

- b. 2nd law of Thermodynamics.
3. We then offered two logical arguments:
- a. Kalam Cosmological argument.
 - b. Basic Cosmological argument.
- = This harmonizes with the teachings of the God of the Bible.

B. Personal Application: The Immensity of the Universe & your position in it.

1. Now having presented this first case I want to close by considering your relationship to an immense universe. Consider the following words by the Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal:

When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space which I fill, and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant, and which know me not, I am frightened, and am astonished at being here rather than there; for there is no reason why here rather than there, why now rather than then. Who has put me here? By whose order and direction have this place and time been allotted to me? # 205 of *Pensees*.

2. Consider the following quote from Blaise Pascal's *Pensees*.
"The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me." # 206.
3. In C. S. Lewis' book, *God in the Dock*, He writes the following from his piece titled, "Dogma and the Universe."

We are inveterate poets. Our imaginations awake. Instead of mere quantity, we now have a quality—the sublime [inspiring, magnificent, uplifting, transcendent] [we are able to be inspired]. Unless, this were so, the merely arithmetical [mathematical] greatness of the galaxy would be no more impressive than the figures in a telephone directory. It is thus, in a sense, from ourselves that the material universe derives its power to over-awe us. To a mind which does not share our emotions, and lacked our imaginative energies, the argument from size would be sheer meaningless. Men look on the starry heavens with reverence: monkeys do not. The silence of the eternal spaces terrified Pascal, but it was the greatness of Pascal that enabled him to do so. When we are frightened by the greatness of the universe, we are almost literally frightened by our own shadows: for these light years and billions of centuries are mere arithmetic until the shadows of man, the poet, the maker of truth, falls upon them. I do not say we are wrong to tremble at his shadow; it is a shadow of an image of God. But if ever the vastness of matter threatens to overcross our spirits, one must remember that it is matter spiritualized which does so. To puny man, the greatness of the great nebula of Andromeda owes in a sense its greatness.

And this drives me to say yet again that we are hard to please. If the world in which we found ourselves were not vast and strange enough to give us Pascal's terror, what poor creatures we should be! Being what we are, rational, but also animate, amphibians from the world of sense and proceed through myth and

metaphor to the world of spirit, I do not see how we could have come to know the greatness of God without that hint furnished by the greatness of the material universe? Once again, what sort of universe would we demand? If it were small enough to be cozy, it would not be big enough to be sublime [inspirational]. If it is large enough for us to stretch our spiritual limbs in it, it must be large enough for us to baffle us. Cramped or terrified, we must, in any conceivable world, be one or the other. I prefer terror. I should be suffocated in a universe that I could see to the end of it. Have you never, when walking in a walking in a wood, turned back deliberately for fear you should come out at the other side and thus make it ever after in your imagination a mere beggarly strip of trees?

I hope you do not think I am suggesting that God made the spiral nebulae solely or chiefly in order to give me the experience of awe and bewilderment. I have not the faintest idea why He made them; on the whole, I think it would be rather surprising if I had....

No, it is not Christianity which need not fear the giant universe. It is those systems which place the whole meaning of existence in biological or social evolution on our planet. It is the creative evolutionist, the Bergsonian, the Shavian, or the Communist, who should tremble when he looks up at that night sky. For he really is committed to a sinking ship. He really is attempting to ignore the discovered nature of things, as though by concentrating on the possibly upward trend in a singular planet he could make himself forget the inevitable downward trend in the universe as a whole, the trend to lower temperatures and irrevocable disorganization [mine bold].

5. Looking at this last statement differently, Alvin Plantinga, in his article on “Darwin, Mind, and meaning” stated it this way: “Modern science was conceived, and born, and flourished in the matrix of Christian theism.”