



FIVE Reasons
To
Believe

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I remember the joy I felt the first time our one-year-old son said “no” to us. That assertion of self meant he was normal and complete. Without “no,” “yes” has no meaning. God gives us freedom. He wants us to choose to love and trust him. For this reason, when it comes to faith he does not use coercive or irrefutable proofs of his existence. God seeks to woo, not overwhelm. God will not take away our will by turning us into puppets or robots. However, because irrefutable proof does not exist (there may be a possible scientific or secular explanation), this does not mean there is no evidence of God’s reality.

Looking honestly at the world and at my own personal experience, I see five reasons to believe.

First, there is the evidence of order and creativity in human beings. There is a *very* long road from the “primal slime” to a Shakespeare, a Rembrandt, a Mozart, an Einstein, a Mother Teresa. It requires an incredible leap of faith to argue that such

gifts could develop accidentally—without some divine action in creating and sustaining human life.

I believe human beings are creative because we are made in the image of a creative God. We are subcreators, given the task of tending, elaborating, and furthering the Creator's work. This has always seemed to me a more satisfactory way to account for human creativity than either the belief that everything develops by accident or the belief that the arts and sciences are mere outlets for animal libido (the Freudian explanation).

Second, the existence of human reason points to an intelligent Creator. From where would human reason come if not from a reasoning source higher than itself? If what we call reason is simply a side effect of blind evolution, then it has little validity. We have no assurance there is any built-in link between our reason and ultimate reality. We may be dreaming that we have reason. Isn't it a more logical explanation to

suppose that the same God who created the world (partly though evolution) also gave us reason with which to explore it?

The logic of this is compelling. It is not possible to attack reason without using reason. By believing in a reasonable, purposeful God we are assured of the validity and trustworthiness of reason which is so basic in all human endeavors. To suppose that reason developed accidentally requires an absurd leap of faith. A “no” to this possibility opens the door to a “yes” to God.

A third strand of persuasive evidence is the Incarnation. Christians claim that God did not leave us to suffer the consequences of evil by ourselves, but came to reveal himself to us in the person of his Son. Whereas the gods of the Greeks and the Romans remained aloof from human beings except when they wanted to make mischief, God entered into our suffering, misunderstanding, rejection, desertion, and death. Christians believe that in his flesh (the “carn” of Incarnation means meat or

flesh), God suffered with and for us. We have here evidence of God's response to the mystery of evil and also a sign of hope to human sufferers who, through Christ, can see in their experiences unity with a suffering God.

The fourth strand concerns our moral sense. All human beings have moral awareness. Though the content of moral codes may differ across cultures, the moral sense is a constant—one more piece of evidence for our creation as free beings by a loving and good God.

But we have failed to live up to God's standard of goodness for us. Our culture's preoccupation with neurotic guilt obscures the fact that all people really do fail morally—both as individuals and as groups. What is more, we do so willfully and intentionally, and never more so than when in our pride we try to deny it. As St. Paul wrote, the good we would do, we fail to do, while the evil we do not intend, we end up doing.

Because of this universal human condition, we need divine forgiveness. Only forgiveness of sins can bring peace with God and with our fellow human beings. Christians believe we are forgiven because, in Christ, God so identified with our dilemma that, knowing that there was no way for us to earn his love and forgiveness, he took upon himself the responsibility for our sins. He suffered for us that we might be forgiven. Knowing this leads to the joyous discovery that we are accepted simply as a gift of his grace; it opens us to the power which transforms our inner selves and our lives.

The fifth strand of compelling evidence concerns our basic human longing for what we call the good, the true, and the beautiful. As Wordsworth said, we experience “effort, and expectation, and desire, and something evermore about to be.” Humankind has a deep awareness of having been born incomplete, of having a desire, a longing that is never fully satisfied.

We wander on toward greener grass on greener hills, always in the distance. St. Augustine says we are restless until we rest in God. Only God can fill the aching void within each of us.

Despite our attempts to fill that void with money, art, sex, success, and so many other things, it remains unfilled until we embrace that beacon to something beyond, and greater than, ourselves.

Imagine living forever in the shadow of some great blessedness which we desire but cannot explain. Does that not point to a loving Creator who yearns for us to commune with him and be completed by him? Within us all is a true self toward which we strive. This argument from longing says that in it God promises one day to give us our full selfhood so that we will be the persons we were meant to be.

These five strands of evidence, while not proofs, are nonetheless compelling evidence. They make Christian belief an honest option: the argument from

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creativity, the existence of reason, a coming to grips with evil and suffering, a way to deal with our sin, and an explanation of the reason for our unquenchable longing. Together these point to the God of the Bible and of Christian faith.

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