

Know Your Faith by Nels F. S. Ferré

Dr. Ferré was for many years Abbot Professor of Christian Theology at Andover Newton Theological School. Published by Harper & Brothers, New York, 1959. Copyright 1959 by Nels F.S. Ferré. This material prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

There is a need to make solid theology generally available. The attempt is made here to fill the gap between popular and professional theology.

Preface

This book is an attempt to make theology more available to the general public. Ferré says, "No book has caused me more pain of authorship than this one... If harder writing makes for easier reading, without forfeit of content, the pain is worth while."

Chapter 1: By What Authority?

Authority is found in experience, the Bible, and the church, but these are all in the world. The Holy Spirit is beyond it. Christ as the Godman is both in and beyond the world. Only when the Holy Spirit can draw from "the things of Christ," using the channels of experience, the Bible, and the church, can we find that authority of the Christian faith which is truly of God, ever beyond the world, and yet also truly in the world for man.

Chapter 2: The Son of His Love

Christ rightly interpreted is the Word of God's eternal love become historic, of God's universal love become personal. Can anything be more universal; can anything be more needed? Here we have the answer to Judaism, to Islam, to Baha'i. Christ can be and has been falsely interpreted so as to block communication, but he can and should be understood in such a way that an open, concerned community is created.

Chapter 3: To Mature Manhood

Is man good or bad? God made man good. This is his essential nature. Man's fallen nature is not his real nature, but only the actual condition of his nature. What does it mean that man was created in the image of God? God is infinite and perfect Love. Man is finite, made for love. The image is absolute; the conscience is relative. Man himself lives in the conflict of the perfect and the sinful, the unconditional and the conditional.

Chapte 4: Grace Abounding

The meaning of sin, salvation, and sanctification: Sin is our deliberate act of faithlessness and rebellion. Salvation means getting right with God, and such a state alone can give man full satisfaction. The indwelling presence of God as Holy Spirit at work in life is called sanctification. To sanctify means "to make holy." God saves us by making us holy.

Chapter 5: "And the Life Everlasting"

Three concepts of "Life Everlasting" are discussed: 1. Eternity as a quality of life is participation without the right of duration, in the case of man, in the life everlasting; 2. Life as a continual stream of choices and consequences, of living and dying, of repeated reincarnations in this world; 3. God reawakens us to life after death in another realm beyond this earthly existence. The final outcome is in God's hands. We can trust him for the best result possible.

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Preface

Popular books on religion keep pouring from our presses. Professional tomes on theology crowd one another. But the former usually are not solid, while the latter are seldom intelligible to the general public. The Marcia E. Wertsch Lectureship, of which this volume was the opening series, was dedicated to fill the gap between popular and professional theology. Its purpose is to make solid theology generally available. I have made a prayerful attempt to do so, especially in view of the fact that the money for the lectureship was given by a laywoman who cared for the intellectual welfare of the Church.

I feel deep gratitude to President Lewis B. Carpenter, and to the faculty and students of the National College for Christian Workers in Kansas City, Missouri, where the lectures were given. I am indebted, too, to my wife, who has listened to the reading of the manuscript and who has made innumerable suggestions as to its improvement. Few occasions have offered more delight than this working together on the final draft of a book. Dr. Everett Tilson of Vanderbilt University Divinity School has made constructive suggestions on the second draft of Chapter Four. The successive drafts have been typed by Mrs. Harold Kieler of Vanderbilt University, and Mrs. Richard Olson and Mrs. Wayne Johnson of Andover Newton Theological School. To them, thanks!

No book has caused me more pain of authorship than this one. Those who heard the lectures perhaps will not recognize them! But the substance of thought is the same, only radically rewritten to make the thought more readily available to the larger circle of readers. If harder writing makes for easier reading, without forfeit of content, the pain is worth while. As with all my books, I now leave this one in the hands of the final Judge to be used as is needed.

N. F. S. F.

Newton Centre, Massachusetts

January, 1959

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Chapter 1: By What Authority?

Some moments of life are peculiarly luminous. Suddenly some truth strikes us with irresistible vividness and compelling conviction. What was vague becomes focused. What is secondary falls into place. Life itself takes on new meaning and our work, a more urgent purpose.

The New England Inter-Seminary Conference, dealing with "Authority in the Christian Faith," was such a luminous occasion for me.

The situation itself was simple. Several speakers had been asked to develop different views on the subject. It fell to my lot to summarize the results, to suggest a final focus, and generally to draw together the truths in the various views into "the extreme center," into "the harmony in contrariety," which is no compromise, but consummation.

Because this Conference helped me in trying to help the students, I am going to use it as a framework in the discussion of this topic. A concrete occasion often best illumines a general truth.

What does constitute authority in the Christian faith?

Our age in particular needs a straight answer to the problem of authority. If we meet this demand we shall also have done something essential to provide an answer to that other basic need of our age: motivation. We say that we know what is right, but do not do it. However, this is not the whole story. If there were more certainty as to what has the final authority to command our lives, would there not be a far smaller gap between knowledge of the right and the incentive to do it? Uncertainty and confusion drain the emotional springs for action. Clarity of faith increases the command of faith.

For decades the World Council of Churches, especially the Faith and Order Commission, has been studying the nature of authority in the Christian faith. Since its beginning, it has asked the

various denominations to examine their own history to find at what point their particular strands of confession became unraveled from the total rope of Christian faith. Whenever a denomination made such examination, the general result of its findings was the insistence that its confession was the original rope!

Recognizing scant hope in this approach, the Faith and Order Commission meeting in Lund, in 1952, decided to appoint a new commission, "Christ and His Church in the Light of the Holy Spirit." Its task would be, not first of all to look back to find the original rope, but, rather, in the light and power of the Holy Spirit to gather both past and present into a creative Christian future in order to twist together again the various strands into a firmly spliced rope. Those of us who have worked on this Commission have come to see, beyond every denial, how central the problem of authority is for Christian people today. It was obvious, therefore, that the New England Inter-Seminary Movement had undertaken no small task in discussing this topic in one conference.

What the program committee decided to do was to have one speaker be the advocate for *Christian* experience as determinative for faith; another as advocate for *the Bible*; two more to discuss the *Church* as final authority. My own task, after these presentations, was to discuss all these standards and to evaluate them. All the candidates for authority were represented by distinguished scholars and church leaders who believed their respective approaches to be basic. In following the sequence of the Conference as a framework for our chapter, let us footlight the stage with a few observations.

In the final analysis, of course, God alone is authority. God is the final source of creation, the final power in control of all happenings, the final agent of man's redemption, and the final determiner of destinies. The Koran (Ch. IV) states that "God is a sufficient witness unto himself." Barth thunders that nothing in history can take the place of God, that ultimately God is his own message and method. Tillich insists that since God cannot be known directly, all symbols that point to God must be "broken." This means that no creature can ever know as God knows; therefore, all knowledge of God is mixed with human imperfection.

Although God is infinite, the historic channels for his self-revelation and the human interpretation of this self-disclosure are both finite. For this reason, it is not enough for us to say: "God is his own authority. Let God be God." It is not enough for us to say: "The Christian faith is its own authority." The question is, rather, how can we recognize the human and historical channels of God's authority? Granted that God alone is the authority of the Christian faith, how can we choose among conflicting claims to historic authority?

Before we proceed to discuss candidates for authority in the Christian faith, it is well to keep two facts in mind. The first is that Christian authority is not domineering. Jesus himself said that the kind of authority the Gentiles sought after, the disciples should shun. God never violates our freedom. He never makes us do his will. Bernard of Clairvaux, in writing to the Pope, stressed

that "love has no lord." If God is Love, his representative on earth can never "lord it over" anyone. Therefore Eric Fromm's accusation that Christianity represents an authoritarian character structure is false. The Christian faith is authoritative, but never authoritarian. Jesus calls his disciples not servants, but friends. Christian authority frees the person for fulfillment in fellowship. St. Augustine long ago defined the nature of Christian authority in saying that the service of God is perfect freedom.

The second fact to keep in mind about Christian authority is that it can never become so much a matter of sight that it no longer remains the occasion for faith. We are bid to live not by sight, but by faith. If the authority which commands us can become so clear and definite that faith is no longer required, that authority is no longer Christian. Authority in the Christian faith must speak to the inner man in such a way that the more solution is offered the more faith is demanded. Only he who is justified by faith shall live, writes St. Paul in Romans, but we often forget that justification is not only of life but of knowledge as well. In discussing experience, the Bible, and the church as candidates for authority in the Christian faith we know at the outset that Christian experience cannot be communicated except by being shared, that the law of the Bible is not of the letter but of the Spirit, and that the church cannot be an institution that compels, but a community that frees.

I

The first candidate is experience. Let it present its credentials! The immediate claim of this aspirant is that no one can get outside or beyond his own experience. What is not real for us in experience is accordingly not real. The final judge, therefore, is experience. Besides, every clinching of conviction is within ourselves. The click of conviction is unexceptionally a matter of personal experience. How else can the Christian faith be real to us except as we know it, feel it, or do it? But knowing, feeling, and doing are all matters of experience. Even faith is a response, a commitment, or a trusting, all of which are kinds of experience. Thus we can never get outside our experience, in the first place; and, in the second, whatever convinces us must gain the assent of our experience.

If, moreover, we try to go beyond our own experience, we ascertain what others believe the authority of the Christian faith to be. As John Dewey used to say, we affirm what we believe can be confirmed. But such appeal beyond our own experience is recourse to the experience of others. What they have experienced as real they communicate to us, and thereby is opened to us a larger experience. As far as we can, of course, we ought to seek authority as widely as possible. In theory, at least, or in intention, we ought to collect man's total experience both in the past and in the present. The systematic interpretation of this total experience -- what the speaker on this subject called "comprehensive coherence"-- should then become the best standard for the authority of the Christian faith. One of the other speakers at the New England Inter-Seminary Conference appealed also to Jesus' frequent employment of experience as witness to his message. Faith for Jesus, for that matter, seemed to be a matter of trusting the

power of God in one's own experience.

Experience as a candidate for authority in the Christian faith makes a strong case for itself. No interpretation that leaves out experience can be wholly valid. All the reasons introduced for the importance of experience are authentic and inescapable. Nevertheless, experience is not the main or primary channel in human history for authority in the Christian faith. The main grounds for rejecting it as the chief channel are two:

First, experience cannot be the criterion for authority in the Christian faith since experience is itself under judgment. It is our experience that needs authority. It is our experience that needs judgment. It is our experience that needs to be changed. We who have the experience are in need of salvation. How then can the experience we have be the authority for our faith?

But suppose that we do not speak of experience in general, but of Christian experience. What then?

Secondly, then, it is no longer our experience as such, but our Christian experience which becomes our authority. Our Christian experience is of Christ. Therefore, it is not our experience of Christ, but our experience of *Christ* that counts. Authority then does not lie in experience, but comes through experience. Experience is the channel, of course, no matter what the content. Religion has to become personal in order to be real. There has to be experience of Christ for genuine convictions to conquer our lives. But Christian authority is not *in* experience but *for* experience; it is not of experience but *through* experience.

II

The Bible as a candidate for authority in the Christian faith is also strong and should be listened to with respect. In the first place, Christianity is a historic religion, and the Bible is the only record it has of its historic foundation. What other authority can there be for a historic religion than its original title deed? In the second place, the Bible is the most open, public, and objective standard possible. It is written once for all. Besides, the Bible does not vary from age to age as do the nature of personal experience and the interpretations of the Church. In the third place, the Bible is the authority that all Protestant denominations accept. Why not utilize the fact of this practical source of unity? In the fourth place, the Bible has proved itself capable of inspiring endless creative variety. To accept the Bible as the authority of the Christian faith, therefore, is not to accept merely some static dogma that lays the dead hand of the past on the fresh life of the present.

Nevertheless, in spite of the place and power of the Bible in Christian authority, we must reject this candidate, too, as the main channel of authority of the Christian faith. We do so for the following reasons:

The Bible is not meant to be a textbook for Christian theology, but a source book for living faith. Barth is right in teaching that the Bible becomes the Word of God only for faith. The Bible itself maintains that the letter kills while the spirit gives life. If the Bible were a textbook we could now live by sight; since it is a source book we must keep living by faith.

Even before we started examining our candidates we pointed out that any authority that makes for sight instead of faith is wrong by the very nature of the Christian kind of authority. The Bible plays a leading role necessarily in the authority of the Christian faith. When it is used as a source book, it becomes the means of the Spirit that gives life, but when it is used as a textbook, it can become the letter that kills.

Jesus asked: How can you understand my words when you do not hear my Word? Only when Christ as the living Word of God's love is accepted, can the words of the Bible find their proper context.

Furthermore, there is, in fact, no developed doctrinal unity in the Bible. The Bible is the record of God's great deeds in raising up a people unto himself. It is the story of a people who were called by God and the response they made to God -- good, bad, and indifferent. It is the recitation of the lives and teachings of great prophets; and, in the fullness of time, of the Son of Man. But there is no one doctrinally developed system in the Bible. If we ask about man, even a specific question concerning man, such as what precisely is the image of God in man, the Bible has many answers. If we ask about the very heart of orthodoxy, the doctrine of the Trinity, there is no doctrine of it in the Bible. If we seek to find one interpretation of Christ, doctrinally developed and clear, we shall be profoundly disappointed. Theologians read back their own versions and distort or disregard the other material, but honest competence will know that while the Bible is universally accepted within the Christian churches, the churches do not in fact interpret the Bible in the same way.

Therefore, whenever the Bible has been made the final authority in the literal sense, or in the sense of the open, public appeal to it as objective authority, there has arisen in the church division upon division. Human nature is such that when a strong leader becomes convinced of the supreme importance of one teaching or of one strand, he makes that one the most important; and since such definiteness and such focus as act to differentiate certain believers from others are very dear to human nature, one new sect after another is founded. Thus the Bible in becoming the basis for endless creative variety also becomes the occasion for endless conflicting difference. The Bible therefore needs within it a pattern and a spirit of unity that goes beyond its objective use in merely being available to be read and interpreted.

Thus the function of the Bible is to be a mirror both for the individual Christian and for the people of God. In it we see our ordinary world in the light of a new world. We see our common words and deeds in the light of the living Word. We see ourselves, at the same time, both as we are and as we ought to be. The reason for this double vision is the presence of God in Christ

showing up life in general. Christ is the love of God come to full fruition in man. He is, as the New Testament calls him, "mature manhood." Therefore it is not any specific documentation in the Bible that is authoritative, nor even the Bible in general, but rather human experience and human history interpreted in the light of Christ. Therefore, it is still Christ who constitutes the authority of the Bible. Is it anything less than the full picture of the universal love of God the Father in the face of Jesus Christ that is the authority of the Bible? The Bible is itself under the authority of the pattern of God who is the personal Spirit who is holy Love. The Scriptures tell of him as they point forward and backward to their own fulfillment in the Incarnate Word.

Even so, it is not the biblical Christ of the past that is the standard, but the living Christ who bids us look less back to Jesus than up to God. Christ is the pattern and the power of God's love drawing all men unto himself only when he is lifted up. The historic figure of Christ "after the flesh" is fulfilled by the "Lord who is the Spirit." The Christ of love who once came in the fullness of time is now the Living Lord who comes fulfilling to each and all as we press forward into the endless future.

We never catch up with the Christ. While he walks with us as God's presence in our lives, he also walks before us as the eternal resource of God for our lives. The authority of the Christian faith is Christ before and beyond our experience through the Book that testifies to him. The Book is a powerful means giving us the picture of the Christ. The Bible provides the pattern of God's love. The picture, however, needs the power of Christ's presence. The pattern needs the reality of the Person.

Thus again we have as authority not the Christ *of* the Bible nor *in* the Bible, but the Christ who has come to us *through* the Bible and still can come to us *through* the Bible. Christ is God's love enmanned. He is God as Love become flesh. He is a human being fulfilled by the presence and power of God.

III

The third candidate for authority in the Christian faith is the church. At our Inter-Seminary Conference two outstanding churchmen, Roman Catholic and Episcopal respectively, espoused the cause of the Church as the main channel of authority of the Christian faith. The Catholic position is that an authoritative revelation of Christ requires an authoritative organ of interpretation and application. The final heresy then becomes the refusal to submit to the official voice of the church in matters of faith and morals. The Catholic representative, in his great outgoing spirit, spent most of his time showing that the Roman church does respect and guard the individual conscience. Protestants should therefore be careful not to caricature the official position of the church with regard to authority.

The Anglican scholar gave large credit both to experience and to the Bible, but stressed that in actual churchmanship, decisions become, in the last analysis, either a matter of thin

individualism or of listening to the long wisdom of the mature church and of co-operating with the total community in its faithfulness to the inner heart of the Gospel. The church therefore represents the corporate judgment of the believers, not *infallibly*, but *authoritatively*.

For the church as authority it should be said that the church at the heart of its being is the embodiment of the eternal purpose of God in human history. God created the world so that we might learn to become mature members of the kind of community that Christ offers us, the open, creative, inclusive community of love.

The church is the building for which the Bible offers the blueprint. The Bible exists for the sake of the building -- which is Christian community. Therefore, although in one sense the blueprint is the authority for the kind of building to be constructed, in another sense, the actual needs of the building in its concrete situation must govern the decisions in the erection of it. The Bible gives general directions; the church needs specific instructions as to the application of these directions. Authority is needed for the specific decisions.

Perhaps the best way of stating this truth of need for concrete authority is that the church is the actual locus of corporate decisions. The church faces necessarily inescapable choices as to faith, morals, and strategy. Can the Bible make the choice? Who then has the right to make the decisions: the individuals as such; local groups; or the church, which represents the corporate experience both of interpreting and of applying the biblical directions?

The church is also the agent of the Holy Spirit. The church was born when the Spirit came on Pentecost. In a peculiar way the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the church. The Holy Spirit is that reality in God that is the eternal prototype of perfect community. Therefore the church by its very nature and total function is best able to heed and to carry into effect the biddings of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, the reasons that we cannot make the church the main authority of the Christian faith in spite of its obvious, irreducible importance are as follows:

The actual church as corporate judgment has made mistakes. The mistakes of the Greek and the Roman churches resulted in their splitting apart. The mistakes of the Roman church resulted in the birth of the Reformation. The mistakes of the Anglican church gave rise to the Methodist denomination.

The ground for these mistakes has been lack of flexibility. The church should have a balance between the corporate and the personal relation to Christ. Schleiermacher taught that the difference between a Catholic and a Protestant is that the Catholic comes to Christ through the church whereas the Protestant comes to the church through Christ. The fact is, however, that both the church and the Christian ought to come to Christ. The corporate cannot be reduced to the personal nor the personal to the corporate. The figure of the church as the body of Christ, in

which the individual cells have no direct relation to the head, needs to be complemented by the figure of the people of God, in which the individual persons can have direct access to their Lord.

God wants no freezing of history in any ultimate sense of authority. Such authority can and does become legalism. It becomes a matter of telling people what to believe and what to do. Therefore, it becomes a living by sight and not by faith. The church as final authority in history takes the place of personal faith and personal decisions. Either the church exercises such authority concretely or it does not. If it does, it precludes the fullest opportunity for personal faith. If it does not, it recognizes in fact an authority beyond its own decisions. The Roman Catholic church is more consistent at this point than is the Anglican.

The fact has been demonstrated that the natural conservatism of human authority in religion tends to domesticate the Holy Spirit. When authority is finally vested in any institution, the wielders of power in that institution become institutionalists, generally more concerned with the promotion and defense of the institution than with God's creative will and with men's changing needs. Human history itself shows the need for people who conform not first of all to institutions, but to truth and human needs. Christian history proves abundantly the need for people who relate themselves primarily to the living Christ and to their fellow men.

The church is subject to Christ. It is his body. He as its head is its only authority. It is not the corporate nature of the decisions that count, but their Christian nature. Sometimes a prophet of the living Christ will have to stand over against the corporate judgment to recall the church to its primary allegiance and to reclaim it to its only Lord. The corporate judgment may very likely be the truer wisdom. It may serve to caution individual enthusiasm. But it may also need the challenge of charismatic personalities, those who have the gift of the Spirit.

The authority needs to be channeled through the church for decency and order within the community. But the authority of the Christian faith is never of the church nor in the church; it is *for* the church and *through* the church.

IV

The upshot of the evaluation of the three contending positions -- experience, the Bible, and the church -- is as follows:

Christ alone is the authority of the Christian faith. Nor is Christ merely a mystery. He is God's revelation in a person, in a mighty deed of salvation, and in the teachings of the Kingdom of God. To be sure, as a person and as God's mighty deed he can never be reduced to any meaning nor confined within any idea. The great Creator is no system of thought nor any impersonal force. He is the living Lord of love.

On the other hand, all meanings meet in him who himself is God's Word. Christ is God's communication to the world. He is the living Word: God is *faithful!* He is God's Truth from whom all truths flow and on whom all truths depend. To say that the living Lord is "our Father" who is Spirit is to affirm at once the biblical bedrock of the authority of the Christian faith: God is Love; we have seen his presence in the person of Jesus as the Christ.

Granted that this is so, have we not avoided the question of authority in *human* history? Of course, God's Christ is the authority, for he is God's presence and power in human history. But how do we know and receive him authoritatively if not through experience, through the Bible, and through the church? Certainly we need all these channels. They are expressions of the revelation. But they are not the authority. Notice that it is through them that the authority comes. They are not the authority, any one of them or all of them together. They constitute, rather, *a needed configuration with Christ as their main pattern*. Christ as God's love for the world -- the Cross and the Resurrection -- is the pattern of Christian authority for and in experience, for and in the Bible, for and in the church. Christ as the pattern of God's love, then, is our historic authority.

This pattern is never reducible to the configuration. The pattern is not of the configuration, but shapes the configuration. Christ is always more than experience, the Bible, and the church. The configuration changes necessarily with history. Our ways of entertaining the experience, of interpreting the Bible, of living in the community change, but the pattern itself is exhaustlessly both beyond change and yet present for change. Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, for he is the enmanned image of God's changeless love. Yet, as real and relevant for every change in time, Christ is also the most changeable, who is always more than all change and ever ready for it. Although changeless as Love, as Love he is sensitive to every change and relates himself appropriately to it.

Professor Gustaf Wingren of Lund University in Sweden has written in his profound book *Skapelsen och Lagen* (Creation and Law) that the constant task of the church is to interpret the world in terms of the Bible, and the Bible in relation to the world. The same truth holds for experience and for the church as well. Thus Christ as God goes beyond human history; Christ as man is in human history; Christ as the Godman *is ever both beyond and in* human history, the challenge to faith and work.

Experience, the Bible, and the church are all in the world. The Holy Spirit is beyond it. Christ as the Godman is both in and beyond the world. Only when the Holy Spirit can draw from "the things of Christ," using the channels of experience, the Bible, and the church, can we find that authority of the Christian faith which is truly of God, ever beyond the world, and yet also truly in the world for man. We turn therefore to a fuller consideration of the Christ who alone is the authority of the Christian faith.

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Chapter 2: The Son of His Love

One day a Jewish rabbi telephoned me, challenging me to come to hear his sermon: "Why Judaism Does Not Need Christ." The claim of the sermon was that Judaism was more universal in its understanding of the love of God than was Christianity. Instead of Judaism's being an "arrested form" of Christianity, as Toynbee holds, he contended that Christianity was a sect of Judaism that walled people off by its worship of Jesus. Then with great generosity he invited me to take his pulpit some future Sabbath night, at the main service of the week, to answer him. I chose as my sermon topic "Why Judaism Needs Christ." Does it? We have lived with Judaism a long time. In the future we shall have to be in ever closer contact with other living religions. Is Jesus a help or a hindrance to the universal faith the world now needs?

A Muslim girl studying at Southern Methodist University came up after a lecture to ask me about Christ.

"I believe," she said, "that God is universal love. I believe no one will ever know him who does not accept the community of his love. I believe that the world could come together on this basis. But why do you Christians insist on Jesus' being the Son of God? What do you mean by the Son of God? Is the Father older?"

"No," I answered, taken aback.

"Then is he more dignified?"

"Of course not!" I retorted.

"Do you, then, believe in the Father's actual physical generation of the son?"

"Certainly not!" I replied in horror.

"Can you give any dictionary definition of the father-son relation that applies directly to your Christian doctrine?"

"I guess I can't," I admitted.

"Well, then why do you use such language? It only confuses people," was her quick and telling return.

Why do we?

Another Muslim, a professor of philosophy from the Middle East, came to Nashville, Tennessee, to speak. He opened his address as follows:

"The Koran begins 'God is love.' If only we could get the Christians to believe this, we could have a new world!"

My copy of the Koran opens "In the name of the most merciful God," but certainly the meaning that God is love is there. Are we, by a narrow and dogmatic interpretation of Jesus, blocking effective communication and spiritual communion in a day when the world's destiny may hang on our finding the world-wide faith?

At Vanderbilt University, in one year, two outstanding students became converts to Baha'í, one a student in the Divinity School and the other an honor student in mathematics. They both told me, when I reasoned with them, that they had found that the Christian churches suffocated every chance at effective understanding and practice of the universal love of God. They both believed in Jesus devoutly and continued to believe that Christ as God's universal love is the ultimate truth, but they felt that now his truth had to be cut loose from those who smother it, and to be announced through a new Manifestation, the more universally and effectively to serve our age.

The world is waiting for a universal faith that can be believed. God's eternal presence and power, the God who is universal Love, is the truth we need as individuals, as people, and as the world. Exactly -- this is Christ. If any religion is in fact more universal than Christ's in love, truth, and law, I will join it. Christ is sinned against, I believe, when anything less than this universal, complete love is made central, either to God's nature and purpose, or to man's nature and destiny.

I

Let us consider Christ under three titles: Son of God, Son of Man, Savior.

What does it mean to call Jesus Son of God? The New Testament has three basic definitions of God. The first calls God "our Father"; the second states that "God is Spirit"; the third says that "God is Love." These three New Testament characterizations of God are central to our discussion of Christ as Son of God. If God is best understood under these three ascriptions, his Son obviously must be interpreted in terms of them. Two other definitions of God in the New Testament, "God is light" and "our God is a consuming fire," indicate not so much who God is as the integrity of his character (light) and his complete opposition to evil (a consuming fire). Biblically, then, God is Father, Spirit, Love.

When we call Christ Son of "our Father" we indicate that personal relations are ultimate. God is personal. We meet God, the eternal Father, in the human, historic Son. God is not to be known basically in terms of ideas, systems, or speculation. The Father God is the eternal Compassion who has created us, controls his creation, and will fulfill what he has started.

While Jesus lived, and when the disciples began to believe that they had met God in him, as the earliest writer, Paul, and the earliest Gospel, Mark, indicate, there was no question in their minds that God was also in heaven. Not all of God came! Jesus prayed to him and worked and spoke for him. Thus God was somehow in Jesus, but he was also beyond Jesus. Consequently the language of Father and Son was born.

There is nothing sacred about the biblical language as such in relation to God. What the language is trying to convey is that God is personal. He is conscious. He wills, he knows, and he cares. He answers the prayers of individuals, but he also controls the nations. This personal God came into human history fulfilling in Jesus. God's presence and power came in Jesus in such a way that we beheld "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Since God took the initiative in this coming to us, we speak of God sending his Son. Since God is personal, we say that God sent his Son. The important thing is that we know who God is, that he is personal, and that we can only be in line with reality and fulfilled as persons and as people when we understand and accept the true God, and ourselves and others in him. When we decide to trust this God for what he is, for what he has done for us, and wants to do for us, we "accept Christ." Such is the heart of the meaning of Christ as the "Son of God" with reference to God's being "our Father."

That God is Spirit means that God is not a limited or a localized personality. He is not a glorified man sitting enthroned somewhere. He is everywhere. He is beyond all spatial ideas. The statement that the Lord is Spirit and can be known only in the Spirit, emphasizes the truth that, although God came into human history, he can be confined and contained by none of its forms.

It is the invisible realities that are eternal. Things are what they are. Facts can be handled and controlled. The Spirit, however, is creative. We call the Spirit "he" because we speak of the Spirit who is the personal God. He is free. He goes where he wants.

Things have spatial relations. They have to stand side by side or under and over. Even when material is crushed there are small particles that are next to each other. Even personalities are discrete individuals. They learn from others and live with others. But they are themselves.

Spirit, however, can be invisibly present everywhere and can even penetrate personality into its deepest selfhood. Spirits can interpenetrate, be "one"! Thus even though the personal God is always himself and remains his own inviolate identity, God as Spirit came into Jesus and

molded triumphantly the life of Jesus. Therefore, Jesus could pray to the God in heaven, the Father beyond him, even while he knew that the true God who is not only personal but also Spirit was present in him as his deepest personal reality. The Spirit came from the Father, but was truly present in Jesus as the Son of God.

Above all, God is Love. The Bible says that love is of God, and that whoever loves knows God, for God is Love. Jesus is called "the Son of God's love." That God is Love means that he can be perfectly trusted. God is ever faithful, never fickle; God is continuously working in our behalf, never only at times and in part. God loves all, is always doing what is best for each and for all.

Love, says the New Testament, keeps everything going in perfect harmony. Paul's hymn to love in his I Corinthians 13 is indirectly the height of man's description of God. Faith and hope will remain because the greatest of all realities, Love, remains forever without disappearing or failing.

The great parables of Jesus yield their meaning to the key of love. The Sermon on the Mount sings the song of love. The deeds of Jesus express his love. The death of Jesus is the supreme example of love. The Cross of Christ shows us the very heart of God. And Jesus' rising from death is the declaration forever of God's faithfulness toward man.

Mysterious is the full meaning of the Personal. Mystery, too, lies in the unfathomable depths of Spirit. Beyond our fullest imagination lie the endless resources of the love of God. That Jesus is the Son of God means that this personal Love, this eternal Spirit who God is, became present, known, and powerful in human history in Jesus Christ. Anything less than, or contrary to, such assertions is the denial of the Christian faith itself that Jesus is the Son of God.

II

Jesus was not only Son of God; he was also Son of Man. The latter was his favorite expression for himself. Those who try to find the meaning of this term in the Old Testament or in noncanonical uses of the word usually go back to Enoch's apocalyptic Son of Man. He was to come on the clouds to deliver his people. The Son of Man is used this way in Mark, for instance, when Jesus warns the Sanhedrin not only that he is Son of Man, but that they will see him sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds.

Others use the term as in Ezekiel. According to this usage Jesus was man in a corporate sense. He was not a man, but Man, in the sight of both God and men. He was, then, the messianic Man, the deliverer, or Paul's new Adam.

But the simplest way to use the term, if we are to follow Old Testament precedent, is as did Jeremiah, who stressed the individual as representative of man. Jesus himself was using the

term in this way when he said that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath; therefore the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. This seems very likely the original use of the term, since later worshipers would hardly use such a designation for Jesus and the term is quite in line with what is unique and powerful in his spirit.

Scholars have written many learned theses and tomes on the subject, but possibly the most fruitful investigation is that of Dr. Henry Cadman of Mansfield College, Oxford University, who after a learned doctoral dissertation on the subject and a lifetime of devotion to it comes to the conclusion that from mere textual criticism we cannot finally decide among the three. In the light of the whole Gospel, however, we may feel free to use the term in its most natural sense.

What troubles many people about Jesus is that they can believe in God, but not in Christ. Christ for them is a problem and an emotional burden. Somehow they think that they know God enough apart from Jesus and that all this business about Jesus being Christ is something they should force themselves to believe in order to be Christian. The New Testament says that no one comes to the Father except through the Son, that there is no other name by which we must be saved. Therefore many, at least figuratively, hold their noses and gulp down the unpleasant medicine of faith in Christ. When they have managed to keep it down, they become proud of their achievement and call this the narrow way of confession that alone leads to life. They derive a kind of selfish joy out of seeing others choking and retching. The whole Christian doctrine of Jesus as the Christ has putrefied within the consciousness of mankind because of this basic misconception of the meaning of Jesus as the Son of Man as well as the Son of God.

Jesus was just as human as anyone else. If anything, Jesus was not less man but more. He was human the way God means us all to become human. We may even say that in a real sense he was the first fully human being.

Man is human in two senses: as a creature rightly related to God and fulfilled by him; and as a creature made to find God in freedom through his own experience. Human nature can be thought of either as "mature manhood" or as a process of maturation. Jesus was human in both senses, but the former understanding of man swallowed up the second effectively. We tend to think of Jesus more as the perfected man than as a man in the process of perfecting.

If we look at Jesus' life as a whole, we get the impression that here was a life that overcame man's problems to the point where the whole world has come to know the power of his life. If we look at his life as a whole, we get the feel of it as that of a person who was tempted most severely, but who won out over man's sins so basically that he can now be called man's Savior. If we consider his Cross and his Resurrection, and what they have come to mean as a message for mankind, we find that in Jesus we meet the God who is Love, who came to save and who won the victory over man's enemies. We see both God and what God can be and do in a human life. We see the meaning of man's life in the purpose of God's love.

Well-meaning but foolish faith longs to accept Jesus as Son of God, but it dreads Jesus' being fully human. If his humanity has to be admitted, these misguided devotees want him to be Son of Man in no real sense, or else Son of Man only in the sense of a perfect human being.

Ardent but misguided devotion wants to worship the deity at the expense of the humanity. Man's longing is for God, and misled piety therefore wants to subtract, at least from conscious recall, the completely human nature of Jesus.

Misspent adoration wants Jesus to be entirely unique. Otherwise, it is feared, he is not authentically Son of God. This craving is due, not only to the desire to have him really be God, but also to the fear that, if he was like us, God demands that we become like him. And that is intolerable! Thus foolish faith and faithless fear combine to reject his full humanity.

In the same way and for the same reasons many insist that Jesus was completely sinless from the beginning of his life. The ground for their insistence is partly that man wants to be sure that God's saving presence was full in Jesus Christ and that God's work of salvation was effectively completed. But this clamor for complete sinlessness in the human Jesus can also be the result of a Jewish and Neo-Platonic idea that God, the perfect, is too holy to behold sin and certainly too holy actually to identify himself with the sinner. God's identification with the sinner is, however, the very heart of the Christian Gospel.

This longing for complete sinlessness in the human Jesus can also be due to a moralism which feels that God can be pleased with and dwell only with those who are good. Thus in man's relation with God, man's goodness is made determinative, rather than God's forgiving Love and empowering presence.

We know, however, that Jesus was human in all respects, even though the sinless God was victoriously present in his life. In any case, the whole history of the Christian church has witnessed a continuous battle to keep full and real the whole humanity of Jesus. The deeper Christian instincts have always come forward to insist that Jesus was not only Son of God but also Son of Man.

Jesus as Son of Man was not only the conclusive presence of God's perfection in his life as a whole, but through the history of his life he became a perfected man. We recall the New Testament phrase "having been made perfect."

Let us examine other biblical expressions. If Jesus grew in strength, weakness is presupposed. If Jesus asked questions from the rabbis in the temple and learned from them, or did not know when the world's end would come, ignorance is presupposed. If Jesus grew angry, lack of self-control is presupposed. If Jesus groaned in his spirit, lack of peace is presupposed. If Jesus complained of his tensions, lack of freedom from anxiety is presupposed. If Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered and was made perfect so as to become the pioneer or

perfecter of our faith, lack of submissiveness is presupposed.

Thus in Jesus as the Son of Man we have not a prefabricated human nature, some ready-to-wear suit, but the Son of Man who was truly a human being both in his being perfected and in his being the mediator of the perfect Love. We know that Jesus was a real, historic figure, a human being such as we are, who by God's presence in him, and by his human acceptance and transformation by that presence, showed us who God is and what God can and will do to save us. Jesus was both Son of Man and Son of God because the life of Jesus became fulfilled by the love of God.

The sinlessness of Jesus is a complex question. In one sense, God, the sinless, had to remain sinless in Jesus or else he would not be God. God cannot sin and God was truly in Jesus. In another sense, if Jesus had been sinful the way we are, there would have been no real victory in his life. Then the power of the Cross over history and the reality of the Resurrection are basically called in question. In such a case, it is useless to speak of Jesus as in any effective sense the world's Savior. Therefore the insistence on the sinlessness of Jesus is not without critical importance.

On the other hand, if Jesus never knew man's sin and never had to struggle with its power, Jesus was never a human being in the full sense of the term. He was then perfect humanity, but never perfected. God then never identified himself with our deepest plight. The sinless was then never "made sin," to use the biblical expression, in order to give us the new righteousness of God. The job then was at best merely external and mechanical, never the work of a participant, of one who shared our lot, who understood our sinful state, and who demonstrated the power of God to overcome it in actual human life.

But God came to us not merely to overcome our weakness and our ignorance, but precisely to enter into our rebellious and faithless state and to set us free. According to the record, as far as we have it, Jesus never committed any deliberate sins of rebellion against God. He was certainly not sinful, because then he could not have become victor over sin. Dominant love excludes sin. Victorious love conquers it. Perfect love throws it out. Jesus was rather the participant in our common human nature and sinful situation.

The Bible says he feared. He knew our human anxiety. This is the root situation that occasions open sinning. Whatever be the sum and substance of ordinary responses (and it is wrong also to separate Jesus here from humanity), Jesus at least knew our deepest ailment of sin: the effective experience of accepted anxiety was his. For this reason he could even at the end realistically differentiate between his own and the Father's will, crying "not my will but Thine," and feel himself desperately forsaken by the presence of God even on the Cross.

God entered sinlessly and victoriously our full human situation in the life of Jesus in such a way that he can also enter into and become victorious in any human life, if he is understood and

accepted. For God was in and with Jesus in life and death and finally raised him up, "declaring him Son of God with power." Such is Paul's basic theology; and it is still the best for the church.

In Jesus, God showed himself to be Love. He did so by being himself present in him. God was truly in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. He did not come first of all to give us knowledge or to show his wisdom and power. He came to set us free from sin; to heal us; to save us; to overcome our alienation from himself; to establish fellowship with us and among men within the presence and the power of Love.

God showed himself to be Love in a real human being. That he could do this without violating, but rather fulfilling, human nature means that when God created man he made him in such a way that man could be right and real only within his true relation to God.

Man is empty at the center of his being. That is why he can grow. But man will never grow to full maturity until he becomes "filled with all the fullness of God." That man can have right relation to God in Christ and with Christ, to use the biblical expressions that abound, is due to the fact that Christ combines in himself the Son of God and the Son of Man, not artificially, but as the very fullness of time when the purpose of God in creating man is made effective by his coming to be in man. Because such a purposed fulfillment came true in Jesus and can come true in us "until we all come to mature manhood, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," we now turn to the meaning of Jesus as the world's Savior.

III

Jesus is not only Son of God and Son of Man; he is also and particularly Savior. Our interest in Jesus is not mostly intellectual, but springs from the crying need of the human heart. Abstract theories or learned theologies can hide from us him whom God sent for our salvation. For this reason Jesus is particularly Savior.

If analysis of the life of Jesus prevents our seeing his life as a whole, God's mighty Christ-deed for our salvation, we have indeed exchanged our birthright for a mess of pottage. Analysis should rather show us how God's coming in Christ should be followed by his coming in us; how Christ should dwell in our hearts by faith. We should be perfected by grace until we can become presented, to use the Bible again, "mature in Christ." Only by such "mature manhood" as God achieved in Christ can anyone ever become fulfilled or fully real.

As Savior, Jesus shows us our sin both of self and of society. The light shows up the dark. Unless we can see what is wrong with us, we are unwilling to be made right. How dark sin is, was not seen until Jesus lived.

Sin is not largely wrongdoing. It is not basically a matter of breaking the law. It is not first of all shortcoming or missing the mark. Sin is a kind of life, a quality and direction of living. Before sin becomes sins or acts, it is a state of the self. Sin is a matter of being before it becomes a matter of doing.

Jesus by becoming a true self shows up the false self. Jesus lived the Love that is the light of the world and the law of life. Therefore he lays bare the dark drives of human nature and uncovers the lack of love that causes lawlessness. Before Jesus' time men never had to face the merciless floodlight of God's holy, universal, unfailing love. They did not know how God demanded that they be and act. Therefore Jesus' life took away the excuse for their sin.

The sin of self is, deepest down, the lack of love. In one sense sin, as Richard McCann points out in *Delinquency: Sickness or Sin?* is a deficiency disease as well as a state or act of will. Lack of love engenders fear. Fear occasions hatred of those who threaten the self. Hatred fashions cruelty, deceit, and blindness to others' needs or good points. Thus hatred breeds contempt and strife. Or it smolders until it bursts into tensions that make us ill. Lack of love carries through a program of evil all the way from carelessness to murder. The self that is starved for love fights the world. It alternates between defensiveness and aggressiveness.

Lack of love, surprisingly, is a chosen state. The self isolates itself from love because of a false love for itself. Such rejection of love, as the eminent psychiatrist Clemens Benda reveals in *Der Mensch im Zeitalter der Leiblosigkeit* (Man in the Age of Lovelessness), is due, however, to the experience of false love or the lack of experience of real love. A loveless person needs love, but he fears love.

Love hurts the self not primarily, however, by exposing the self to rejection or to hurt by others. Love hurts the self mainly because love is death to the loveless. The self that is turned in on self dreads being turned out. Love does just that. Therefore the loveless person hates those who love. Their love threatens him.

The lovers of mankind are often its martyrs; because, as Oscar Wilde said, Jesus was a lover for whom the world was too small, he had to die.

The loveless, nevertheless, need love and crave it. They know that they are hurting themselves in shutting love from their lives. Therefore they hate themselves in their sin as well as those who love them. They have a false love of self that must die at the hand of true love. Only so can the loveless find reality and release.

Lack of love is sin, for it is lack of faith in God. Sin, in biblical thought at its highest, is lack of faith, and faith is the affirmation of love. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin," says the Letter to the Romans, and "perfect love," adds the First Letter of John, "casts out fear." Therefore, the lack of faith that is the heart of sin is due to a lack of love.

When love comes, faith grows, and fear goes. When Jesus came as the Love of God in human form, he exposed man's sin as never before. From then on, there is New Testament depth in the understanding of sin. The New Testament is merciless in exposing the depth of sin. No one can be Savior of men who does not first show what is wrong with them. Jesus threw the full light of reality on man's sinful existence.

The sin of self is also lack of action. The Letter of James affirms that sin is knowing what is good and not doing it. This understanding of sin does not go so deep as does the interpretation of sin as lack of faith through a refusal to accept the Love that is offered. Nevertheless, when man refuses to affirm Love because of his faithlessness, he also translates this attitude of rejection into inaction. He does not feel like doing good because his heart has become hardened. Soon he may not even see need or genuine sympathy. He will turn increasingly, perhaps, toward himself and toward what he considers to be his own true good.

Oppositely, the loveless and the faithless may compensate in overactivity. Feeling guilty within and coveting being right with God, the sinner may do good things or give to good causes in order to make himself feel that he is really good and truly right with God. The sinner may thus both do and give in order not to have to accept God's love. God's free love costs far too much.

Yet Love is free unconditionally. Jesus demonstrated that God loves us completely just because he is God. When we show our lack of trust in him by trying to win his approval by what we do or give, we reveal, however good our intention may be in our own eyes, that we are guilty of sin at its deepest base. We disclose that we dread Love, the Love freely bestowed on us.

By living Love, Jesus showed us by the full floodlight of his personal attitudes and choices that we are sinners precisely in our lack of love. Sin becomes our deepest death when we refuse God and human fellowship in the spirit of Jesus. Overactivity, a guilty restlessness, may be a sign of the refusal of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Whether sin manifests itself overtly as lack of action or as compensatory action, however, is a matter of secondary consequence. Jesus is the world's Savior in that he reveals the full nature and depth of man's sin.

Jesus Christ as the coming of God's holy, universal, ever-faithful love into a genuine human being also shows us our social sins. God's all-inclusive love condemns as sinful all separation due to pride and faithlessness. Most of such separation is personal or private in nature; then it is personal sin.

But sin is also social. The pitting of nation as ultimate against nation is presently our most terrifying sin. Shutting out persons or peoples in any place where public communication should be unrestricted is another form of social sin. Segregation based on race, for instance, is sin. Segregation based on religion is also sin. Indiscrimination based on social standing or property, again, is sin.

Love, of course, makes for creative difference and not for flat sameness. Certainly there is place for voluntary groups inviting whom they would. There can be no compulsion of friendship, or prohibition, or even prejudice, against congregating according to interest or kind. But such freedom for variation and intensive community is one thing; compulsory segregation in public places for civil, educational, or religious activity, again, is quite another matter. It is definitely social sin in the light of Christ the Savior.

Christ condemns as sin lack of public concern, lack of responsible political participation, lack of commitment to ways of peace in public life and concord among the nations. Christ shows up the sin of our indifference when we live in abundance, without basic sharing, while the world, in large part, starves. Christ condemns as sin our walking in the secular ways of the world in our education. We should rather be alert to interpret all things in the light of Christ wherever we have educational opportunity. Often to accept secular knowledge as final fact is to crucify Christ afresh on the tree of knowledge.

To retain sectarian worship, moreover, and consider it Christian is to deny that Christian cooperation is stamped with a cross and that denominational loyalties are fulfilled only in the great glory of a common Christian faith. Local loyalty apart from, and over against, the whole body of Christ, Christ himself condemns as social sin.

For sins of both self and society, however, Christ is the Savior. Christ as God's universal love, if truly accepted, gives us a heart that cares, a mind that considers and cooperates, and a hand that is willing to work in places of need.

The Savior of men must show us in the full light of God's living truth the fact and seriousness of our sin. He does so, however, entirely in order to save us. God sent not his Son to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved! Christ as the Godman not only shows us our salvation, but effects it.

Salvation depends on light. Sin must be seen in order to be recognized; unless we really face sin, head on, we cannot be convicted of it and repent of it. Christ enables us to see sin and to acknowledge it to ourselves, to others, and to God. God in our hearts, Son and Spirit, or the Personal and Communal aspects of Love, alone can give us the strength to be sorry for our sin and the genuine desire to be rid of it. It takes great grace to repent, to be turned and to turn.

Christ also enables us to receive God's forgiveness. He has himself tasted the power of sin and borne its cost in his own body. He has wrestled with it and won. The Son of God as Son of Man has met sin, law, and death head on and conquered them all. God has assumed our plight, the whole plight, in Jesus Christ, and come off victorious within genuine humanity.

For us, God has done this self-emptying and self-expressing; therefore we can look to him and be saved. We can look to him and accept as penitent sinners his going to death for us. He who forgave those who crucified him, waits to forgive all who keep crucifying him.

The Cross is God's seal and sign that he loves us and craves to forgive us in order to have us enter into the fellowship for which he created us. The Cross is God's work in history whereby he has poked a hole in heaven's floor to let the divine light shine upon earth. The Cross is the outlet from eternity into time of the power of God for salvation that comes with forgiveness. Here God drilled through the partition between eternity and earthly time to admit the highest voltage wire of his love.

God as Man assumed the burden of our sins that we might know who he is, who we are, and for what he has made us. God as Love walked our weary ways. Fully identified with a human being, he felt hunger and thirst, loneliness and rejection. He suffered the pangs of death within our experience. But he did so to conquer and to give us authentic life. The victim became the victor.

God in his boundless love could go with man to death and share man's agony of dying; yet the Deathless could not die and he who in the Son of Man was also the Son of God, broke the power of death in man. By so doing he bestowed upon us the power of the resurrection even before and while we share the fellowship of his sufferings.

Jesus Christ enables us to become fully and effectively saved because as God and Man he has gone with man to man's furthest extremity. By God's conquest in man of man's furthest extremity, man became Man; potential man became true Man. Consequently the Mediator is not God or the Son of God as such, but -- as the Bible says -- "the Man Christ Jesus." God as Son became man that the Son of Man might forever minister to all men. He shared our whole human experience, becoming the summary and summit of man's history, in order that we, seeing him, the Man Christ Jesus, might trust the Son of God not only to convict us of God's truth, of sin in us, but also to convince us of God's fuller truth, the power of salvation for us.

Thus by accepting "Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior" the official formula of the World Council of Churches for world-wide Christendom, we receive the presence of God as universal Love whereby alone we can attain mature manhood. The Godman thus helps us to become Godmen. Paul prays not in vain that we all be filled with the fullness of God!

Christ shows us what we can become and empowers us to attain our vision. When God fills the empty centers of our lives we can be made whole. High and holy is the Christian call to newness of life. We are bid to take Jesus Christ as our actual example, "to walk even as he walked," to be perfect even as God is perfect, yes, even to imitate God himself. We are enjoined not only to live in the Spirit but also to walk in the Spirit. To grace we are told to add virtue. Jesus himself bids his disciples take up their cross and follow him.

Not humility, but self-pride causes us to reject our instructions. God came in the flesh in the fullness of time to empower us "to live godly lives." God assumed generic humanity to cure the ills of man's heart. The Son of God, through his generic humanity, comes to us as individuals that we might become new creatures in him and walk in newness of life.

To become Christians, therefore, is to become in some real sense different in our motivation. We do not, of course, escape human moods; most certainly we do not become God; but every genuine Christian life contains a quality of effective Christian witness. In spite of our all too obvious failures and sins, we have so identified our lives with God's will for the common good that we no longer can recognize such failures and sins as willed by our most authentic self. Now we can understand what Paul meant when he wrote, "It is no longer I but sin that works in me."

Something real must also happen in the church. In Christ a new community was started. The community of the universal love of God began a new age in human history. The only full witness to Christ is the power of God's love in his people. Christ is best announced by the effective living of the Christian community and by the leaven of this community's concern for the concrete needs of men.

Christ rightly interpreted is the Word of God's eternal love become historic, of God's universal love become personal. Can anything be more universal; can anything be more needed? Here we have the answer to Judaism, to Islam, to Baha'i. Christ can be and has been falsely interpreted so as to block communication, but he can and should be understood in such a way that an open, concerned community is created.

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Know Your Faith by Nels F. S. Ferré

Dr. Ferré was for many years Abbot Professor of Christian Theology at Andover Newton Theological School. Published by Harper & Brothers, New York, 1959. Copyright 1959 by Nels F.S. Ferré. This material prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 3: To Mature Manhood

Our age is man-centered. We are sure of man, but we are not sure of God. Because doubt and despair come more easily than faith, we reinterpret the classical affirmations of faith in terms of man. That, indeed, is what "existentialism" is all about. To some this man-centeredness seems the nadir of faith. We have gone about as low as we can go. Tillich, however, in his Lowell Lectures, has pointed out that the kind of science and the kind of philosophy that made man an object, a thing, was even lower.

Existentialism, even nihilistic existentialism, is at least the affirmation that man is free to choose. All roads may equally lead to nothing, as Sartre claims, but at least man is free to throw himself into the pursuit of his choice. At least, as Hesse maintains, every man is a road unto himself. There is some hope at least in the Chinese poet who cried that out of nowhere nothing answered yes!

But the full standard for man is Christ. Christ is the fullness of God in the fullness of man in the fullness of time. He is God as universal, unconditional Love, the reality of eternity fulfilling created time. He is the Godman in whom are joined the nature of God as entire Love and the nature of man as made for that Love. He is God convincingly present in one of us, showing us his heart in the Cross and his arm in the Resurrection.

If we look at man in the light of Christ, how does he appear? If the God who came in Christ created the world, creation is good. To deny this is to deny Christ. On the other hand, when we look at the merciless ravages of nature or at the bestiality, even of religiously educated man -- especially as we have seen him in this century -- it is impossible to maintain that creation is merely good. It is also somehow terrifyingly evil.

This fact gives ground for the historic doctrine of "the fall" of man. In the history of man as anthropology shows it, however, there is no such fall. But if God is the creator of man and nature, in some way man has "fallen" from his origin. The least that can be said is that evil

nature and sinful man are not God's intention in creation.

Therefore, no discussion of the Christian understanding of man can be right if it so glories in the goodness of creation as to obscure the reality of "the fall," or so grovels in the depravity of "the fall" as to deny the goodness of creation. This double fact concerning man sets the problem of our discussion on this topic.

I

First, we must ask if man is good or bad. This question can have no easy answer. The answer depends upon the meaning of the question. From the point of view of creation, man is good. God cannot make a bad world or a bad man. The Bible says that God saw everything that he had made and that it was good. The God who created man is the same God who came in Christ to save him. How can such a God be guilty of an evil creation? God has all possible power and wisdom. Creation suffers from no defect. Therefore, if we start with God the creator, man is essentially good.

He is essentially good because he is from God. The origin of man is perfect. The source out of which he was made is flawless. Besides, if God is the one to and through whom all things are ultimately related, man's chief reference is good. Man's present nature is primarily related to God. Therefore by main reference man is essentially good.

Besides, man's destiny is to be made for God. God made him for himself. When he created, the perfect, allwise and all-loving God created man for a perfect destiny. Anything short of such an affirmation would be a denial of the reality and nature of God as seen in Christ. Man in the light of Christ is consequently essentially good. This way of looking at man is ultimate. There can therefore be no dispute about the fact that man is essentially good. Such is the view of man from the point of view of creation, reference, and destiny.

Nevertheless, looked at the opposite way, at his actual nature, while similarly in the light of Christ, man is undeniably bad. Man, we remember, is made to be all good, as God his Father is. Jesus bids us to be perfect even as our heavenly Father is perfect. The perfection Jesus enjoins is a maturity of love that is universal and indiscriminate. God lets his sun shine on the just and the unjust and we likewise are required to love all people alike. Man appears continually to be selling God short. He falls prey to fears and becomes guilty of accepting anxieties. But perfect love casts out fear, we know, and we are bid to be anxious in nothing, but in everything to be thankful. Being honest with ourselves and unsentimental about others, can we say that in these respects we are predominantly good?

With regard to others, we are told to prefer them in honor and never to measure ourselves by them. As a matter of fact, we are created to be continuously and unexceptionally outgoing in our acceptance of others and in every needful self-involvement in their lives. Who dares to say

that, measured by this standard, he is more good than bad?

Who knows his deepest motives and hidden drives enough to say that he has been delivered from self-regard and knows his life to flow like a fountain, full and free, in mature good will to others? And knowing that nothing is impossible for God, if we trust him, who can look at his own life as not only free from distortions but also as a living miracle of world-shaking power for good? Who dares to take literally the biblical promise that greater works of faith than Christ's shall be done because Christ has gone to his Father? When we measure the best of men by Christ's standard, then, not even to mention the full, gross, common sinfulness of man generally, how can we claim even for a moment that man is basically good?

Thus we seem to be up against the fact that either our faith is wrong or our observation of man in the light of it is incorrect. We could conclude that the Christian faith taken at its own best is idealistic and unrealistic, that it is in fact, escapist. Or on the other hand we could conclude that man is not really bad, not really sinful in the Christian sense of being "curved in on himself." But neither choice will do.

We have, then, to find a possible solution of this seemingly impossible dilemma. The Christian faith has its own problems, but it is easier to accept these problems than to deny the central light Christ sheds on existence.

God made man good. This is his essential nature. Man's fallen nature is not his real nature, but only the actual condition of his nature. He is in alien territory but he is still a citizen of heaven. What does this mean?

First of all, we must view all things, especially man, in the light of God. Seen thus, earthly existence is only a small segment of God's preparatory work. If we make this time-space world central to our existence, there is no answer to our dilemma in terms of an adequate faith. The length of time God takes to prepare for free life staggers us. His molding man from "the dust of the ground" is a cosmic process of millions of years. Incomparably long is the time he took to prepare for the coming of life on this planet.

By contrast our little lives here on earth are but a brief bit in his rearing. Decision before God, not the false assumption that our time-space existence is all there is or the only place for choice, makes life important. Unimaginably beyond our lives on earth, God works his way of fostering his children.

God has given man a unique capacity to know and to respond to him. He created him in his own image for eternal life. God offered man the knowledge of good and evil. But such knowledge can be received only by the taking. It comes through the making of choices and the discovering of consequences. By the freedom to make real choices involving good and evil, God let man become real. He did not want puppets. God, being no paternalist, created a world of real risk.

On the other hand, in order that man might not be self-sufficient, he left him hollow at the center.

Man, therefore, risks falling either in or out, so to speak, in an attempt either to become secure by filling in his own emptiness or to find safety by leaning on others. Not only is man made precarious within his own nature; he finds precariousness in nature. Hence his insecurity and anxiety.

Consequently, man works to make himself safe. He tries to remake himself by self-improvement. He struggles to conform to what others believe or want. He labors to lay aside means of security, whether in terms of working competence or in terms of cash savings. He invests in friendships, in "connections."

The fact that God also made this world dependable enough for man to plan and to achieve, to sow and to reap, to study and to grow, gives the false hope that he can escape from this hollowness at the center of his being. No planning, doing, or saving can make man secure. Threatened by this God-made insecurity, man sins in his attempt to be self-sufficient and self-important.

What is true for the individual is also true for the group. Groups, too, are threatened by collective insecurity and commit social sin by striving to become collectively self-sufficient and self-important. Although God created us insecure and thus gave the occasion for our sinning, God never causes sin; sin cannot be caused; but he knew at the creation of the world that man would become himself only through his finding in freedom the difference between good and evil.

The very hollowness of man's center, however, God meant for himself. Only when God is truly the center of man's life, can man escape the insecurity that tempts him to curve in on himself, or to lean on others as means to his own safety, and to be faithless toward God.

When God the eternal Spirit fills man's central hollowness, on the contrary, man accepts himself, finds true community, and lives in peace and power with God. Thus man's essential goodness is his potential goodness. His sin is holding God off. The more he knows God, the greater the sin.

If freedom is to be real and God's good freely chosen, man needs this experience. He needs to be alienated from God. To say so is not to make light of sin, but to honor God's way of working. The more and the sooner God is accepted as central, however, the better. It is God's will and man's destiny that God become thus central. Therefore, although man is under the dominion of sin, he is even more made for God. The way nature works is to show man that although he can plan and grow in personal responsibility and in community, there is no

permanent or sufficient fulfillment except in relation to God, in whom is man's true life.

Man is made for the Love God is. This Love is man's essential nature. Therefore, although in his immaturity man finds sin easier than love, nevertheless, in the light of God's long-distance plans for man, he is essentially good.

II

The nature of man is best lighted up by a discussion of what it means that man was created in the image of God. This subject has been the occasion for fierce dispute in modern theology. Such sharp disagreement is understandable, since the subject involves man's central relation to God, and since, as we have seen, man's very nature is determined by his relation to God. Emil Brunner has never tired of saying that man can know himself only when he knows God in his Word; and Peter Taylor Forsyth drives home the same fact when he makes the central perspective for the understanding of man not the world, but the Word.

One long and sturdy strand of historic thought has it that the image of God in man is reason. Man is a rational animal, a morally responsible creature, because he can think, reflect, evaluate, decide. Man alone, therefore, this position holds, can be like God. In this respect he is unique. As a rational creature, the great amphibian transcending time, man bears the stamp of God's image. The Early Church Fathers usually supported this position. It has, so to speak, been the main line on the subject.

The question we must ask ourselves, however, is this: what view of God is implied if God's image in man is reason? Is God centrally a thinker? Is God like Rodin's famous statue, a static figure contemplating the world? Greek philosophy, in large part, would shout its muted amen (reflective thought shouts only silently and inwardly!). Plato's perfect forms are statically immovable and Aristotle's unmoved mover is unmoved. The passively perfect gives rise to the actively imperfect, seeking the beauty of abiding rest in the undifferentiated unity of the One. Pythagoras' forms underlie even the music of the spheres. Christian thought has been Circe-ed by the endless ocean of unmoved rest beneath the troubled waves on the surface.

Or thought can have its impersonal logic and its history of development as the key to all reality, as in Hegel. Modern mathematicians like Sir James Jeans can find in God, the Thinker, the final explanation of the starry heavens and of man's life; and a modern philosopher like Alfred North Whitehead can find God to be the vision of the whole and of what can be, and the mediating thought between them, as he contemplates or "envisages" the possible beauty of the harmonies among the worlds of flux.

But the Christian who starts with Christ, with the Cross, with God as Love, knows that whatever truth there may be in the image of God as reason, it cannot be the full and final truth. It cannot be the "extreme center" where all aspects of truth find their delimitation and

fulfillment.

Others, like Professor Mowinckel of the University of Oslo, find the image of God to be the Old Testament version of it in the Eighth Psalm: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him little less than God . . . thou hast put all things under his feet." In other words, the image is specifically developed by Professor Mowinckel in connection with the Eighth Psalm as man's power over creation. In view of man's nearly insatiable drive for power, or as Joseph Haroutunian puts it, man's "Lust for Power," it is easy to believe that this is man's central image.

But what does this do to our view of God? It is no longer Christian. It is pagan. It presents God as basically power in nature. A dictator! But, said Bernard of Clairvaux, "love has no lord!" Great Jewish scholars like President Louis Finkelstein of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City are fighting a valiant battle to show that such a view of God is not even the heart of the Old Testament. There is, of course, some truth in this position of the image of God as man's power over creation, but certainly not the truth that fulfills.

Some theologians, notably Reinhold Niebuhr, interpret the image of God in man as man's capacity for creative self-transcendence. This view is distinguished with great seriousness from rationalism. A good deal of the power of the main-line view was in reality reason as the capacity to transcend our actual situation. But Niebuhr puts more emphasis on decision. In his view man sees an ideal in the abstract. He can see this with "a perfection" that is lost as soon as he must make decisions among the ambiguities of existence, not least of which is the ambiguity of his own sinfulness.

In one period, Niebuhr stressed the morality of the individual as over against the immorality of society. He has outgrown this position, for the most part, but he still analyzes the operation of the image of God in man as the contrast between the original righteousness of man before he acts (the act of creative self-transcendence, what he calls "perfection before the act"), and the "fallen" state of man within the ambiguities of our sinful world.

There is, however, no such perfection. Actual man cannot even see perfection. Man's vision is tainted by his sinfulness as a total being. Yet there undeniably is in this position, too, a truth in the fact of man's creative self-transcendence.

Again we ask, what does this position do to our view of God? Is God then supremely Creator? Is God first of all Creativity? The Christian answer is positive: God creates because he loves; he does not love because he creates. Therefore, however important the truth involved in the defining of the image of God in man as creative self-transcendence, it cannot constitute the main make-up of the image.

Another important position in today's thought is that of Emil Brunner, who defines the image of

God in man as his *answerability* to God. While man, according to Brunner, no longer possesses original righteousness, he cannot escape the fact that he is responsible to God for his life. No matter where man may be or what he may do, he is in fact so related to God that he cannot escape feeling guilty before God, either in his conscious mind or in the torments and imaginations of the unconscious.

We ask a similar question of this position: What conception of God does this point of view entail? Is God mainly Judge? The Christian knows better. God judges, but he is far more Savior and Father. He judges in order to save. The Bible even says that God sent his Son not to judge but to save.

In fairness to Brunner it must be said that the original image that man possessed before the "fall" was not answerability; only the form of the original image now remains as man's answerability to God. We know of no such historic "fall," however, and with this admission Brunner and the others agree. Therefore it is better to make the image central to man's essential relation to God. Its working can be obscured, thwarted by sin, but its nature is part of God's goodness in creation that must not be denied by "the fall."

The truth of Brunner's position is powerful. It is connected with God's whole use of law, of guilt, and of grace, but Brunner's interpretation does not arrive at the determinative nature of the image of God in man.

Others like Karl Barth and Anders Nygren have maintained that the image has been totally destroyed. There is no part of it left in man. The fall was entire, involving the whole man. There is nothing of God in man. Such denial is the most radical in Christian history.

With Karl Barth the emphasis is on the complete sovereignty of God. Man is, even by nature, in no position to help the least bit toward his own salvation. All is by grace and faith. In Nygren there is extreme sensitivity to what he takes to be the disastrous heresy of mysticism, namely that there is a bit of God in every man that makes him restless apart from his right relation to God.

Both Barth and Nygren are afraid of mixing the categories of God and man. Both are also afraid of thinking of God in terms of substance, as some "stuff" that can be in man, or some structure that can organize man. Barth now is willing to speak of the image of God in man as God's call to man. I think Nygren would not object to such a statement of the case. As a matter of fact, Barth and Brunner likewise have come closer to each other, as David Cairns points out in *The Image of God in Modern Theology*.

An outright repudiation of the image of God in man would really amount to a denial that there is a natural relation between God and man. Indeed, both Barth and Nygren are woefully weak

on the point of God's presence in creation; they even stammer on his positive use of creation. Their denial that God is "stuff" is, of course, sound, as is their insistence on the sovereignty of God's grace. If only they could see more fully how this grace works in creation and in man: offering man free acceptance on God's part and letting him use his freedom to find God!

On this important question of the image of God in man, is there a clear word from God? One fact is obvious and beyond all dispute: the God of the Christian revelation is centrally Love, the God of the Cross and the Resurrection. Simply put, the fact is, God is faithful.

God being Love, his image must be man's capacity for love. Man is centrally made for love, for God's love and for man's. The true image includes the truth of all partial images. Love, for instance, has within it the reality of reason, fulfilling the insight of the first position we considered. How can love be high and free without the power to know, to reflect, to evaluate, and in the light of this process to choose? Man is not essentially an animal. Even in the respect that he has reason he is unique in every developed sense of the meaning of terms.

Man also has been given power over nature, our second position. His is the world to use. God has put all things under his feet. He enjoys creative transcendence over time, a fearful position to be in. This is a sacred place in which to be put. God also holds man accountable. He is not only under law, but under the Lordship of the inescapable God. And man's chief relation to God is not in terms of some bit of God in man, but in terms of God's coming to man, his calling man.

There is truth in all these positions, but they never fall into essential relationship until man is understood as created for love by the God who is Love. The image of God in man is man's need for love. The image of God in man as centrally man's being made for God's love gives context and total meaning to all other aspects of the image. Hunger is not food, but it does characterize man's relation to nature. Hunger for God is no bit of God in man, but it determines his very being. Man's emptiness is for God's filling.

No individual and no community can be right until they are rightly related to God. No individual and no community can be real until they are made real in relation to God. The reflection of God's love in man's need for love indicates the reality of God as Love. Christ as the revelation of God's love fulfillingly present in man is God's right relation to man and man's right relation to God.

Therefore we can include still one more view as to the image of God in man. Gustaf Wingren in *Skapelsen och Lagen (Creation and Law)* says that the New Testament calls Christ himself the image of God. The Letter to the Colossians does that exactly. Christ as the realization of God's presence in man as fulfilling love, giving man "mature manhood," is in fact the revelation of the true image, the filling of the image in a concrete man. The image of God's love is fulfilled only by the actual presence of God's love.

Christ as the image, therefore, is the reconciliation of the image of God with conscience. To this crucial topic for understanding man, namely the infilling of the image of God in conscience, we now turn.

III

The image of God is the means whereby we adjust to God; the conscience, "what we know together," is the way we adjust to men. God is infinite and perfect Love. Man is finite, made for love. The image is absolute; the conscience is relative. Man himself lives in the conflict of the perfect and the sinful, the unconditional and the conditional.

The only right way we can adjust to God is his way! With respect to God, there is no compromising one whit. God's love is totalitarian in its demand on us. It means full acceptance of him and his way, and complete openness to all men and concern for them. It involves self-acceptance as part of the community of God. We accept ourselves, but only as members of the fellowship, totally to be used for God and for the needs of the community.

God and the mature Christian community, on their part, are totally concerned with each self for his maximum good and development in the good. God asks totally of us what is good within his will for all. The image reflects this reality of our basic relation to God and the demands this relation puts on us.

Conscience is a means for our adjustment to man. It is the concrete rightness we feel in the light of our background, total schooling, and experience. We learn that certain things are right from our parents, mostly informally by the way they live and by the way they share their experience in the ordinary course of life. We learn in school that certain things are right. Many other ideas of right and wrong we pick up or have ingrained in us from life's experience in general and from the way our communities think and act.

The conscience, therefore, varies markedly from person to person and from culture to culture. What some do to God's glory would for others be a mockery of him. Conscience is mostly set by the prevailing religion; not by the religion professed, but by the religion lived. Conscience reflects largely the status quo.

Between the perfect image and its demand on man's conscience there is thus not only a wide gap, but a hurtful conflict. Sinning against their conscience, men are hurt. Such sinning against the conscience is what is generally meant by sin.

But by sinning more deeply and constantly against the image, men are even more deeply hurt. As long as they do not know what the image involves, men are no more than uneasy and

vaguely anxious because of this inner conflict. While they then have specific guilt feelings with respect to their conscience, they have only unspecific anxiety with regard to their image of God.

Before they know the better law of God's will, men have a far less keen understanding of what is wrong with them and consequently are far less hurt. When they encounter the better law that interprets the image, the nature of sin bursts upon them and their conflict multiplies. Sin now becomes far more terrifying.

With Christ's coming, the image of God in man became filled by being fulfilled. Conscience received its intended content. With Christ's coming, conscience obtained its perfect standard. Christ showed man the perfect will of God by demonstrating the perfect nature of God and the mature nature of man. Christ showed man his right relation to God.

God reduced in Christ the laws of the Old Testament decalogue to two: love to God and love to man, universal and entire. This concentration of the ten into two commands had already been accomplished by Judaism; Jesus himself had been brought up reciting them daily.

But in Jesus these two laws became demonstrated in life as well as explicated in meaning. In Jesus, too, the law of perfect love became, beyond every command, the Gospel of God's grace. The law of love became fulfilled in the life of Love.

From now on, men must not strive to fulfill this law as law, but, rather, to accept God's life freely as a gift. This new gift of life turns the conscience from an enemy, representing a law impossible to keep, to the correcting friend who enables man to become fulfilled within a new relation to God that itself is the very power for the life of love.

Thus in Christ the full nature of the image is made clear, conscience is fulfilled, and man is given the power to live the law, no longer as law, but as the life of love. Thus right is real and uncompromisingly maintained even while it is left behind as no longer an enemy or a primary relation to God and man. The amazing freedom of life fulfilled by love takes its place.

But actual man lives in conflict between law and love, between conscience and image. Few find the reality and the power of the Gospel of Christ in this life. Most people get clogged in the attempt to satisfy their conscience by right conduct, and find no rest. Acquiescence in the status quo is almost always the essence of sin. It is choosing conscience rather than image.

Conformity to sinful society is nonconformity to God. And in the light of the full standard of Christ our communities are deeply sinful. Original sin consists in the partaking of this societal heritage that shields our misgivings almost as they arise. We protect ourselves by devious and ingenious rationalizations in the guise of the wisdom of the ages. We try to quiet the protest of the arguments of our socially oriented conscience.

For this reason Kierkegaard is right in saying that man's characteristic relation to God is sin. We repress in our subconscious our unwon battles on the conscious side. But such repression does not deliver us from conflict, for God never loses and never lets go. Therefore, our unwon battles continue at a level below our consciousness. Deep down we hate God who threatens our compromises.

Thus we live by fear of God on the conscious level and in anxiety toward God on the subconscious level. Our relation to God becomes characterized by guilt. Such guilt results in physical illness and mental malady. One woman who could not be cured by doctors was cured quickly after she came to know that her suffering was caused by basic dishonesty in regard to her income tax!

But above all we feel wrong toward God. Because this is the case, either we try to throw ourselves into some religious faith and activity that will persuade us that we are pleasing God, or we grow to resent what we call religion, even to hate the highest form of it. Or else the depth spirit in us, the demonic self we are, robs us of our convictions or produces in us spiritual restlessness or its opposite, spiritlessness. We forfeit the free and fulfilled life for which we are made.

We are made for God, for his love and for man's. When Love's community is real, life becomes satisfying in new dimensions. We become free to live. We become free for creative community. We become free to be ourselves, as persons and as community.

But nothing can bring about this freedom in the full sense, except our becoming right with God. Our fears and anxieties must lose their importance by being focused in our main relation: our fear and anxiety before God.

Only forgiveness by God can make man free. Only forgiveness can fulfill man. Only forgiveness can put man in the relation to God and man where he can find increasingly his true nature and grow in it. Therefore, no study of man can be more than a description of man's plight and possibility until it include the prescription by God for man. We now turn to this prescription under the heading of sin and salvation.

Know Your Faith by Nels F. S. Ferré

Dr. Ferré was for many years Abbot Professor of Christian Theology at Andover Newton Theological School. Published by Harper & Brothers, New York, 1959. Copyright 1959 by Nels F.S. Ferré. This material prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapte 4: Grace Abounding

Sin holds the spotlight among contemporary theologians. We have a new understanding of its depth and stubbornness. Though we are not sure about many essentials, we are sure about the reality and power of sin. We even run the risk of turning sin into a popular topic. To put heavy stress on sin pays off in popularity in some theological circles.

We can be thankful for the rediscovery of the cost and magnitude of sin for it cuts deep wounds into humanity; it even curses nature. If we care for men we must wrestle with the problem of sin. If we ever enter at all into God's nature and purpose we must do battle with sin. Thus every adequate theology must deal with the deadly power and awful reality of sin.

But we must not put a false and one-sided stress on sin. We can talk about sin in grave tones, without ever really coming to grips with it. We can discuss sin without either repudiating it or fighting its power. We can even become theologically "right" by stressing sin without ever taking up the cross to follow the Christ. By so doing we encourage men to emphasize man's sin rather than God's grace; we prompt them to let sin usurp the place of God in human consciousness; we lead them to become more sure of sin than of the Gospel. When sin assumes such proportion in theology, theology itself becomes sin.

I

We cannot indicate the main dimensions of sin without looking at the meaning of sin, salvation, and sanctification. Each dimension exhibits sin in a new light. As always, our examination of these Christian doctrines must be in the light of God in Christ as universal, holy Love. Only the Person of Christ, as we have already seen, exposes sin in all its ugliness and darkness.

We begin with a look at the difference between sins and sin. In the Prayer of General Confession we acknowledge the many sins we from time to time have committed. We find it easy to confess such sins, if their confession keeps us unaware of our sin. Sometimes deep

contrition accompanies the confession of sinful acts not so much out of sorrow for the sins we know we have committed as for the fear we may discover that we are basically sinful. We do not like to think of ourselves as basically evil. So we shudder when we discover the power of sin in us.

Such repentance over a gross or overt act of sin is possible alike for Christians and non-Christians. Why? Because sin is a most pervasive reality; and, too, because our response to it is exceedingly subtle, perhaps even largely subconscious.

Sin is what we are; sins are what we do. Sin is the response of the entire self to God in faithlessness or rebellion; sins are our deliberate acts of faithlessness and rebellion. Because we are sinful we act in sinful ways; we sin and commit sins.

Some distinguish between "material" and "formal" sin. They define the former as doing wrong. Man can do wrong without intending evil. He can be both faithful and loyal, yet do wrong out of ignorance; he can break God's law, fall short of God's command, or miss God's mark. Such unintentional instances of doing wrong illustrate the meaning of material sin. But they are not occasions of sin in the formal sense. This distinction readily lends itself to a sub-Christian and unworthy interpretation. God holds us responsible only for what we know or for what we would know if we cared.

So we return to sin as the source of man's trouble. Sins, though real and serious, are only ugly flowers on the vine of sin. Sin is always intended by the self. Sin is a chosen state. Sin is what we are and do because of what we choose to be and do.

But our choice of sin is seldom conscious and clear. Sin is a work of darkness; it thrives in the shadows rather than in the light. Seldom does sin involve a well-thought-out course of action in defiance of God. Seldom do we consciously tread the path of faithlessness.

Usually the choice of sin takes place below the level of consciousness. Down in the deep recesses of the subconscious, with consummate craft and in self-deceit, we distort our actual situations and true choices into a caricature. We analyze our situation in the light of self-interest, subtly ballooning the points in our favor and quickly belittling the unfavorable aspects of our situation. We let our eyes dwell on what we think we like, until reason touches up the situation to the point where we become convinced we are doing only what is good and wise.

We sin most deeply by refusing to see ourselves as sinners. We sell ourselves on ourselves, not by clear and conscious deception, but by clever and subtle misrepresentation. Self-interest transplants us in a false world, then prompts our minds to work overtime in search of the defense of that world. Thus reason becomes a tool of self-justification, if not of self-glorification.

We exercise reason in the hope of proving ourselves right and others wrong. Seeing a false world in our conscious minds, we act in accordance with our warped reason. Without conscious intention, and therefore without any feeling of guilt, we do many things others deem wrong; in fact, we, too, would think them wrong if our vision were sound. We even pin the label of evil on such actions when performed by others, unless we pause long enough to remember that we are condemning ourselves by this judgment of them. Whenever the true world manages to pierce this picture we experience conscious guilt.

Nevertheless powerful allies work mightily to keep this conspiracy in guilt under cover. Occasionally we even use repentance to distort and falsify our basic situation. Sometimes we "repent" of our sins to protect our sin!

So the self-critical are far nearer the Kingdom of God than the self-righteous; so long as men do not feel the pain of sin, they deny God and deceive themselves. But they do not go scot free. Their self-deception exacts a high toll in the deeper self. It begets a guilt-feeling in the subconscious. This in turn aggravates moral decay. And, worse still, moral decay spreads its poisonous contagion.

Why is sin so hard to detect in ourselves? Because it is the very set not only of the self but also of society. Not that this "set" eliminates responsibility, for sin involves choice at every level. Although we cannot choose sin for others, we can choose sin with others. Our capacity to do this explains our birth into a sinful order. From the very beginning men have joined hands with their neighbors in the hope of making their hiding place secure from God. Clever and ingenious are man's devices to conceal his depth-hiding from God. Individuals and communities sinning together over long generations have built formidable barriers against the light of God.

Some seek escape in atheistic theory; more seek it in religious practices and doctrines. Because God stands at the center of the human situation, both the self and society feel driven to distort his nature and will. Sinful selves find mutual support and comfort in their construction of some idealistic religion as a refuge from God. Religion in the history of mankind has most often been a product of human fear, and religious practices have usually been a mixture of good and bad. Though the self can scarcely fool itself into looking on the bad as good, or society deceive itself into mistaking darkness for light, both self and society can dim the rays of light in a smoky half-darkness.

Thanks to this mixture, church people can unashamedly defend segregation as an expression of God's will, justify war as divine service, defend ruthless competition in business as a part of the natural order, and reflect hostile and uncharitable attitudes generally; they can bless personal and social evil in the name of religion.

Only rarely does the self have to invent such protection against the light or build such strong support of sin from a fresh start. Usually he has only to acquiesce in the social order. As a

matter of fact, he finds it hard to do otherwise. Afraid of public opposition, he takes refuge from persecution in the crowd. He dares not break "faith" with fellow refugees from the light.

The prophets and saints are the greatest enemies of "normal" social order and practices. Jesus had to be crucified. They are deemed most guilty of social misconduct who expose man's religious subterfuges and lay bare the sin of churches. Alfred North Whitehead, accordingly, maintains that it is merciful to stone the prophets. Like the ancient High Priest, many can see nothing especially wrong with the practice of letting one person die for the people.

This body of sin, molded through the ages by the set of society against God, suggests the permanent meaning of original sin. In this sense man is generically sinful. We are born into a sinning order.

Theologians illustrate this fact by their tendency to acquiesce in views of God that are unworthy of him. By so doing, they allow views inconsistent with God's universal holy Love in Christ to rob the Gospel of its full powers of judgment and salvation. Worse yet, they permit themselves to be led astray in their search for the full illumination and judgment of sin. They look for this illumination and judgment in religion or "Christianity," but not in Christ as God's universal holy Love come to earth. They fail to see that the judgment is the Light: the Light of Love who came into the world!

II

If sin is so deep and serious, if repentance of sin as well as of sins requires such a wrench in the self and such a break with society, then how can the Gospel be good news? Is it not the part of wisdom and kindness alike not to expose people against their will to the full light of God's holy, universal love in Christ? By no means, for all men must pass through suffering on the way to salvation. Indeed, to be unsaved is to suffer. Men who do not know God as Father and who run from him down the dark alley of their subterranean life cannot help suffering.

They suffer from their fear of self, from their fear of others, and from their fear of God. Most of such suffering takes place below the level of conscious awareness. It is not only people who lack inward peace and the sense of ultimate reality who experience such suffering. So also do they who straddle the fence between God and ordinary behavior; these latter suffer from an inability to feel at home among either world-lovers or God-lovers.

They also suffer, of course, who take up the Cross and follow the Christ. But they suffer redemptively. They suffer for others, even for those who inflict their suffering. Unlike other sufferers, they experience the joy of the Gospel even in their pain and agony.

To hope for a life without suffering is futile. No one will ever be saved until his measure of

suffering is fulfilled. God has ordained suffering for our good. Only by suffering can we learn to know how false the way of the fearful, self-centered self is, in the first place, and want to find another way, that of the self fulfilled in God. Even then suffering comes, but love's suffering, which, deepest down, satisfies the self and draws us nearer to God. We all must come to God by the way of suffering. The old Gospel song says truly: "The way of the Cross leads home."

By using suffering for God's glory and for his purpose, and not just enduring it as helpless victims, we can triumph inwardly through suffering; in us, as in Jesus Christ, the victim can emerge the victor.

While men may be regarded as "full of sin" in the sense of being permeated through and through with its contagion, they never become so sinful that they can do no good. God lives and works in all men. In fact, most individuals, apart from undue pressure, are a fairly decent lot; they ask only to live and let live. The theologian who paints men as "a mass of corruption" not only distorts the facts; he betrays both God and man.

The wrench in the sinner does not constitute a hopeless chasm; nor his break with society, absolute separation. After all, all men seek right adjustment, which is what salvation is. Very few sinful men ever fall so low that they can no longer applaud the saints. Sinful man, after all, is a sinner seeking salvation. The sinner remains divided in his own response to the Revealer of salvation. But the Gospel hits too hard and hurts too much to let him remain neutral forever.

Why, then, do we call salvation life's truest good? Why is salvation "Gospel"? Because salvation means getting right with God, and such a state alone can give man full satisfaction. To be saved means to be right with God, to be in line with his will. Salvation is life's goal because man is God's creature. Salvation is man's main need because God is life's final goal. So we cannot long continue at odds with God until we begin to be at odds with self. We cannot long enjoy our denial of the very satisfaction for which we are made.

But how do we get right with God? The answer is simple: God has already paved the way for us. God himself came in Jesus Christ as holy universal Love to fulfill the life of past human history in the life of one historical person; his coming paved the way for the fulfillment of the life of every man.

Salvation has two requirements. The first is to be right with God who came in Jesus Christ as suffering and victorious Love; the second, to be right with men.

What does this first aspect of salvation involve? What does it mean to be right with God? The answer is: to accept the only security on which we can fully and firmly rely. Any person who is right with God, by being aligned to his will, knows life's truest security. God alone never fails. He alone can be trusted implicitly. He alone can lend certainty to our life in a world riddled with uncertainty. He alone can lend permanence to our fleeting existence in time. God alone can give

reality to the dream of that part of life we have already lived. He alone can brace us for the walk down the problematic tomorrow. He alone can steady us for the jump off the brim over which we cannot look back.

Certainly the hard facts of human existence justify our search for security. Often the healthy and strong die first, perhaps through accident. Disaster lurks behind every corner. Meaninglessness threatens us on every side. Friends may desert us. Possessions may forsake us. Even when we have them, we fear their possible loss or theft. Nothing seems certain in life except death, and people fear what may happen to them after death, despite the advertising slogan of a cemetery in California: "Permanent protection for your precious departed."

Man can find permanent protection only by losing himself in God. He can find safety only in salvation. He can count on the future only if he counts on God. Man can find eternal security only as he seeks security in God. He cannot be saved except by the grace of God. The saved man knows this. So he endeavors to commit his life without reserve or condition into the hands of God -- come what may! So he turns toward the path of faith and freedom in fellowship with the Father.

Salvation, in addition to security in God, brings deliverance from something. When God gives us a new Spirit in Jesus Christ, he also saves us from the power and pain of self-centeredness, from the fear-ridden, "natural" self. Indeed the presence or absence of salvation can be determined only by the presence or absence of the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit may be thought of as the characteristics of those saved from self: love, joy, peace, and all the other Christian virtues.

The self is a hard taskmaster. No one can be harder on a person than his own self. Self can punish and keep punishing. Self can drive with feverish ambition, keeping him ever restless. Self can plague with blinding fear, denying true peace. The self can dodge discipline and spoil life with fickleness. The self can coddle desire and go to pieces. The self can grieve over self from morning to night. The self can go on, day after day, with no energy and no zest. The self can spurn every attempt to set himself free for faith. The self can go on sinning and still rue his role as slave rather than master.

But when, saved by grace and faith, man finds a new self, the old and all-spoiling self has to release its tyrannical hold on his life. Then he discovers how free and secure the self can be if only he remain within the will of God.

Salvation, insofar as it is effective, also saves us from too heavy dependence on others. We find in God-directedness both a live alternative to and a sure cure for constant fretting over what other people think of us. We neither become overly depressed by their expressions of disapproval nor elated by their words of praise.

Many people suffer from clumsiness in personal relations. They cannot get along with others. They are either falsely aggressive or unnecessarily defensive. They either hurt and blaze forth or hurt and smolder.

Only when we know God as our refuge and strength can we live with others as genuine persons. Only when we have God as our Father and Judge can we live with others and with our own strong convictions without constant tension. Only when we are forgiven by God can we accept ourselves to the point where we feel no desire to blame others.

Forgiveness by God and by ourselves releases us from the tensions which keep us from being generous in our judgment of others. We no longer feel we have to be either sentimental about others' faults or shocked by them. Instead in proportion to salvation's being real in us, we view others realistically -- not blind to their faults, to be sure -- but within the hope and purpose of God.

Once we personally experience God's love in Christ, once we know the Spirit whose we are, we can also be saved from our bad habits. Trivial as this aspect of salvation may appear, it is crucial. Innumerable people long for escape from some habit they loathe but cannot conquer. Many drunkards hate drinking, but cannot leave off. Many sex deviates deplore lust, but cannot resist its drive. Whatever the habit may be among the legion that threaten us, when it rules, we lead an unhappy and enslaved life. God can release us from the tyrannical power of these insidious destroyers of self-respect and freedom.

God likewise sets us free from the bondage of the past. Multitudes find in their own past something they can neither forget nor forgive. Some go to psychiatrists in search of relief. Some try so to change their way of life as to forget their oppressive past. In both instances at least temporarily, the irretrievable past puts under bondage the inescapable present

Multitudes contain in their lives a whole reservoir of past shame that has never been forgiven or swept out of the subconscious. They feel guilty but cannot tell why. They blame themselves but can find no rational basis for so doing. They cringe within but cannot articulate the reason for their fear.

When a guilt-sufferer genuinely accepts God in Christ, he begins to undergo a radical transformation. With a new Spirit comes a reorientation of life, a sweeping clean of the past and a full facing of the present. The light of salvation starts chasing the clouds from his future. He henceforth sees hope not as cowardly escape but as solid reality.

Salvation also includes deliverance from the wrath to come. Often men live as if they could get away with living for themselves in this life. And, sometimes, they do -- in this life! But in the world to come they must face God and face up to what they have done. God's forgiveness of our guilt does not exempt us from the obligation either of paying for our wrong deeds or of

working to set things right. We do not get away with anything before God; we only think we do.

In spite of our persistence as sinners, we can have our reward in this life; we can defy God in this life; we can have fun and folly in this life, but, as sure as God is holy and just, in the life to come each of us shall pay every debt not made good in this life.

Salvation is no bargain-counter product. We have to pay for it in full. Though God pays for the guilt of personal relations and freely offers us full restoration to fellowship, we still have to pay for the consequences of our deeds in works of faith and love within the grace of God. Sin is more serious than any human being can fully understand.

Yet we are saved not only from but for something. We are saved for a new self. The more fully saved we are, the more we are in tune with God. The perverted self becomes more and more the fulfilled self. Only experience can teach us what it means to be rid of the fears, drives, and desires that once mastered our lives. Only freedom from their power can teach us the joy that comes when they no longer dominate our lives and spoil them.

We are similarly saved for a new society. A whole new range of experience begins to open up. Lonesome man finds the companionship for which he was made. Instead of fighting others or fearing them, he lives with them humbly, as friends. The experience of salvation enables us to care what others do or think, because we are concerned with them, while not dependent upon their judgment.

Salvation opens the door to the fellowship of the true church, the new society. Even in the home the church begins to become a reality in family life; we become joined in love and faith to those with whom we are bound by blood and birth. Once aware that life apart from the companionship of Christ can never be full and rich, we work to turn the church into a family fellowship of vital prayer and mutual concern. In short, as salvation becomes real we glimpse that community whose character reflects the meaning and nature of salvation.

Above all, the saved are saved for heaven. Already in this life they set foot on the threshold of a new home. In worship and prayer they begin to pull away from ordinary life and reach over into God's side of reality. In companionship with God they see with new eyes and feel with new hearts.

As in prayer and experience they even now soar beyond this earth and life and they commence knowing life on a higher level. They start finding a new focus of fulfillment in God. They know heaven as more than a place of imagination. Indeed they often approach its gates. They even carry something of its far-off glory back home with them. Inevitably they spill some of it into the humdrum of ordinary life.

But heaven remains primarily a place awaiting the saved. They know where they are going at the end of this life. They are going where God is. They are going to be with Christ. They are going home to the larger family. They are going through resurrection to the place of many mansions.

He who has lost his heart to heaven knows in this life "the power of an endless life." Death is no longer merely an enemy to be feared. The days of unrelieved doubt are over. He in whom salvation is active knows his Father and his home and he waits, while working, to be called home.

Many who do not know salvation regard such talk as nonsense or, at best, questionable speculation; however, many a secular writer seems almost possessed with man's longing for immortality as a basic drive. This deep-set want is due to a need rooted in reality. Thus though men may mock, they cry for what they mock.

For the saved, however, though life never loses either its challenge or its beauty, it always remains touched with homesickness. The saved are pilgrims who can never find full rest and peace on earth, for their hearts are in heaven. Although they may know ever so much heaven here and now, they never fail to remember that heaven, even more, is the home that awaits them.

III

We are saved from sin for God. We are saved from self for community. We are saved from the faults of earth for the fullness of heaven. But such salvation does not come all at once. The decision to let oneself be saved may come all at once. At some particular time each person must cross the line from death into life, from self as central to God as central -- at least in conscious intention -- but it takes time to make the full turn away from self to God. Indeed, God has given us eternity for this purpose. We still can and should, of course, make a significant start on earth.

As illustrated in the life of the Master, when God becomes central to human life how much of heaven's goal can be realized on earth! The indwelling presence of God as holy Spirit at work in life is called sanctification. To sanctify means "to make holy." God saves us by making us holy.

"To be separate" is the biblical meaning of "holy." Normally, holiness in the Christian's vocabulary has a more restricted connotation; "to be holy" means "to be separated from evil." So sanctification means separation from sin and from the ways of the world. One of the most crucial misunderstandings of the Christian faith frequently is rooted in the misinterpretation of sanctification for thought and life. For this reason we must look closely at the questions: What does it mean to be made holy? What does sanctification involve?

The very mention of sanctification repels many people. They take it to mean a kind of unctuous pietism. If pressed, they will even say they had rather remain unsanctified than to become unnatural.

Admittedly they have a point. Often, "holy" people do seem queer. And, worse still, some of the "sanctified" are hard to live with! Such people have turned sanctification into a bad word not only for the population in general but also for many Christians. Many devoted Christians still equate sanctification with a stuffy and inhibiting legalism -- a matter of avoiding this or eschewing that, whether drinking or card-playing, wearing make-up or going to the movies.

But true sanctification means something quite different. It denotes the process, sudden or gradual, whereby the person who has been saved in intention becomes saved in fact. It describes the action of God in which he fulfills this intention by education, by intensification of intention, and by teaching us how to enjoy the truly good life. Sanctification is the process of becoming genuine. It is an exchange of the false self for the true self, of the unreal personality for the real person. Sanctification indicates the process whereby we are made holy, within the purpose of God for our life.

A non-Christian or sub-Christian understanding of sanctification defines it as physical separation from people who do not live holy lives. Some even treat the absence of a certain "orthodox" profession as a lack of holiness and a ground for excommunication. This erroneous interpretation, though reflected in the New Testament in some instances, stems from the belief that God himself shuns evil people and expects the "saints" to follow his example.

But the life of Jesus causes embarrassment for this view. Indeed, this attitude bespeaks the kind of "Pharisaism" (as the word is ungraciously used by us Christians) Jesus came to destroy. When God walked in human flesh, he walked into unclean Samaria to talk with a "bad" woman, he associated with publicans and sinners and met the accusation of being a winebibber and a friend of the untouchables.

So does he even yet! God loves the sinner completely and comes to him freely -- even into him, to dwell with him, that God might cast out sin and cancel guilt from within. He still offends our natural goodness and self-righteousness.

Not only does he do it by calling "sinners" to repentance. He does it still more emphatically by identifying the worst sinners as those who trust in their own goodness and hold themselves aloof from the sinners and the despised. Then, as if to rub salt into sore wounds, he says these self-righteous "saints" are the very people the true "saints" should be helping with their company and encouragement.

Christian holiness has as its goals the elimination of sin and the transformation of the sinner into

a saint. Particularly does it aim at the transformation of the most sinful -- the religiously self-righteous.

Christian holiness means to be like God. It means to partake of his nature and attitude. To be sure, the sanctified in his effort to be one with the sinner does not try to please him by sinning with him. To be holy means to be separate, in thought, imagination, word, and action, from sin and even from needless appearance of sin. The truly sanctified finds no pleasure in evil and no satisfaction in sinful company. He is with sinners because he loves them. He associates with them as a fellow human being touched with divine love for people as people, particularly for those in need, even more for those in moral and spiritual need, and most especially for the religiously self-righteous.

The sanctified separates himself from evil in his inner attitude. The really sinful things, as Jesus taught, are neither what goes into a man nor what he touches. Sinful things, rather, are what go out from his inner self, the lusts that conceive and occasion sinful acts.

Thus a saint seeks out sinners not to judge them but to enlighten and help them, and not too self-consciously, at that. He joins them as a human being who likes and accepts his fellow human beings. By his presence he offers them the only Presence that can truly change them, fulfill them, and thus set them free. Neither threats nor rewards can do that. Only love can rightly fill the self, free it from its false desires and give it peace.

Young women of a new religious order in France choose to live close to brothels and among atheistic labor groups, not to preach, but to be friends, to be of help in need, and to show the lone and lost the heart of God in the midst of human hell. Such living is an example of Christian sanctification.

To be sanctified means, then, to grow in grace. Grace can be had only by being shared. To be holy, we remember, is to be separate from sin. To separate from sin, however, is possible only as, with God's aid, we live more and more for others. Sanctification is from sin but not for selfish reasons. To be made holy is to be removed from sin but not externally.

To be sanctified means being separate *from* because we are lovingly *for*. It is to be separate from sin because we are for God and for others. Just as God, who is ever and by nature sinless and cannot sin, comes to the sinful world because he loves it, so the saint goes into the world because the holiness of God has made him real and overflows his humanity into human fellowship.

Sanctification is, then, for the world. Jesus presents the best example of sanctification. He kept himself pure ``for their sake." His own conquest of temptation was intimately connected with and, indeed, the very expression of, his holy love, his living for others. Jesus learned obedience through his sufferings for others. He identified his life and passion with the welfare of his

people. Thus he became in truth the Messiah.

The Son of God sanctified his ordinary manhood into the Son of Man. In just such a way must we become holy by letting the Son of God rule us until we attain "mature manhood" and come, as the Bible says, "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Jesus was in his deepest intention the Universal Man. The Universal Man is whoever under God most fully identifies himself with all men.

Being bid to walk even as Jesus walked, we might start by trying to make all people happy, by so living as to let all men know what it means to be free souls. The more we try to make men happy, as Robert Louis Stevenson pointed out, the more we come to realize that no one can be happy by living for himself. Happiness presupposes goodness while guilt brings sorrow. Therefore we must aim at making men good as well as happy. Goodness presupposes good intentions, a possession always of happy people. But good intentions are not enough. People with the best intentions can be most destructive of other people's happiness.

Goodness requires, besides, the knowledge and the observance of law. Law is a matter of right relations. Right relations are from God for human good. Therefore true happiness does not destroy the law, i.e., right relations. In order to be happy, consequently, we ourselves must fulfill God's intention that we be our true and real selves. We must also help other people to be their best selves. That cannot be done by by-passing the law.

How does holiness work as law? Law is necessary to show right relations, to teach right relations, to correct wrong relations, and to keep guiding into ever more nearly right relations.

Law, however, is only a help; it is no substitute for love. It is only a crutch that does not take the place of walking. Only love can rightly make use of law in any full sense, for the purpose of all law is finally for love. Therefore love alone, as the Bible says, can fulfill the law.

There is no genuine conflict between law and love for those who see the true nature of love as holy and the law as an instrument for facilitating love. Holiness observes law. But the laws of right relations are the fruit of the long outworking of justice. They can be finally attained and fulfilled only by love. True love, therefore, is never slack or sentimental. It is, rather, holy, austere, concerned for others in their total relationship to one other, to themselves, to God, and to the natural order in which they live.

Whenever holiness becomes separated from goodness, or law from love, God is violated. All law is for love; all holiness, for happiness. Consequently both the safest and the most creative response toward sanctification is to live to make all people happy. We fulfill the law of love only as we become inclusively concerned for other people and work in concrete situations to make them happy as whole personalities and communities.

"Happiness" has become a threadbare and shopworn word, tinged with the superficialities of the ordinary and even with escapism. For this reason we must see happiness in the context of holiness and the law. But even when we have done so, no one has the right to happiness except within the trust of God whose suffering and sovereign Love will in the end gather up all human sorrow into a full and inclusive salvation. This godly happiness we may now embrace. Apart from it we shall have little positive satisfaction to offer a doubt-drenched and sorrow-laden world.

Working with a concerned happiness our minds begin to become free to pursue ways and means of helping people. Only thus do we increasingly realize that happiness comes most truly and most fully only within the inclusive, holy love of God. To be holy in relation to happiness is to live humbly and obediently the implications and involvements of a nonsentimental realistic love.

So fulfilling the law within the love that frees the self, we "grow in grace." The saints who have accepted salvation as the act and promise of God experience its fulfillment in themselves.

"Entire sanctification," a term much bandied about in evangelical circles and life's hardest and rarest attainment, is the complete surrender to the will of God and the consistent living of it until, within the grace of God, saints find that temptations lose their power. Even though the "totally sanctified" can still feel temptation and their spirits can still be disturbed by evil imagination; even though they can still be troubled in disposition and less than perfect in decision and act; nevertheless their total self rests in God and finds no happiness apart from his presence.

Once for all God has secured the saints' will against basic disobedience because he has won their hearts for himself by their actual experience of the kind of life he offers. Such steadfastness within the love of God and such experience of its fruit are what total sanctification means. It is far more a hope than an attainment; for most people it is unreal and frustrating; for all, its deepest experience lies beyond this earthly life.

"Eternal security," the claim "once saved, always saved," does not involve the loss of ability to sin. The insight that this claim sets forth is, rather, the towline to the shore of heaven that will not give way. But we, of course, can let go of the towline! Eternal security is the confidence that, no matter how much the waves of earthly temptation toss our bark, we shall reach the harbor.

The biblical and historical doctrines we have just discussed have meaning within genuineness of Christian experience. They should neither be denied nor claimed as attained by ourselves. Beyond whatever experience is granted us, they should be the goal of our lives and our far-flung hopes in God's promises.

The Christian doctrine of man is a most serious topic. It precludes every effort to hide our illness or to claim what is unreal for the cure. Sin is real and long lasting. The power of sin, even in the life of the saints, is a terrifying force. Genuine faith never speaks of easy or fast victories over it.

Nevertheless, once the hearts of believers have been won by the love of God and their eyes opened by faith, they cannot deny in their own experience the reliability of the grace of God. To that grace they witness: to the greatness and goodness of God.

Know Your Faith by Nels F. S. Ferré

Dr. Ferré was for many years Abbot Professor of Christian Theology at Andover Newton Theological School. Published by Harper & Brothers, New York, 1959. Copyright 1959 by Nels F.S. Ferré. This material prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 5: "And the Life Everlasting"

Thousands upon thousands, Sunday after Sunday, end their confession of the Christian faith with these words: "and the life everlasting." How many believe them? For those who do, what do these words mean? Even among theologians no topic is touchier. Many of them would rather not discuss it. They often use, sometimes heatedly, phrases and symbols, words like "resurrection" and "life eternal," but all too often they have changed the meaning so that these symbolic phrases do not stand for life after death. For such confessors, the biblical question still remains: "If a man die shall he live again?" Or perhaps the question does not remain because it has long ago been silently answered in the negative.

On a large university campus the faculty member who represented the university on the Religion in Life Committee came to me for a private talk.

"I have no Christian faith," he said, "but I want others to believe. Am I being dishonest? I believe that there is no God who controls history and that when I die, I'll be cold and hard like a chunk of cement. And that's the end of it. More than that: I know practically every active layman among our churches, and at least seventy-five per cent of them believe exactly as I do. Do you think I should tell the students my stand or should I go on pretending to believe? I have a daughter and I want her to believe. I think faith is wonderful for those who can have it, but I myself can't make myself believe. All these fanciful claims of religion don't spell anything for me."

I looked at him and loved him. What had I to say?

On another occasion a distinguished theologian, an honest and humble spirit, had invited me to dinner. A few of us finally warmed up in conversation concerning life's basic meaning and hopes. The great man's face was sensitive with the world's hurts. Before us sat a giant intellect and a saint's heart, visibly shaken by my suggestion that the Christian faith could not be genuine apart from faith in life after death.

"For me," I had said, "your thinking is profound and illuminates all my experience. You are one of the two men who have helped and stimulated me the most. If only you could believe in a personal God of providence who initiates action for the world's good and who answers prayer; and if only you could believe in life after death!"

Pulling back a bit with pain, the theologian spoke to this effect:

"Lately I have been far from happy about my position that individual life ends at death. My thinking offers no explanation and hope, for example, for idiots. As a matter of fact, I have been considering that even reincarnation offers more of a solution. I may come out for it in my lectures within the next four or five weeks. The Christian position where people are changed all at once at death does not seem to me to take the meaning of this life seriously enough. Why should we have all the trouble of striving in this life and what does it amount to in the end if we are all magically changed? Augustine left the idiots in limbo. The Roman Catholics at least have purgatory after death. That is some better. They take the moral problem more seriously."

Such in general ran his line of thought. A profoundly learned and thoughtful man whose very face showed the deep sensitivity of his nature, thus pondered the three main positions that seem open to us on the question of everlasting life.

Many of Christianity's leading theologians in America have wrestled silently and come to no confident conclusion, or have been forced in honesty, not to deny life after death, but to admit frankly that they cannot be convinced of it. What are these three positions and what attitude should we take toward them?

I

The first is that eternity is a quality of life; it is participation without the right of duration, in the case of man, in the life everlasting; the second is that life is a continual stream of choices and consequences, of living and dying, of repeated reincarnations in this world; and the third is that God reawakens us to life after death in another realm beyond this earthly existence.

Our attitude on all these questions should be one of humble faith and openness. Each of the above positions will be developed only in kernel. Some would say dogmatically that only the last of these is Christian; a very few would call the second Christian, although historically it definitely is not; many others would allow the first as well. In our day, however, the nature of the Christian faith itself is being reinterpreted. Perhaps any view that honestly interprets life in the light of what it sees in Jesus as the Christ has the right to claim his name. Some believe that the very survival of Christianity depends upon such a bold facing of modern man's knowledge. Every man's report should be as humble, honest, and open as possible in this realm. In such a spirit I advance the following suggestions.

The first view of life eternal is that it is a matter of man's participation in God's life. It emphasizes quality rather than duration. It is a kind of life rather than length of life. Man as such is not eternal. He is a creature. He lives and dies. But man is not therefore merely an animal. On the contrary, he is a child of God capable of eternal life, of sharing God's own presence and power.

For some this is the only honest answer to man's deepest dread: that life is meaningless. To be sure, we shall all die and be no more. But meantime we are more than we know. At least we do not thus postpone our problems for some fancied existence. We know and take seriously the fact of death. This kind of eternal life is also something we can experience and be sure of here on earth.

For some this means participation in life eternal amidst the busy demands of ordinary life. Life is hard and we are frustrated. It is next to impossible to be the kind of person we want to be -- husband, wife, son, daughter, or friend. We fail and feel guilty. We work, and sometimes we succeed even to the point of enjoying the success; but at other times we are disappointed with the results or ache over our own lack of satisfaction in achievement.

Sometimes we feel like the thrifty New England housewife who kept using the apples that were spoiling in the barrel so that most of the apples she used were the spoiled ones while the good ones were always there for the eating! We worry over the one or two things that bother us and fail to be grateful for the many things that are right. We are anxious over possible threats to our planning or living while we never rejoice over the many securities and satisfactions life brings. And what is worse, we cannot by willing change this basic life attitude.

Therefore the offer of forgiveness for those who hold this position is good news. The Gospel of grace means for them that we can be accepted beyond our desert. We are glad for even partial participation in a strength not our own that quiets our anxieties and takes the edge off our fears. We are grateful for the faith that life is not meaningless. In this view while God may not be personal, there is peace to be had. We shall all die, they say, but while we live we can find the resources to be better persons, better family members, better members of the church and the community. If religion gives us no more than this, we can honestly and humbly be thankful for eternal life, for our being touched and moved by our participation in it.

Others who hold this position have more hope, even though they, too, believe that death ends all for each and all of us. They believe that we can become new beings by the power of the Gospel. They believe that by the participation in God's life the basic quality of life itself can be changed. For some of them this experience is a matter of being found at least from time to time within a "Gestalt of grace," a pattern of Gospel power. In either case we do not have and cannot command this power of eternal life. It is a free gift of God. Or in other terms, it is the possibility for us within the hidden resources of reality in its dimension of depth.

For still others of this group who hold that eternal life is an aspect of our experience in this life, everlasting life offers the possibility of being caught up into the ecstasy that can never be contained within time and space and that can never be explained from within our finite and evil existence. It is mystic union with eternity itself. It is sharing beyond explanation in joy at the depth. It is participation in the freedom from self and society, and from the whole world of things, that only those can know who have ever broken through the spiritual time and sound barrier of existence.

All these interpretations offer eternal life by participation. They hold that eternity is timeless, that eternity transcends completely and indescribably the failings and finiteness of time. Reality beyond the limitations of space-time existence has somehow come into people's lives to help them, whether by touching their lives by a new quality of beauty and strength, by offering, that is, a new level of being, or by releasing them into the mystic ecstasy of immediate participation, beyond all knowledge, in eternal life itself.

While life lasts, they say, there is beauty in the wave, even in the breaking of it. At last, however, every troubled sea finds rest. The divided life is freed from the fever of existence. It sinks back into the ocean of being, after having been used on the surface, to rest in the depths of calm. The weary returns home. The tired finds rest. The separated bit of being finds its harmony within the whole to which it now fully belongs. There is peace.

For most people even this view of life eternal may seem unreal. They know only the humdrum of existence with its duties and demands, its bits of hopes and joys, its many sorrows and its final death. But many testify to the reality of the presence and power of eternal life in the midst of ordinary existence. The quest then becomes an eager reaching for a life less frustrating and more fulfilling. The central hope of life becomes the partaking of eternal life for the power of a new being, whether by touch, by newness of life, or by rapture. And after patient service comes the peace of silence; after life's wrestling, rest in reality.

For those who know this reality of eternal life, there is no denying it. Problems remain, however, to haunt the thoughtful. If the world should come to an end, our total existence would be as though nothing had ever been. Then, too, what final justice or hope is there for idiots and the morally diseased? For them, within the point of view of this position, there is no eternal life. There is a certain snobbishness or parochialism in a view that provides eternal life only for the elite. Most people are untouched by such a high claim, and since death ends all, they become untouchables.

For that matter, many of those who hold this view neither act nor look as though this doctrine had vital reality. It seems often a kind of substitute faith for the classical Christian view. The theologian at the dinner party, we recall, had come to see how empty was the hope and how limited. He wondered, therefore, whether reincarnation did not offer far more hope. It does!

II

Reincarnation is eternal life without beginning or end. Each life keeps being reborn. Its character is responsible freedom. Reincarnation, from many angles, is the most reasonable explanation of life and the one viewpoint that most fully corresponds to our actual world while still having an eternal standard of right, wrong, and salvation.

From this standpoint there is no problem as to the origin of life. There is no origin. Each life is eternal by nature. Similarly there can therefore be no question as to the end of life. There is no end.

Furthermore, life is a matter of free choices continually. The choices come weighted with the consequences of our past choices, but, ever and ever, there is a chance to better our lives. Even though the cards of life are dealt to us according to our past, we are always free to play creatively for the future.

In reincarnation, what we do is put into a reservoir of deeds. Whatever we receive in life, of good or bad, is due to what is in the reservoir. We do not, to be sure, get everything at once. An evil deed may create consequences that are funneled back at a much later time. But we are what we do. We get what we deserve. Some interpreters of reincarnation emphasize deeds as acts, others as knowledge, and still others as love, but from whatever aspect of self we act, the result is stored in the reservoir. Life exhibits, therefore, perfect justice within an order of responsible freedom.

Rebirth may be into the order of human beings once again; or according to the classical form of the doctrine, transmigration into the animal realm; or into a higher order of heavens; and at the highest, the delivered self can escape from the round of rebirth to rest within the reality of eternity. This reality has been interpreted as consisting of being, plus intelligence, plus bliss. Such resting is identification with reality. It is being accepted by, and accepting, the center of what is truly real and right, which alone can fully satisfy what is real and right in man.

Such identification is finding the bliss of being in intelligent fulfillment. It is escape from the severed and fragmentary life. It is love's union beyond our divided understanding of it. It is freedom with no overagainstness. It is perfect peace through full finding. Beyond the mere vision of God, it is full participation within the bliss of his perfect being, beyond the lacks and faults of human emotion. This identification is the negation of all that we know, the very finding of the perfect attainment we hoped for in our knowledge.

Here is fruition without frustration. Yet the spirit is free, and responsible choice remains. Those who wish can keep striving, losing or gaining partial satisfactions; those who will can find eternal life itself and enter into it.

No wonder our theologian friend was attracted. Who can see and not admire such freedom and justice, with such a wide spread of possibility? No credulity is needed to believe in irrational beginnings or in miraculous endings. The problem of evil is met fully without hopelessness.

Interest in this doctrine is rising sharply. All over the United States and Canada, I have come across people who believe in reincarnation while professing Christ. A Presbyterian minister, for instance, told me that in a ministers' discussion group to which he belonged, most of them had confessed, once they had "let their hair down" that they had abandoned the Christian point of view of eternal life in favor of the doctrine of reincarnation. Recently several leading writers, religious and secular, have openly or subtly taken leads along this line.

With classical Christianity at the crossroads, decisions have to be made honestly and creatively. For most educated people, the world view of the Christian faith as a whole in its supernatural dimensions is a shell. Emptiness is bound to suck in some faith. What shall it be? The traditional views of immediate translation into heaven or hell are hollow. Emptiness cannot be filled by emptiness! Perhaps taking the Christian center and rethinking in its light the doctrine of reincarnation may be a creative step. Certainly this second view, of reincarnation, is far more reasonable, considering all problems of beginnings and becomings, than the first view's claim that there is no rhyme or reason to our origins and ends before and beyond this life.

I personally have been long and heavily tempted to make a try at such a synthesis. Now with the world becoming one, if it remains, and with our leading Western universities importing religious teachers from the East to teach students the religions that brought forward views like reincarnation, not to mention the success of missionaries in our midst from non-Christian religions, we Christians had better think long and deep concerning these religions, not only to be honest with ourselves, but to do justice to the central realities of our faith.

Reincarnation is certainly an improvement on the emptiness of naturalism. No wonder our great-minded and great-hearted theologian pondered the possibility of reincarnation as a step beyond his own position, which is basically in our first category as described above. I even suggested to him that evening that with his creative capacity he might develop a view going beyond both reincarnation and traditional Christianity to some form of fulfillment implicit in the Christian faith, but not yet brought to light. The classical Christian center seems to me to involve, in any case, a far more just and dynamic view of eternal life than has so far been expressed in traditional formulations, a view which accepts and incorporates whatever is true in the first two.

III

The Christian view of life after death is not easy to describe. The authority for it is Christ as the context of God's love. Our standard of truth is: "God is faithful." That affirmation on the subject of life everlasting implies everything basically Christian. In humility and honesty we must leave the far future in God's hands. As Roger Shinn puts the case: It is not so much what

we believe as Whom we believe. All that is needed is to draw the implications of the main confession.

With the first point of view in this chapter I agree that life everlasting is basically a participation in the life of God. It is first of all a quality of life. We are not interested in mere continuation of life. That could be both bad and miserable. It could be a decidedly selfish wish, based both on the fear of death and on a drive to be at the center of things. It could also amount to a postponing of life's present problems for the sake of some fancied solution by or after death. The New Testament talks of a new life, a new being, not a mere continuation of life. For this reason many biblically minded thinkers dislike the term "immortality" and use the term "resurrection" instead.

Nor should life be thought of as eternal in its own right. That would mean that man himself had become self-sustaining forever. That would imply that man can become independent of God. To speak in such fashion is indeed to make man God. It is to be Platonic and not Christian. The Christian knows that man is mortal by nature. The breath God gave him in creation is the breath of earthly, not of eternal life. Man lives and dies as a human being. His life beyond this life, whatever it is, is surely a life of relation to God. It is a life of participation in God's immortality. It is a new being, a new quality of life. With this main assertion I reaffirm my agreement.

Nevertheless, must we substitute quality for quantity? Why not have both? The better life is, the more it deserves to continue. If the basic meaning and reality of our lives are partaking of God's love, that quality ought to insure the quantity. If everlasting life is life beyond the evils of temporal change and failings, why should not everlasting life *last*? The posing of quality as an alternative to quantity not only prejudices the question, but makes the answer necessarily deficient.

The longing for such a life is no more selfish if it is desired for a lifetime, or for eternity, than for an hour. For that matter, life everlasting in Christian terms is the death of selfishness. Such is its quality. No one can enter eternal life in reality unless he is willing to give up his own centrality in order to find a true center in God and in a community of love. Such a losing of self into life everlasting is the basic threat to selfishness. How, then, can the hope of such life after death be selfish?

To face God and eternal life aright, each person must face reality. Flight from God is the flight of fear. Acceptance of God is the acceptance of the love that involves the acceptance of self and others. It is the acceptance of life. How, then, can a genuine faith in life everlasting involve the postponing of problems in this life for the sake of some mysterious solution in the next?

We can, consequently, accept the positive truth of this first position without falling prey to its negative conclusion. We accept participation and permanence, quality and quantity, a new life now and in the world to come.

The second position presented reincarnation as eternal life without beginning and without end, the life of continuously responsible freedom on man's part and of continuously perfect justice on the side of reality. This view, we saw, makes a strong attempt to be honest and realistic in its dealing with the mysterious question of life after death. Reincarnation offers life after death for each and for all. We have stressed this position in the belief that Oriental religions will be heard from with great vigor in coming generations. Many of the emphases of reincarnation are of utmost importance for Christian thinkers who have done little, for instance, with the question of the meaning of animal life and pain.

The most appealing part of reincarnation is its reasonableness and its morality. If all we knew of life were that it had always been here and had always been a mixture of good and evil, reincarnation would be even more tempting than it now is. As it is, we know that our main evidence is of a lightning quick history which has burst out of the unknown. In the light of Christ, our most adequate context for understanding the meaning of our total experience, we see that our world has not always been here, but has come into being as a special creation with a special goal. There are still problems aplenty and no one can be glib about ultimate matters. Our little world history, however, points toward God's deeper meaning for us, not only in the future of our world within this cosmic process, but in the future of all life beyond death.

The governing thought in reincarnation I can accept insofar as it stresses both our responsible freedom and perfect justice in the universe. To this justice, however, the Christian faith adds God's perfect love beyond our own deserving and capacity. God is seen in Christ as the sovereign Love who controls all the conditions of this life and beyond.

We can also maintain and develop reincarnation's inclusion of the animal world as an enriching aspect of the Christian faith. Christians must be increasingly sensitive to God's purpose for the whole of creation. Even animal suffering has its place there. The fulfillment of animal life in some way is surely in accordance with God's most inclusive plan. I have tried to indicate several ways of such fulfillment in *Evil and the Christian Faith*. The God of perfect love is even more concerned with animal life than any ultimate reign of justice could be!

For a Father's love, however, each and every individual is everlastingly important. The Christian faith because it believes in a personal God of love believes also in the perpetuation of human personality. God whose love is everlasting loves every individual forever.

Life everlasting denies the perpetuation of what is falsely individual. The selfish and the finite who take themselves too seriously cannot participate in God's perfect love, while the truly personal life of love lives forever in it. The Christian faith teaches the perpetuation not only of the personal, but of the person. Such perpetuation is not only by participation in the divine life but by the eternal partaking personally of it.

Would a God of love create us to find no fulfillment beyond this life? Is the wish for fulfillment selfish? If we have to choose between believing in a selfish man and a selfish God, it is far better to keep faith in the ever-faithful God of creative concern. Thinking to be noble in not desiring life after death, we become most ignoble in our accusation of God as the creator of such a world as this with nothing more to follow! The Christian views of God and of life after death are inseparable. Apart from life's continuation there is neither conquest of evil nor fulfillment of life. God is not the God of frustration but of the fullness of love.

Eternal life involves, naturally, the divine fruition of community. Man is not a person apart from others. He lives in, through, for, and by community. Individual life as such is a myth. True individuality is always reality of self-being as a social self. The Christian faith promises, by its very bedrock authority of God in Christ, that Love cannot lose his own.

How, when, and where we shall live after death we cannot tell, but we know that we shall be as Christ is. For us to try to predict the details of personal and community fulfillment is far harder than for a cocoon to envisage the life of a butterfly. No earthly eye has seen, no earthly ear has heard, and no earthly mind has conceived what heaven will be like. All we know is that the God we meet in Christ will exceed immeasurably every expectation and all imagining.

We have no right to believe, of course, that a magical change will take place at death. The meaning of this life has to be taken with all seriousness. Morality would be violated if God were to translate all immediately into the eternal perfections. This much we can surely learn with profit from the doctrine of reincarnation. The Christian view must be fully as moral, fully as patient, and fully as dynamic as any and as all alternate positions.

A weary life desires escape from all life's problems. There is much appeal in the Buddhist doctrine of nirvana, which literally means "being blown out" of existence. Fear is fond of such an escape. Death as cessation is dear to a large side of our experience. We cannot build on our desires, however, one way or another, but only on God. When we build on God we shall find his mercy underlying the next life still offering us the challenge of growth and the chance for new grace.

Life everlasting can be had only by freely accepting God's life of love. Love alone is eternal; love alone is free. Perfect love casts out fear. God has given us freedom of choice in order that through it we might find freedom of life. Freedom of life comes only as, through freedom of choice, we learn that God's will for us is best.

God made us for fulfillment through freedom. In making us for himself, he created us for unconditional and universal love. We are free only as we find this kind of love from, for, in, and through God. The anxiety of the loveless is a chain of fear.

Our earthly experience and whatever similar experiences may be in store for us beyond death

exist for the sake of our free choosing of God as we learn from the consequences of our action that God and his way alone are worth having. God never shoves heaven at us; like the father of the Prodigal Son he leaves us to come to ourselves as we discover the results of our lives. When we are ready, however, he is already there to offer the freedom of love and the reality of eternal life.

The final outcome is in God's hands. We can trust him for the best result possible. He will find, but never force. He will free, but never force. He will fulfill, but never force. God is Love and he is faithful. Does not such faith give light on the way and strength to walk it?

The Christian who believes, in line with all classical Christianity, that Christ truly rose from the dead knows -- whatever elements of truth the doctrine of reincarnation may have on the lower levels of life -- that for man the final truth is personal resurrection. The disciples encountered the same person they had known before he died. To be sure, the resurrection of Jesus is a mystery both for history and for thought. So is man's living again. But in both instances we are dealing with the mystery of the faithfulness of God.

When God is unreal and unknown, life after death becomes either a threat or an escape. When he is known as real, living, and Lord, our faces turn toward death with the quiet assurance of those who put their lives into fulfilling hands. Life everlasting, in the Christian sense of fulfillment, has the deepest meaning of all for those who within a life of love have already begun to glimpse the faithfulness of God. For them argument has less and less relevance, for they rest on the reality of God.

"And this is eternal life, that they know thee, the only real God, and him whom thou hast sent, even Jesus Christ."