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*Why Believe? Reason and Mystery as Pointers to God.* By C. Stephen Evans. Grand Rapids, MI, and Leicester, UK: Wm B. Eerdmans and Inter-Varsity Press, 1996. ISBN 0-8028-0127-7. Pp. 164.

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This is a short but ambitious book. Within the space of 150 pages, the author, a professor of philosophy at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, seeks to demonstrate the reasonableness of basic Christian claims, specifically, that God exists and that Jesus Christ is God in a unique and exclusive way. The book is ambitious because Evans's apology is developed in response to virtually every conceivable contemporary objection to the truth claims of Christianity: he tackles everything from the alleged incompatibility of science and religion to the proposition that belief in God is an impediment to human liberation.

It is, perhaps, not only ambition that prompts Evans to leave no stone unturned in arguing that an educated person who cares about truth can opt for Christian faith today. I shall articulate below what seems to be a crucial assumption he makes about the nature of reasonableness, and to indicate that it is the logic of this unstated assumption that *requires* Evans to seek as comprehensive a justification of faith as possible.

As if aiming at comprehensiveness were not daunting enough, Evans is also determined to reach a wide audience and to encourage them to accept Christianity, and so he writes in a popular style. His ambition is no less evident in the attempt to make controversial and complex issues accessible to a general readership.

The first three chapters introduce the issues and set out some methodological considerations. The next four argue for the reasonableness of belief in God on the basis of certain pervasive features of human experience. Chapters 8 and 9 argue that Jesus is the divine Son of God, and that this truth is reliably attested in the Bible. Chapter 9 also contains a discussion of the possibility of miracles. Chapters 10 and 11 address various objections to faith, namely, the existence of evil; the pre-scientific character of the biblical world-view; faith as wish-fulfilment; Christianity as patriarchal, fostering the oppression of women; and religion as the "opiate of the people." Chapter 12 discusses the reasonableness of the mysteries of faith, namely, the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement, and Resurrection of the Body and Life everlasting. Finally, chapter 13 addresses the challenge posed by religious pluralism for a person considering commitment to Christianity.

Throughout the book, Evans argues for the truth of Christian claims by showing that they are reasonable and, indeed, more reasonable than rival accounts—particularly skeptical and atheistic accounts. His stance is not foundationalist, that is, he does not assume that reasonable beliefs are those that are either self-evident or derived by inference from more basic evident beliefs.

His position on the reasonableness of belief in God is illustrative. In the tradition of Reformed epistemology, Evans suggests that belief in God does not require demonstration in order to be warranted. Belief in God may be acquired

non-inferentially: God may, for example, implant a natural tendency in some people to believe that God is real, or provide others with an experience that would produce conviction. Still, he says, it is worthwhile asking whether there are evidences for God's existence that are independent of the non-inferential grounds of faith.

He believes that there are such evidences, and discusses four of them: (1) cosmic wonder, or, the experience of the contingency of the universe; (2) the purposiveness of nature; (3) consciousness of an objective moral order; and (4) the natural desire for God. The first three of these he calls "mysteries" and says that it is natural to infer from them that the universe owes its existence to a creator; that the author of nature is a mind; and that this creative mind is a moral being. The fourth piece of evidence discloses a "God-shaped hole" in human nature which, if God does not exist, is something "very odd indeed."

Evans does not take these evidences as premises in arguments of the traditional sort designed to prove God's existence with apodictic necessity. Rather, they are evidences which, when taken together, render the claim that God exists highly probable or plausible. Nonetheless, the reasonableness of belief in God does not rest only on the probability of God's existence.

Evans's understanding of evidential relations seems closer to a coherentist position—a belief is reasonable to the degree that it is consistent with a network of other beliefs, or provides an explanation of why we have those beliefs. His strategy is to suggest that belief in the kind of God Christians believe in makes sense of our experiences of contingency, natural purposiveness, moral obligation, and so on, and hence that it is reasonable.

Of course, a belief said to be reasonable on the grounds that it makes sense of certain mysteries must show that it makes better sense than alternative explanations, and so Evans addresses rival interpretations of the same sets of evidence. For example, the impression of purposive order in nature may be a mistake. Perhaps the teleology of organic structures is sufficiently accounted for by appeal to evolution. Evans replies that "if the theory of evolution is true, then the intricate structure that we perceive in nature is dependent on an even deeper level of order.... The theory...should not lessen our wonder at nature's purposiveness" (36-37).

Thus, even if the evidences in question may not be regarded as providing us with material for *proofs* in the strict sense, they are precisely the kinds of clues we might expect to find if God is real and wants to provide us with non-coercive evidence of the divine reality.

Evans's argument for the divinity of Christ is based on the historical reliability of the New Testament. He says that a reasonable person cannot deny that the historical record (the NT) represents Jesus as divine. Against the claims that the New Testament portrayal of Jesus is a later mythic embellishment, and that the Gospels do not purport to be historical narratives, he emphasizes that scholarly opinion largely maintains that the New Testament was written quite soon after Jesus' death, and that the Gospel narratives are "realistic" with a "history-like feel." Thus, Evans says it is reasonable to re-

spond to the evidence that Jesus claimed to be divine in one of two ways: either Jesus was and is God, or he was a lunatic or possibly a "bad man."

Readers otherwise sympathetic to Evans's project might wish for a nuanced approach to this question of grounds for believing in Jesus' divinity. Traditionally, the church's evidential basis for this belief has been the reliability of the apostolic witness as recorded and "canonized" in the New Testament. Evans, however, takes the reliability of the New Testament as a *historical record* for his evidential basis. This distinction has important consequences.

If one accepts the traditional view, one can argue that the affirmation of Jesus' unique kinship with God illumines the apostolic church's historical experience of Jesus, and hence that belief in his divinity informed the writing and selection of the New Testament documents. But to admit that confessional and kerygmatic interests have informed the Gospel narratives is to admit that they are not historically reliable in the way that Evans's position requires. Still, there is no reason why this admission should be viewed as undermining the evidential basis for belief in Christ's divinity.

Of course, neither the apostolic witness nor historical documentation can compel belief in Christ's divinity. Evans therefore urges the reader "to go to the New Testament and meet the Jesus who is pictured there." While it cannot be denied that this strategy works in that people do come in this way to acknowledge Jesus as their personal saviour and Lord, some readers may wonder whether the approach Evans endorses—one that identifies the problem of human existence with individual guilt, and that locates encounter with Christ in private Bible reading and introspection—is really adequate for inducting new people into the gospel of cosmic scope and eschatological moment proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles.

Evans's treatment in subsequent chapters of various objections to faith is succinct and confident, but by no means unsophisticated. Finally, in chapter 13, he returns to the theme introduced at the beginning of the book and developed in the discussion of Jesus' divinity—namely that of "making a decision for Christ." He presents the argument of the book in summary form as an argument demonstrating the reasonableness of such a decision.

"Belief in God is coherent with all we know about ourselves and our universe. It contradicts no known facts, and it makes sense of many things that would otherwise be inexplicable.... [T]he story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as told in the Bible presents us with a strong claim that forces us to decide whether he was truly the Son of God, or else a madman or charlatan. To a person who senses her own need for God...[a] commitment to Jesus as Savior seems eminently reasonable" (144).

One need not, however, be an evangelical Christian to appreciate this book. It is learned and readable, and provides a good, short introduction to issues in contemporary apologetics.