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## **ESSAYS**

### **The Psychological Dimensions of Faith**

Man is in a predicament! No matter how he tries to avoid pain, he is, nevertheless, going to suffer it. At some time in his life something that happens to him or something that he does will disturb his own tranquility and the tranquility of those close to him. It may be a natural disaster such as a fire, earthquake, flood, tornado or hurricane that destroys his belongings or kills his loved ones. It may be a disease that incapacitates him or takes the life of someone dear to him. Man himself is responsible for wars, revolutions and economic upheavals that profoundly alter a people's life style and destroy thousands of lives.

If he escapes these causes of suffering, man has a choice between boredom (ennui) and a life of risk as he seeks novelty and excitement in a new environment or in hazardous pursuits such as racing cars, sky-diving, shooting rapids in rivers, or mountain climbing. In doing these things he threatens his security or endangers his life. Recognizing this predicament of mankind, the "Philosopher" of Ecclesiastes saw life as "chasing the wind" (Eccl. 1:17; 2:26), and Sartre described it as "despair" (Evans, 1973, p. 13).

### **Man's Search for God and God's Search for Man**

Contemplating his insignificance in the universe and the pain that life brings, man feels the need to believe that his life has meaning. Unless he can believe that there is significance in his birth, life and death, he might as well never have been born. But even in the face of despair and his own insignificance, man's spirit creates within him a desire to exist, so he reaches out for something or someone that will provide his life with meaning.

Julian Marias (1971, pp. 80-88) and Victor Frankl (1959, pp. 176, 177) have indicated that one of the ways in which man can find meaning is by "experiencing" (loving) someone or something. Millions, however, have "experienced" one or more human someones and many material somethings and

still have not found meaning. Out of the search for something or someone comes man's intuitive recognition that an intelligence higher than his designed both the universe and himself. He, therefore, seeks to know that intelligence.

Man's search for a god or gods is not always highly successful. At a primitive level of development he focuses on forces in nature. Incorporating these forces into animistic religions, he becomes bogged down in fear because of his impotence before the power of natural forces, which most often appear malevolent. At a more sophisticated level, man often visualizes a pantheon of heroes with supernatural powers; but because he conceives of them as he does other human beings, they are untrustworthy. Using another frame of reference, man may worship a god of justice who provides him with laws that have to be obeyed; but his own inherent selfishness and self-centeredness lead to continual disobedience and keep him in a state of guilt and fear of punishment. If man conceives of god as a nearly inaccessible supreme being, he may attempt to purify himself through good works and ascetic practices in an effort to rise up, by his own power, to the lofty heights where the supreme being resides. But he soon finds that the ability to perfect himself does not live within him. The man who decides that he is his own god, and that he can create meaning for his life by his own efforts is also doomed to failure, for the meaning of life lies outside the sphere of human endeavor.

There is a God! He was not created by man, he is not inaccessible, and he is loving as well as just. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Because he is loving, he does not make man reach up to Him; instead, he reached down to a man (Abraham), then to a nation (Israel) and finally through Jesus Christ, to all mankind. Having created the universe, this God knows and understands his creation. He is aware of the strengths and weaknesses of his unique creation, man, and he has promised to be with him, to strengthen him in his weaknesses, to protect him, and to provide for his needs. All that man is asked to do in return is to recognize the omnipotence of this loving God by making him the lord of his life, to worship him and him alone, and to try, with God's help, to obey his laws. In the past, knowing that perfect obedience is impossible for imperfect man, God provided a system of sacrifices whereby a man who was truly sorry for his sins and who had decided to turn away from his sins could obtain forgiveness. But man was still too lazy or too selfish to take advantage of this means of cleansing himself. Time, after time, God's people, turned away from him and his laws to worship the heathen gods of the nations surrounding them. Punishment had no lasting effect. Finally God found it necessary to make a final sacrifice for all of mankind's sin of rebellion. After the sacrifice of His own son, all persons who accepted Jesus as God's atonement for their sins received the Holy Spirit to help them be obedient and empower them to be his witnesses.

Jesus was the final sacrifice offered by God for all men, and his Holy Spirit is the part of himself that came to dwell in the believer. Jesus, the visible expression of the invisible God (Col. 1:15; Phillips), was a real man who walked the earth with

other men of his time. Unlike other men, however he lived without sin in such a way that none could find fault with him. His teaching was truth and came from God. His deeds were such that only one with divine power could have done them. His resurrection, by which his kinship with God was demonstrated, is a thoroughly documented fact in history. He was the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies. Because of Jesus, no man can say that God has not revealed himself. If a man wants to believe in Jesus as God's son and atoning sacrifice, he can. This belief called **faith**, is God's gift to anyone who sincerely desires it and asks Him for it (Eph. 2:8, 9).

### **The Nature and Consequences of Faith**

According to Webster (1967), faith is "firm, unquestioning belief in something for which there is no proof." According to the writer of Hebrews, it is "to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things that we cannot see" (Heb. 11:1). Jesus who is called "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2 KJV) said that all who believe in Him would have access to God (John 14:6). Paul the Apostle clearly stated that faith in Jesus Christ is the means God has for putting people in a right relationship with Himself.

But now God's way of putting people right with himself has been revealed. It has nothing to do with the law, even though the law of Moses and the prophets gave their witness to it. God put people right through their faith in Jesus Christ. God does this to all who *believe* in Jesus Christ, because there is no difference at all: everyone has sinned and is far away from God's saving presence. But by the free gift of God's grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus who sets them free. God offered him, so that by means of his death he should become the means by which people's sins are forgiven; but in the present time he deals with their sins in order to demonstrate his righteousness. In this way, God shows that he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who *believes* in Jesus. (Rom. 3:21-26; italics added)

I have included this quotation to emphasize that unwavering belief (faith) in Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith.

Two basic and paradoxical psychological changes occur when a man comes to believe in God and His Son, Jesus. The development of fear and of trust. The fear that I am talking about is fear of the Lord - respect for his power (omnipotence).

It is not surprising that the Old Testament emphasizes fear, because God had revealed himself to the Israelites as a just God, who rewards right behavior and punishes wrong behavior. People whose concept of God's Son is *only* that of the "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" may be surprised to find that the coming of the Messiah did not abolish the emphasis of fear. Jesus told the Twelve not to "be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God,

who can kill both body and soul in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Paul saw that God visited punishment on unrepentant man not only by allowing war, famine, pestilence, sickness, and natural disaster, but also by withdrawing his love, power and guidance. "Because those people refuse to keep in mind the true knowledge about God, he has *given them over* to corrupted minds, so that they do the things they should not do" (Rom. 1:28; italics added). What could be so frightening as to be deserted or rejected by the living God?

Paradoxical though it may seem, when man begins to fear God, he also comes to trust Him. "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge" (Prov. 14:26 KJV). The biblical account of God's action in space and time attests to His trustworthiness (Packer, 1973, pp. 70, 75). God spoke to His people through his prophets and then fulfilled His prophecies. I Corinthians 15:1-7 documents the fact that God promised his people a Savior and then fulfilled that promise.

But it is not enough that God has acted in the past; a living trustworthy God must continue to act in the present (Phillips, 1967, pp. 126, 127). To those who believe in Him, He must reveal himself not only subjectively (through their spirits) but also objectively by answering their prayers. He must act in the world by healing and saving his people. God must also continue to speak through his prophets; therefore, prophets must be raised up in each generation to speak for God and foretell his actions-and the events foretold in the prophecies must "come to pass". When they do, faith is strengthened and the power of the living God confirmed.

Finally, since man is future oriented (Marias, 1971, p. 15), a loving, trustworthy God's promises for the future should be of such a nature as to create hope. Man wants to know that he has a future beyond this earthly existence, and that it will be filled with love, joy and peace-not with pain, sorrow, fear, confusion, anger and torment. The fruits of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer (love, joy, peace and others listed in Galatians 5:22) are God's guarantee of all that he has in store for the Christian, provide a foretaste of the perfect life that will be the Christian's after death (II Cor. 1:22, 5:5; Eph. 1:14). Man can trust the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; for He has kept, is keeping, and will keep his promises.

The origin of faith is love. Only when we know that someone is committed to put our best interests and welfare above his own can we have faith in that person. Frankl misses the mark when he suggests that we place our trust in another human being, for all of mankind is fallible and no human being is absolutely trustworthy. Only God, as we know him through His Son, is absolutely trustworthy. Jesus Christ, who "is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8), is the only person who we can trust completely. In that trust we find real meaning.

If it is true, as Frankl and Marias maintain, that loving and being loved by another give life meaning, then the infinite love that God has for us should provide, to those who love Him, meaning that is infinite. God's love is shown by the fact that he sent his Son into the world and allowed Him to be put to death so that all men might have eternal life. All other loves are but pale images when compared to the love God manifested in Jesus. If love brings meaning, then surely this love can extinguish forever the despair of meaning.

Means (1933, p. 45) has stated that the whole New Testament teaches faith in Christ as the ground of life. Jesus came to demonstrate to all mankind, through his death as well as his life, how much God loves the world (John 3:16). All man has to do is to respond to Him in love by admitting his sinfulness, repenting of his sins, and asking Jesus to be his Savior and his Lord. In so doing, he is saved from his sins and receives the Holy Spirit to dwell in him. This brings about a transformation of his personality that is called conversion. Recognizing God's trustworthiness and his own unworthiness, the new believer must be willing-even eager to allow God to shape and fashion him in a new image-to transform him by the complete changing of his mind (Rom. 12:2 KJV). God. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, brings about this transformation gradually in most cases, suddenly in some.

### **The Psychological Benefits of Salvation**

With salvation one enters the "faith state", or the "state of assurance" (James, 1961, pp. 202-210). Even though the outward circumstances remain the same, worry is replaced by a state of harmony, peace, and willingness to be different. When the repentant sinner receives God's forgiveness his guilt and sense of contamination are removed and he is released from the depression, or feeling of oppression, that has resulted from the painful emotions of fear and shame. Because he is no longer distracted by his internal problems, his external surroundings seem brighter and cleaner. Because his emotional tone is now positive rather than negative, he sees the world-perhaps for the first time-as a place of beauty and brightness.

Another change produced by salvation is that the believer begins to perceive truths not known before. These truths fall into two categories. The first relates to an understanding of the Trinity: God, His son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would reveal the truth about God (John 14:17; 16:13). This revelation of truth strengthens the believer's faith and increases his certainty as to the trustworthiness of God. The Gospel doesn't make much sense to a person without faith. To him, it is just one more "comparative religion", of slightly more significance than those of Buddha and Mohammed. But when the Holy Spirit reveals to the believer the truths of God, the gospel becomes the foundation of his faith.

The second category of truths which can be perceived by the believer is related to the absolute truth of God's commandments. He might have been aware all along that these commandments make sense and would make a favorable difference to the world if they were generally obeyed; but he had never made a serious effort to live by all of them-and could not have done so if he had tried (Rom. 8:7). The difficulty lay not only in his self-centered and selfish nature but also in the prevailing view that God's commandments are relative rather than absolute (9). With salvation, God's commandments and values are revealed to the believer by the Holy Spirit as truth, and his positive emotional response to this revelation makes it possible for him to obey them.

This motivation is strengthened by his God created desire to have fellowship with other believers, which leads him to seek out a group of like minded Christians. In this fellowship, the new Christian's knowledge and understanding of God's commandments are increased, and he is rewarded with affirmation when he obeys these laws. When he fails to obey them, or refuses to obey them he fears chastisement by God and by the fellowship. Only through confession and repentance can he receive forgiveness and be restored to fellowship with God and his Christian brothers. This continual external pressure, together with the Holy Spirit's internal work of transformation, leads to lasting changes in his patterns of behavior.

Even a born-again Christian is still a human being. All too often the pressure of circumstances, weakness of will, or a resurgence of the old desire to have his own way leads him to revert to pre-Christian patterns of behavior. Knowing man's weakness, God made provision for these moral lapses. If the Christian who has sinned confesses his sins to God, He promises to forgive him "and purify him from all his wrongdoing" (I John 1:9). Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) assures the Christian that, no matter how far he strays or how long he stays in willful disobedience, God will welcome him back if he confesses his sins, repents and asks forgiveness.

Another gift that awaits the believer when he enters the "faith state" is the receipt of power that resides in the Holy Spirit. A person who has never experienced salvation and received the Holy Spirit cannot understand either the changes that occur or the power that comes with the indwelling Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:13, 14). I have seen that power give immediate freedom to men and women who had been alcoholic for years, and I have seen heroin addicts instantaneously and permanently cured of their addiction when hundreds like them relapse within days after being discharged from the hospital. It is moving to read of Zaccheus, who made restitution to all he had defrauded after Jesus visited him; but it is more moving to see-as I have-a kleptomaniac return hundreds of dollars worth of stolen merchandise because the Holy Spirit empowered him to do so.

Less dramatic, but equally important manifestations of the Holy Spirit's power are healing of broken or damaged relationships and the development of a desire in

the believer to pray, to study the Bible, to discern God's will for their lives and to witness to the reality of God in their lives. The Holy Spirit also empowers previously self-centered men to live for others; to visit the sick and imprisoned, to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, and to clothe the naked. It is an observable fact that streams of "life-giving water" flow from the heart of the believer after he receives the Holy Spirit (John 7:38) (10).

The Holy Spirit not only motivates the believer to read the Bible, it also reveals to him, through the Bible, an understanding of Christ, his teaching, and his work that is not available to nonbelievers (I Cor. 1:18-25) (Wilson, 1972). Not only is this statement scriptural, it is also verified by the experience of believers. Only the Spirit can reveal spiritual things (I Cor. 2:14).

The more one studies the Bible and opens himself to the instruction of the Spirit, the more firmly he believes that God will keep the promises made in his covenants with His people. Because man is future oriented, God's demonstrated trustworthiness in carrying out His promises reduces anxiety and produces stability. Man has a basic need for security. Uncertainty about his ability to obtain adequate supplies of food, drink, clothes and shelter in the future produces anxiety. To allay this anxiety, both Christians and non-Christians alike put their faith in savings, real estate, insurance and retirement programs. They want to make sure that events such as accidents, fires, and illnesses are not going to leave them destitute. The Social Security program and the size of the insurance industry both testify to man's desire for security (Matt. 6:19). Those who remember what happened during the depressions of the past, recognize the possibility that insurance companies can fail, that stocks and bonds will be worthless, and that governments can repudiate their debts. Security is only a delusion if it is based on material possessions.

The inevitability of physical deterioration and/or death is another anxiety-producing factor. In spite of medicine's advances, man still faces the danger of cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, arthritis, and other crippling diseases, to say nothing of accidents. Man dreads old age, but he is even more afraid of the alternative-dying young. For the non-believer, the fear of death, early or late, is compounded by anxiety about the possibility that there really is life after and that judgment is coming after death (Matt. 25:31-46). What righteousness will a person have when he or she stands before the judge? If one's security is based on his health or his own righteousness, anxiety is inevitable.

Contributing further to man's anxieties are man-created calamities: economic depressions, wars, revolutions and civil strife. A realistic look at our present situation, in the light of both biblical prophecy and history, convinces man that the ideological and economic conflicts that exist in the world will never be resolved by mankind. Anxiety increases!

How can faith in God help to allay man's reality-based anxiety? The answer is simple and is based on a simple faith in an all-powerful, all-knowing, loving heavenly father who has promised that He will never fail or abandon those who have entrusted their lives to Him (Deut. 31:8; Heb. 13:5 RSV).

## **Guidance**

Because God wants his children to find fulfillment, He is interested in their relationship with one another as well as with himself. God created within each human being a radical neediness for others. The strongest need is for a person of the opposite sex. To fulfill this need He provided the institution of marriage. Since the right marriage partner is important to the happiness and spiritual growth of those who believe in Him, God is willing to guide their dating, marriage and procreative activities. If we commit this area of our lives to Him, He will guide us into relationships that will fulfill this radical neediness in the way that is best for us. With few exceptions, the marriages of equally yoked Christian (II Cor. 6:14 KJV) are judged to be good or excellent (Landis, 1948, p. 307).

God has a special interest also in the children of believers, and He has provided guidelines to help Christian parents raise their children. These guidelines include both rules of discipline and instructions for relating to children in love.

But we do not live alone in the world so he has given us the need for others that we call friends. We will relate to these persons usually because we have some common interest. When this common interest is the Lord Himself, the friendships that develop are envied by the world because they are energized by a supernatural love. This supernatural love also provides the power to love even the unlovely. To complete his guidance in our relationships, He has given us instruction as how to communicate in all of our relationships (Eph. 4:22-32).

Finally, God will guide almost every other aspect of our lives. He will help us find our vocation, will provide the means for us to train for it, and will guide us to a place of work that will best achieve his purpose. God has guidance for every situation if we will look in his Word, listen to our hearts, seek the advice of Christian friends and use common sense. Everything that we do, however, must be done for His glory (I Cor. 10:31).

## **Hope**

God is interested in all men, no matter what their race, nationality, religion, or socioeconomic status. Most of the churches in America are filled with affluent members. Not only do they have sufficient food, clothing and shelter; they also own cars, televisions sets, comfortable furniture, and more earthly treasures than any of the population of many underdeveloped nations. Even in this wealthy nation, however, there are people who do not have enough to eat, who have to sleep in an unheated, rat-infested rooms with eight to ten other persons, and who

have to walk everywhere they go-often without adequate clothing. Affluent Americans like to forget about these persons. But God has not forgotten them. He did not send His Son for the rich. He sent Him especially for the poor, the sick (including alcoholics, drug addicts and prostitutes), and the prisoners (including thieves and murderers), and all who are oppressed either by Satan or by the society in which they live (Matt. 9:10-13; Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38). To live they must have hope (Bruhn, 1984). God made it possible for all men to have hope. His Son is the hope of the world.

## **How Faith Develops**

In view of all of these benefits to believers, why would anyone choose *not* to have faith in the God that Jesus Christ has revealed to mankind? Many, perhaps, would like to enter the "faith state", but feel it is impossible to have a "firm belief in something for which there is no proof". Since there is no way of *proving* that God exists, how can man come to have faith in God?

In most cases, I believe, faith develops as a result of one or more of the following processes.

1. Unquestioning acceptance of an authoritative statement by someone we trust, especially if that statement is repeated often enough.
2. Inductive reasoning, taking into account all available evidence that supports, directly or indirectly, the premise that God *is* who Jesus revealed Him to be and that the gospel is true.
3. An experience of God through His direct intervention in one's own life or through the lives of people we know.

Under all circumstances, the triune God is the author of faith (Heb. 12:2 KJV), and it is He who gives us faith in Himself (Eph. 2:8,9), using any or all of the above methods. Let us examine each in detail.

## **Authoritative Statements**

In most instances, perhaps, faith develops as a result of the first process; belief in the message presented by someone considered authoritative. Knowing the value of this method, God ordered the law to be taught by repeated presentation (Deut. 6:4-9). Leaders of men also recognize the effectiveness of repeatedly presenting their beliefs to those who submit themselves to their authority. Unfortunately, erroneous as well as valid ideas can be disseminated by this method. Hitler's repeated declaration that the Jews were responsible for Germany's economic and social problems after World War I led to the acceptance of this delusional belief by the German nation, and resulted in the wholesale extermination of Jews in the German gas chambers.

Although it seems clear to us today that the Jews could not possibly be held responsible for the difficulties faced by a nation defeated in a war it had instigated, these beliefs were generally held by people living in Germany at the time they were being proclaimed. Reasonably well-informed citizens believed because they trusted Hitler and wanted to believe him.

### **Inductive Reasoning**

Another process by which faith develops is that of inductive reasoning. J. S. Mill (Anschutz, 1953, pp. 78-114) who shaped modern thought on this subject, was a proponent of the notion that every event must have an antecedent cause. This argument is not a strong one, for there may be many causes and a great range of possibilities. There is, however, a finite limit to the number of possible causes. This latter concept was emphasized by Bacon (1883, pp. 47, 57, 51), who considered causality an axiom.

This is the process on which modern natural philosophy (better known today as science) has been based. The scientific mind seeks causes, and if it cannot find them it will create probable causes, sometimes called hypotheses. Scientists then search for data to support their hypotheses-and in too many cases their faith state is such that they will accept even the most tenuous evidence to support their beliefs, while ignoring or minimizing all evidence to the contrary.

Although modern man seems to have no trouble in believing in evolution and the "Big Bang", he will believe in God only if he has evidence to document His existence. Admittedly there is no such evidence that is based on the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. All evidence of God's existence is obtained by inference-the method used to gather all the evidence that supports the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe. No one can see God, for he is Spirit; and no one could have seen the Big Bang, because no human existed when it took place. What, then, is the evidence supporting a belief in God?

The first evidence of God's existence is found in the things that he has created (Rom. 1:20). The physicist, Heisenberg (1971, pp. 205-217) has observed that the universe appears to have been a *great thought*. Anyone could hardly contemplate its orderliness in a serious way and not wonder how it came to be. Whether one is observing the universe or the structure of a cell, whether he is studying the ecological relationships of plants and animals in an environment or the ecological relationships of ectodermal, mesodermal and endodermal cells in the body of a complex animal, he is struck by the extraordinary orderliness and complexity of their arrangement and function. Could such orderly complexity have happened by chance? It seems just as likely that Apollo XII could have "happened by chance" to rendezvous with the moon!

Another evidence of God's existence is found in the process of thinking. God is spirit, and therefore, He is intangible. Thinking is also intangible. The spirit is like

the wind; no one knows where it comes from or where it goes (John 3:8). Thinking is a process that occurs, but no one understands how it originates or what drives it. The content of one's thoughts is determined by past experience, but thinking can go on to create things that have not been experienced. Just as thinking transcends the finiteness of time and space, God transcends the finiteness of ourselves, as well as of time and space. Thinking about thinking helps us to understand the transcendent nature of God (Lewis, 1947, p. 42).

Miracles provide another evidence that God IS. Although the modern mind finds it hard to accept miracles, they do occur. Francis McNutt (1974, pp. 21-28) in his book on healing has reviewed the evidence for miraculous healings and points out that healings do occur in spite of scientific skepticism. Many Christians have personally witnessed or experienced events that they consider miraculous. The unbeliever always denies miracles, because he believes that "natural laws" would be negated by a single exception. But if the laws themselves were written by the God who created the universe, He would surely have it within His power and discretion to change the direction of a natural process producing a completely unexpected result.

To be convincing, miracles must be dramatic. Therefore, when God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, He made certain that the revelation was associated with, not only one, but many miracles. In the first place, the coming of Jesus was foretold by Old Testament prophets, who predicted that at some time in the future a child would be born of a virgin and that this child would be the son of the most high God (Isa. 7:14; Ps. 2:7).

All of these Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus. God had said, "I AM" (Ex. 13:14). Jesus said the same thing: "Before Abraham was born, I AM" (John 8:58). In this statement he laid claim to divinity. He also claimed that He was in God and God was in Him ((John 17:21). He was both God and man. C. S. Lewis (1958, p. 41), a master of the inductive reasoning process, has said that either Jesus was what he claimed to be or he was a madman. To believe that he was anything else was nonsense, he did not give us that choice.

If Jesus was God, he should have exhibited Godlike qualities. This he did! He performed miracles-among them, many dramatic healings (lameness, blindness, epilepsy, leprosy, for example), casting out of demons, and in at least three instances the restoration of life to a corpse. He taught with an authority that was not like the authority of men (Matt. 7:28). He prophetically foretold his crucifixion and resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the establishment of His church, which would spread his Kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Before Jesus could leave the earth and return to His place with the Father, one final event had to take place and the greatest miracle of all had to be performed. The old covenant, which had required the sacrifice of animals by men who wanted to escape punishment for their disobedience to God's laws, had to be

replaced by the new covenant. To institute this covenant, God made one final sacrifice that would atone for the sin of all men for all time. This was the sacrifice of His own son, Jesus. But a stubbornly unbelieving world thought that Jesus' crucifixion was God's way of punishing Him for making the preposterous claim to the Son of God, or God Himself. To disprove this notion, God repeated the miracle that he had performed through Jesus in raising Lazarus after he had been four days in the grave. Just as Jesus had called to Lazarus and brought him forth from the tomb, so God called to Jesus after he had been in the tomb for three days, and he rose from the dead (Matt. 26:6-8)!

Following the resurrection, Jesus' closest followers and more than five hundred others saw him, talked with him, touched him and ate with him. After forty days some of them saw him ascend into heaven. Even then God's revelation of himself had not ended. Forty days after the ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had promised, to dwell in those who believed. The Holy Spirit has never left the earth, for He was promised not just to the apostles but "to you and your children, and to all who are afar away-all whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2:9). Now all men can realize Christ's presence as His Spirit joins to their spirit to declare that they are God's children (Rom. 8:16).

The viability of the Christian faith is perhaps the most convincing evidence of Jesus' divinity. Because its followers have obeyed Jesus' orders to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, and because he supplied them with the power of the Holy Spirit, Christianity has changed the world. No other faith has led men to such great heights of achievement. Christianity has set men free to explore the earth and outer space, and has led indirectly to the development of modern science, modern medicine, and public education.

Finally, at the risk of being redundant, I wish to reemphasize the point that evidence for the kind of God revealed in Jesus Christ is the observation that He has acted in time and space in a trustworthy way. The Biblical record of God's dealings with the children of Israel is testimony to his trustworthiness. God has chosen men to speak for Him and has revealed to them his plans for action. They in turn make prophecies known to his people-and God reliably brings these plans to fruition. A careful unprejudiced reading of the Bible in the context of history and with the enlightenment of the Holy spirit makes it clear that God has acted in a reliable way.

### **Direct Revelation**

We have seen that God has revealed himself in nature, in the process of thinking, in miracles, including the fulfillment of prophecies, and in his Son. Yet many remain unbelieving. God has one more way of producing faith in men. That is by revealing Himself supernaturally to an individual-sometimes directly, sometimes through other people. Because He loves the world, God seeks men out and draws them to Himself by the power of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes he

uses his adopted sons and daughters to open their minds to his reality and his love.

A young woman was admitted to the Duke Hospital because she had become suicidal. Even though it was quite late and she was not my direct responsibility, I was compelled by an inner conviction to visit her before I left the hospital. When she had finished telling me the story of her life and the despair that she felt, I said to her, "You have an existential depression; your life has no meaning."

"I know it", she replied. "I've been telling them that for five year and they don't listen."

"There is an answer to meaninglessness", I said.

"What is it?"

"I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"You are not my patient; and if I told you your physician might not like it."

"Tell me anyway", she begged. "I won't tell him, if you don't".

Prompted by the Holy Spirit, I yielded to her pleading. "The answer is Jesus", I told her.

"I knew it! I knew He must be the answer! Tell me about Him." For the first time her voice had some life in it.

During the next hour, there in her hospital room, I told her the Good News about Jesus, and she found the meaning that she was seeking. She left the hospital four weeks later, literally a "new person".

I was not surprised to witness this healing, for God is in the business of healing and transforming the people to whom He reveals himself. He revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush and transformed him from a timid shepherd into a powerful leader of men. He revealed himself to Paul in a blinding light, and Paul was changed from Jesus' enemy into his friend and most effective spokesman. He revealed himself to the suicidal patient in the hospital by pouring his love into her, and she was healed of her despair and given meaning for her life.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

When God opens a person's mind to believe and reveals himself to that person, He gives them the power to change and become a "new" person. They begin

then to control behavior that had been uncontrollable. Many dramatic behavioral changes take place in people who had a personal experience with God. Men and women have stopped gossiping, cursing, drinking alcoholic beverages, using addicting drugs, committing adultery, lying, stealing-even murdering. They have been healed of depression, compulsions, obsessions, addictions, homosexuality, and mental illness. A less dramatic but equally important change that takes place when a nonbeliever becomes a believer is that he begins to understand God's teachings. He develops a desire to know more about God and to communicate with Him; so he reads his Word and prays. He wants to further God's work; so he tells others about what God is doing in his life. When he does he finds that the Holy Spirit gives him the power to be his instrument to change other people's lives. In this way, his faith is strengthened and the transformation of his personality and life continues.

In this chapter I have, therefore, tried to show that belief in God, as he has revealed himself in nature, in his Son, and in his Word, is the primary answer to the existential predicament of man. He assuages its intellectual and emotional concomitants of conflict and fear that give rise to "despair." A loving God who is omnipotent, omnipresent, and absolutely trustworthy, has made promises that we can rely on. Through his Son he has made it possible for us to amend our past and be relieved of the burdens of damaging emotions that carry with us. Because he has promised to be concerned with our every need, both in this life and in the next, we can have peace of mind about our future. The only condition is that we have a firm unquestioning belief in God as he is revealed in Jesus Christ. This belief is called faith.

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