

A HUMBLE DEFENSE

Reasons to Believe

Book Editor's Note: Mark Moore and I had the privilege of editing a book to honor Dr. Lynn Gardner, long-time teacher and former Academic Dean of Ozark Christian College in Joplin, Missouri. The title, A Humble Defense: Evidence for the Christian Faith (College Press, 2004) matches Lynn's character and passion. The book is divided into two parts: reasons to believe and responses to objections. Fifteen Christian teachers and leaders contributed to the work.

OUR faith in God takes us beyond human reason and faith is more than just the sum of evidences. However, "a reasonable faith" is supported by evidences. Faith does not have to be blind. It can be informed. That is true even in a postmodern culture that supposedly has jettisoned evidences as a valid category of reality.

The Existence of God

The first essay in the book is on "The Existence of God."

Written by Jeff Robertson,

Bible and Apologetics professor at Ozark Christian College, this essay "surveys evidence for the existence of God and briefly responds to some major objections." After defining theism, atheism, and agnosticism, Jeff asks three questions of methodology: Must the existence of God be established before anything else? Can the existence of God be proven? Can unbelievers appreciate evidence for the existence of God?

The typical arguments for the existence of God (cosmological, teleological, moral, and anthropological) are discussed under the section on general revelation. The Bible, Jesus, and personal experience are discussed under the section on special revelation. After answering three major objections to the existence of God, Jeff says, "There are numerous things about this world that point compellingly to the existence of God: the origin of the universe and of life, the complexity of our world, human personality, morality, widespread belief in God, the transformed lives of thousands, the Bible itself, and the person of Jesus Christ."

God the Designer

The next essay by Terry Chaney, Church History professor at Ozark Christian College, expands on the teleological argument from the former essay. God is a designer, and his design is his signature in the world. The dominant illustration in the chapter concerns the human eye. It is a masterpiece of God's handiwork. After explaining the argument from design and answering the objections to it (particularly that of David Hume), Terry asserts that this argument "may well be the most popular argument for the existence of God." In his conclusion he states, "Rationally, we perceive that there must be some creative agent to explain the creative design. The

various objections that are raised against the TA (teleological argument) serve to sharpen our reasoning about this designer and define limits for the argument, but they do not seem to succeed in invalidating the argument itself."

The Testimony of the Manuscripts

Two linguistic scholars team up to write the third essay, Kenny Boles and Larry Pechawer. They teach Greek and Hebrew languages respectively at Ozark Christian College. The authors provide evidence for a reasonable faith by considering the manuscript testimony of the Bible. After explaining how manuscripts were produced, Boles shows how the New Testament manuscripts can be categorized and evaluates their usefulness in giving to us a trustworthy

Bible. Boles states, "While the work of textual criticism is not finished, we can have confidence in the accuracy of the restored New Testament text."

Larry Pechawer stresses the care the ancient scribes took in copying the text. The size and age of Old Testament textual criticism makes the task "daunting," but "it should be stressed again that the overwhelming majority of readings in the Hebrew Bible are on firm textual footing." The evidence for the Bible's trustworthiness is seen in the number, age, and diverse testimony of the ancient manuscripts.

The next two essays continue this theme of the Bible's trustworthiness, which makes our faith even more reasonable. Jack Lewis, long-time teacher at Harding Graduate School of Religion in Memphis, Tennessee, developed the theme, "The Historical Accuracy of the Bible." Lewis cites numerous objects and characters (names) that interface with secular writings and findings that give evidence of the Bible's accuracy. He discusses the recent discovery of an ossuary bearing the inscription, "James, Son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus." He cautions us that artifacts do not provide interpretations, but "finds . . . do make us more confident that the biblical people . . . once lived."

Geography and Culture

Mark Ziese, professor of Old Testament Cultural Settings at Cincinnati Christian University, describes the land and lifestyles of Palestine, evidence that the stories of the Bible took place in time and space. Ziese states, "The texts of the Bible did not spring fresh from the imagination but grew out of the lives of real people living in a very real world." Given the number of civilizations that have existed in Palestine, the discoveries of so many of cities the Bible calls by name certainly affirms the integrity of the Scriptures.

Our faith in God takes us beyond human reason.

By Mark Scott

Fulfilled Prophecy

Fulfilled prophecy is one of the greatest evidences for a reasonable faith. Jim Girdwood, Old Testament professor at Kentucky Christian University, Grayson, Kentucky, writes this essay. He says, "It is difficult to overestimate the value of the Old Testament prophets to the beginning church." Girdwood gives 14 reasons why the Old Testament prophets were valuable for the beginning church and spends the rest of the chapter attaching Scriptures to those reasons. God's control of history, the person of the Messiah, the church, the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's kingdom, and the last days are all part of what the prophets predicted. His caution about interpreting Bible prophecy needs to be heard: "There are about 150 places where the New Testament clearly quotes the Old Testament.

It is astounding how many interpreters of Bible prophecy ignore what the New Testament says about these verses. How much closer to the mind and heart of the Bible message would we get if we let the way the New Testament uses these passages shape our understanding and use of them?"

'The Christian religion rises or falls on the question of the resurrection.'

Miracles

The next two essays deal with miracles. Robert Lowery, New Testament professor at Lincoln Christian Seminary, Lincoln, Illinois cites examples from the Old and New Testaments to argue that the Bible's testimony is clear: miracles took place. They pointed to the power of God, the presence of God, the intervention of God, and liberation by God. We must be open to the reality of miracles in order to receive them as testimony. Otherwise they become obstacles to faith. Lowery suggests that miracles have a forward look. "They anticipate the conditions of the new Heaven and new earth."

The Resurrection

My dear friend and co-editor Mark Moore, professor of New Testament and Hermeneutics at Ozark Christian College, writes the essay on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The importance of this chapter could not be overstated. (It contains seven pages of end notes!) "Indeed, the whole Christian religion rises or falls on this question." In contrast to many miracles of the Bible, the miracle of resurrection invites empirical investigation so that our faith will be reasonable. After marking out "four points of historical probability," Moore accounts for the evidence of the resurrection. He wrestles with five criticisms of the

resurrection, with the accent on the last one. His conclusion contains three objections that people typically use, but he states, "It is not that the resurrection is the best of several possible theories; it is the only one that makes sense of all the evidence."

The Deity of Christ

The last essay in the first section of *A Humble Defense* is written by Seth Wilson, OCC Dean Emeritus. The subject is the deity of Jesus. Getting that wrong will lead to an unreasonable faith. Brother Wilson believes that "Jesus cannot be known by philosophical reasoning . . . Our faith in Christ needs to be not opinions which we have formed, or statements which we like; it needs to be convictions about the identity in fact and history of the person, Jesus, so that we accept all that he has done for us and all he has told us." With that conviction, it is not surprising that the bulk of this chapter is a litany of Scriptures

that testify to the deity of Jesus.

The book is dedicated to Lynn Gardner, an evidential apologist for the Christian faith. Lynn would be the first to state that true biblical faith takes a person beyond evidence, but a blind faith that has little or no evidence is most unreasonable. ■

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