Foreword

I have no idea who Michael G. Harvey may be. All I know is I received a request from him to write a “Foreword” for a book he had written entitled, *Scepticism, Relativism, and Religious Knowledge*. He included with his request the “Introduction” to his book, which I read with great interest. I did so because Harvey was addressing questions about the veridical status of the attitudes and beliefs that make us Christian that have been at the heart of the way I have tried to do theological ethics. Reading his “Introduction” made it clear to me that Harvey was someone from whom I could learn.

I responded to his request indicating my willingness to write the “Foreword” but I also expressed a worry. By reading the “Introduction” I thought he might think Wittgenstein had tried to defeat scepticism. Influenced by Cavell, I was convinced that Wittgenstein thought that scepticism could not be defeated philosophically because any attempt to defeat scepticism philosophically could not help but reproduce the scepticism that was assumed to be the problem. Harvey responded to my worry acknowledging he shared my view that scepticism cannot be defeated because it is integral to our humanity. He explained that he is influenced by Hilary Putnam, who in turn was influenced by Cavell’s arguments that help us see that scepticism has philosophical significance.

Harvey’s response was a clear indication that he was a person of extraordinary philosophical and theological insight. Reading his book has only confirmed that judgment. In particular I urge readers to take seriously the subtitle of the book, “A Kierkegaardian Perspective Informed by Wittgenstein’s Philosophy.” That “perspective” is one he acknowledges he learned from the teacher we have in common—Paul Holmer. Thus Harvey, drawing on Holmer, argues that scepticism is often the result of the attempt to provide objective justification for beliefs that are properly groundless.
Foreword

That claim, or better, argument, is one that should stop you in your tracks or, in the very least, it ought to occasion the response, “I’ll have to think about that.”

Just to the degree that you think you will have to think about that is why you need to read Harvey’s book. Drawing on the work of Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard, he has thought long and hard about what it means to be creatures who must trust the knowledge that trust makes possible. Accordingly he argues, an argument that makes him an appreciative critic of “reformed epistemology,” that faith is a passion that reorients our will to the knowledge of God. He, moreover, rightly denies that this means that Christians have nothing to say about the rationality of our faith, but what cannot be forgotten is that truth for Christians is not just another object but a concrete person, Jesus of Nazareth.

For Harvey, therefore, what makes Christians Christian is not that they “believe in God.” To be a Christian, which to be sure involves “believing,” entails an ongoing transformation of the emotions. Such a transformation means to believe in God is to know how to do something. In particular it means knowing how to go on when you often do not know where you are or where you are going. The truth of what Christians believe cannot be separated from who they must be. I think Harvey is quite right, moreover, to attribute this perspective to how Paul Holmer taught him to read Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein.

Scepticism arises from our desire to know without the self being transformed. Ironically scepticism is but the result of our anxious desire to secure certainty by being “at home in the world.” But we were not created to be at home in the world. We were created to glorify God, which means, as Harvey puts it, that the knowledge that comes from God cannot be possessed. Such knowledge is the work of patience that produces endurance that makes faith possible.

Harvey has written a book I feel sure Paul Holmer would have liked. I cannot imagine higher praise or a better reason to commend the book to anyone who seeks to better understand the status and character of what it means to be a Christian.

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