

# Science & Faith

**George Samuel**



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## FORWARD

My wife Jenny and I have enjoyed the privilege of personal time with Dr. George Samuel. We have welcomed him into our home for hot curry meals. He has blessed us with his prayers for our children and us. I have travelled with him, savouring long conversations at airport lounges, delighting in his many stories. I have stayed in his home in India, and experienced the gracious hospitality of a most joyful household.

Dr. Samuel is a man of faith as well as a man of science. He has seen suffering at close range within his own family. His mind may be informed by the books he reads, but life is tempered by experiences beyond words. Hence, he writes as one who knows life as it is lived, in all its complexity and incomprehensibility.

Some may be tempted, in such circumstances, to say we live only by faith. But Dr. Samuel argues that reason has a place. 'Faith can use the bridge that reason builds'. He shows how faith is reasonable, though he warns that reason alone will not work. 'Empirical and rational approaches to religious truth are doomed to failure by the moral impairment of the human mind fallen in sin'.

As a nuclear scientist, he concedes that science cannot give all the answers. Scientific inquiry is important, and so is commitment to belief. 'Commitment alone, without inquiry, tends to become fanaticism or narrow dogmatism. Inquiry alone, without commitment, tends to end as trivial speculation, irrelevant to real life'.

By nature of the subject, readers may find parts of the book heavy going. But patience will reap (or mine) its rewards, especially the nuggets of insight and wisdom strewn throughout. You will appreciate the real-life stories at the end. Don't miss, among others, the ones about a taxi driver who came to faith and the intellectual who found the Gospel relevant.

Faith and reason may exist in tension for many people. But as Dr. Samuel rightly points out in his final remarks, there was a time when 'we had to maintain our beliefs *only* by faith'. Now it is different: 'they have to maintain their unbelief by *faith*'. May we find faith and walk by it – but it need not be a leap in the dark, for ahead may be a bridge that reason had built.

Dr. David Wong  
Vice-President, International Training  
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Samuel came to a conscious experience of personal salvation at the beginning of his undergraduate studies in 1955, although his committed parents and the local church provided a Christian environment. Being a science student he was questioning the Christian faith to which his parents introduced him. He found the living Christ enabling him to experience transformation in his life as answers to his questioning mind.

He has served as a nuclear scientist specialising in nuclear medicine research both in Bombay, India and in Los Angeles, California. He received education and training leading to doctoral level degrees both in nuclear science and in theology, and has attended University of Kerala, University of Bombay, University of California Los Angeles and Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. He is a 1974 alumnus of Haggai Institute and he was honoured by the Fuller Theological Seminary as the ‘alumnus of the year’ in 1986 for his contributions in Christian ministry.

After 15 years of research and consultation work with Government of India, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre and the University of California-School of Medicine, he served as a visiting faculty for programmes sponsored by the United Nations and World Health Organisation for over 10 years. He is currently Director of Value Education Centre, Tiruvalla, Kerala, India, involved in training teachers and parents in value based education. He continues as a visiting faculty on value education for the teacher-training course at the Academic Staff College of the University of Kerala, Trivandrum, India. His other current involvements include leadership training for Christian ministry and communicating the faith to professionals and college youths.

He has been a member of the faculty of Haggai Institute for over 30 years, and has served as its Dean for over 10 years. He also has served on the Board of international organisations like World Vision International, Prison Fellowship International, International Bible Society and Lausanne Committee Strategy Working Group. He is currently the Board Chairman of the International Bible Society South Asia. He has travelled widely in all continents, and has met a number of scientists as well as Christian leaders. Dr. Samuel is an experienced writer, and his publications are *Courage in Time of Discouragement*, *Despite Adversities* and *Forty Hard Lessons of Faith* in English. He has also written a half dozen books in Malayalam, his native tongue, on Christian life, value education and effective communication.

His wife Elizabeth died in 1998 after caring for their boys, who suffered with cystic fibrosis. His younger son Ronnie died at age 22 in 1999 and the older boy Johny died at age 32 in 2002. He lives with his daughter Annie and her husband Oommen Thomas in Tiruvalla, Kerala. Despite such devastating situations of sickness and bereavements, the family has triumphed over finding strength in God. He, along with Annie and Oommen, who are computer specialists, continue to witness to the power of God in serving Christ in India.



## **PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Dr. John Edmund Haggai challenged me during my first visit with him in 1973 about the matter of reaching the leadership for Christ. Later on when he gave me the privilege to lecture regularly at the Haggai Institute, I came across highly qualified Christian leaders who expressed some of their problems in the matter of sharing their faith with their colleagues and friends. Since I was assigned to lecture on ‘communicating the Gospel to the scientific secular mind’, I could share with the participants certain aspects of making the message of the Gospel meaningful, as well as the rationality of the Christian faith. I emphasised in my lectures that ‘the Christian who is also a scientist has no valid reason to question on scientific grounds the respectability of his faith in Jesus Christ’. Modern science has not yet made faith impossible or unacceptable, I asserted. During my scientific career I experienced that the modern scientific thinking and contemptuous outlook of certain people toward the spiritual reality need not be barriers to get the message across. Some of my experiences of interactions with people who are particularly influenced by materialism and anti-theism are reported in the last chapter of this book where I discuss the cases of such people subjecting their newfound faith to the test of experience. The rationality and the relevance of the Christian truth claims, especially in ‘quenching the thirst of people’s heart and meeting the demands of their mind’, are the focuses of this book. I am grateful to Dr. Haggai and Haggai Institute for giving me the privilege to work on this writing project.

I would like to thank those who have played a part in the production of this manuscript: Dr. Richard Bowie, who initiated the Scholar-in-Residence program, invited me and assigned me the topic much earlier. But I had to face a lot of difficult situations at home and I could not concentrate on writing. However, Dr. David Wong, currently the Vice President, International Training, very patiently listened to my difficulties and gave me the opportunity to spend these three months in Maui at the Mid-Pacific Centre of the Haggai Institute, in spite of my postponing the offer twice. While Dr. Wong encouraged me to pursue the project, making available a number of books and his own laptop, Dr. Bowie took time to read part of the manuscript during his two visits to Maui, giving his endorsement, which gave me confidence in my work. I am extremely grateful to these gentlemen for their deep interest in me and in this project. I thank Dr. David Wong for his willingness to write a very appropriate foreword as well to this book. I am thankful to Dr. Aldo Fontao, Vice President, Training and Development, for his helpful suggestions, especially to add a chapter on worldviews. Mr. Mark Menzies carefully looked into the

computer equipment and my technical needs from time to time and I thank him for his valuable help. Becky Moody provided help not only in coordinating the project details, but also in assisting me to use the appropriate computer software. Mr. Frederick Danielson and his wife Carol looked into my accommodation needs – they and the volunteer helpers made my stay really pleasant and productive. While I thank them, including other staff, the faculty and volunteers at the institute, for their valuable assistance, I mention my special thanks to volunteer Mr. Ernie Krahn, volunteer Mrs. Dartha Whitis and faculty member Dr. Kuruvilla. George, who took time to read parts of the manuscript and to correct grammatical errors, and to Mr. Art Dickman who rendered physical help during my stay. I would like to mention also that I was able to devote time for this project with the strong support of my daughter Annie and her husband Oommen Thomas, and I praise God for them. I trust this publication will be of use to find certain concepts and clues that might help communicate the Christian truth claims more meaningfully with conviction.



## CHAPTER 1 EVIDENCES WHICH POINT TO GOD

### **Reasonable hypothesis and clues**

Various strands of evidences point convincingly toward God. These evidences may not be persuasive to everyone, but God's existence is as necessary a presupposition to make sense of the universe as the most fundamental principles of logic.

Let us start by looking at the order that we find in the universe. Matter and energy have no ordering or organising principles in themselves. If left to themselves, they would reach the point of absolute disorder. As they have no ordering principles inherent in themselves, then something other is needed to enforce order on them. Whatever little bits of order and of order causing matter there may be in the universe can't have caused their own order. In a machine, parts are transformed from the non-orderly state into a highly ordered one. In living organism, there is the process where organised bodies generate other organised bodies, transmitting order from one entity to another. The universe as a whole can't have brought about that order either, if it is entirely material. There must be a cause outside the material universe.

It takes intelligence to bring about order in our material universe. The cause behind the universe must be something extraordinarily powerful and intelligent. Here we have to believe that the universe was created by some intelligent and powerful Being we usually call God.

Certain features of design in the world are more reasonable given that God exists than they are without God. The design argument supports a rational, free and powerful designer.

The sense of man's finitude in the form of needs points to the existence of a Being who can fulfil that need. Our very hunger for blessedness is a divinely given hunger, and therefore an indirect evidence that there is a God. Our ability to perceive comes from God. Science so far is unable to show how a nerve impulse can result in a very complex perception in the brain. The rational basis that can explain man's perceptions is that the perceptions come from God.

It follows then that God can give mental perception to our minds. The classical theistic arguments are well known in this connection. Summarising the following three classical arguments we can come to the conclusion of a super powerful, intelligent, good and personal Being who is interested in what we are doing.

The Cosmological argument: Existence of God is consistent with the fact of causality. Every effect that has a beginning has a cause; the universe has a beginning, according to modern science, and therefore there must be a cause behind the universe. That First Cause is God the Creator. This inference can be a reasonable hypothesis, though it cannot be treated as a proof.

The Teleological argument: Existence of God as Designer is consistent with the presence of order and design in the universe. In our experience, design implies a designer and therefore it is reasonable that the universe has a designer. This justifies an intelligent powerful being. This conclusion can also be used as a reasonable hypothesis.

The Moral argument: Every moral law presupposes a moral lawgiver. The fact that we are born with a moral sense and awareness of a moral law is an indication of a Source of this moral law from beyond us. Since morality applies to persons, this lawgiver is also personal. As the absolute authority over all, this lawgiver must be the Creator God.

Although these arguments are deficient as far as these being any logical proof, they may, however, be used as strong clues about the existence of God. Science has examined the universe and finds that the most reasonable hypothesis about the origin of the universe is that of the Creator. Other hypotheses have failed. We can then take the fact of a Creator God by faith, but it is a faith supported by reason.

### **Evidence of divine disclosure**

Another way to state the above conclusion is this: God has revealed Himself in the creation. We call this General Revelation. But God has also revealed Himself by His Word, the record of his direct verbal communication to man. This is Special Revelation.

Special Revelation comes in human language so that the rational faculty can grasp the meaning of the words and sentences used. God gave us the faculty of reason and directed His revelation to it. Therefore God expects us to employ our reasoning abilities both to recognise His true revelations and to detect fraudulent ones.

Bishop Stephen Neil has said, 'Reason is that faculty in man which makes it possible for him to receive the revelation of God, to receive revelation in the form of the Word of God; but to receive it, he must be humble and ready to listen to God, whenever and however He speaks'.<sup>1</sup>

'The heavens declare the glory of God',<sup>2</sup> and this shows the revelation in nature. The more we explore nature, the more we hear God speaking to us. In this context it may be appropriate to say that science is the speech of God in nature. The Bible, of course, is the speech of God in the Scriptures. In that case both science and the Bible are divine

records. God, the Author of both these records, is infallible and cannot go wrong. But man is a fallible interpreter of both these records, and that's why man forces these two records into unnatural conflict. The revelation in the Bible can be considered as the 'self-manifestation' of God.

The spiritual capacity of man shows the divine disclosure through man's conscience, although conscience operates within the limitation of relating it to a known law. God's full and final message to all mankind is revealed in the Scriptures through men of God who were moved by the Spirit of God. The Almighty God, the creator of the universe, desires to have an intimate relationship with the people He created. He has fully explained, defined and revealed this mysterious relationship to us in the wonderful incarnation of Christ. The incarnation of Christ displays the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God in that He initiated the process whereby He would both redeem man and destroy the devil.

### **Understanding immaterial (nonmaterial) things**

When we apply our human reason and sense experiences to understand reality, we tend to think that only what is measurable is real. Although we cannot assay beauty, love and happiness, no one questions the existence of such reality. Our knowledge of reality, which is affirmed by sense experience, may suggest that only matter and energy are real. Scientific method involving empirical approach is a way of knowing by repeated observations and experiences to ascertain facts. In understanding spiritual reality we are dealing with a reality that we may not be able to quantify by applying scientific methods or examine in a lab situation or grasp with our senses.

Empirical evidences are reliable within their boundaries. Scientists cannot give empirical evidence for their belief in the reliability of such evidences. When we deal with non-empirical realities, empirical evidence is very inadequate to prove its existence. Moreover, answers to questions like 'What is science? What does science do? Why it does so?' are not open to empirical testing. These are concerned with ultimate reality and ultimate truth.

We can also look at evidences that are consistent with the three commonly accepted human standards of proof, namely the analytical, statistical and the legal evidences. We use the word 'prove' in mathematics, and mathematical proofs cannot be challenged because the method of proof is absolute. Analytical evidences can be measured and defined accurately as we predict with certainty the effects of the law of gravity, the solar eclipse and the like. Repeatable experiments can verify it and it represents the strongest evidences that are measurable, precise and highly predictable.

Certain analytical studies provide only a degree of evidence until observations can establish as fact. Statistical evidence is proof by probability. In fact, our daily actions are based on such probabilistic proof. By applying it in the daily course of our lives, we can use discernment and avoid doing ridiculous things by being aware of the probability of disastrous consequences of certain actions. Although statistical evidence is not absolutely

certain, it is found highly reliable, and so we accept such probability as proof. Certainly no one can test spiritual reality by a repeatable experiment.

Legal evidence is proof beyond a reasonable doubt for the events occurred. When it is claimed that something has happened, the only way of proving it is by legal evidence. Surely, there is uncertainty with legal proof, because an event can't be repeated. However, it can be taken as good and reliable proof, if ample statistical evidences can support an event. Also a number of consistent and credible testimonies about an event can give us an acceptable degree of certainty in our judgements. The eyewitness testimony, hostile-witness testimony, corroboratory and circumstantial evidence can also be taken into consideration. We can test the probability of God's existence by testing for something that only God could do<sup>3</sup>.

There was a time when matter and energy did not exist. They were not eternally in existence. Nothing comes from nothing. This means something other than matter and energy must have existed before. Matter and energy cannot be the only real things if something existed before them and brought them into existence.

Although we find it difficult to find strong empirical evidence for the existence of reality other than matter and energy, at least in theory, it is possible to know something about immaterial things. In our approach, we need to see where the evidence leads in order to know about such immaterial (nonmaterial) things. Perhaps we can start with one immaterial (nonmaterial) thing that created the universe and the order in it. Whatever created the universe has more power than all the power in the universe. No effect can be greater than its cause. This leads us to think of something extraordinarily powerful and intelligent that created the universe and all that are in it, including the human brain.

It becomes necessary to apply familiar methods of learning when we look for evidence about immaterial (nonmaterial) things. We use our ability to think and reason when we try to understand any reality, physical or spiritual. Reasoning is the basic function of logic in our minds. Pure reason affords absolute proof for those that can be known by reason alone. But in most of our day-to-day understanding, we do commit to things for which we may not have one hundred percent proof. Moreover, we do trust with little evidence and don't demand stronger evidences for many things in life that we accept as true. We can therefore accept this criterion for our understanding of reality other than matter and energy as well.

Observation and experiences are very much employed in our learning process. Sense experiences of sight, smell, taste, touch and feel are taken as means for checking reality. We may have to correct our senses when they mislead us, especially to accept as reality that which only appears to be true. Evidences for immaterial (nonmaterial) things are not directly acceptable to human sense experiences, although some mental satisfaction, real or imagined, can be felt.

Trusting credible authority on certain knowledge often becomes inevitable, as we cannot afford to investigate certain matters ourselves. We have to rely on the experiences,

observations and teachings of others whom we respect. We believe such authoritative sources as truthful and capable of imparting knowledge to us. We take for granted their findings and proceed from there.

It is, therefore, right to apply reason, personal observation and acceptance of authoritative information in understanding and testing our knowledge of reality, including immaterial (nonmaterial) things.

As man is finite and God is infinite, we can understand God only in part. There is a limit to what human reason can discern about God. Our perceptions of God from nature can be accepted, although our fallen nature can only reflect on a fallen order. Scriptural authority and revelation can add to its meaning. God has left the imprint of His nature upon the created order. It can be taken as the self-expression of God through nature.

In any chain of cause and effect, either there is a first cause or there isn't. The chain of cause and effect can't be circular, because then each effect would be both before and after itself. And the chain can't be infinite either, because then there would be no explanation for anything.

Effects don't explain themselves. If everything were an effect, then nothing would be explained at all. But there must be a reason for the existence of the universe, since once it didn't exist and later it did. If there is a reason for anything to exist, then there must be something that is uncaused and eternal. Since the universe itself is an effect, then there must be a First Cause somewhere along the line – the Uncaused Cause of the universe, a Creator/Designer. This Cause must be intelligent. All the information in the universe can't equal His intelligence. God does not have a cause because He is eternal and self-existent. Being eternal, He is not an effect. Since He is not an effect, He does not require a cause. God is uncaused.

The opening words of Genesis mean that the cosmos began when it was created out of nothing by God, before which event God existed but nothing else did. We and the things around us are not only parts or components of the natural world, but also creations of God. To say that there must be some First Cause – Uncaused Cause in the series of cause and effects – is to assume that time is finite and that change, together with causation, began with the operation of that First Cause. The beginning of the universe was caused, and it is logically not possible to ask for a cause for an uncaused being.

### **The inherent capacity of man to relate to God**

We have a built in capacity as well as a built in need to relate to God. There is a 'God-shaped vacuum' and only God can fill it. Substitutes cannot satisfy when fallen man looks for other things to fill this need. Dissatisfaction can set us on the road that leads to the discovery of a personal God, a God we can handle, feel and name. Although there is a longing for a dimension of existence beyond time and space, there is tension because of the inadequacy of our present grasp of the One who can really bring satisfaction.

God has endowed humans with a structure of rationality patterned after the divine ideas in His own mind. We are able to know the truth because God has made us in His image. As an inherent part of our rational nature, we possess form of thought by which we know and judge sensible things. The human mind, therefore, is a secondary and derivative source of light that reflects in a creature-like way the rationality of the creator.

The rational world is the projection of a rational God who objectifies His eternal thoughts in the creation. The creation of man in His image includes a structure of reason similar to God's own reason. The laws of reason thus are the same for both God and the humans.

The omnipotent God has created human beings as rational creatures who innately possess the capacity to think and to use language. Human language is a divinely given instrument. God can therefore reveal truths about Himself through words. Human beings came into the world already equipped with an innate ability to acquire and use language and to construct grammar. Language does not grow out of human experience. Instead, language is made possible by human thought.<sup>4</sup> Language, like human knowledge, arises from sense experience; language grows out of children's imitation of their parents' use of language.

A blank mind cannot know anything; human knowledge of anything depends upon an *a priori* possession of innate categories of thought. These categories are ours by virtue of having been created in God's image, a fact that guarantees that the human structure of reasoning matches the divine reason. Language is a divinely given gift to facilitate a communication between God and humans that is both personal and cognitive. Neither the nature of God nor the nature of human knowledge and language preclude the possibility of the human mind attaining cognitive knowledge of the Word of God.

The record of human history reveals a fervent pursuit by man for spiritual things. Jesus was very much aware of this bend toward the spiritual within the human spirit. That is why he said worship ought not to be only in spirit, but also in truth. Worship alone cannot justify itself; it needs the constraints of truth, and that truth is in the person and character of God. God created us to worship, and no degree of academic progress will ever replace that need. It is not to be reduced to a ceremony. We are capable of worship. Worship permeates every aspect of life. Worship that is spiritual coalesces conscience, mind, imagination, heart and will in one direction.

The world of personal glory moves from triumph to emptiness because it can never deliver fulfilment of the spirit. Victor Hugo said, 'The world was made for the body; the body for soul; and the soul made for God. Go not merely to the temple for worship on the Lord's day, but also take the temple with you'.

Our ability to perceive and think about the world is evidence that these abilities were designed by an intelligent being for such purposes. This capacity to think and sense accurately about the world go far beyond what is needed for survival. It is not clear that the ability to know truth from falsity is necessary to survive. An amoeba will react to heat in a consistent way regardless of whether or not it grasps the essence of heat. Our minds

can grasp abstract truths that do not seem to have anything to do with the survival value they impart to the organism.

People have a real need for transcending the finite and the appropriate object of that need is God Himself. The universality of the desire to transcend the finite and to seek some sort of a Supreme Being does suggest that this desire is grounded in being human.

### **Revelation-bearing evidences**

The Biblical view included the explanation of the order in the universe because of ordering by a creator; the mind of man of course is part of that created order.

If matter and energy are finite in extent and in time, and if the ranges of the parameters for life are narrow, we have potent evidence for a personal creator, especially for the God of the Bible. Not only must the parameters for life support fall within a certain range, but also they must remain relatively constant over time.

Some parameters, like the number of stars in the planetary system, if more than one, tidal interactions would disrupt planetary orbits, and if less than one, heat produced would be insufficient for life. Taking the 'distance from parent star', if farther, our planet would be too cool for a stable water cycle; if closer, the planet would be too warm for a stable water cycle. Also, taking the oxygen to nitrogen ratio in atmosphere, if larger, the advanced life functions would proceed too quickly; if smaller, the advanced life functions would proceed too slowly.

The evidence for a universe designed, initiated, shaped and sustained by God exactly as the Bible describes continues to mount.<sup>5</sup> Out of the one trillion galaxies, not even one planet would be expected by natural processes alone, to contain the necessary conditions to sustain life.

The only rational response to the mountain of evidence accumulated thus far is to surrender one's life to the God of the Bible.

The sense of deity is continuously impressed upon man during his total lifetime, and it is impossible to efface it. Man's talents or gifts are revelation bearing in that they point us to the gracious Giver, God Himself. Man's intelligence is revelation bearing. Man's moral sense is revelation bearing, because our moral experience is meaningless unless there is a Judge in heaven. Man's very existence is a witness for the existence of God.

The man who gazes upon nature is the man with the sense of deity and seed of religion within him. The inner witness of God concurs with the witness of God in creation to form a most certain witness to the being of God. Therefore, no man can plead ignorance from knowledge of the being of God.

God's providential actions reveal the goodness of His heart, and the wisdom of His rule. His providence is seen in the food we eat, for it is His gift for our sustenance.

God has built into us, the finite human being, the capacity to receive the revelation. The infinite God can reveal to the finite human being. The infinite clothed himself in the finite, Jesus, who could restore the relationship between man and God.

Revelation and salvation shape man's experience. Reason and revelation are consistent with each other since the truths were disclosed by God. Revelation occurred in historic events involving both God and man. Human expressions and the divine self-disclosure are two sides of the same event. Divine revelation and human response were always interwoven, and the God-given encounter was experienced, interpreted and reported by fallible men.

There can be no knowledge of God unless we ourselves are involved. Man not only accepts a body of information, but also God's love and forgiveness as well as judgement. Because revelation leads to a new relationship to God, it is inseparable from the reorientation and reconciliation between man and God.

Revelation is fulfilled in the activity of God in the present experience. It helps man to understand his life today. A nation interprets its present experience in terms of key events in the past. The life of Christ is such a key event for us, which illuminates the rest of experience and helps understand ourselves and what has happened to us. Revelation provides interpretive categories relevant to all life situations. Revelation lies in interpreted history, which involves subject as well as object. Also, both particularity and universality are present in Biblical revelation and neither can be ignored.

Divine initiative is most clearly manifested in human life through religious experience. Both experience and history point to a God who acts by evoking the response of His creatures. The object of experience causes the experience. The subjective aspect makes our experience personal. Personal experience is relevant, but must have an account of the object of religious experience. The experience must be coupled with a reality that can be tested in ways other than by one's own experience. God gave us the minds that can think about the natures of reality and so we can describe accurately the reality of God and love Him with our minds as well.

God acts in time and space. He discloses Himself in hard-hitting events that continue to reverberate with lasting consequences. Because of the historical reality of Jesus Christ, we can know that God is real. Christian theology seeks to describe the reality of the self-disclosed Truth to us.

The fact of theism persists in many cultures, while atheism is also embraced by some. The existence of God is reduced to a question of practical meaningfulness in life. Here, anything that is meaningful to the individual is regarded as true, and so if faith in God is found meaningful, God is true and acceptable. On the other hand, for those who find unbelief meaningful to them, faith in God is false for such people. Such pragmatic considerations will not lead us to the truth, although it brings some satisfaction. Therefore, the ways of attaining truth, as well as the definition of truth, matters much.

The conclusions reached by the theist or the atheist are conditioned by the validity or invalidity of the methods employed.

Surely, there are various views and concepts followed in explaining about the kind of God of whom people speak. Although men desire and create for themselves a deity who meets their needs, grants their wishes and provides them with a number of benefits for this life and the life to come, they are not likely to create instinctively a God who is holy, just, sovereign and demanding. Although many follow some variety of theism (that a power, being, or a person on a higher level than that of ordinary humanity exists), there are various kinds of beliefs to which people subscribe.

One among such beliefs is polytheism, which is a kind of theism that affirms the existence of many gods. In henotheism, the existence of many gods is affirmed, but allegiance is given only to one who reigns over them. They believe that other gods exist to reign over others. Monotheism is belief in one deity who is regarded as personal or impersonal, transcendent or immanent, abstract or concrete, finite or infinite.

In every culture, with believers in God there have also been unbelievers. Some refuse to believe due to personal reasons. They want to live life without any outside interference. Their desire for independence and self-sufficiency drive them away from God.

The question of the existence of God provokes deep emotional and psychological prejudice. It is difficult to be free of emotional prejudice. Even if one is using impeccable deductive reasoning and inerrant inductive procedures, still, by reason of emotional bias, the person can refuse to accept the truth. God may be meaningless in certain cases, but contemplating for a better existence is something that keeps such people involved in religions. The threat of extinction or of nothingness provokes a wish for a better future existence. Because of this, even some of those who were once proponents of atheism have turned to certain rituals that they believe will ensure them some benefit in the life after, especially toward the end of their lives.

### **Scientific evidences**

Science points to the infinite power and order of the universe, which reveals not only the existence of God, but also His character. Also, science points to the finitude of man compared to the vastness of the universe. Scientific truths being discovered can be used to understand the nature of God.

We can welcome science as a partner in discovering the truth. We are aware that science is limited as a method of obtaining knowledge. It can operate only in the realm of the physical world, and nothing beyond. Science can tell us what and how, but not why. For example, science can describe the movement of stars, while the Bible describes the star-maker. Science gives statistics about crime, while the Bible reveals the reasons for crime. Science tells us how we gain a little knowledge, but the Bible tells how we gain eternal life.

In 1927 Astronomer Edwin Hubble<sup>6</sup> discovered a phenomenon known as the 'red shift', that is light from distant galaxies is shifted toward the red end of the spectrum. This

indicates that the universe is expanding. Galaxies are moving away from one another, much like dots on the surface of an inflating balloon. More on this is given in Chapter 5. This led to the Big Bang theory.<sup>7</sup> It tells that the universe began from a large explosion and has continued to expand ever since, and that all of the mass, energy, space and time were contained in a single mathematical point with no dimensions. This implies that the universe sprang into existence from nothing a finite time ago. The sudden emergence of matter, space, time and energy points to the need for some kind of transcendence.

Einstein first opposed the mounting evidences for a Big Bang origin. He eventually admitted his error and concluded that the universe was created. Stephen Hawking raises the question of who put ‘fire into the equations’ and ignited the universe. It is simpler to postulate creation *ex nihilo* – divine will constituting nature from nothingness.<sup>8</sup>

Several factors indicate that there was only one initial expansion and that the explosion that caused it was an absolute beginning to the universe of mass-energy and space-time. The first event was not the first moment ‘in time’, but the first moment ‘of time’. Whatever existed prior to the first moment was timeless and immutable. When we use the word ‘prior’ here, we do not mean temporarily prior in time, but outside time altogether. God existed ‘prior’ to the first moment that He was and is timeless. Although this is mysterious, it is not incoherent or contradictory.<sup>9</sup>

The above-mentioned expansion, coupled with deceleration, indicates a universe that is exploding outward from a point. Using the equations of general relativity, we can trace that ‘explosion’ backward to its origin, an instant when the entire physical universe burst forth from a single point of infinite density. That instant when the universe originated from a point of no size at all is called the ‘singularity’. The singularity is not really a point. It is the whole of three dimensional space compressed to zero size. This infinitely-shrunken space actually represents a boundary at which space ceases to exist.<sup>10</sup>

The time between the singularity and the present now has been measured to be about 16 billion years.<sup>11</sup> Volumes of data converge to tell us that, at most, the universe could be 20 billion years old. It seems only rational to conclude that God, not random chance, must be responsible for the creation. An eternally self-subsistent being is no more improbable than a self-subsisted event emerging from no cause. The probability of something physical coming from nothing is zero, and not a single physical state or event being observed or otherwise known is known to originate from nothing.

The *Anthropic Principle* is based on the most recent astronomical evidence for the existence of a super-intelligent creator of the cosmos. It states that the universe was fitted from the very first moment of its existence for the emergence of life in general and human life in particular. Astronomer Robert Jastrow<sup>12</sup> is of the opinion that the universe is amazingly pre-adapted to the eventual appearance of humanity. In order for life to be present today, an incredibly restrictive set of demands must have been present in the early universe. Scientific evidences point to a very sophisticated high tuning of the universe from the very beginning that makes human life possible. Scientist Robert Dicke said, ‘In fact it may be necessary for the universe to have the enormous size and complexity which

modern astronomy has revealed, in order for the earth to be a possible habitation for living beings'.<sup>13</sup>

We are seeing intelligent design in the history of life. The high information content in the living cell provides compelling evidence for an act of intelligent design of the first life. We speak of a God who acted in history, and who left His fingerprint all over creation as the evidence. The evidence from the telescope to the microscope is pointing powerfully in the direction of a Creator. A reasonable person weighing the purely scientific evidence can see that the data point strongly in the direction of the God hypothesis. When scientific evidence and Biblical teaching are correctly interpreted, they can and do support each other.

We speak of a God who acted in history and who left His fingerprint all over as the evidence. God cannot be checked in the same way as physical reality; the religious element is something more than the material, and it refers to a spiritual reality. The transcendence level cannot be conceptualised in terms of the here and now alone. This goes beyond purely human experience that is based merely on physical features. Science is the result of the attempt of man to determine what God did in the creation and what laws he laid down. The laboratory situation deliberately excludes the influences that are outside the lab.

Modern man's concern is the intelligibility and coherence of the total process of human experience in all its diversity. The natural forces are instrumental to God's action. The presence of divine causality does not diminish the effectiveness of natural causality, or vice versa, since they are on totally different planes and do not compete with each other.

The same Master Creator fashioned both the world and the human mind. The human mind is capable of discerning the divine ordering in the universe, and grasping its significance. Our knowledge of the rational world ties in with a belief in God's rational and creative existence. One should avoid uttering sentences like 'science has now proved all' to undermine faith in God. Here one needs to present evidences with caution. Since scientific theories change, we should not lean too heavily on development in science. Scientific breakthroughs will not change the situation radically with respect to the credibility of the Christian faith. While scientific evidences lend some support to the Christian faith, one must be careful not to exaggerate this support naively.

### **Historic events expressing divine disclosure**

From the events recorded in the Bible, we read about the mighty acts of God in history. When Abel worshipped God, we notice that he did it in faith. Also we read about Enoch walking with God by faith, and Noah working to build the ark in faith, especially when others were mocking at him. Later we read about the calling of Abraham, who obeyed God by faith, and about the promises given to him to become a blessing to all people.<sup>14</sup>

We notice from all the events recorded at various stages about a God who is interested in revealing Himself to man and bringing the rebellious man back to Himself. God has to

make the people understand physical cleansing in order to explain the spiritual cleansing required to have the right relationship with Him and to enjoy God.

The apostle Paul says God's invisible nature, even His power and deity, have been clearly perceived in the things that are made.<sup>15</sup> Though people are not persuaded by the evidence, this does not indicate an insufficiency in the evidence, but rather an insufficiency in man. This insufficiency is not a natural inability that provides man with an excuse. Man's failure to see this general revelation of God is not because he lacks eyes or ears or a brain with which to think. The problem is not a lack of knowledge or a lack of natural cognitive equipment, but a moral deficiency.

Man is held to be at fault for his refusal to submit to the evidence, which God plainly provides. The critical distinction between the objective data and the subjective appropriation of it is one that is overlooked far too often. If man had no natural cognitive ability to receive the general revelation, God could hardly hold him responsible for it. But man can claim no such excuse, as Paul emphatically states. We must make this distinction: that the manifestation of God by which He makes His glory known among His creatures is sufficiently clear as far as its own light is concerned.

Describing man's reaction to the knowledge of God, the suppression of truth is at the heart of Paul's psychology of atheism. Ungodliness involves a state of opposition to the majesty of God. Unrighteousness indicates an assault against the righteousness of God. No one can claim ignorance of the knowledge of God, and no one can cite insufficient evidence for not believing in God.

The matter of the knowledge of God is not so much an intellectual problem as it is a moral problem. It became an intellectual problem because the mind is darkened by man's indisposition or psychological bias against the light.<sup>16</sup> Not only that men failed to know God, but that they also failed to honour Him. The judgement is not against ignorance, but against the 'holding of the truth' in unrighteousness. Knowledgeable men, not ignorant men, are the focal points of divine wrath and judgement. Men are judged for refusing to acknowledge what they knew to be true.

Any reasoning process that begins with a denial of the known and proceeds on the basis of prejudice can hardly produce light, no matter how lucid and cogent the argument may be. The problem is not in the capacity for thought per se, but in a thought process that begins and is maintained by prejudice to the facts. As mentioned earlier, the intellectual problem is produced by the moral problem, not the moral problem by an intellectual one.

The moral qualitative difference that exists between man and God is greater than the difference that exists between man and nature. Man's alienation toward God is greater than his alienation toward nature simply because there is a greater degree of 'alien-ness' in God than there is in nature. We share creature-hood with nature, not with God. The qualitative difference between creator and the creature is an unbridgeable chasm.<sup>17</sup> One reason why men would witness to the existence and activity of the Holy One is that He actually exists, and mere need and imagination are not valid reasons.

Although there are many these days who seek earnestly the possibility of God's existence, some feel protected and quite secure in their unbelief. It is interesting to notice that even some atheists have pondered the possibility of theism. Even the atheist Bertrand Russell said, 'Unless you assume a God, the question of life's purpose is meaningless'.<sup>18</sup> We see these days an open-mindedness that has become synonymous with intellectual sophistication; this may also be due to absence of any conviction.

It is easier to hide behind philosophical arguments, than it is to admit our confusions and passions in the marketplace of life's transactions. However, the intensification in search of a spiritual answer continues in spite of the fact that every now and then there arises some new anti-theistic voice mocking religion and debunking the sacred. But there are many factors that prevent such seekers from finding the truth. Religion is one among the other things that people try to force-fit life's mental furniture in the process of restructuring reality. Sophisticated environment has induced within them an air of superiority that only gives false hope that they are better equipped for life no matter what jolts and bumps lie ahead.

The influence of anti-theism has left people with no mind to look back for their origin, no law to turn to for guidance, no meaning to cling to for life and no hope for the future. Having killed God, the atheist is left with no reason for being, no morality to espouse and no hope beyond the grave.

In this context, it is not lack of availability of truth, but the hypocrisy of the heart. It seems modern man is trying to reconstruct reality to suit his own fashion. Man's inclination is to flee from the truth. Even though man may be convinced of the truth of God's existence, that intellectual assertion in itself cannot overcome the moral inclination to flee from the truth. Man's corruption is such that he will do everything in his power to disprove, combat, obscure and deny the truth of that knowledge. The capacity for evil is locked into human heart.

Truth about God and spiritual realities are to be judged by taking all evidence into account. All men have the freedom of choice. Scripture and experience show that we are not forced to choose, whether accepting the truth or suppressing it. We are pictured as free to choose good or evil. We are free responsible persons, who must face the consequences of our choices. In response to the grace of God, man's freedom becomes a freedom to serve and obey God.

## **Summary**

### *Reasonable hypothesis and clues*

As matter and energy have no ordering principles in themselves, there must be some cause outside of the material universe to enforce order on them. It takes intelligence to bring about order and the cause must be something intelligent and powerful. Certain features of design in the world are more reasonable, given that God exists. Looking at the three classical arguments, namely the cosmological, teleological and moral arguments, we can come to the conclusion of an infinitely powerful, intelligent, good and personal Being. We can take a step of faith in the same direction that the evidence is pointing.

### *Evidences of divine disclosure*

God has revealed Himself in the creation and in the Scriptures. God gave us the rational faculty of reason and directed His revelation to it. God expects us to employ our reasoning abilities both to recognise His true revelation and to detect the fraudulent ones. The spiritual capacity of man, the revelation through nature and the Scriptures and the incarnation of Christ make it possible for the finite man to know the infinite God at least in part.

### *Understanding immaterial (nonmaterial) things*

Empirical evidences are reliable within their boundaries. But in understanding spiritual reality, we are dealing with a reality that we may not be able to quantify by applying scientific methods. It is possible to apply reason, personal observation and acceptance of authoritative information in understanding and testing our knowledge of immaterial (nonmaterial) things as well.

### *The inherent capacity of man to relate to God*

We have a built in capacity as well as a built in need to relate to God. God has endowed humans with a structure of rationality patterned after the divine ideas in His mind. The record of human history reveals a fervent pursuit of things spiritual. God created us to worship and no degree of academic progress will ever replace that need. There is a need within us to transcend the finite and to seek some sort of a Supreme Being.

### *Revelation-bearing evidences*

Looking at the narrow range of parameters for life support, not even one planet out of a trillion galaxies would be expected by natural processes alone to contain the necessary conditions to sustain life. The other revelation-bearing evidences include the sense of deity in man, his moral sense and capacity to receive revelation. The fact of theism persists in many cultures. The desire to live without any outside interference and with self-sufficiency drives some people away from God. People refuse to accept truth because of emotional bias as well.

### *Scientific evidences*

Science points to the infinite power and order of the universe. The Big Bang theory implies that the universe sprang into existence from nothing a finite time ago. It indicates a universe that is exploding outward from a point. Using the equations of general relativity, we can trace that 'explosion' backward to its origin, a single point of infinite density. This point is the whole of a three-dimensional space compressed to zero size, and the time from it to the present is estimated to be about 16 billion years. Scientific evidences point to a high tuning of the universe from the very beginning to make human life possible. An eternally self-subsistent Being is no more improbable than a self-subsisted event emerging from no cause. Scientific breakthroughs will not change the situation radically with respect to the credibility of Christian faith.

### *Historic events expressing divine disclosure*

As we look at historic events expressing a divine disclosure, they imply a God who is interested in revealing Himself to man as we look at historic events expressing divine

disclosure, leaving His fingerprint all over. No one can cite insufficient evidence for not believing in God. The problem is not a lack of knowledge, but a moral deficiency, a suppression of truth. It may be easier to hide behind philosophical arguments than it is to admit one's confusion. Man's corruption is such that he will do everything in his power to disprove and deny the truth. Scripture and experience show that we are not forced to choose. We are free to choose good or evil, but man's freedom is actually to serve and obey God.

Our faith is based on objective revelation in the Scriptures. We shall look into the reliability of the Bible on which our faith is grounded.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **FAITH GROUNDED IN THE SCRIPTURES**

#### **Reliability of the Bible**

The key to Christian faith rests in the Holy Bible. Christian faith is grounded in the acts and facts that are recorded for us in the Bible, and often corroborated by extra-Biblical history. A loving God is revealed both in the Old and in the New Testament. The Bible can be trusted. It is uniquely inspired by God<sup>19</sup>. The Bible is factual in all it teaches and touches upon. People may reject the Bible in order to free themselves to live a corrupt lifestyle.

Not only does the Bible meet the minimum requirements for being a book coming from God, but it also contains powerful additional evidence of having a divine origin. There is more evidence that the Bible is a reliable source than there is for any other book from the ancient world. It conveys one central theme, although written by 40 different authors with diverse backgrounds in 66 books over a period of approximately 1,500 years. These authors not only lived in different time periods, but were also in totally different cultures, living in totally different environments, in a wide variety of occupations. Yet, miraculously, all the books of Bible are in complete unity and agreement, revealing the nature of God, man and his relationship with God and how God planned to restore that relationship. The transforming power of the Bible was experienced in renewing people, giving them hope, courage, purpose, wisdom, guidance and power.

Everything hinges on whether the Bible is true. Most of what the Bible tells us about earthly things can be verified. The Bible was subjected to both an internal evidence test and an external evidence test to substantiate its accuracy, reliability and authenticity. Archaeology confirms that the Bible is historically accurate. There are thousands of archaeological findings in the Middle East that support the picture presented in the Biblical record. Proofs are available through recent discovery confirming the narratives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and King David. All the five cities mentioned in Genesis, including their destruction as stated in the Old Testament, were uncovered. Various aspects of the Jewish captivity have been confirmed. Reference in the Old Testament about an Assyrian king has been proved correct. In 1960, the tunnel through which Israel entered Jerusalem during David's time was confirmed. The site of Solomon's Temple was excavated. Archaeological excavations in modern Turkey have discovered the record of the Hittites. Archaeology has found substantial historicity of the Old Testament.<sup>20</sup>

There are also evidences for reliability from historical geography that seeks to relate events in history to geographical locations.

Roman historian Colon J. Hemer<sup>21</sup> shows that archaeology has confirmed hundreds and hundreds of details from the Biblical account of the early Church. Hemer gives a dozen reasons why the Acts of the Apostles had to have been written before AD 62, about 30 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. The same author of Acts, Luke, wrote the Gospel even earlier. It was written within one generation while eyewitnesses were still alive and could have disputed it if it were exaggerated or false. John A.T. Robinson declares 'that all 27 New Testament books were produced in approximately the two decades before AD 70, and that they are the work of the Apostles themselves or of contemporaries who worked with them. Since Jesus was crucified around AD 30, this would mean that the authors knew numerous eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and early church events'.<sup>22</sup> This means that there was not enough time left to become a legend. The closeness to the recorded accounts of the New Testament is an extremely effective means of certifying the accuracy of what is retained by a witness. We don't have anything like that from any other religious book from the ancient world.

The bibliographical test for the reliability of the New Testament is an examination of the textual transmission by which documents reach us. Look at the 5,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence for attestation! F.F. Bruce comments: 'There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual comparison'.<sup>23</sup> Also bibliographical tests for the reliability of the Old Testament with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a number of manuscripts have been found which scholars date before the time of Christ. When the rules and accuracy of the copyists are considered, it confirms the reliability of the copies we have today.

The Bible sets forth a true description of reality. The book must be literally true in every place and exhaustively accurate. No book, except mathematics and formal logic, meets these criteria. Interpretation of the Bible will lead us to view some portions of the Bible as literal statements of fact and some as symbolic presentation of truth in understandable form. The Biblical revelation uses thought models and patterns common to the authors and their listeners and sets forth through them the timeless truth that we need to know. We can have complete confidence in the truth of the insight given to us by the Bible, provided that we derive our insight in the right way, from a contextual interpretation in the light of the purpose for which the Bible is written.

The Biblical revelation has the ability to let man see himself as he is, and to inform us of God's activity in history, especially the effects in the lives of those who commit themselves to God.

### **Capacity of man to receive revelation from infinite God**

How can the mind of man know the mind of God? There is a limit to what human reason can discern about God by an appeal to nature. A natural knowledge of God serves its purpose well when it intimates both the necessity and possibility of a fuller knowledge of God than that hinted at by the natural order. God communicates His purposes and truths

about Himself in the Biblical revelation. God of the Bible is a rational God. Man was made in the divine image for intelligible communion with God. We are created as creatures capable of knowing His mind as well. God has made information about His mind and will available in revealed truths.

Human mind is capable to receive and understand divine revelation. God adjusts Himself to the capacities of the human mind and heart. God's willingness and ability to condescend, to scale Himself down, and to adapt Himself to our abilities is a mark of God's mercy toward us and care for us. God revealed Himself in this pictorial manner (anthropomorphism) because of our limited intellects. Images of God that represent Him as having a mouth or hands are divine 'baby talk', a way in which God comes down to our level and uses images we can handle. It is like a mother using different ways of speaking to a child than those that are appropriate for an adult.

The Greeks used logos as a synonym for mind or reason. Human participation in the eternal Logos of God (Jesus Christ) makes all human knowledge possible. Carl Henry presupposes about the Logos doctrine as 'an intelligible order or logos in things, an objective law, which claims and binds man, and makes possible human understanding and valid knowledge.... God's creation of man as a rational creature whose forms of thought correspond to the laws of logic subsisting in the mind of God, as well as to the rational character of the world as God's creation'.<sup>24</sup> The ordinaries of human words can be transfigured by grace, when the Holy Spirit applies those words to our minds and our lives, causing faith to be born from understanding. The Holy Spirit uses revealed truths as a means of persuasion and conviction. The knowledge of God or the experience of God-in-the-heart is not merely an intellectual understanding or explanation. God's revelation must become alive and dynamic in the present experience of the believer, through the action of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing irrational or illogical about the content of divine revelation. Christian experience includes a rational assent to the truth of God. The cognitive knowledge of God is replaced by personal encounter, religious feeling, trust and obedience.

The general revelation of God is rendered helpless by man's depravity so that it does not produce a true knowledge of God. Human depravity is something that clogs up the channels blocking the message, as the human race has degenerated from the law of its creation. Sin had affected creation so that natural revelation is not as clear as it would otherwise have been. Sin adversely affected human ability to interpret natural revelation. The impact of sin upon human intellect prevents the true interpretation of natural revelation. Sin necessitated a revelation of God's free grace to sinners. The special revelation of Scriptures, in Calvin's term, are the 'spectacles' which enables a man to read the record of general revelation correctly.

Human beings cannot cope with the infinity of facts within the universe. Even if we know all the facts, our immaturity prevents us from making the proper interpretation of them, as our sinfulness darkens our minds and alienates us from the truth. Man's rational powers desperately need the revelation of God. This revelation is the torch guiding the reason of

man. For our purposes, this revelation is the Scriptures communicated by the Supreme and True God through holy men.<sup>25</sup>

It is special revelation alone that can overcome the depravity of man and restore a true knowledge of God. Special revelation meets man's special condition, his depravity. It is redemptive revelation. Special revelation overcomes our sinful ignorance. For us sinners, this special revelation is the rule of eternal truth.

The knowledge of God is as redeemer, the revelation of God is the revelation of redemption and the redemption of God is the redemption in Jesus Christ. Special revelation is objective revelation preserved in the form of Scriptures. The certainty of the Scriptures is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures need the witness of the Spirit to establish it in the heart as the truth of God. It is the recognition of the scriptures as the redemptive Word of God. When the Spirit works with people of God, the Word of God is His instrument.

Illumination is the interior revelation of the heart enabling the sinner to see the exterior revelation in the Scriptures. This illumination is part of the blessedness of the human salvation. It is imperative for grace to include a revelation of God. Unless we know God we cannot choose Him.

The revelation is spiritually assimilated by the sinner, as he is recreated in being and renewed in mind. The certification of the Christian faith is found in the union of Word and the Spirit. It is to be found in special revelation centring on the person of Christ and affirmed by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

### **Man requires a standard outside of himself**

While secular humanists start and end with man, the Bible starts and ends with God.<sup>26</sup> Ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras said, 'Man is the measure of all things'. When the Bible says 'glory to God in the highest' the comments of the modern humanists imply 'glory to man in the highest'. This indicates that man is the ultimate standard by which all life is measured and judged. Values, laws, justice, good, beauty and right and wrong all are to be judged by man-made rules with no credence to either God or the Bible.

The secular humanists believe that man will be able to solve all his problems. But their creed offers no concrete solution to those looking for a way out. Man operating by himself cannot set up a true standard of justice or values in the world without God. If one man decides his human view of values is correct, and another man decides his view, which is different, is correct, then there is no one to decide between them. Without a higher standard of authority to go to, which is God, all of life is based on the values of the majority or of a dictator in power.

When secular humanists say 'man is getting better and better every day in every way' all know that it is not happening. Not only is there no hope found, there is only despair left. Instead of solving problems, they create them. It leads man to look beyond himself for the answers.

Secular humanists pretend to esteem the human being above all else. In reality, they take away all worth from mankind. Unless our worth is rooted and grounded in something objective and outside ourselves, we are of value only to ourselves and can never rise above the impermanence of our own short lives. The God of the Bible is outside our own finite and transitory universe and His love for us gives us a value that transcends not only ourselves but also our finite universe as well. The spiritual condition of man is such that he is past the point of 'saving himself'. There is no way of knowing and differentiating right from wrong without a standard outside of man. Man not only needs a standard outside of himself, but also some outside intervention. While secular humanism make all human dignity self-centred, the message of the Bible gives true worth and dignity to man.

Revelation is a faith-claim that God discloses Himself to us in space and time. This faith-claim must be tested by reason for the simple reason that there are many such faith-claims and they cannot all be true since they contradict each other. We can support our faith in the Bible by our reason. Having faith in the God who discloses Himself to us in understandable ways through real historical personages and events, ours is a reasonable and verifiable faith.

We can accept Scripture as a rationally validated authority. One of the functions of reason is to judge revelation. Reason can judge not only the meaning, but also the morality and evidence of revelation. The Scripture is credible throughout and we are bound to that which it binds us. We need not commit to that which the Scriptures are not committed.

The Biblical writers did not seek to use religious experiences as proof of anything. They simply described them. Religious experience is not the same as the description of religious experience. The Biblical writers were unashamed to proclaim the ultimate mystery in religious experience. There is an element of eye not having seen, ear not having heard, or seeing through a divine glass of the not yet, still to be fully grasped and revealed. Yet, there is a rationality and objectivity connected with it.

We need to be careful in the interpretation of accounts given in models and analogies. Since the central model for God is the human person, we must be careful to ask which aspects of the model we should regard as important and relevant, and which are irrelevant and inapplicable. There are passages that speak of God with hands and feet. There are other aspects of personality such as intelligence and purpose. There are teachings about the different aspects of the personality of God such as sovereign ruler, judge, loving father, etc. All these are inadequate by themselves because there is one supreme model of God, a point at which the model and the reality have become one – Jesus Christ.

The wide range of images given in the Bible will be mutually self-correcting and self-limiting. When they are used together, they enable us to build up a sufficient picture of the total reality that the Bible reveals for the purposes which it sets before us. The images, models and analogies in the Bible are given to us. We could never of ourselves, have arrived at an adequate conception of God and of spiritual reality. Without this revelatory character we would merely end up by making God in our image.

The scripture is not telling how man finds God, but how God finds man. It is God who breaks into man and lets Himself be known. So, in the Scripture it is not proof for the existence of God, but the true knowledge of God, or the reality of God is given. God establishes His reality with man by giving him a knowledge of Himself that is valid through acts of revelation and redemption.

Also the Bible dictates morality to us. Morality is about right and wrong behaviour. Every moral system gives some account of ideals, defining what is good and right. It is said that knowledge without character is useless and dangerous. The use of knowledge is to be guided and controlled by moral and spiritual values. Good values make a person more human or a better human being, while bad values make one less human or even inhuman. Values have to do with certain behaviours and modes of conduct, a belief that a particular mode of conduct is preferable to an opposite one. Morality speaks of the rules to be followed defining what ought and ought not to be done, of the motives that help and hinder our moral choices.

Our morality is a reflection of the nature of God. The rules which specify what ought and ought not to be done are revealed by God. The motive involved in morality is the wish to reflect the nature of God. 'Ought' statements are prescriptive and are revealed in the Bible. The transcendent God reveals morality to mankind.

All people have some grasp of morality. God has put in the nature of things and in the human nature a moral law. It is an objective rational morality. It is in God that we find the source of morality.

The involvement of God with the Biblical account of morality offers a consistent statement of a lifestyle that is a possible alternative to other moral systems. We are not pictured as forced to choose. We are pictured as free to choose good or evil. God is pictured setting before us that choice of good or evil. We are in need of guidance to make the right choice. A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. Christian morality is concerned with what is right and wrong in itself. We have objective basis for morality. Biblical revelation is the keystone of the testing of the truth. Our morality stands on the basis of revelation. Our values have absolute basis because they are prescribed in the revealed Word of God. Belief in absolute moral values is reasonable.

### **A human book without error**

The Holy Spirit moved Biblical writers<sup>27</sup> as they wrote the Word of God. Here inspiration means that the 'inexplicable influence of the Holy Spirit which enabled the human authors to transcribe inerrantly God's full and final message to all mankind with its historic and other attendant details without obscuring the individuality of the author'. Revelation relates to the origin and actual giving of truth.<sup>28</sup> Inspiration, on the other hand, relates to the receiving and actual recording of truth. Inspiration means that 'God the Holy Spirit worked in a unique supernatural way so that the written words of the scripture writers were also the words of God'.<sup>29</sup>

The writers were moved by God to record that which God desired. God used each individual writer and his personality to accomplish a divinely authoritative work. God's control was always with them in their writings with the result being the Bible, the Word of God in the words of men. The books were recognised as inspired by the Church. They were inspired by God when written. In fact, the writers might not have been aware that they were writing God's Word, although they were under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Because the preponderance of evidence points that it is God's Word, we only gain a lot and have nothing to lose from believing it. It is authoritative since we received it from the hand of God. Since it was written by men of God, it is prophetic. It is authentic since the validity was established. Because of its transforming power, it is dynamic and alive.

It is God's message given in man's language. The mediums for original revelation were the Hebrew (Old Testament) and the Greek (New Testament) languages. The earliest versions were prepared to assist in the propagation of the Christian faith among people whose native tongues were Syriac, Latin, and Coptic.

The Massorettes (from Massora, 'tradition') were well disciplined, they treated the text with the greatest imaginable reverence, and they devised a complicated system of safeguards against scribal slips. The Dead Sea Scrolls give us an explicit and positive answer to the question of whether the Hebrew text (Massorettes) faithfully represents the text as originally written by the authors of Old Testament books.

There are many things in the Bible we cannot understand, many things we only think we understand, but there are many things in the Bible we cannot misunderstand. The Bible was true, is true now and will remain true for all time to come. Its message is unchanging although the generations of people who use the Bible are changing. People of different languages and cultures can respond to God from their own settings substantially the same way those originally responded.

Bible history stands confirmed in its essential outline as far back as secular historical information can take us. Our approach to the Bible should be that of Jesus to the Old Testament. Remember what the risen Lord affirmed to the disciples on their way to Emmaus: 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken...'<sup>30</sup> Here, Jesus was not speaking with his possible human or even Jewish limitations. He was the risen Lord. This is the foundation of our faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures. Our faith in Genesis as the inspired Word of God depends on our faith in the authority of the risen Lord.

Jesus considered the Old Testament to be the Word of God<sup>31</sup> and promised His disciples, who either wrote or had control over the writing of the New Testament books, that the Holy Spirit would bring all things back to their remembrance. Knowing this, we can insist, with sound and accurate logic, that the Bible is God's Word. Revelation in the Bible is supernaturally grounded. It is the disclosure of a Divine Being. It is not developed within human nature. It is revelation from 'above' and not construction from 'below'. It is objective and not merely subjective. 'What is' is important, and not what

any one thinks or feels. Ultimate truth cannot be a matter of personal choice. The Bible is authoritative, absolute and final in the sense of God giving His message to mankind. It is absolute truth, though not absolute knowledge.

All truth is an illumination of the mind of God, whether the truth is secular or sacred or whether the mind is that of the sinner or saint. The human mind is light but it is wise only as it partakes of the Supreme Light. Reason alone cannot arrive at ultimate truth as our fallen-ness affects our faculty of knowing.

Historical knowledge is dependent on a prior belief that some people are reliable and trustworthy. Our firsthand knowledge of anything is a mere drop in the ocean of knowledge. If we were dependent on firsthand knowledge alone, we would be impoverished intellectually. All history would be eliminated and much of science too. We cannot avoid depending on authority, especially the authority of experts. Experts are people whose credentials and training are trustworthy in their particular field. It will cause error if authority in one field tries to speak authoritatively on another field. For example, when an eminent scientist says he does not believe in the existence of God, his hearers cite him as an authority of atheism. Actually, one cannot be an authority of what is not; he can only be an authority of what is.

Science is able to give us knowledge and in many cases it can be very precise and accurate. But science cannot give much about God the invisible, as science mainly deals with observation. Science is trying to describe the mechanism of the world, while the Bible gives us absolute truths about ultimate reality.

The Bible does not contain absolute knowledge. We should not make the Bible to say that which it does not propose to say, or what the Bible writers have not intended to say on various branches of knowledge.

The Bible is pertinent to us today. It is a book that would be applicable, not only to all cultures and nationalities, but also all generations. The Bible has been read by more people and published in more languages than any other book in history. More copies of its entirety and more portions and selections have been produced than any other book. No other book has known anything approaching this constant circulation from generation to generation.

### **The Bible and modern science**

Modern science has not yet made faith unacceptable. Science is a body of knowledge obtained by methods based upon observation. Scientific method is a way of learning through repeated observation or experiences. The basis for science is the reliability of the human mind. The task in science is to understand Nature. Scientists presuppose that Nature is real, rational (a belief in the regularity of events) and understandable.

Scientific explanations are accepted as valid, although one theory may be superseded by another in the process of exploring Nature. The nature of energy, particles and the like are explained in physics. Chemistry deals with the study of atoms, elements, molecules and compounds, biology deals with the study of living cells, the explanation of plants and

vegetation are dealt with in botany, while that of animals are dealt with in zoology. Human physiology deals with the study of man's physical nature. As man is a social being, many aspects of man in society are dealt with in sociology. These are various levels of scientific explanations of the physical world from energy level to man in society. Explanations of the ultimate reality or God level are dealt with in theology. Both the theologian and the physical scientist must have the willingness to accept the explanations of each other. There is no reason for the physicist, for example, to feel insecure when a theologian explains about the intervention of supernatural reality in the natural world. Similarly, the theologian should not try to blame the physicist when certain aspects of modern science do not make sense to him. Each of the above explanations is valid.

Biblical writers did not use the language of any science to describe natural things. They shared with their countrymen 'the views then prevalent as the mechanism of the universe'. They used popular language, the language in which people converse to describe natural things. They have also used phenomenal language, which pertains to appearance. Phenomenal descriptions of natural events are what appear on the surface to be the case when events are taken simply at their face value, as they appear to common sense and are described in everyday language. These phenomenal statements about nature are free of any scientific postulation of theories. These statements are not subject to theorising either. Therefore, there is no theory about astronomy, nuclear science, geology, or zoology that is intended by the Biblical writers.

Biblical conflicts with science must be understood in terms of common sense approaches to the 'phenomenal' world. Also the Biblical writers have employed the culture of the times in which it was written. It is possible to filter the cultural elements after understanding the meaning of language originally used and accept the trans-cultural truths.

If the Bible's writers had used the language of modern science in describing natural things, we know that those who lived in pre-scientific days would not have understood. If it were written in the language of the final science that is yet to come, we who live in modern scientific days would not have understood. Although the Bible is not written in the scientific language of any age, it is not written in anti-scientific language either. A correct understanding of the original meaning and the culture will help us to grasp the meaning of statements made about nature.

Scientists observe the events in God's creation and then attempt to discover the rules as to how these events hang together. We can consider scientific activities as one aspect of the fulfilment of the command of the Bible given to mankind to subdue the earth.<sup>32</sup> Being aware of the fallenness of creation (which includes our own reason), we need to submit all our 'reasonable ideas' to the light of revelation and to the facts elucidated by scientific endeavour.

There will be constant temptation to submit facts to reason in a way that can easily lead to a distortion of truth. God's activity is present all the time. So there is no point in saying God uses natural laws. God is there all the time holding everything in existence. Our discovery of the regularities in the events we have been observing means that for us

natural laws are descriptive rather than prescriptive, and emerge as features within the created order.

Concepts are terms devised and made use of in our human symbol system. Physical laws do not cause physical processes to take place. Our mathematical laws do not cause the earth to revolve. We do not know to what extent the laws of physics are dependent on the configuration of the universe at any given moment. God is always utterly other than His creation. God's priority is absolute in His eternal time scale, not to be found or measured from within our relativistic space-time continuum.

To a believer the natural events must be a claim for a certain pattern of relationship between the transcendent God and His creation. It is not simply one way of seeing reality. It is the true and accurate account of the nature of reality as a whole. The authority of science to dictate boundaries to theology has been weakened. The history of science shows an incredible list of cases where science has changed its views and replaced former theories. In certain cases, scientific theories have been falsified and the theological views confirmed.

Caution must be urged to guard against using God to merely cover our scientific ignorance. Past cases of inappropriately appealing to God to explain gaps should warrant caution. Gaps may be getting worse rather than better with the advance of science. It is not our ignorance of science that should cause us to appeal to God, but the knowledge of the Biblical text.

Scientific pursuits and a belief in God ought not to be seen as contradictory approaches to reality. Science and theology are two distinct, non-interacting approaches to the same reality. Theology starts with faith in revelation, involves receptivity and commitment, and is based on personal involvement in living the truth. Science involves active observation of the universe and objectivity and detachment, and makes no demand on the scientist. Theology provides the metaphysical foundation for science and helps to ground the latter by explaining the necessary preconditions of science.

With the intellectual abilities endowed upon us by the Creator, we can acquire knowledge in order to exercise our stewardship. We can do this in such a way that we are able to use the knowledge to serve our fellow men more effectively. The motive behind the scientific description must then be to get more understanding of the world, and better be able to control the phenomena that interact with our lives. The better we are able to control the phenomena that affect our lives, the more likely we are to improve the quality of life and its potentialities for expression and fulfilment.

Control is not to manipulate. When we heal the disease, fertilize the fields, make traffic laws, we are in the process of controlling the world. Here control can be translated into service, and the power to control comes with it a great responsibility. A love for God prompts a love for knowing the world that He has created. The quest for knowledge and truth is not hindered, but guided by the very purpose of God revealed in the Word of God.

### **Applying the principles of God's Word in life and work**

The believer who is a scientist can take his Bible to his place of work, not for finding some scientific theories in it, but in order to apply the principles of God in his life and work. The Bible says<sup>33</sup> it is instructive in teaching what is right. It is the straight line that can be used to compare and find whether other lines are crooked or not. The Bible is our standard to learn what is right as well as to think right. We need to know what nourishes us so that we can focus on it keeping away from what deteriorates us. It is instructive in rebuking what is wrong. It indeed is a good mirror to look at and check whether there is any 'filth' in us. It brings to our attention even those undesirable things in our life that we thought are harmless.

Not only does the Bible tells us what is wrong, it is also instructive in showing us how to get right. There are many instructions in it giving illustrations from the lives of several characters indicating the way one can get right with God and do right things. In addition, the Bible tells us how to stay right as well. The Holy Spirit uses the Word not only to cleanse us but also to keep us cleansed.

The Bible is instrumental in our salvation. The message of salvation is clearly explained with all its implications. It is instrumental in our sanctification to live a pure and holy life pleasing to God in this world, setting us apart from this world. Since the promise given in the Bible is that we will be blessed of God, and at the same time we will be a blessing to others, it is instrumental also in our services in meeting various human needs.

Although we all go through various kinds of experiences in life, the Word of God is applicable in our life situations. It encourages by truths revealed to us regarding the sufficiency of God's provisions to meet our needs, as well as the sufficiency of God's grace to face situations in life. The revealed truths are the basis for developing theological statements about God and His activity. Our life experiences can never become the basis for truths. But the revealed truths in God's Word can be confirmed in our life experiences. We are faced with a lot of opportunities to confirm the Biblical truths in our day to day experience.

When we read that God will provide for our needs,<sup>34</sup> we can subject that belief in His provisions to the test of experience. The goodness of God<sup>35</sup> can be confirmed and we will be able to prove that God is good even when everything looks bad. When it says, 'God is our refuge and strength and a tested help in trouble',<sup>36</sup> our afflictions and problems are found as opportunities to experience God in a unique way. When circumstances are going to rule over us and try to defeat us, we are strengthened by the truth that 'we can bear and do all things because of Christ who never ceases to make us able'.<sup>37</sup> When we place our feeble hands into God's able hands while believing the truth, we experience Christ making it possible for us to rule over such circumstances.

As we face mountainous problems and obstacles, we are able to experience the one who 'leaping upon the mountains and skipping upon the hills'<sup>38</sup> making our feet 'like the feet of a deer'<sup>39</sup> to surmount the insurmountable difficulties in life. Also, as we go through anxious moments in life, we can experience the peace our Lord left with us, that is 'His

own peace'.<sup>40</sup> Also we can be free on the 'inside' by getting rid of bitterness, resentment and hurt feelings.<sup>41</sup> We can follow the principle of yielding our personal rights to God and receiving privileges that are given according to our needs from the example shown by Christ.<sup>42</sup> The Bible is full of such promises and principles that can strengthen our faith and make possible the seemingly impossible.

## **Summary**

### *Reliability of the Bible*

Christian faith is grounded in the acts and facts recorded in the Bible. There is more evidence that the Bible is a reliable source than there is for any other book from the ancient world. Most of what the Bible tells about the earthly things can be verified. Archaeology confirms that the Bible is historically accurate. Also, there are evidences for reliability from historical geography. The New Testament was written while eyewitnesses were still alive, and this is an effective means of certifying the accuracy of what is retained by a witness.

### *Capacity of man to receive revelation from infinite God*

God communicates His purposes and truths about Himself in the Biblical revelation. Special revelation enables us to read and understand God's revelation in nature. This objective revelation in the Scriptures is the torch that guides the reason of man to meet his condition. It overcomes our sinful ignorance.

### *Man requires a standard outside of himself*

Secular humanists believe that man will be able to solve all his problems. Man operating by himself cannot set up a true standard of justice or values without God. There is no way of knowing and differentiating right from wrong without a standard outside of man. We can accept the Scripture as a rationally validated authority.

### *A human book without error*

There is mystery in religious experience, yet there is rationality and objectivity connected with it. Our morality stands on the basis of this objective revelation in which the values and standards are prescribed. Because the preponderance of evidence points to it being God's Word, we only gain and we have nothing to lose from believing it.

### *The Bible and modern science*

The Bible is authoritative, absolute and final in the sense of God giving His message to mankind. The Bible gives us absolute truth about ultimate reality. The Bible does not contain absolute knowledge. We should not make the Bible to say that which it does not propose to say. The Bible's writers did not use the language of any science to describe natural things. Although the Bible is not written in scientific language of any age, it is not written in anti-scientific language.

### *Applying the principles of God's Word in life and work*

The inspired Word of God is instructive in teaching what is right, rebuking what is wrong, showing us how to get right as well as to stay right. The Bible is instrumental in our salvation and our sanctification. We can apply the principles of God's Word in our

life and services as the daily study of it nourishes us. We require the rational justification for faith. We shall see in the next chapter that reason and faith are not contradictory to each other.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **SUPPORTING FAITH WITH REASON**

#### **Genuine faith that demands reason**

Faith commits itself only to that which is worthy of belief. No one believes anything unless he has thought it worthy of belief. Genuine faith demands reason and reason demands adequate grounds for faith. Here reason comes to the aid of faith. We note that faith is a manner in which we accept something or receive something. Reason may have good reasons to reject that which faith proposes. So the issue is between reason and that which faith accepts. Reason does have a proper function in the Christian faith; otherwise we could never distinguish truths from superstitious beliefs.

Defence of faith includes intelligent response to legitimate questions about our hope.<sup>43</sup> Although we first believe and then subject that belief to the test of experience, in certain times we look for the reason behind the probability of such a belief. Then we begin with reason and end in faith. For example, it is reasonable to hold that special revelation is probable once we accept the fact that God exists. Thus it becomes reasonable to hold that Scriptures are God's special revelation.

The act of faith is an act of the intellect, for there cannot be blind faith. Intellectual assent is followed by physical action in order to derive the benefits. It is like having faith in the sturdiness of the chair or the soundness of the bank. In the spiritual realm, the equivalent of the physical act is the will or volition. Intellectual assent itself is an act of the will. It is an internal act of commitment. There is no volition without intellectual assent, and there is no intellectual assent without volition. The will, which moves the intellect to faith, has been previously supplied by the intellect, with information that forms the basis of the motivation to believe. Faith is not an irrational act; it is always made on some credible grounds.

Belief and action become one unitary state of mind. Belief alone does not save, but action does. Actions are consequences of faith, not prerequisites of faith. One cannot talk of faith without talking of the will. Will is the most powerful of the human faculties. Faith is itself a species of the will, for the will, prior to knowledge, dictates to faith. Otherwise, will would bow down to reason and lose its autonomy. While understanding the spiritual reality, the grace of God touches the will and teaches it to forsake its 'pride' and thus come to the truth. Coming into the truth is not mere intellectual vision but demands the act of the will in an act of moral obedience. If the will is wrong, the motions of the soul

will be wrong. If the will is right, the motions of the soul will not just be blameless, but will even be praiseworthy. God empowers us to put our trust in Christ, as our will makes the decision.

Faith is not something opposed to reason. Faith is something that everybody needs to get started in any direction, and to keep going in the face of disappointment. Faith is not something some people have and others don't have. Reason builds on a foundation of faith. Our faith is grounded, tested and verified on the basis of reliable authority. We have the foundation of 'solid rock', God, and we trust in the goodness of God all the more when the presence of evil and suffering cause us to doubt. The materialist may say that his rock is matter and to never move from an unshakeable faith in materialism. Reason is never isolated from morality. Just as sin and vice blind and cripple the reason, faith and hope enlighten it.

The rationalism of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and critical philosophies since then, sought to justify knowledge on the basis of human reasoning apart from revelation, and tried to argue for reality without faith.<sup>44</sup> But all of them could be shown to be unable to live consistently with reason and reason alone. We find that reason without faith is impossible to sustain consistency in thought and in practice. Some Christian thinkers concluded that there could be no differentiation between the subject and object in the mystic consciousness. Hence their beliefs are not subject to rational criticism.

Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855) propounded the idea that reality cannot be taught or communicated rationally or academically. His famous idea is 'taking a leap into the dark' in reference to the leap of faith.<sup>45</sup> According to this, God does not exist objectively and God exists for those who believe. This is faith without reason. We need to avoid the extreme autonomy of rationalism that is reason without faith and is found futile. Also we have to reject the insanity of subjective irrationalism or faith without reason. It was Albert Einstein who said 'faith without reason is blind, and reason without faith is lame'. No wonder some people follow after superstitious beliefs and some give lame excuses for their unbelief.

Faith is not unreasonable and reason, though not primary, is important in that belief and understanding both entail intellectual assent. Reason, as logic, is always present in deducing from Scriptures the objective truth propositions. In other words, when we read Scriptures to deduce truths, we are reasoning all the time. Although we begin with faith, it is supported by reason.

The Bible established the right of reason in our beliefs.<sup>46</sup> William Brenton Greene, Jr. argued that reason itself is a divine revelation. He said, 'Reasoning is controlled by laws which God has established and which reveals to us His intellectual nature. Our thoughts are not God's thoughts; yet when we really think, it is in accord with the regulative principles of His thought. Logic binds our thinking because God is essentially logical'.<sup>47</sup> Human reason itself reflects the reason of God, and from it derives its laws and its validity. Faith involves the whole being, which includes the reasoning mind. But we realise that the mind must be regenerated and be submissive to the Word.

We put our faith in something solid and can clarify the reasons for believing. We believe in Jesus because the object of our faith is solidly supported by the evidence of history, archaeology, literature and experience in Jesus. It is to embark on our experiment of faith by doing what faith would do. Like learning to ride a bicycle, we need to be a following learner by doing what Jesus says. We have to get on to get the feel of it, to taste and see.<sup>48</sup> The more we do this, the more we will experientially be woven into a web of faith. Faith is not just a mental assent, but it is action, a direction of life. We have to move out and do it. The more we experience by doing, the less we have to worry about intellectual questions about why certain things can't be true – we know they are true. When we begin to practice faith, God begins to validate it. Personal experience over and over will confirm what no empirical evidence could ever prove. It is not a matter of how much faith we have; it is a matter of whether we have any at all. God promises to anyone who trusts in Jesus strength enough to stay faithful to Him.<sup>49</sup>

Believing in Christ is not tantamount to committing intellectual suicide. God is a reasoning and reasonable God.<sup>50</sup> It is our duty to show on what grounds our faith possesses a true knowledge of God. Paul reasons, explains and persuades people to accept the message.<sup>51</sup> This means reason surely has a place in our coming to believe in Christ. However, reason has its limitations. If the finite man could understand all God's ways, and knew as much as God, then God would cease to be God!

Reason can build a bridge, but the encouragement and attraction of faith are needed to motivate using the bridge to make the crossing. Faith can use the bridge that reason builds. George Eldon Ladd says, 'Faith means believing in the light of historical facts, consistent with evidence on the basis of witnesses'.<sup>52</sup> It is not a leap in the dark, an irrational credulity, a believing against evidence and against reason. It is rational to believe that something exists if no good reason has been given to doubt it.

The rationally undeniable is the actually real. Whatever is logically necessary is actually so. It is logically necessary to think of God as necessary, and then it is actually true that He does necessarily exist. The ontological argument is the classic case in point. The object in question exists outside our minds when it is not being thought of. Even in the case of perceptual objects, they exist in reality even when no one is thinking of them. Subatomic particles and black holes are objects in thoughts by means of theoretical constructs. An object of thought, neither the cosmos nor the Supreme Being is thought of as part of anything else. When we affirm the real existence of God or anything else, we are affirming that the object exists outside the mind when it is not being thought of. We are able to experience by faith the object identified in thought due to our ability to think and reason.

We can describe the things of this world as having a dependent, conditioned and caused existence. They have existence only for the time during which they endure – from the moment they came into existence until the time they pass away. That which is independent, unconditioned and uncaused in its existence has its existence in, through and of itself. Because man bears the rational image of God, man can understand the world God has made. Reason in man and the reason expressed in nature must be the same

kind. This is expressed by saying that the world is created by the Logos, a term which means both reason and the word.

Reason is the source to man, not only of principles of knowledge, but of laws of duty as well. Man is a being who distinguishes good and evil and who recognises the obligation to obey the law. In this, man proclaims himself a subject of moral law, and a being with a moral duty. Man bears the image of God in his deputed sovereignty over the created order, and he shows his ability of rational thought in his achievements in arts and civilisation. Faith can use this matter of intelligibility that reason provides as a bridge. Reason can support faith, although reason is not fully adequate for establishing spiritual truths.

### **Methods in apologetics for valid reasoning**

The problem that reason has with the supernatural is not that it is irrational, but rather that it goes beyond the rational. One common definition states, 'Apologetics is the science of the rational proofs that Christianity is the supernatural and so the authoritative, the exclusive, the final, in a word, the absolute religion'.<sup>53</sup> Its role is to give an answer to the critics of Christian faith, and to show that the supernatural, although 'above' reason, is still congruous with it. The purpose of apologetics, also, is to help people by removing the barriers to faith in leading them to the road to the cross.

We have a responsibility to answer fairly and fully their intellectual questions. We should not minimise the seriousness of intellectual objections to faith. We need not consider an intellectual defence of the Christian faith as un-spiritual. We need to defend the truth and explain the credibility of what we believe. It is also important to correct the misunderstanding that the mark of true spirituality is to refrain from arguing on intellectual grounds.

Various apologetic approaches are adopted in order to handle issues such as the theory of knowledge one assumes, the value of theistic proofs, the degree of certainty that Christianity provides, the role of evidences in apologetics and the amount of common ground between Christian and other faiths.

In classical apologetics, the emphasis is the use of logical criteria. The law of non-contradiction (that is, two mutually exclusive entities cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense), cause and effect reasoning, self-consistency, comprehensiveness and coherence are applied in determining the validity of competing religious philosophies. This approach emphasises the function of proof in apologetics. Reason is the ground on which the arguments for defence are made. The classical method was developed by Justin Martyr and Thomas Aquinas, and later men like Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield and others advocate it.

In the evidential approach, empirically and historically verifiable facts are taken as the ground of commending the Christian faith. In this approach the defence is based on facts and is known as apologetics of defence. Joseph Butler is the pioneer in this approach and later men like John Warwick Montgomery and others advocate it.

The reformed approach states that rather than trying to prove or defend the faith on the basis of reason or fact, we ought to ground it on reason and fact. Empirical and rational approaches to religious truth are doomed to failure by the moral impairment of the human mind fallen in sin. Here it is also assumed that the self-sufficiency of human beings to employ reason and interpret facts independent of divine revelation will only add to the problem. Because this approach tends to focus on proving the irrationality of non-Christian positions, it is considered as apologetics of offence. Here the emphasis is on God's revelation of Himself and in the Scriptures. This approach was inspired by John Calvin and was first formulated by Cornelius VanTil.

In fideism, the emphasis is just to believe in God or Christ apart from any reasoning or evidence. It maintains that human knowledge of truth is at the bottom a personal matter of the heart or the will, rather than of the intellect. Here the emphasis is also on the transcendence and hidden-ness of God, repudiating natural theology for theistic proofs. We see in this approach the value given to a personal, subjective dimension in faith and religious commitment. This tends to argue for the function of persuasion in apologetics. Martin Luther, and then in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, are those who advocated this.

All the above approaches are valid for the context in view. Human beings in general process new information and ideas by relating them in some fashion to their own experience in life. Some analyse human experience in terms of universal truths in which the Christian message is grounded. Others don't go for arguments, but use approaches in a passive way to help people of other faiths to experience God's love in Christ. We can learn from all approaches. As we get to know the person with whom we share the Gospel, we may be able to recognise some of the personality traits associated with one approach and then choose to draw more from that approach. People are either dead in sin or born again, lost or found. But they may be closer to or further away from crossing over from life to death, depending on what they believe or do not believe. Some approaches are more useful at certain points along the spectrum than at others.

These approaches need to be complemented by the art of apologetics. While recognising the strength of the science of issue-based apologetics, it must be complemented with the art of the people-based approach. As people have different reasons for not believing, it requires taking the trouble to express ideas at such a level and in such a form that our audience can understand and respond.

Also, we have to present the divine initiative of the Gospel in terms with which its hearers can identify, using terms and modes of expression that make its challenge intelligible. We may have to avoid using a cultural framework and vocabulary unfamiliar to our audience. We know that in the past the cultural norms of the presenter projected onto the Gospel and distortion of various kinds were introduced due to such carelessness. Also, the suspicion that the Gospel is an 'outsider' to the culture can be disarmed through the use of words, ideas, events and values familiar to that culture. Sensing the points of contact that exist for the Gospel, we can explain new ideas in such a way that the

strangeness can also be minimised. We must remember to do it in the God-given and God-authorised matrix of Scripture.

We have to recognise that there are limitations to apologetics. We cannot argue people into the Kingdom of God. Although apologetics does not create faith, it creates a climate favourable to faith. It creates a climate of trust in which God can be seen as worthy of faith and commitment. Eventually the people must see how their anxieties and needs are met by Christ. Apologetics helps people to be convinced that the Christian faith is true. Conviction of truth becomes the bridge by which they enter into the promises of God and all that He offers. Realising that God loves will be a joyful reaction to the overwhelming divine love revealed in Jesus Christ.

### **Reason and experiences that lead to faith**

It was mentioned in the earlier chapter that reason and experience led us to believe that the universe was created and that it was created by an intelligent being. God has revealed this to us by special revelation and by incarnation in Jesus Christ.

All of us hold certain reasonable assumptions and relate our life experiences to those deeply held views. Some people use such worldviews and belief systems as shields to protect themselves from the real world. A worldview is the sum of a person's basic assumptions about life and the nature of reality. Removing those shields allows the harsh realities of the real world to raise questions about the credibility of that belief system. These assumptions are accepted without any empirical validation. However, people are aware that probability, not certainty, is the law of the life of experience. We can talk about varying degrees of probability about what we believe. But as believers in Christ, we can quite happily live our lives on the basis of our assumptions without letting the lack of absolute certainty cause us any real difficulty. Although we also live on the basis of probability, our faith rests on history, reason, experience and revelation, like the four legs of a well-balanced table.

Until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the criticism was that Christian faith was basing itself on the person of Jesus Christ, rather than on the permanent, universal, unshakeable foundations of reason. Now it is generally conceded that no such unshakeable and universal foundations actually exist. Just about all human knowledge rests upon a degree of uncertainty. The fact that faith is predominant in our worldview and that we cannot prove our faith with certainty are no longer crippling disadvantages to us. It places us in the best of intellectual company and marks us off from those who naively think that the really important things in life can be proved with certainty. We are content to live in a world in which nothing important is certain and nothing certain is important.<sup>54</sup>

The threat of yesterday is often deposited in the trashcan of history today. The worldviews some regarded as challenges to our faith are not around us any more, although we begin to face some fresh challenges. What one generation invented, another generation discards. What proved liberating to one generation proves oppressive to another. Often individuals adopt a belief system because it happens to be fashionable among their peer group. Belief systems ultimately rest on something. All belief systems rest on presuppositions. It is quite

possible that a person's life is actually based on a whole set of unrecognised presuppositions. However, the belief systems very often linger on long after their theoretical foundations have been demolished and discredited. Although the base has collapsed, the superstructure remains, at least for a while. But a crisis may result in which faith can be born. Our task is to determine the nature of the crisis, and then to help to find the answer in Christ, challenging those discredited foundations. It is worthwhile to explore what the logical conclusions of a given belief system might be. The Christian faith offers ideas with a distinguished past and an assured future.

Faith in its most basic form is trust, or committing oneself to truths without the benefit of scientific confirmation. Every day we put our trust in a number of things or a variety of people, including package labelling by manufacturers of consumable items. We are creatures who have both the inclination and the desire to believe. Faith in God provides specific, comforting answers to a number of questions of life that science cannot answer. Here we find our security in the immovable God, and our faith gives our life a stability that cannot be shaken. The heart of the concept of faith in the Old Testament is the quality of 'reliability' or 'steadfastness'.

In an uncertain and wavering world, the believer becomes steadfast himself by laying hold of the 'immovable rock' that keeps us from being swept away by the turbulent and violent flow of fast moving rivers of greed and disappointments. Here faith involves accepting propositional statements as truth. The emphasis is on the content of what is being believed. Purely intellectual assent to truth is certainly the starting point of faith, but it is not the end. Trust is faith moving out of the mental realm and involving the whole person. It is a reliance on someone else in matters beyond our control. Trust is rooted in the faithful character of God.<sup>55</sup> Our faith is manifested in the way we live. What we believe affects our lifestyle and the decisions we make, and this commitment to truths is a continual outworking of what we believe and trust in our hearts.

A person-centred apologetics recognises individual needs and problems. Here the apologist can share something that he has found valuable and exciting. For example, he can give hope in the face of death, a sense of peace in the presence of God, a new perception of personal dignity and a vitalised sense of purpose. It can be presented not as a confrontational option, but as something attractive. It is important to confront and challenge ideas rather than the person who holds them.

### **Beliefs based on convictions**

Christian faith is based on solid historical data. It does not allow the individual the freedom to construct whatever kind of belief system he subjectively chooses. Instead, it demands that he subject himself to the objective reality of historical data. Objectivity in forming an opinion is characterised by weighing all the evidence available and coming to a rational conclusion. Christian faith is a rational faith based on the totality of Biblical revelation, historical events and personal experience. Our belief is based on personal perception, a personal experience sufficient to be convincing. It requires a careful and logical assessment of all the available evidence to have a conviction.

Man is created with the capacity to know. As an indication of the rationality of man, God gave him an opportunity to exercise his ability to analyse and identify – giving names.<sup>56</sup> The vulnerability to temptation is itself indicative of man's ability to reason. The ability to weigh facts and values and then to make decisions presupposes the ability to know.<sup>57</sup> Knowledge is the function of the mind. The possibility of knowledge of a proposition precedes the possibility of truth or falsity of a proposition. Knowledge is, after all, a kind of belief. It is belief resting on evidence.

Faith is a decision of the will. It is the will to believe and to follow the best light we have about God. By God's grace, we are empowered to make a choice without having all the complete information we would like to have; otherwise, what we would have is knowledge, not faith. Some people think that faith is to know that something is true beyond any doubt whatsoever. They try to prove faith through empirical evidence. When we see and touch it, it is no longer faith, it is knowledge. We don't need faith if we can see and touch. For His own reasons, God has not subjected Himself to that kind of proof. But various strands of evidence point convincingly toward God. It leaves room for us to make a choice by taking a step of faith in the same direction that the evidences are pointing.

Faith must be grounded in certainty. The search for evidences and rationalistic proofs for God define faith primarily in terms of intellectual assent, and the object of faith is seen less as a Person than as a creedal formula. The fascination with extraordinary experiences attests to a yearning for rational or experiential certainty in addition to faith. The elements of risk and venture are entirely missing in such an approach. When faith is buttressed by the authority of sight and empirical evidence, such proof can only ensure a high degree of probability. For Calvin, 'faith is a firm and effectual confidence, and not just a bare idea'.<sup>58</sup> The knowledge of faith consists more in certainty than in comprehension, he says, 'For to have faith is not to waver, to vary, to be borne up and down, to hesitate, to be held in suspense, to vacillate – finally, to despair! Rather, to have faith is to strengthen the mind with constant assurance and perfect confidence, to have a place to rest and plant your foot'.<sup>59</sup>

Luther also understood faith as giving certitude and confidence to the Christian: 'Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times'.<sup>60</sup> Doubt is not an element within faith but a contradiction of faith. The certainty of faith lies not in itself but in its object, the living Christ. Our faith is certain 'because it carrieth us out of ourselves, that we should not lean to our own strength, our own conscience, our own feeling, our own person, and our own works, but to that which is without us, that is to say, the promise and truth of God which cannot deceive us'.<sup>61</sup> Luther was emphatic that the born again Christian will feel in his heart the joy and certitude of his salvation,<sup>62</sup> but even when these inner consolations are absent he can still believe, since his faith has a sure and certain anchor in the promises of Christ in Scripture.

Belief is not the same as faith: it means belief in objective propositions. Assurance is not the same as faith: it means subjective feelings of certitude. Faith is subjective-objective reality. It is both about our convictions and also about reality. But here God is not an object. In a personal relationship with another person, we do not regard that other person as an object, so faith is best described in personal terms. In human relationships faith

involves trust between two persons. In relation to God, Christians live in a relationship of trust towards Him that permeates their whole being, consciously and unconsciously. Faith shows itself not only in unconscious attitudes, but also in conscious acts – in action taken to carry out God's will.<sup>63</sup>

Our conviction is not derived merely from usefulness of a claim. Even if a claim is found useful, say, to have peace and joy, it would hardly give anyone who cared about truth a reason to believe Christianity, *if the claims are false*. We cannot base our convictions by looking at what seems useful.

Also, belief is not under our voluntary control. When people finally find God, they discover that it was really God who found them. Still, we can control indirectly over time, by thinking about evidence we have and by acting on the beliefs we are acquiring. Judged by all the evidence that is reasonably available, a commitment to a position is reasonable for a person when that position makes more sense than any of its rivals. We have the objective evidence for Jesus being the Son of God, and the subjective evidence which lies buried in the needs and desires of our hearts.

Belief in God is genuinely coherent with all we know about ourselves and our universe. It makes sense of many things that would otherwise be inexplicable. To a person who senses his own need for God, who understands that he would be unable to know God if left to his own devices, a commitment to Jesus as Saviour seems eminently reasonable.

### **The objective reality behind subjective experience**

The object of experience is what causes the experience. The subjective aspect is what makes my experience mine. God, the transcendent level of reality, cannot be checked in the same way as physical reality. Part of what makes religious experience 'religious' is the reference to and involvement with an aspect of the divine or the transcendent. This religious element refers to a spiritual reality. This goes beyond the experience that is based and formed purely by human features. This kind of reality, to which transcendence refers, is impossible to conceptualise in terms of the reality here and now alone.

Personal experience is relevant. But it must be coupled with an account and the description of the object of religious experience which makes sense and corresponds with a reality which may be tested in other ways than by one's own experience. Here we have to uncover and make clear the presuppositional framework and test the adequacy of it by comparison with other presuppositions. For example, when we accept the religious experiences meeting the psychological needs, the objective basis must be clarified. The attempt to reduce religious experience to the purely subjective fails to do justice to the complex nature of religious experience in both its subjective and objective elements.

When all of life is interpreted in relation to the divine, individual experiences are characterised as seeing from the divine perspective. To the Christian, the natural events can be a claim for a certain pattern of relationship between the transcendent Lord of creation and the world He has made. It is a true and accurate account of the nature of

reality as a whole, because through natural events the divine discloses something objective that can be understood and tested in terms of our experience.

When the genuineness of a religious experience is tested, the cause, the divine object is known by experience. Usually one experience or set of experiences is used to judge and safeguard the validity of another experience. There can be the same kind of internal features, such as feelings of awe, being overwhelmed, happy glows and the like. Also, it shows results in the life and behaviour of the believer. We need to remember that such experiences can also be without anything religious.

Meaningful verification of experience occurs in the context of the community with reference to the totality of that community's worldview and life. The validity of experience within the Christian community must 'fit' with its history and tradition. The essence of verification is a 'fit' with Christian teachings and life, as these teachings fit with the divine. Experiences tested by and grounded in Scripture are in keeping with the character of God. The results from such experiences also must be in keeping with the nature of God. As there are also possibilities for such experiences from some demonic source, the fruits in word and deed are proof enough of their origin.<sup>64</sup>

The subjective experience of faith is a response to the objective revelation of God in His historical acts of redemption. Our experience is rooted in objective, external works of God Himself through incarnation. Christ's appearance to Thomas<sup>65</sup> shows that God is quite willing to provide evidence for the truth of the Gospel. The Christian experience rests in the revealed truth of God, embodied in the resurrected Christ and the authoritative Scriptures.<sup>66</sup> Faith in Christ is created and sustained by the witness of the Holy Spirit. When a person responds to the evidence, the personal experience and assurance come from the Holy Spirit. Christian faith offers objective ground for testing it experientially.

When a scientist treats anything scientifically, what he treats becomes an object. The scientist is the subject, and everything else is the object to be observed and manipulated in order to gain an understanding. The Christian is constantly testing the elements of his experience in the light of the Biblical revelation, attempting to draw objective judgements. This attitude is implicit in the exercise of a rational faith. Some kind of scientific testing ought to be possible to indicate that Christian regeneration is an objective reality.

Christian principles seek to be faithful to the created structure of the world. The basic level of the scientific structure of the world is energy. The interaction developed in the energy pool gave rise to the material level labelled 'elementary particles', 'atoms', 'molecules' and 'compounds' constituting matter. All varieties of non-living matter result from the patterned interactions between molecules. The living cell is the result of bringing together the non-living matter with some 'life force' in it. The patterned interactions of living cells produce a vast variety of plants and animals. The human being, the most complex pattern of cell interactions, is distinguished from the animal world with which he shares certain similarities. The patterned interactions among men produce what we recognise as social structure. If any mention of God is to be included in such a

description, it must be everywhere, in every level, and in every concept. In order to know the ultimate meaning of this world, it becomes necessary to know God, the Reality.

As we see in the Old Testament, people could come to know God through divine revelations, divine providence, divine miracles and many theophanies by arriving at an immovable conviction of the reality of God as the living Lord. The medium or sign may be some natural object, some natural phenomena or a miracle. In this medium and in this event, the revelation of God comes to man. The event and the act of revelation have both an outer and inner side. For example, while ‘the burning bush’ was the outer side, the Spirit of God Moses experienced was the inner side.<sup>67</sup> Through the use of such events, the Spirit of God made God the Reality to the people. In its essential character, God’s truth is objective, ‘out there’, like the rest of the objects of human experience, as much as atoms, chemicals and plants.

As mentioned earlier, for a Christian, behind his subjective experience is an objective reality as its basis. There can be relevant questions like, ‘What is the objective reality for the subjective experience?’ and ‘How many other people have had the same subjective experience from being related to the objective reality?’ We know that millions of people from all backgrounds, nationalities and professions have seen their lives elevated to new levels of peace and joy by turning their lives to Christ. In such explanations of experiences and events, we set forth the significance of the event in terms of its relationship to God, say in the case of Christian regeneration. Here, consistency of experiences is taken as the test for objectivity within our Christian worldview, although we cannot eliminate the possibility of such consistency in other views.<sup>68</sup>

In science, the subject as well as the object contributes to scientific knowledge. The object of study is influenced by the observer in the very process. The process of measurement and the language in which results are reported are influenced by the assumptions and concepts of the investigator. Data are always a selection from experiences in terms of one’s purposes and expectations. Attitudes change as to what problems are worth investigating, what kinds of questions are fruitful, and what types of concepts are likely to be promising. The assessment of evidence requires personal judgement. There are certain very broad attitudes required for fruitful inquiry in any field, such as curiosity, imagination, honesty and freedom of thought and communication.

As a creative thinker, the scientist constructs concepts not provided ready made by nature. Theories are evaluated by the judgement of the scientist as a responsible person. Science is a human enterprise, not a mechanical process. Despite the fact that data are always interpreted in conceptual categories, it has a high degree of reliability and reproducibility. The scientist is willing to be led by evidences regardless of his own personal preferences. No private interests obscure openness to new ideas in the pursuit of truth. Intellectual integrity characterises all genuine inquiry.

As we move from natural sciences to social sciences and then to humanities, we will find that the personal involvement of the investigator influences the process of inquiry in more and more determinative ways. The significance of human existence and destiny do

not depend on particular scientific theories, but depend on particular religious beliefs. Science and religion may be placed in a spectrum of personal involvement. The social scientist is far more deeply involved as a person than is the natural scientist. Human actions can be interpreted in terms of unobservable motives, dispositions and values only because we have immediate knowledge of their operation in our own lives. The motives and interests of an author influence the type of factor he considers relevant. Fidelity to evidence, open-mindedness, self-criticism, and readiness to learn from other interpreters are demands of scholarly inquiry in any field. Particular images of man are embedded in all philosophical positions, which are interpretations of the totality of human experience – moral, religious, social and scientific.

Both subject and object contribute to knowledge in all fields, and all events can be treated as unique or as lawful. Religion deals with questions of ultimate concern. An ultimate concern entails an inclusive perspective or a life-orientation, for it relates to all areas of life and it involves the whole person. What is acknowledged is a centre of unreserved loyalty and commitment. It provides a supreme value in terms of which other values are justified and ordered. In confronting God, man is in an 'I-Thou' relationship of total participation and availability. Faith in God is an aspect of a personal relationship, resembling in some ways the faith in a friend or one's doctor, or a husband's faith in his wife. Surely, faith in God involves new attitudes toward oneself and others.

In both science and religion, statements are made which are held to be valid not just for one investigator, but potentially for all. Dedication to universal truth rather than private preference is in fact a demand made by Biblical Christianity itself, not something imposed from outside. Religious faith gives rise to a new perspective for viewing the world and new insights that illuminate subsequent experiences. The experiences are systematically interpreted, and the testing is done using criteria such as consistency, comprehensiveness and adequacy to the full range of human experience. The testing must occur in life, for its central questions are about the objects of a man's trust, his responsible action, and the challenge of a possible pattern of life. A combination of personal involvement and reflective inquiry is required.

Revelation lies in interpreted history, which involves subject as well as object. Revelation starts from interpreted events and the experience of a community, not from private preferences. We start with Christ and our response to Him that we could not have deduced from universal principles. Then we interpret God's confrontation in our lives. Our task is to understand what has happened to us as individuals and as a community.

Commitment alone, without inquiry, tends to become fanaticism or narrow dogmatism. Inquiry alone, without commitment, tends to end as trivial speculation, irrelevant to real life. What faith does is to take us beyond the detached speculative attitude that prevents the most significant sorts of experience. It enables us to live and act amid the uncertainties of life without pretensions of intellectual infallibility.

### **Rational justification for faith**

Christian faith is a reasonable faith. But reason cannot be the sole test for truth. Because God transcends the universe, the human mind cannot arrive on its own at substantive knowledge about God. Truths about the transcendent God and His relationship to mankind are beyond our capacity to prove rationally. Warfield says, 'We believe in Christ because it is rational to believe in Him, not even though it be irrational'.<sup>69</sup> This means there cannot be true faith that is not rationally grounded in evidence. We believe in God on good grounds, though we may not be able satisfactorily to analyse the grounds of our faith.

A person's conviction of faith need not depend for its soundness on his ability to state the grounds of his convictions. Norman Geisler uses 'unaffirmability' as the negative test for truth, while 'undeniability' as the positive test. A statement is unaffirmable if the act of affirming it actually contradicts it. A statement is undeniable if it is true by definition.<sup>70</sup> C.S. Lewis argues that, at a minimum, Christianity must have some rational plausibility; it is not a religion of indifference to reason or evidence.<sup>71</sup>

William Craig says, 'to distinguish between knowing Christianity to be true and showing Christianity to be true'.<sup>72</sup> Craig suggests that a person who has the self-authenticating witness from the Holy Spirit does not need supplementary arguments or evidences, because it is a direct experience of God. A person who knows Christianity is true on this basis may also have a sound apologetic that reinforces the Spirit's witness, but it does not serve as the basis of his belief.

Showing that Christianity is true involves presenting sound and persuasive arguments for Christian truth claims. Craig concludes that the effectiveness in apologetics is presenting cogent and persuasive arguments for the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leaving the results to God. Geisler warns that rational arguments may be objectively correct but not always subjectively convincing. This is because they are directed at the mind but are not directive of the will. He says, 'The arguments "can lead the horse to water", but only the Holy Spirit can persuade a person to drink'.<sup>73</sup>

The truths we affirm in religious beliefs are not affirmed on the basis of reason alone. Religious beliefs may be adopted even if they are unreasonable. The fact of divine revelation can be neither proved nor disproved, nor can it be a subject for argument. Purely philosophical theology can go no further in providing reasonable grounds for belief. It can carry us up to the edge of the chasm that separates between the God of the philosophers (Pascal's term) and the God of worship. The philosopher can build a bridge to the other side of the chasm by attempting to show by reason the affinity that exists in between. There is a world of difference between believing that God exists and confiding in Him, and having hope in Him.

While the apologist appeals to facts about and from the Bible to show that Christianity is true, the theologian appeals to facts of the Bible to show what Christianity means. The purpose of the apologist is to provide a credible base to bring people for believing the Gospel. The argument is intended to give solid objective ground for testing the Christian

faith in experience. The apologetic task is not to construct a rational substitute for faith, but to provide a factual ground for faith. Although the facts cannot compel faith, they can leave people without a legitimate excuse for not coming to faith. Human beings in their sinfulness can reject the truth to which the facts point. If they reject, it will not be because of a deficiency of evidence, but because of a perversity of the will.

Faith without reason implies irrationalism. Reason and faith are not antithetical but harmonious. There is an intellectual content in faith. The sensory basis of all knowledge is with reason. Both reason and faith are human activities. They are to be viewed in the light of human personality as a whole. Faith in God is a personal trust, rather than a cold intellectual belief. Belief can be an intellectual acceptance of an historical proposition, say a person can have belief in Christ's resurrection. But belief does not save, as salvation is not a matter of belief at all. But faith saves, for true faith is personal trust in God and His provision for saving us.

The unregenerate mind cannot be trusted with the truth. To the mind in rebellion against God, the truth of God can appear only as absurd. As Augustine said, 'the mind must be purified, and it is purified through faith so that it will have power to perceive the "Light", and to rest in it when perceived'.<sup>74</sup> To believe in God is to undergo a major spiritual transformation. Some may speak abstractly of God in His holiness, but without His demand of holiness in them that fear Him, they are not speaking of the Biblical God. Christian conversion is an outcome of the activity of the Holy Spirit in which men turn to God from anything or from any ideology to which they have previously given their commitment.

### **Trust based on evidence that faith provides**

Christianity makes room for both 'reason' and 'heart' in grasping and experiencing its truths. In understanding spiritual reality, the issue is between what faith accepts and what reason can accept. Faith needs the corrective voice of reason in matters such as history, science, logic, etc. But reason will have to yield to revelation in matters such as salvation, incarnation, sanctification, etc. There is a possibility of conflict between reason and revelation since reason is the product of fallen man, and revelation is the gift of a righteous God.

We are to give a reason to those who ask questions. Reasonable questions deserve reasonable answers. Also, we have a responsibility to show a person the error of his thinking. Logic is a valid tool for discovering truth. Remember the scriptural warnings such as 'Have mercy on some who are doubting',<sup>75</sup> 'Do not answer a fool according to his folly',<sup>76</sup> 'Answer a fool as his folly deserves, lest he be wise in his own eyes'.<sup>77</sup>

Some truths of Christianity are beyond our capacity to understand or express in a logically definitive fashion. When reason is found incompetent to provide a satisfactory answer, faith can provide a way to deal with it. Although Christian truth claims cannot be verified on the basis of methods of reasoning acceptable to all people, our truth claims can be shown to be rational from within a Christian system of thought.

Some people's minds are more intuitive, while others are different. We have to respect the differences in the way people think. The line of reasoning we will use depends on what is perceived by our hearers. People are generally better persuaded by the reasons they themselves have discovered. Here we have to show that Christian faith is not contrary to reason, and have to help them to be convinced of its truth, and also make the Gospel loveable and acceptable.

Unbelievers who pretend to be self-sufficient and happy may not be honest with themselves. The apologist may have to identify himself with them in order to conquer them with the truth. Instead of demonstrating the truths for our own satisfaction, ignoring their perspectives, we have to present the truth as the answer to questions they ask about life and meaning. Chapter 8 deals with different worldviews. People of other views can be recommended to try the Christian faith and enter into the experience as a way to faith. The mind must be opened to proof that is human, while faith is a gift from God. To limit oneself to reason would mean the elimination of mystery, while to ignore reason would result in absurdity.

Pascal had rightly put it, 'reasons must trust the intuitions of the heart, and must base them on every argument'.<sup>78</sup> Faith is not of itself anti-intellectual nor anti-volitional. Whenever God puts grace in the heart, He also puts reason in the mind. Pascal affirms proofs of the changed life of a Christian. He speaks of further proofs in the Biblical miracles, testimonies of Jesus Christ and the apostles. From the Old Testament he illustrates Moses and the prophets, the Jewish people, the Biblical prophecies and other evidences.<sup>79</sup>

Faith determines reason, not vice-versa. Because our faith has sure anchor and basis in an objective revelation in history, the decision of faith is as important as the fact of revelation in giving us certainty of the truth of faith. Faith is anchored in the supreme rationality that constitutes the content and object of faith. We believe in order to understand. Faith is neither a blind leap into the unknown nor an assent of the will to what reason has already shown to be true, but a venture of trust based on evidence that faith itself provides.<sup>80</sup>

The Christian faith offers a systematic view of reality that can and should be accepted by all people. Jesus, 'the way and the truth and the life',<sup>81</sup> Himself, is the most persuasive case for us. When the founders of other major religions step aside and introduce another who speaks, Jesus Christ alone has made Himself the supreme issue. However, Christianity proclaims that even its own adherents are to be under the judgement of unbelief, and that it is not acquitted by any inward worthiness, but only by the grace of God. The person of Jesus Christ is the personal revelation of God, to which Scripture is the authoritative witness as God's written Word. This testimony is understood as a subjective experience, enhancing our confidence in the message of Scripture. People of other faiths may be encouraged to inquire whether they have good reasons for believing what they believe instead of Christ.

Faith is a passionate commitment to Jesus Christ, which must be the result of a person's despairing of self and turning in helplessness to Christ. Faith expresses itself in a person's

life in such a way that there can be no doubting one's relationship with Christ. What we have is not self-certainty, but God-certainty. The objective revelation of God is the ground of our certainty. The inner assurance of faith produced by the Spirit is closely integrated with this objective ground. To the question, 'Why should I believe in Jesus Christ?' the answer is simply, 'Get to know Him and you will see'.

We surrender to the will of God in faith. Whereas, reason is accepting something through provable propositions, faith learns from credible authority, accepting the truthfulness of testimony. According to Augustine, faith precedes reason, and reason is the point of contact in revelation in the sense that the message of revelation cannot be meaningless. There is then a preliminary critical sifting of what is heard, and this decides the direction that faith is to take. He implied faith leading the intellect in saying that, 'If you are not able to know, believe that you may know. Faith precedes; the intellect follows'. This means it is impossible to see the truth in any system, if the mind is in a state of unbelief.

A friendly disposition is the prerequisite for all learning. In the spiritual realm, the intellect needs the aid, insight and illumination of faith. 'Faith gives the understanding access to these (Christian) things, unbelief closes the door'. Similarly, with reference to the existence of God, Augustine said, 'Nor does any one become fit to discover God unless he shall have first believed what he is later to come to know', and 'understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore, seek not to understand that thou mayest believe, but believe that thou mayest understand'.<sup>82</sup>

### **Summary**

#### *Genuine faith that demands reason*

Faith commits itself to that which is worthy of belief. Reason has a proper function to distinguish truths from superstitious beliefs. Faith is always made on some credible ground. Faith is not just a mental assent, but it is action. Faith is not something opposed to reason. Reason builds on a foundation of faith. Faith is grounded, tested and verified on the basis of reliable authority.

Faith is needed to sustain consistency in thought and in practice. Faith involves the whole being, which includes the reasoning mind. Our faith is solidly supported by the evidence of history, archaeology and experience in Jesus.

Reason has its limitations. Because man bears the rational image of God, man can understand the world God has made and can show his ability of rational thought in his achievements in arts and civilisations.

#### *Methods in apologetics and valid reasoning*

The purpose of apologetics is to defend the truth and explain the credibility of what we believe. Various apologetic approaches are adopted in order to handle issues. The classical approach emphasises the function of proof, while in the evidential approach the defence is based on empirically and historically verifiable facts. In the reformed approach the emphasis is on God's revelation of Himself in the Scripture. In fideism, the value is given to a personal, subjective dimension in faith arguing for the function of persuasion.

The strength of the science of issue-based apologetics must be complemented with the art of the people-based approach. Apologetics creates a climate favourable to faith, a trust in which God can be seen as worthy of faith and commitment. Conviction of truth becomes a bridge by which people enter into the promises of God.

*Reason and experiences that lead to faith*

We live on certain reasonable assumptions on the basis of probability. The lack of absolute certainty does not cause us any difficulty. All human knowledge rests upon a degree of uncertainty. Our faith gives our life a stability that cannot be shaken. Purely intellectual assent to truth is the starting point of faith. Trust is faith moving out of the mental realm and involving the whole person.

*Beliefs based on convictions*

Christian faith demands objectivity which is characterised by weighing all the evidence available and coming to a rational conclusion. We take a step of faith in the same direction that the evidences are pointing. The certainty of faith lies not in itself but in its object, the living Christ. Belief in God makes sense of many things that would otherwise be inexplicable.

*The objective reality behind subjective experience*

Personal experience is relevant, but it must be coupled with an account and description of the object of experience. The experiences tested and the results must be in keeping with the character of God. Consistency of experiences is taken as the test of objectivity. Christian faith offers objective ground for testing it experientially in the light of Biblical revelation. Both subject and object contribute to knowledge in all fields. In both science and religion, statements are held to be valid for all, not just for one investigator. Revelation lies in interpreted history, which involves subject as well as object. Faith enables us to live and act amid the uncertainties of life.

*Rational justification for faith*

Our conviction of faith need not depend for its soundness on our ability to state the grounds of our conviction. Our rational arguments may be objectively correct but not always subjectively convincing, because they are directed to the mind and not directed to the will. The fact of divine revelation can neither be proved nor disproved, nor can it be a subject for argument. The apologetic argument is intended to give solid objective ground for testing the Christian faith in experience.

*Trust based on evidence that faith provides*

Faith needs the corrective voice of reason in matters such as history, science, logic, etc. But reason will have to yield to revelation in matters such as salvation, incarnation, sanctification, etc. When reason is found incompetent to provide a satisfactory answer, faith can provide a way to deal with it. Faith is anchored in the supreme rationality that

constitutes the content and object of faith. The inner assurance of faith produced by the Spirit is closely integrated with the objective revelation of God.

The Christian truth claims are to be validated. Let us examine the basis and mode of such validation in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 4 VALIDATION OF FAITH

### **Basis and mode of validation**

The success of science encouraged many people to believe that eventually everything could be explained naturalistically with scientific evidences. People with scientific bent want empirically based evidence to validate their faith. Believing in the 'unseen things of God' became no longer valid in an age that craves the certainty of technology. Science constructs models and symbols to assist in understanding reality. But empirical facts alone cannot settle questions about God. Reality is more than we can say and know. The reality of God is greater than our capacity to express it in words.

We may know more than we can say. A pianist may be able to play a tune in perfect harmony, but be unable to express that skill in words. What is known is a transcendent God, who is known in the context of this world and its limiting conditions. Words are often simply pointers toward the reality and it involves more than a simple recital of words. So we need symbolic ways of talking about God and His reality using models. Such models and symbols are tools to help us to see new meaning beyond what we presently can understand.

Religious experiences and the language used to express them offer such moments of revelation, insight and disclosure that require sensitive appreciation. Emotion is part of what makes us fully human. The realm of feeling separates humanity from the world of machines or inert reality. There is obviously some clear distinction between religious experience and other realms of experience such as the moral and aesthetic.

The universe exists only because of the creative and preserving power of God. We rely upon God constantly for our very existence.<sup>83</sup> Every aspect of the physical world is on the interface with God. The possibility that we may exist without God is unthinkable. The possibility that matter exists independently of God is also unthinkable. In fact, to ask where God came from is equivalent to asking where the basis of our existence came from. The reason for our existence is in God, and the reason for His existence is in Himself.

Every life is an admixture of the rationality of the mind, the intimations from the senses, the influences of the imagination and the commitments of the will. The quest for rational certainty is admirable. However, when dealing with all of reality, one cannot force

mathematical certainty into every test for validation. Einstein said, 'As far as the propositions of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain, and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality'.<sup>84</sup>

Scientific knowledge is derived from an interpretation of observations and experience in the natural world. Theological knowledge is derived from interpretation of revelation and experience. We can consider the natural world also as a revelation provided to the scientist, since he plays no role in its existence and yet accepts it as wholly reliable. In both science and theology, the interpretation of revelation is guided by experience, and the interpretation of experience is guided by revelation. When interpretations are found faulty and face problems, both accept the natural world as wholly reliable, and revelation as wholly reliable. Conflicts arise when one denies the validity of the other's source of revelation.

The validity of the Christian faith arises from the power derived from the re-establishment of the creation-ordained relationship between man and God. In the person of Christ, God Himself made it possible for the separation between man and God to be ended, so that man could enter into a new life of a restored and forgiven relationship with God. It became possible for us to recover that relationship with God and with our fellow men. This was intended for us as human beings made in the image of God. The restoration of broken relationships carries with it many other effects that we recognise as blessings in our life. In order to apply the content of this experience, it requires discipline to break through 'what I want to see' and 'what I want to hear'. Loving God and loving man are the responsibilities that flow out of this love relationship.

The test of the reality of Christian faith is based on the degree to which a believer has achieved the goal of Christ-likeness, with its accompanying attributes of love, humility, justice and righteousness. The source of this faith is divine, but the exercise of faith is human. In the validation of experience, knowledge need not be complete before it is true, understanding need not be comprehensive before it is satisfying, and insight need not be exhaustive before it is sufficient.

In both science and in Christian faith, we come to believe things based on authority, by accepting the word of someone we trust. Also it is based on personal perception, by our own personal experience sufficient to be convincing. The mode of belief by which one trusts the spoken word in Christian faith involves acceptance of the revelation provided in verbal form by God Himself. While the scientist trusts the reliability of the natural world, the Christian trusts the reliability of God's Word.

Scientific proof is based on showing that something is a fact by repeating the event in the presence of the person questioning the fact. There is a controlled environment where observations can be made, data drawn and hypothesis empirically verified. Testing the truth of a hypothesis by the use of controlled experiments is one of the key techniques of the modern scientific method. If the scientific method were the only method of proving something, we could not prove that we went to church service last Sunday morning, or even that we had meals last night. There is no way we can repeat those events in a

controlled situation, so we have to rely on proof by some other methods on reaching a verdict on the basis of the weight of the evidence.

The scientific method can be used only to prove repeatable things; it is not adequate for proving or disproving many questions about a person or event in history. Scientists and historians observe data and proceed thence to some theory about what best explains the occurrence of this data. The very same criteria which scientists use to reach their own theories lead us to move beyond those theories to a creator God who sustains everything in existence.

The practice of science is derived from an act of faith, because interpretation of data (that is, subjective interpretation given by men) is faith-related. Validity of Christian faith must be based on the 'data' of historical revelation, on the witness of trusted men and their experiences and one's own experience, both individually and in the company of one's contemporaries. The attitude implicit in the exercise of a rational faith includes the testing of experience in the light of the Biblical revelation.

One of the scripture passages describing natural theological evidence<sup>85</sup> may suggest models for God in such concepts as Great Mathematician, Machinist, Lawgiver, or Designer. But only the revelation in the Bible conveys to us the attributes of God such as love, care, righteousness and holiness which are not revealed through natural revelation. Scientific description is natural description. But we need to realise that the natural description does not preclude a supernatural description. Scientific description is only one part of the comprehensive description.

Revelation occurred in historic events involving both God and man. The revelation-bearing events are described in Chapter 2 earlier. Historicity of Jesus and the message communicated through the person of Christ are given in Chapter 9. Human experience and divine self-disclosure are two sides of the same event.<sup>86</sup> Revelation is fulfilled in the activity of God in the present experience, which has been represented by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Because revelation leads to a new relationship with God, man accepts not only a body of information, but also God's love and forgiveness.

Revelation also helps man to understand his life today. The life of Christ is a key event for us, which illuminates the rest of our experience and helps us understand ourselves and what has happened to us. Revelation provides interpretive categories relevant to all life situations. Religious beliefs provide a coherent account of all phases of reality.

When someone says, 'I can believe only what I can see', it must be remembered that this proposition itself cannot be seen. I must deny the existence of my thoughts if I believe only what I can see. Several non-empirical entities such as one's own thoughts, values, numbers, sets and the laws of logic, etc., exist and cannot be seen. The history of philosophy is filled with the existence of non-empirical entities. A fallacy of assigning to something a property that applies only to objects of another category is known as 'category fallacy'. For example, it is a category fallacy to fault colours for not having a smell! It is not part of the nature of a spirit to be visible empirically as a material object

would be. It is a category fallacy to ascribe sensory qualities to God or fault Him for not being visible.

Some objects that can only be partly visible are not completely visible and it makes it difficult to believe in the existence of whole physical objects. For example, we do not see three-dimensional objects in their entirety. We need to use some principle other than that of crude empiricism to believe in mind-independent physical objects. There may be other ways of seeing apart from sensory seeing. It may be some form of rational intuition that enables one to perceive non-physical objects. It may be possible to 'see' God by some form of awareness other than sensory perception.

We believe in the existence of things because we infer their existence, for example, the magnetic fields and the existence of other minds. The inference may be by the interpretation of experimental observations or of pointer readings on scientific instruments. Theoretical constructs are not objects of immediate perceptual experience. The notional apparatus of theology consists mainly of theoretical constructs. One can infer the existence of God from His effects in a way similar to that in which we infer the existence of other minds or theoretical entities.

God really exists, but not in the way that anything else really exists. God lives, not by interaction with the environment, not by the ingestion of nutriment, not by growing and declining, not as subject to health and disease, not as a result of being born and not as doomed to die. One needs to remember that God is a person, not a thing.

Also people have a need to transcend the finite, although materials and means exist to meet their physical needs. The universality of the desire to transcend the finite and seek some Supreme Being does suggest that this desire is grounded in being a human being. As we are aware, God is not visible to our senses. Here we need to apply some method other than the sensory perception to know what our senses do not tell.

Religious experiences are often called 'numinous' experiences, and they may or may not involve visual or auditory sensations. The term 'numinous experience' comes from Professor Rudolf Otto's classic work on religious experience, 'The Idea of the Holy'.<sup>87</sup> Those who have not met this term may be introduced to it by the following device. Now suppose that you were told simply, 'There is a mighty spirit in your room', and believed it. You will feel wonder and a certain shrinking, a sense of inadequacy to cope with such a visitant. You may prostrate before it, although you do not see anything. The expression of such an emotion is beyond reason. This feeling may be described as awe, and the object which excites it as the 'numinous'. This is an experience in which the subject, allegedly, has some sort of direct apprehension of a personal Being who is holy, good, awesome, and is separate from the subject and one upon whom the subject depends in some way for life and care. Such experiences are life transforming in a number of ways.

A person can postulate God as the best explanation for his change, when he cites certain experiences of spiritual power, changed life and ability to handle problems in a way not available before. William James said, 'That which produces effects within another reality

must be termed as reality itself, so I feel as if we had no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal. God is real since He produces real effects'.<sup>88</sup> Such experiences exhibit properties all their own, like new zeal for holiness and self-sacrifice. They exhibit power that cannot be reproduced in its intensity or longevity by other forms of experience. There are diversities in the background of people who experience such a transformation. The differences in time, place, upbringing, temperament and age are good evidence to consider that the cause is not merely psychological or sociological. The working of God seems to be the major, perhaps the only, constant factor at work. Such a transformation is rooted in and predicted by objective, historical data (the data from the event of the resurrection and from the Bible), and its reality serves to confirm the truth of that data. Also occasionally God Himself is directly perceived or apprehended by a non-sensory form of seeing as we read about Job.<sup>89</sup>

In the normal act of sensory perception, the perceiving subject must not be blind, and eyes must be open, place lighted and no other object to obstruct the view. There are experiences of objects that are taken to exist outside the subject, like the experience of pain and depression which usually exist independently of the experience itself. Successive experiences of the object of such a nature lead from a vague to clear experience when different experiences replace one another for better view. Of course, the subject should not be on drugs or colour-blind. Sometimes several people can see the object and at other times it can be private for one person. Also one need not exhaustively see an object in its entirety to truly see it. There is a variety of means whereby one could check his perception and have it confirmed or not.

In the case of the above-mentioned numinous experience, there are conditions both within and outside of the subject. The subject must be seeking for God, must be willing to respond, and must practice and discipline an ability to 'recognise' God's voice and so on. Outside conditions include a place of quiet or solitude, certain forms of music which can facilitate awareness of God and certain forms of group prayers with others seeking for God. There can be the sense of immediacy or objectivity of what is apprehended in mystical experiences.

Numinous perception can fasten onto different aspects of God as He is experienced in different conditions such as grief, guilt, celebrations and the like. Many individuals who have experienced numinous awareness are intelligent, self-examining, rational people not prone to emotionalism. It shows both private and public aspects, and the object of numinous awareness can also be attended to by several persons at once. There seem to be several public checks available by which one can validate the truthfulness of those experiences.

The consequences of such experiences must be edifying to one's outlook, unifying to his personality, and empowering to the person's devotion to God. It should cause the person to build others up and help them to be better people. The depth, the profundity and the 'sweetness' of the experience count as evidences for its genuineness. The experience must conform to an objective body of revelation, the Scriptures, which can in turn be validated by means other than numinous claims. We notice that there is a close analogy between sensory perception and numinous perception.

The human mind is a mental substance that points to God as the cause of or grounds for its existence. Mental properties do not emerge from matter. The best explanation for the existence of the finite mind is the existence of an infinite Mind. Some aspects of the world are more rational if God exists than if God does not exist. Swinburne said, 'If there is to exist anything, it is far more likely to be something with the simplicity of God than something like the universe with all its characteristics crying out for explanation without there being God to explain it'.<sup>90</sup> Finite human beings cannot expect to gain absolutely certain knowledge of any empirical reality. When examining evidences for Christian truth claims, we are aware that absolutely certain proof lies beyond our reach. The truths can be shown to be highly probable. Probability can be a guide here.

Probability falls short of the absolute certainty of mathematics, but it is the sort of knowledge we are able to operate on in all the affairs of life. We commit ourselves completely to certain things in everyday life for which we may not have one hundred percent proof. It is adequate to provide us with a sound basis for the trustful certainty of faith. In matters of fact, probability is unavoidable. There is no contradiction in claiming that something is probably true on the basis of a particular argument, and also certainly true on some other basis. If something is certainly true, then it is also probably true. The degree of probability for the Christian truth claims is so high that the rational person can believe. The reasonable person who bases his life on the best explanation of the facts should believe the Gospel.

The truth of the Christian message cannot be properly denied without a fair consideration of the factual basis for the Christian truth claim. The facts support Christianity because they are set in a context that includes speech expressive of the meaning of the facts. The facts do not stand blank and dumb before us, but have a voice given to them and a meaning put into them. Reason can give abundant corroboration and verification to the truth of the Christian revelation. There is sufficient evidence to show that the Christian view of God is not unreasonable. The reason why Christianity cannot be waved out of the world at the bidding of sceptics is that the facts are too strong for the attempt.

The truth of the absolute claims of Christian faith rests on certain historical facts open to ordinary investigation. These facts relate essentially to Jesus. When people of other faiths examine the historical evidence fairly and are open to the philosophical implications of that evidence, they will find that God has revealed Himself in and through history, particularly in the unique events of Christ's incarnate life, death and resurrection.

Christianity alone can produce testable evidence of God's interventions. Christianity has miracles, fulfilled prophecies, and other evidences that the God of the Bible is the true God. A religion that is true would be one that defeats death, man's most detestable foe. There is plenty of evidence for the historicity of the central events of the Christian faith. Testimonies of changed lives help people see that Christianity is not only about events in the past, but the 'evidence that demands a verdict' is found in history.

### **The adequacy of testing various truth claims**

We have noticed that certain people are reluctant to believe even if they are presented with historical facts, and with the convincing personal testimony of even people in whom they confide. There can be several reasons for such a response. An inappropriate approach can also be one of the causes. Perhaps an examination of the tests for truth claims will throw some light on this issue of unwillingness to believe. Norman L. Geisler in *Christian Apologetics*<sup>91</sup> describes the evaluation of various tests for truth. Let us look at his treatment on truth tests in view of establishing the Christian truth claims as well as the reasons for the inadequacy of certain approaches.

#### *Rationalism*

Rationalistic theism holds that the existence of God can be demonstrated with logical necessity. Logic can eliminate what is false but cannot in and of itself establish what must be true. It can only demonstrate what is possibly real but not what is actually real. It is not logically necessary to conceive the existence of anything, including God. There is no way to prove logically the very laws of thought that are used to prove things. All rational justification must come to an end in first principles. These first principles cannot be rationally proven. Rationalism cannot rationally demonstrate its first principles, and there is no rational way to establish Christian theism.

#### *Fideism*

Religious fideism is the way to truth through faith. It reduces the claim to 'this is true because I believe it to be true'. The best modern example of a fideistic position is found in Blaise Pascal. Pascal sensed an accelerated tendency to reject God's revelation in favour of human reason. Reason alone will never find God. Pascal said, 'It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. God must take the initiative, for those to whom God has imparted religion by intuition are very fortunate, and justly convinced'. For Pascal, faith is different from proof. His well-known statement 'The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of' is repeated on several occasions in connection with faith. When Pascal appealed to the heart's experience of God, Kierkegaard and Barth appealed to a personal encounter with God through Christ.

There are many significant insights provided by fideism into the total picture of religious knowing. The anti-rationalistic emphasis of fideism has significant value. Fideists are right that neither evidence nor reason is the basis for one's commitment to God. Objective evidence alone does not induce a religious response. Faith operates in the subjective and personal dimension that goes beyond purely rational processes. Fideism has rightly stressed that faith in God is not mere intellectual assent; it is a heart commitment. Fideistic stress on personal dimension of truth is an important contribution.

In spite of the many important insights fideists offer into the nature of religious truth, their method and test for truth are decidedly inadequate. Contrary beliefs can be 'experienced' or claimed to be true by fideists. But unless there is some rational or objective way to adjudicate these conflicting claims, the truth questions cannot be settled. Fideists must either justify their beliefs or else it disqualifies its claim to truth.

### *Experientialism*

Experientialism offers experience as the final court of appeal. It is the self-attesting character of experience that verifies the truth-attached claim. The experientialist's claim may be correct as a source and basis of truth; but as a test or warrant for the truth of that claim, he is decidedly wrong. For no experience is self-interpreting and there are conflicting truth claims built on experience with no purely experiential way to adjudicate between them. Experience is merely a condition of persons, whereas truth is a characteristic of propositions. One must have some justification as to why he interpreted the raw data of the experience itself one way or the other. No religious experience as such is either understandable or justifiable apart from some truth framework independent or separate from the experience itself. If the experience is truly unique to one view and unavailable to another, then there is no way to use it as a truth support for one view as opposed to the others. What is not available to the other view cannot be used against them.

### *Evidentialism*

Evidentialism appeals to the historical evidence of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as verification of its claim to be true. The most common appeal to evidence is to the past. Evidentialism provides some notable insights into the relation of truth and human events. Evidentialists make a significant point when they stress the objective and public nature of evidence. Objectivity is essential to verifiability. Truth may be subjectively realised but it must be objectively grounded. The truths are factually based. Facts are not based in theories but theories in fact. Experience is the basis for expressions about it. Events are fundamental to interpretation; the viewpoint does not constitute factualness of the events. Facts are not known to us as bare facts but as interpreted by the context from which or through which they are viewed. No facts can be justifiably isolated or arbitrarily interpreted apart from their proper context.

Evidentialism is inadequate as a test for the truth, since evidence as such cannot be used to establish the overall context by which it obtains its very meaning as evidence. There is no way for facts themselves to determine in which context or by which framework they are to be viewed. The question is not one of bare facts but of the interpretation given by divergent worldviews or models. Other views can handle all the facts by their metaphysical models. There is no way to use the bare facts alone in order to justify one model of them over another. There is no ultimate meaning or truth attributable to facts unless it is from the overall perspective of a worldview. Bare facts as such cannot establish the truth of a model or establish which of the alternative viewpoints should be taken.

### *Pragmatism*

Pragmatists contend that one cannot think or even feel truth, but he can discover it by attempting to live it. Truth is what is experientially workable. Pragmatism provides a balance in the reaction against the purely formal and rationalistic approach. It is not content with seeking causes but also is concerned with producing effects in lives. It points out that truth has concrete dimensions and applications. Religious truth is confirmed in personal experience. Religious truth, with its life-transforming claim, must be applicable to life.

Despite many commendable features of pragmatism, as a test for the truth of a worldview it is insufficient. The results or consequences of an action do not establish what is true but simply what happened to work. The truth question is not settled but is still open after the results are reached. It shows only what works but it does not prove that what worked is true. Many false and evil things have worked for many people for many years. The truth may be unrelated to results and the results may have been accidental. Sometimes the desired result may not be true. Neither the desired nor desirable is necessarily the truth. Also, it is impossible for us to know the long-term consequences. A purely personal and private test for truth cannot meet even the minimal standards for truth criteria. On purely pragmatic grounds, opposing worldviews may work equally well.

### *Combinationalism*

Combinationalists feel that a combination of tests for truth is necessary to establish the truth of a worldview. There are a number of noteworthy dimensions in the combinationalist test for truth. Facts and experience may be the basis for meaning, but the data alone cannot provide what meaning should be given to it. Truth does not reside in facts as such. Only fact plus meaning can be the basis for truth. The meaning does not arise naturally out of facts. Rather, meaning is something attributed to facts from the outside. It is necessary to presuppose a worldview or framework within which a fact can have meaning. They move in the right direction by the attempt to be comprehensive in the test for the truth of a world and life view. Merely one dimension of the truth question is not enough. Worldview truths must cover all that is in the world. Feelings, attitudes, virtues and interpersonal relations are all part and parcel of a complete worldview, and must be accounted for when one is assessing the truth of the overall system.

Combinationalism does serve as an adequate test for truth within certain contexts. When one is in a reasonable possession of all relevant facts, then, as in a court room context, there can sometimes be a decision 'beyond reasonable doubt' as to which interpretation best fits the stated context. The combinational test for truth is sometimes known as systematic consistency. Often it entails three tests: logical consistency (freedom from contradictions), empirical adequacy (applicability to all domains of feeling and perception) and experiential relevance.

As a test for the truth of an overall interpretive worldview, combinationalism will not suffice. By simply adding together inadequate tests for truth, one does not get an adequate test. The very claim that the facts fit better in one system than another begs the question. Once the facts are 'pre-cut' to fit the pattern, then it should be no surprise to anyone that they fit better in that system. Opposing systems can account equally well for all or equal numbers of facts. Hence, combinational tests are insufficient to exclude opposing systems, in which case they are ineffective in establishing the truth of any one system over others.

### **Adequate tests for truth**

In the tests for truth examined hitherto, the one insufficiency common to all these tests is that none of them could definitively establish one worldview over another. Whatever applicability they may have within a worldview, none was sufficient enough to decide or

adjudicate between or among worldviews. More than one worldview may be true on the grounds of the above-mentioned tests for truth. However, unaffirmability can falsify a worldview and undeniability can verify a worldview. Unaffirmability does not mean that a view cannot be stated. Everything that can be said need not be meaningful, because nonsense can also be stated. Some things that can be said are unaffirmable. For example, one cannot affirm his own non-existence. Any view that can be found to be unaffirmable, then can be untrue. Nontheisms can be said, but are not meaningfully affirmable; they are utterable but not justifiable.

If what is unaffirmable is false, conversely, what is undeniable can be true. The affirmation that ‘triangles must have three sides’ is undeniably true. If we actually find a triangle, then it must actually have three sides. Likewise, if God is actually found to exist, then He must actually have all the characteristics that God must necessarily be conceived to have, such as eternity, immutability, and so forth. Of course, there is no way to show in advance that theism is actually undeniable and all nontheisms are unaffirmable. All we can say is that if one view is undeniable, then conversely the other opposing view must at least be untrue, if not unaffirmable.

In determining what is true within a given worldview, combinationalism, or *systematic consistency*, seems to be the most adequate test. The facts within a system are given meaning by that system. All the facts interpreted in an internally consistent way are a sufficient test for truth within a given system. Systematic consistency is qualified to test for truth within a system. Anything not systematically related cannot be a truth within that system. If Christian faith best explains all the known facts in the most consistent way, then it should be accepted as truth. Only theism is actually undeniable. It offers an argument with undeniable premises that leads to the existence of an infinitely perfect and powerful Being beyond this world who is the current sustaining cause of all finite, changing and contingent beings.

### **Validating the truth of Christ**

Several secular sources from outside the Bible also have established on firm historical grounds the accounts of Christ’s life, teachings, death and resurrection. A leading expert on ancient history, Edwin Yamauchi said, ‘We have better historical documentation for Jesus than for the founder of any other ancient religion’.<sup>92</sup> Seven secular sources and several early Christian creeds concern the deity of Jesus as a doctrine in the early church.<sup>93</sup> As to the accuracy of the reports of the New Testament writers, there is support from the secular history of the first century in numerous archaeological discoveries supporting specific details of the account.

Both the authenticity and the historicity of the New Testament documents are firmly established today. From the standpoint of a documentary historian, the New Testament has superior evidences than that of any other book from the ancient world. We possess eyewitness testimony in documents that were recorded between twenty to fifty or so years after the actual events.

Paul, the contemporary of the eyewitnesses, wrote some ten epistles between AD 50 and 60 that contain the essential teachings about Christ. Luke, the companion of Paul, using written documents and eyewitness accounts, wrote a complete life of Christ and history of the early Church up to AD 60-62. Mark is believed on literary grounds to be prior to Luke and Matthew and, hence, must be dated between AD 50 and 60. Mark was an associate of the apostle Peter who was an eyewitness disciple of Christ. John uses independent sources of his own that can be traced on linguistic grounds to between AD 30 and 66, though many place his composition between AD 80 and 100.

The number of eyewitnesses supporting or writing the New Testament accounts is large. The direct eyewitnesses who either wrote or superintended what was written of Christ's life and teachings are Matthew, Peter and John. Peter's influence is behind Mark's Gospel. The death of Jesus was actually witnessed by the apostle John,<sup>94</sup> by Jesus' mother, as well as by the soldiers, the crowd and many others standing nearby.<sup>95</sup>

There were over 500 persons to whom Christ appeared bodily after His resurrection. The number of individual appearances is more than sufficient to determine the validity of their testimony. No like testimony is possessed for any event from ancient times. Both the vast number of the independent eyewitness accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection as well as the nature and integrity of the witnesses themselves leave beyond reasonable doubt the reliability of the apostolic testimony about Christ. They were not only honest, but also sane witnesses of the events of which they spoke.

Predictive prophecies about Christ in the Old Testament, His sinless life and miraculous deeds and His resurrection lead forthrightly to the conclusion that He alone is the unique Son of God. The Old Testament predictions about Christ were made hundreds of years in advance. When there are dozens of these prophecies converging in the lifetime of one person, it becomes nothing less than miraculous. Because Jesus fulfilled prophecies about the coming Messiah, Christ's claim to be God is confirmed by the miracle of the fulfilment of messianic prophecy in His life and death.

Jesus' sinless and miraculous life is evidence of His deity. Those who were acquainted with Jesus thought most highly of Him. Not only the disciples, but Pilate, then the soldier at the cross and the dying thief<sup>96</sup> all spoke of His innocence. No one was able to successfully pin a sin on the remarkable and impeccable character of Jesus. His life was miraculous from the very beginning. When asked whether He was the Messiah, He offered His miracles as the evidence.<sup>97</sup> Miracles of the kinds Jesus performed were accepted by the Jews of Jesus' day as an evident sign of divine favour on the person performing them. He also predicted His own death and resurrection.

The vacant tomb of Jesus is an historical reality. Jesus rose triumphantly and bodily out of the grave. His body was absent from the grave. The empty grave is reported or implied in extremely early sources. The site of Jesus' tomb was known to Christians, Jews and Romans. Not even the Roman authorities or Jewish leaders ever claimed that the tomb still contained Jesus' body. One would have to conclude that Jesus rose from the dead by the evidence examined by an impartial jury.

The apostles argued for the truth of the resurrection by appealing to known facts and eyewitness testimonies, and by correlating this empirical evidence with the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>98</sup> In order to commend the apostolic testimony to people today, we must be prepared to give them credible reasons to accept that testimony.

Both Old Testament prophets and Jesus predicted the resurrection. The only way one and the same Messiah can accomplish the actual fulfilment of the teaching that the Messiah will come and die<sup>99</sup> and that the Messiah will have an enduring political reign<sup>100</sup> is by a resurrection from the dead. Only a death and a resurrection could make the royal prophecies realisable.

There is more evidence that Jesus died than there is that most important people from the ancient world ever lived. The heavy loss of blood indicates Jesus was dead. He was on the cross from nine in the morning until just before sunset.<sup>101</sup> When pierced in the side by the soldiers 'blood and water' flowed out<sup>102</sup> and this is an indisputable medical sign of death. The experienced Roman soldiers examined Jesus and pronounced Him dead.<sup>103</sup> Pilate inquired to make sure that Jesus was dead before he gave the body to Joseph of Arimathea for burial. The undisturbed appearance of the grave clothes is further indication that He was dead.<sup>104</sup>

There are many alternate explanations for the resurrection of Christ. But none of them satisfy the facts of the case. For example, we deal with the hypothesis that Joseph removed the body of Jesus. Joseph was a pious man and would not have removed the body on the Sabbath.<sup>105</sup> By the next day the guard was placed at the tomb.<sup>106</sup> The hypothesis that the Roman or Jewish authorities took the body is completely untenable. The Roman authorities would not steal the body because that might contribute to unrest. The Jewish authorities would not steal it because that would undermine their religious influence. The disciples would not steal it and then lie about Jesus rising from the dead because that would get them into trouble with the Roman and Jewish authorities. The disciples were fearful men who had fled the scene for fear of being caught.<sup>107</sup> In fact the disciples went to their deaths proclaiming the resurrection was true. Nobody knowingly or willingly dies for a lie. There is no reason why such sceptics as Paul and James would have been converted and would have died for their faith.

Some have suggested that the women went to the wrong tomb while it was yet dark and that seeing it empty, they reported that Jesus had risen. Then the authorities could have gone to the right tomb to produce the body of Jesus. Peter later went in broad daylight, and both the women and Peter saw the grave clothes.<sup>108</sup> The hypothesis that no one ever really visited the tomb to verify a bodily resurrection is contradicted by a host of facts, and the Gospels clearly indicate that several people did visit the tomb at different times.<sup>109</sup> By process of elimination, then, no one stole the body, and therefore the body must have been raised from the dead.

Resurrection did not occur in a factual vacuum, but was accompanied by Jesus' own explanation of its significance as the miraculous act of God. Paul's reference to Jesus'

death, burial and resurrection as part of the received tradition of the Church<sup>110</sup> and the burial account in Mark show that the empty tomb was a part of the earliest records. The fact that Jesus' tomb was not venerated as a shrine shows, again, that the earliest Christians believed the tomb to be empty. The resurrection appearances are shown to be authentic history.

Several features characterise the New Testament descriptions of the appearances of Jesus. Some appearances were to a single person; one was to a group of five hundred. They are reported to have taken place during a very specific period of forty days. The writers of the Gospels and Paul are agreed that Jesus appeared in bodily form. It should be granted that Jesus now had a spiritual body, which was not entirely the same as his earthly body. This body could be seen and touched, and had continuity with the body lain in the tomb. The risen Christ was capable of eating.<sup>111</sup> His body was no longer bound by space and time. It could be transported, appear and disappear in a closed room without spatial approach or withdrawal. It could be materialised and localised at will.

The alternative explanations are less plausible or factually based. The swoon theory, which holds that Jesus merely passed out on the cross and was revived after being left for dead in the tomb, attempts to overrun the fact of Jesus' death. Such theories are purely speculative and all fail to come to terms with significant factual evidence. Production of the dead body would have silenced the alternative stories of resurrection. This was never done. When the eyewitness experiences of the disciples, James and Paul are considered, along with their corresponding transformations and their central message, the historical resurrection becomes the best explanation for the facts. All considerations brought together can constitute a cumulative case to show that the resurrection is the most probable, reasonable explanation of the facts. Jesus' claim to be God would lack all credibility had He remained dead. The resurrection in the context of His life and teachings verifies His claim to deity. The fact that He rose provides strong warrant for accepting His divine claim.

He did not come to set up a political regime. He instead came to touch our hearts and lives. Because His kingdom consists of people with the power of love, His kingdom is indestructible. So, He did not attract people by meeting just their physical needs. His eternal perspective points us to the reality of heaven, which is the longing of our heart. He came to tell us of the glory of heaven. He brought together the past, the present and the future. With His inspirational incentive, many are inspired to make possible even the seemingly impossible. His personal directives come to each one of us as individuals, for He is available right now and has time for each individual.

We are not excused from the responsibility of defending the Gospel. Scripture commands us to defend the faith, by giving a rational answer to those who question our faith.<sup>112</sup> Our faith is true and reasonable. We see rationality in our faith and credibility in the Gospel. The Holy Spirit can use the evidences in meeting the demands of the mind while quenching the thirst of the heart.

## **Summary**

### *Basis and mode of validation*

Empirical facts alone cannot settle questions about God. The reality of God is greater than our capacity to express in words. The realm of feeling separates humanity from the world of inert reality, and there is clear distinction between religious experience and other realms of experiences.

Although the quest for rational certainty is admirable, we cannot force mathematical certainty into every test for validation when dealing with all of reality. The scientist trusts the reliability of the natural world, and the believer trusts the reliability of God's Word in their validations.

Validity of Christian faith is based on the data of historical revelation and our beliefs provide a coherent account of all phases of reality. It is not part of the nature of a spirit to be visible empirically as a material object would be. We cannot ascribe sensory qualities to God or fault Him for not being visible. Experience in which we have some sort of direct apprehension of a Personal Being who is holy and awesome is known as numinous. The experience must conform to an objective body of revelation, the Scriptures, which can in turn be validated by means other than numinous claims.

In validating the truth claims, probability is adequate to provide us with a sound basis for the trustful certainty of faith. The degree of probability for the Christian truth claims is so high that the rational person can believe the Gospel. The facts related to Jesus are open to ordinary investigation.

### *The adequacy of testing various truth claims*

Truth tests for establishing the Christian truth claims as well as showing the inadequacy of other faiths are summarised. Rationalism, religious fideism, evidentialism, pragmatism, and combinationalism (which is a combination of tests for logical consistency, empirical evidence and experiential relevance) are considered. But they are found insufficient to exclude opposing systems, although they serve as tests for truth claims within certain contexts.

### *Adequate tests for truth*

Unaffirmability can falsify a worldview and undeniability can verify a worldview. Any view that can be found unaffirmable, then, can be untrue. When one view is undeniable, then the other opposing must at least be untrue, if not unaffirmable. Christian faith best explains all the known facts in the most consistent way and so it can be accepted as truth. It offers an argument with undeniable premises.

### *Validating the truth of Christ*

Several secular sources from outside the Bible have established on firm historical grounds the accounts of Christ's life, teachings, death and resurrection. There is support from the secular history of the first century as to the accuracy of the reports of the New Testament writers. We possess eyewitness testimony in documents that were recorded between twenty to fifty or so years after the actual events. The nature and integrity of the

witnesses themselves leave beyond reasonable doubt the reliability of the apostolic testimony. Christ's claim to be God is confirmed by the fulfilment of messianic prophecy in His life and death.

None of the alternate explanations for the resurrection of Christ satisfy the facts of the case. The resurrection appearances are shown to be authentic history. All considerations brought together can constitute a cumulative case to show that the resurrection is the most probable, reasonable explanation of the facts. The fact that He rose provides strong warrant for accepting His divine claim. Our faith is true and reasonable.

The question of the origin of the universe with all the life in it is also of interest during our discussion on the rationality of our faith. We need to compare what the Bible reveals about it with what the theories of modern science claim about it. We shall discuss this in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 5 ALTERNATIVE TO IMPERSONAL ORIGIN

### **Scientific data showing intelligent design**

An intelligent designer's involvement better explains the origin of the universe and the life in it. Fifty years ago the vast majority of leading scientists believed that the discoveries of modern science had eliminated the need for a supernatural Creator. In this context the declaration in the Scriptures, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth',<sup>113</sup> is certainly the most controversial and important scientific statement made. The tremendous new discoveries of modern science during the last few decades provide compelling evidence that a supernatural Creator created the universe as the Biblical book of Genesis affirms.

One of the difficulties we encounter when we consider the question of creation and the origin of life is that we are confronted with the limitations of scientific inquiry. Although science can trace processes into the past on the assumption that the laws of nature were obeyed at that time in the same form as now, it is rendered helpless when called upon to face the very beginning of these laws themselves. Since scientific ideas are undergoing radical changes, it is probably only reasonable to assume that no presently conceived cosmological theory for the origin of the universe on scientific grounds is completely adequate or acceptable. Moreover, science just does not have knowledge of the 'beginning' in the genuine sense of the term. The creation of our universe is a unique one time only event that cannot be repeated.

When we deal with matters concerning the origins of the earth, we need to recognise the difference between 'operation science' and 'origin science'.<sup>114</sup> Operation science deals with the way things normally operate. It examines how the world normally works in the present, and seeks answers that are testable by repeated observations. On the other hand, the origin science studies events that happened only once and having no natural explanation. It looks at how things began, not how they work. Such things that happened only once, by their nature, don't happen again. Origin science works on different principles than operation science does. It uses analogies between the kinds of cause-effect relationships that we see today and the kind of effect that is being studied.

In the case of the theory of evolution, it has applied the principles of operation science to the study of origins. It has forced the operations that are presently working in the world to

explain how the world got here in the first place. We must use origin science to understand the origins, not operation science.

The narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 indicate a mixture of direct creation and divinely guided natural processes. It is a story about events that really took place, narrated in a form different from that in which they scientifically occurred. It is also an affirmation concerning the fundamental relation between God and the world, acknowledging our own dependence on God. It points to the relation of all events to their eternal source. The doctrine of creation is clear enough to tell us that God is sovereign, transcendent, free and purposeful, and the world is real, orderly and is essentially good. It expresses man's sense of being like a creature, finitude, and dependence on God, and encourages worship and reverence.

It is more probable that the Hebrews took the Genesis statement of earth, firmament, sun, moon, stars, etc., to represent the appearance of things, as they appear to common sense described in everyday language.<sup>115</sup> When we consider the language used in the Bible with reference to natural things, we bear in mind the distinction between what is in the scientific sense and what appears on the surface to be the case when the events are taken simply at their face value. In science the models, by their very nature, will be subject to continual change. In the Bible the basic and underlying templates against which the models will be matched, are those which are given to us by God since they are His self-revelation. God is always utterly other than His creation, its giver, originator and sustainer.

It seems several scientists in the past thought they had to accept that the universe had existed forever. Also there were others who believed that there had to be a beginning at some point in the indefinite past. The influence of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, published in 1859, had been pervasive and enduring in scientific and non-scientific fields. The theory of organic evolution may be defined as the derivation of species from different pre-existing species by a process of descent with modification. This descent is usually held to run through the whole organic world, including man himself.

It assumes that the first living cell developed in a rich primordial 'soup' that provided the perfect chemistry for its formation. That over billions of years the first cells changed, through mutation, into more complex cells, which in turn mutated into multi-celled creatures, which eventually mutated into many types of multi-celled creatures. That these life forms continued to become more and more complex as mutant alternatives were sorted out by natural selection. That older species transitioned into newer ones that were better suited to survive. Recently some evolutionists began to hold the view that evolution took place in very rapid spurts at those times when new species were formed (which is known as *punctuated equilibrium*), since *gradualism* requiring billions of years is not supported anywhere in the fossil record. But as a whole they favour the classical gradualistic form of evolution.

Some who favour evolution contend that life started at a place other than planet earth. Life still had to be somehow 'injected' into 'stuff' that was somehow put together properly. Across a wide range of sciences, evidence has come to light in the last 50 years which, taken together, provides a robust case for theism. Theism can provide an

intellectually satisfying explanation for the origins. Today, we have the benefit of molecular biology and astrophysics that provide important boundaries in evaluating what is possible in regard to the origin of life. If evolution is going to work, it must work at the cellular level or not at all. Some of the old ways of thinking can no longer be supported by the molecular bio-chemical evidences. Also the evidence from astrophysics is implying the development of the universe which has the appearance of unfolding an environment precisely tuned for mankind. The ‘intelligent-design theory’ is challenging the notion that naturalism is the only way to view the world. New questions are being asked. Free inquiry has brought forward ‘information theory’ as a new basis on which to compare naturalistic evolution and intelligent design.

The philosophical and scientific evidence of contemporary cosmology is pointing toward a universe designed for a hospitable cosmic habitat. The *anthropic principle* (which was only mentioned earlier, and will be discussed in detail again a little later) essentially says that all the seemingly arbitrary and unrelated constants in physics are precisely the values required to have a universe capable of producing life. There is no fundamental reason why these values have to be the way they are. Yet, all of these laws and constants conspire in a mathematically incredible way to make life in the universe possible.

The constants of physics, the forces of nature and other physical laws and principles necessary for life explain the fine-tuning for a life-sustaining universe. Earlier the believers had to maintain their beliefs by faith in the Bible to face the contrary arguments that were raised against God and faith. But they were ridiculed by the atheists for their blind faith in the Bible. Now the situation is different. The atheists have to maintain their ‘unbelief’ or ‘misbelief’ by faith, in view of the evidences from science. The believers can stand confidently within Biblical truth, knowing it’s in line with mainstream astrophysics and cosmology.

Although the idea of evolutionary progress became a secular substitute for providence, and faith in progress replaced the doctrine of divine providence, we are encouraged by the scientific data for intelligent design. .

### **Evidence for intelligent primary causes**

From the very moment of its inception, the universe had to be fine-tuned to an incomprehensible precision for the existence of life like us. Scientifically speaking, it is far more probable for a life-prohibiting universe to exist than a life-sustaining one. One theory called ‘natural necessity’ is used to explain that ‘something in nature’ made it necessary that things would turn out life sustaining. But the precision is so utterly fantastic, so mathematically breathtaking, that it is just plain silly to think it could have been an accident. The fine turning of the universe points powerfully toward an Intelligent Designer.

Chance has no power to cause anything. Chance is a mathematical abstraction with no real existence. Since it is nothing, it cannot do anything. To say that the universe was created by chance is to say that was created by nothing or was ‘self-created’. Self-creation may be a popular idea socially but it cannot withstand even a rudimentary intellectual critique. Similarly, if life is something special that can be distinguished from

matter, then we must face the question of that which is not life producing life. If life is an effect, we must account for its cause. If matter is utterly lifeless, how can it produce life? Moreover, intelligent life is life that has the ability to think and to act in a purposeful way. Can nature do that without intelligence? The whole realm of nature shouts of the design of the universe. This design must have a designer or it is improper to call it design.

According to the Big Bang theory, somewhere between fifteen to twenty billion years ago, the universe began with an explosion of cosmic dimensions. The universe has been steadily running down since then, and it will eventually come to a halt in what is sometimes called a 'thermodynamic death', the ultimate entropy of matter and energy so degraded that nothing further can happen.<sup>116</sup> Things always tend to go from a state of order to chaos, not the other way around, unless there is a purposeful input of energy. Things run down. Everything from our bodies to machines, buildings and the universe itself is running down. The term 'big bang' was coined at the time scientists were originally speculating on the origin of the universe based on the theory of general relativity. Einstein's equations, along with the updates based on experimental physics, indicate that the universe started from nothing and burst into existence.

Using the equations of general relativity, scientists can trace that 'explosion' backward to its origin, an instant when the entire physical universe burst forth from a single point of infinite density. That point when the universe originated from a point of no size at all is called the 'singularity'. Singularity is the whole of three dimensional space compressed to zero size. This infinitely shrunken space actually represents a boundary at which space ceases to exist. The probability of something physical coming from nothing is zero, and not a single physical state or event being observed or otherwise known can originate from nothing. General relativity points to the need for a cause that transcends the domains of time, space, matter and energy. An eternally self-subsistent being is no more improbable than a self-subsisted event emerging from no cause.

Theories designed to avoid the beginning of the universe have turned out to be untenable. The Steady State Theory claimed that as galaxies retreat from each other, new matter comes into being out of nothing and fills the void. But it never secured a single piece of experimental verification. The Oscillating Model of the universe, popularised by astronomer Carl Sagan, suggests that the universe expands, then collapses, then expands again, and continues in this cycle indefinitely. This model was popular in the sixties. But it contradicts the known laws of physics. The whole theory was simply a theoretical abstraction. Physics never supported it.

The Theory of Cyclic Universe postulates that our universe is a 'three-dimensional membrane' in a 'five-dimensional' space. The collision of another three-dimensional membrane with ours causes an expansion of our universe. Then our universe retreats and repeats the cycle again, and on and on. Though difficult to conceptualise, this idea had a certain amount of appeal. But the equations for this string theory haven't even all been stated yet, much less solved. This is found extremely speculative and uncertain. Also it turns out that even the cyclical model in five dimensions has to have a beginning.

Stephen William Hawking a theoretical physicist who is currently the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University, a post once held by Sir Isaac Newton, says in his book *A Brief History of Time*, ‘So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator’.<sup>117</sup> However, Hawking questioned the place for a creator if the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary. But he asserts the universe has an origin out of nothing in the sense that there’s absolutely nothing that comes before it.<sup>118</sup> He wasn’t able to write God out of the picture successfully.

In order to escape the theistic implications of the finely tuned universe, the ‘many-universe’ hypothesis also is speculated. Some physicists subscribe to some sort of multiple universe, or ‘multiverse’ theory, although others scoff at the idea. Similarly there is the theory of ‘inflationary cosmology’ which postulates a pre-existing superspace that is rapidly expanding. It assumes that a small part of this superspace is blown up and a huge number of new universes are randomly birthed. Thus each universe has a beginning and is finite in size, while the much larger superspace is infinite and endures forever.

Regardless of which multiple-universe theory is used, it would require the right structure, the right mechanism and the right ingredients to churn our new universes. It is highly unlikely that all the right components and ingredients are put in place by random chance. The atheistic scientists acknowledge that it is scientifically impossible ever to find evidence for the existence of a single additional universe, let alone an infinity of other hypothetical universes. This assertion of a belief in an infinity of untold trillions of other random universes takes more faith than to believe in God as Creator.

Almost by accident, astrophysicists started realising amazing things about the physics of the big bang and how it seemed to set up a perfect environment for life on planet earth. The *anthropic principle* (the term derived from the Greek word *anthropos* for ‘man’ by Cambridge physicist Brandon Carter in 1973) points to the concept that the development of the universe seems to be aimed at providing an environment suitable for human life. Professor Robert Jastrow, although an agnostic, admits that ‘the universe was constructed within very narrow limits, in such a way that man could dwell in it. The result is called the anthropic principle. It is the most theistic result ever to come out of science, in my view’.<sup>119</sup> This evidence in support of the anthropic principle strongly supports the conclusion that our universe and earth were designed to provide a home for humanity by an intelligent and supernaturally powerful creator.

The astronomer Dr. Paul Davis has written about the strong evidence that points to the fact that this universe looks like it was designed by a super-intelligent designer with a very specific purpose involving humanity.<sup>120</sup> Biology professor John Maynard Smith wrote: ‘It turns out that the physical constants have just the values required to ensure that the Universe contains stars with planets capable of supporting intelligent life... The simplest interpretation is that the Universe was designed by a creator who intended that intelligent life should evolve. This interpretation lies outside science’.<sup>121</sup>

The same anthropic principle can be seen in the other scientific variables such as the force of gravity. Life would be impossible if the force of gravity were either much greater

or much weaker. The electrical communication between every one of the sixty trillion cells in our body depends on the earth's magnetic field. A reduction of the strength of the magnetic field beyond a certain level would make life impossible. Some of the scientific factors that are set within precise parameters to facilitate our life on this planet are mentioned in the following paragraphs.

Our universe, solar system and especially our earth was purposely constructed by a very powerful intelligence within very narrow scientific parameters to allow human life to flourish. The rate of expansion was just right for the formation of stars and galaxies. If the rate had been greater, matter would have dispersed too efficiently to form galaxies. No galaxies, and then no stars, no sun, and no moon. On the other hand, had the rate been slower, matter would have clumped together so efficiently that it would have collapsed into a high-density 'lump' before any stars could form. Again, there will be no stars, and no sun and no earth.

Also the constant of the speed of light (299,792,458 kilometres per second) is critical to the existence of life. A faster speed of light would cause energy to increase, burning up life on planet earth. A lower energy would cause things to freeze. The earth had to appear at a certain stage. Several generations of giant stars had to have fused enough heavy elements to allow for the proper earth chemistry. Also, the earth had to be located in the right part of the galaxy for life to appear.

Once some astrophysicists started discovering the amazing precision of the cosmos, others started seeking additional parameters that might have been pre-programmed into the universe to make an environment suitable for life. To date, more than 152 critical parameters have been identified. A small change in any one of these would make life impossible. Some of the critical parameters include the earth's distance from the sun, the sun's location relative to the centre of the galaxy, the sun's mass, the tilt of the planetary axis which is necessary for the seasons, the ratio of oceans to continents to keep the global temperature stable, the carbon dioxide level for the rate of vegetation stabilisation, atmospheric transparency for the degree of energy transfer to the earth, oxygen nitrogen ratio and the like. Even from just these eight parameters, we can see that the conditions on this planet are far from random chance.

The sun is highly stable, more so than most comparable stars. Its right mass, the right light, the right composition, the right distance, the right orbit, the right galaxy and the right location are favourable to nurture living organisms on a circling planet. Also the moon happens to be the right size and in the right place to help create a habitable environment for the earth. The extraordinary conditions that create a hospitable environment on earth also happen to make our planet strangely well suited for viewing, analysing and understanding the universe. Our location makes it so wonderful for scientific measurement and discovery. The big bang looks like an immense master plan to prepare an environment that precisely fits the needs of human beings and other living creatures on earth. When there is no natural explanation for the fine-tuning, the cosmological constants by themselves strongly establish design.

Some of the key breakthroughs of twentieth-century physics involve phenomena that affect the study of the origin of the universe. Scientific discoveries made during the 1920s transformed modern astronomers' understanding of the basic structure and form of the universe. Until that point in time, virtually all astronomers believed that science had established that the universe was static and had existed forever. The new discoveries produced a revolution in scientific thought as scientists struggled to adapt to this new radical truth that upset all of their previous assumptions.

In 1927 a contemporary of Einstein, Edwin Hubble, documented that the most distant galaxies are moving away from the earth. Furthermore, the farther away the galaxies are, the faster they are receding. His experimental finding that showed this is termed the *redshift*. The 'degree of redness' indicates speed. By measuring 'Hubble's constant' two teams of scientists at the Carnegie Observatories report converging findings on the age of the universe in 1996. One team estimated the age at 9 to 12 billion years, and the other estimated at 11 to 15 billion years. The age of the universe is estimated to be about 16 billion years, and of the earth about 4.6 billion years. The first event of creation was not the first moment 'in time', but the first moment 'of time'. Whatever existed prior to the first moment was timeless and immutable. God existed 'prior' to the first moment that He was and is timeless.

Postulating the existence of God as the explanation for the fine-tuning of the universe makes all the sense in the world. The laws of nature seem to have been carefully arranged so that they can be discovered by beings with our level of intelligence. The mission of physics is to pursue a naturalistic explanation as far as we can. It can never by itself explain the 'most fundamental laws'. Explaining these fundamental laws is where one moves from physics to metaphysics. Although invoking God may not be strictly part of science, it is in the spirit of science that we follow its evidence and its implications. We shouldn't shrink back from the God hypothesis if that's where the facts fit. Harvard's scientist Owen Gingerich said, 'I believe that the Book of Nature suggests a God of purpose and a God of design. And I think my belief makes me no less of a scientist'.<sup>122</sup> God carefully and precisely created the world as a habitat for intelligent life. This not only fits the idea of design, but also suggests a providential purpose for us to learn about our habitat and to develop science and technology.

### **Origin and development of life**

Russian biochemist Alexander Oparin proposed in 1924 that complex molecular arrangements and the functions of living matter evolved from simpler molecules that pre-existed on the early earth. It was the thinking of those days when Stanley Miller tried to validate by 'Miller's experiment' the chemical evolution of life (Stanley Miller's experiment in which he shot electricity through an atmosphere like the one on the primitive earth, creating amino acids, the building blocks of life).<sup>123</sup> The early earth conditions necessary to produce life were just as likely to destroy it. No oxygen was present for the reaction to work. The energy needed from the sun and cosmic radiation were damaging to the very substances produced. They would be destroyed faster than they could be produced. Even if the right chemicals could be produced, no satisfactory

answer has been given for how they could have been arranged properly and been enclosed in a cell wall. This would require another set of conditions altogether.

The geological record does not support this view. Based on the discovery of microfossils, scientists have now estimated that the time gap between the earth reaching the right temperature and the first emergence of life was only about 400 million years. That's not much for chemical evolution to take place. Just to complicate matters further, there is growing evidence that the early earth was rich in oxygen but low in nitrogen, just the opposite of what evolution needs.

The experiments, which support the generation of living matter from non-living chemicals, are flawed by the very interference of the intelligent scientist performing the experiment. These experiments do not really reproduce the conditions of early earth. The experimenters are only fooling themselves to think that they are observing a natural process. They have manipulated the process by their own intervention.

Evolutionists have never shown any mechanism that can harness the energy to do the work of selecting amino acids and sorting which will build each gene to develop a living organism. The right amino acids have to be linked together in the right sequence in order to produce protein molecules. A collection of protein molecules with the right functions, about two hundred of them, have to be brought together to get a typical living cell.

The ability of biological organisms to reorganise and regenerate themselves has puzzled philosophers and scientists since ancient times. With the exception of mature red blood cells, the sixty trillion cells in our human body contain a nucleus that holds the forty-six vital threadlike chromosomes that contain our genetic instructions. The guidance that's needed to assemble everything comes from DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid). Every cell of every plant and animal has to have a DNA molecule. DNA works hand-in-glove with RNA (ribonucleic acid) to direct the correct sequencing of amino acids. It's able to do this through biochemical instructions, or information that is encoded on the DNA.

The proteins in any multi-celled life form are the primary ingredients that determine what each cell is structurally, and what each cell does. Our bodies, and those of plants and animals, are made up of cells. It is the protein, built according to the instructions of DNA, that determines what become hair, skin, bone and all the organs of the body. It also determines whether we will be a plant, a human or a toad. Although human DNA appears to be the most complex, the DNA found in even the 'simplest' form of bacteria is still enormously complex, as it contains at least three million units, with every single unit aligned in a very precise, meaningful sequence.

The probability of linking together just one hundred amino acids to create one protein molecule by random chance would be 'about as likely as a tornado whirling through a junkyard and accidentally assembling a fully functional Boeing 747'.<sup>124</sup> The theory assuming that there must be some inherent attraction that would cause amino acids to spontaneously link up in the right sequence to create protein also was repudiated later by its proponents.

Granting that there have been enough energy available to do the work, the only systems we know which can harness the energy to do this kind of work are either living or intelligent. Intelligence is required in order to put energy into a system to organise and create information. The only cause that we know routinely does this kind of work is intelligence. Francis Crick, who shared the Nobel Prize for discovering the molecular structure of DNA, said, 'An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have had to have been satisfied to get it going'.<sup>125</sup>

Darwin's principle of natural selection provided a system by which new developments of life form could be explained without recourse to a supernatural cause. He arrived at his theory through studying the effects of selection as practised by man in the breeding of domesticated animals and cultivated plants. But the action of man in selective breeding is not analogous to the action of 'natural selection', but almost its direct opposite. Man has an aim or an end view and so can pick out and choose characteristics he seeks to perpetuate or enhance. Nothing of this kind happens, or can happen, through the blind process of differential elimination and differential survival that we miscall 'natural selection'. If Darwin's analogy proves anything, it shows the need for intelligent intervention to produce new life forms.

Fossil discoveries over the last 150 years show the Cambrian explosion was more abrupt than scientists once thought. It gave rise to the sudden appearance of most of the major phyla that are still alive today during the Cambrian geological period. The fossil evidence clearly gives a picture of mature, fully functional creatures suddenly appearing and staying very much the same. There is no real indication that one form of life transforms into a completely different form. The existing fossil evidence supports creation better than evolution.

Some evolutionists have attempted to deal with the fossil evidence by introducing the idea of *punctuated equilibrium*, stating about 'jumps' which brought on major changes in shorter times. But they cannot produce any evidence for a mechanism of secondary causes, which makes these sudden advances possible. Sudden appearance of these life forms only strengthens our case that a supernatural intelligence was at work to accomplish this organisation.<sup>126</sup> The origin of life certainly cries out for a designer.

Natural selection only preserves things that perform a function; it can only preserve them once they have been built. The integrative, complex systems in biological organisms include signal circuits, sophisticated motors, and all kinds of biological circuitry. These 'biological machines' need all of their various parts in order to function. Such systems perform no function until all the parts are present and working together in close co-ordination with one another. It is impossible for evolution to take such a huge leap by mere chance to create the whole system at once. Whenever we see 'irreducibly complex systems' (which will be explained later) and we know how they arose, invariably a designer was the cause.

The cell is horrendously complicated, and it is actually run by micromachines of the right shape, the right strength and the right interactions. If one of the components is removed, the system would no longer function. Also you have to have information resident in the system to tell the components to get together in the right orientation; otherwise it is useless. In molecular machines, components have portions of their shape that are complementary to each other. So they connect with each other in the right way. They all have to fit together. None of the individual parts can do it by themselves. The necessary components would have to come together at the right place at the right time, even assuming they were all pre-existing in the cell.

If we do any calculations about how likely this could occur by itself, we would find it's very improbable. It would take a prohibitive amount of time even to get three proteins together. A recent study found that half the proteins in a simple yeast cell don't function alone, but they function as complexes of half a dozen proteins or more. Evolution has to build things up from the bottom. The audacious claim of Darwinian evolution is that it can put together complex systems with no intelligence at all. The finely tuned machines of the cellular world adequately point to an intelligent designer.

The system of blood clotting involves a highly choreographed cascade of ten steps that use about twenty different molecular components. Without the whole system in place, it doesn't work. If the blood clot isn't confined to the cut or if that doesn't cover the entire length of the cut, it is dangerous. We are familiar with the blood clot in the wrong place, say the brain or lung. To create a perfectly balanced blood-clotting system, clusters of protein components have to be inserted all at once.

Nobody has ever succeeded in showing how blood clotting could have developed. Complex biological systems have yet to be explained by naturalistic means. As science advances, we are continuing to find more and more complexity in the cellular world. Science should be the search for truth, not merely the search for materialistic explanations. Microbiologist James Shapiro said, 'There are no detailed Darwinian accounts for the evolution of any fundamental biochemical or cellular system, only a variety of wishful speculation'.<sup>127</sup>

Michael Behe, well-known molecular biologist, describes the *irreducible complexity*, 'By irreducibly complex I mean a single system composed of several well-matched, interacting parts that contribute to the basic function, wherein the removal of any one of the parts causes the system to effectively cease functioning'.<sup>128</sup> The cellular system's complexity is vastly greater than all of the manufacturing facilities in the world put together.

Considering the human eye, the parts easily seen include the cornea, the iris and the pupil. We also have to account for the lens, the retina and many other parts, not to mention a brain that has to know how to process the information. The most basic and the simplest part is the 'light-sensitive cell'. A biochemical cycle of twenty-one steps in the process, from the time the light strikes the cell and to complete the cycle, takes only a few picoseconds. When we dig into the individual cells and analyse specifically what they do, we find that any single step of the twenty-one would result in lack of vision. The

concept of irreducible complexity indicates that all of the above would have to happen simultaneously because any partial light-sensitive spot would have absolutely no survival value. If it had no survival value, the mutations would die out. For the eye to work, many other parts are needed, each with its own microbiological irreducible complexities. If all of these individual irreducibly complex parts can't come together at once through simultaneous mutations, the survival value of the eye is worthless.

In the mid-twentieth century, it was perhaps justifiable to hold that apes and humans were related because of their appearance. Today, with molecular biology, it's not. With the electron microscope, X-ray crystallography and nuclear magnetic resonance imaging, we can peer into the actual makeup of genes and the functions of the living cells. Irreducibly complex systems are strong evidence of a purposeful, intentional design by an intelligent agent.

Scientists found how the DNA provides the genetic information necessary to create all of the proteins out of which our bodies are built. DNA serves as the information storehouse for a finely choreographed manufacturing process in which the right amino acids are linked together to build biological system. DNA is the repository for a digital code containing the instructions for telling the cell's machinery how to build proteins. The cell's critical functions are usually performed by proteins, and proteins are the product of assembly instructions stored in the DNA. The genetic code in the DNA within every cell communicates to the rest of the trillions of cells within our body through the RNA genetic transfer material found in every cell.

Geneticist Michael Denton said, 'The information needed to build the proteins for all the species of organisms that have ever lived could be held in a teaspoon and there would still be room left for all the information in every book ever written'.<sup>129</sup> Biology Professor Dean Kenyon repudiated the conclusions of his own book on the chemical origin of life and concluded instead that nothing short of an intelligence could have created this intricate cellular apparatus.

The huge advances in genetic research in the last five decades have enabled scientists to begin to unlock some of the mysteries of the genetic code which governs the formation of every organ in our body, the colour of our eyes and whether one has black or blonde hair. One of the most extraordinary discoveries of the twentieth century was that DNA actually stores information in the form of a four-character digital code. The DNA is composed of four subunits called nucleotides. These four nucleotides (except for red blood cells) are composed of a phosphate (P) with ribose sugar together with one of these four bases: guanine (G), cytosine(C), thymine (T) or adenine (A). The genetic message that conveys the way organs and body structures form is encoded in the intricate sequence of the four chemical bases (G, C, T and A) that are arranged as letters to convey precise instructions. To record the genetic instructions encoded in human DNA, we would need more than five billion letters that would require up to three thousand volumes of a thousand pages to print out, while that of a simple bacteria would fill a book of at least a thousand pages.

This degree of microengineering is so far beyond the ability of humans that it fills the mind with wonder at the work of the Creator. Properly arranging those four 'bases', as

they're called, will instruct the cell, and different arrangements of characters yields different sequences of amino acids. The sequence of the amino acids is critical to getting the long chain to form an actual functional protein. Wrong sequence of amino acids is unable to serve its function.

To build one protein, it requires 1,200 to 2,000 bases, which is a lot of information. It is the information that makes the molecules into something that actually functions. Computer genius Bill Gates said, 'DNA is like a software program, only much more complex than any thing we've ever devised'.<sup>130</sup> The deeper issue here is as to what's the source of the assembly instructions in DNA. Among the biggest dilemmas for supporters of naturalistic evolution is how information is programmed into the DNA structure to begin with.

We know from our experience that creation of new information is habitually associated with conscious activity. What enables us in our regular communication is an irregular sequencing of letters. They convey information because they conform to a certain known independent pattern according to the rules of vocabulary and grammar. The 'four letters' (bases) in the DNA are highly irregular, while at the same time conforming to a functional requirement of arranging correctly the amino acids to create a working protein. The irregularity that's specified by a set of functional requirements is called 'specified complexity', and this is recognised as information. It is fairly simple to see the distinct difference between information that contains specified complexity and information that does not. For example, a redundant pattern in sand is random and is unspecified information, whereas a sandcastle is specified complex information. Broken coloured glass is unspecified, while a stained glass window is specified.

One cannot invoke self-organising processes to explain the origin of information, because informational sequences are irregular and complex. In the DNA, there is nothing chemically that forces them into any particular sequence, and neither chemistry nor physics arranges the letters into the assembly instructions for proteins. Moreover, the different kinds of cells have to be arranged into tissues, and tissues have to be arranged into organs, and organs have to be arranged into overall body plans. The sequencing has to come from somewhere else. This kind of information is invariably the result of mind, not chance, not natural selection and not self-organisational processes. Design and information are linked together. Design implies that information has been applied to accomplish a purpose. Based on the principle of causality and observational science, we know that this type of information is only produced by intelligent causes. We can conclude that the first living cell required an intelligent cause.

As mentioned earlier, in the Cambrian explosion there was fossil record of a dazzling array of new life forms that suddenly appears fully formed, without any of the ancestors required by Darwinism. This phenomenon would have required the sudden infusion of massive amounts of new genetic and other biological information that only could have come from an intelligent source. One calculation shows that if we compress all of the earth's history into twenty-four hours, the Cambrian explosion would consume only

about one minute. Without any ancestors in the fossil record, we have a stunning variety of complex creatures appear in the blink of an eye, geologically speaking.

Darwin admitted the Cambrian explosion was ‘inexplicable’ and a ‘valid argument’ against his theory. He insisted ‘nature takes no leaps’. This phenomenon is a powerful evidence of a designer. Once we allow intelligent design as an option, we can quickly see how it accounts for the key features of the Cambrian phenomenon. No other entity explains the sudden appearance of such complex new creatures.

Evolutionists are still trying to apply Darwin’s nineteenth-century thinking to a twenty-first century reality. Explanations from the era of the steamboat are no longer adequate to explain the biological world of the information age. Invoking design is definitely not giving up on science. We should look for the best explanation, not merely the best naturalistic explanation. Naturalistic theories that rely solely on matter and energy are not going to be able to account for information. In a sense, information is not something derived from material properties, it transcends matter and energy. Information is the hallmark of the mind. We can infer, purely from the evidence of genetics and biology, the existence of a Mind that’s far greater than our own. An intelligent entity has quite literally spelled out evidence of His existence in the genetic code. It’s as if the Creator autographed every cell!<sup>131</sup>

Ralph O. Muncaster says, ‘As an explanation for the origin and development of life, the bridge of evolution has crashed down. In contrast, the bridge of intelligent design looks strong enough to bear the weight of current facts and discoveries’.<sup>132</sup> The interpretation of the evidence points to an intelligent designer and this is far more ‘scientific’ than the evolutionary interpretation. The evidences are more objective, based on hard evidence, and more compelling.

Even the very secular-minded editors of *Time* magazine were forced to acknowledge that a quiet but profound ‘intellectual earthquake’ was occurring in the academic and scientific communities. In a significant article the writer declared, ‘In a quiet revolution in thought and argument that hardly anyone would have foreseen only two decades ago, God is making a comeback. Most intriguingly this is happening ... in the crisp intellectual circles of academic philosophers’.<sup>133</sup> Grant R. Jeffrey says, ‘After decades of academic and scientific rejection of the universe, the atheistic scientists were startled to discover that they were finding compelling evidence of a super-intelligent design in the arrangement of the atoms, the universe, the genetic DNA code, as well as the startlingly intricate and complex arrangement of every single biological system’.<sup>134</sup> The prestigious science journal *Nature* reported the survey of the beliefs of leading scientists in North America revealing that 40 percent of the physicists, biologists and mathematicians acknowledged that they now believe in God as a Supreme Being who is involved in our earthly affairs and hears our prayers.

### **Human consciousness**

Human beings are more than a bunch of chemicals and nerves. Evolution cannot reckon with the transcendental nature of human beings. Man has the power of rational thought.

Although time, space and matter limit man, he can come out of the circle of his limitations. All science is based on man's power of rational thought and ability of conceptualisation. Many scientists and philosophers are now concluding that the laws of physics and chemistry cannot explain the experience of consciousness in human beings. They are convinced that there is more than just the physical brain at work, but there is also a nonmaterial reality called the 'soul', 'mind' or 'self' that accounts for our sentience. Wilder Penfield, the renowned father of modern neurosurgery, through performing surgery on more than a thousand epileptic patients, encountered concrete evidence that the brain and mind are actually distinct from each other, although they clearly interact.<sup>135</sup> Physician Sam Parnia of the Institute of Psychiatry in London said, 'The scientific findings so far would support the view that mind, "consciousness", or the "soul" is a separate entity from the brain'.<sup>136</sup>

Consciousness is what we are aware of when we introspect. When we pay attention to what's going on inside us, that's consciousness. Consciousness consists of sensations, thoughts, emotions, desires, beliefs and free choices that make us alive and aware. There is more to us than our conscious life and our body. The 'self' cannot be seen or touched unless we manifest ourselves through our behaviour or our talk. Consciousness is being alive. It is an immaterial entity apart from the brain. In several places the Bible uses the word 'soul' or 'spirit' when discussing animals having consciousness.<sup>137</sup> Augustine said animals have thoughts, but they don't think about their thinking. While we have beliefs about our beliefs, animals don't. We have self-reflection and self-thinking.

The emergence of consciousness is a mystery, and one to which materialism fails to provide an answer. Darwinian evolution will never be able to explain the origin of consciousness, because it can't explain how we can get something from nothing. *Physicalism* holds that the only thing that exists is matter. Physicalism asserts that a human being is just a physical system, and that there is no mind or soul, but just a brain and central nervous system. According to Darwinists, the physical world is all that there is, and consciousness is the automatic by-product of increasingly sophisticated brain power. Scientists who are committed to finding a purely physical answer admit that they currently have no explanation for how the brain might spawn consciousness. Some find refuge in their unshakeable faith that science will eventually discover a completely naturalistic explanation.<sup>138</sup>

*Dualism* asserts that in addition to the body, a human being also has a non-physical component called a soul, mind or self. There are two main varieties of dualism – *Property dualism* and *substance dualism*. Property dualists hold that the mind is a property of the body, a by-product that does not cause anything. It ceases to exist when the body ceases to function. Its emergence seems to be tied to the brain. As a brain is an object, it is not very promising to account for the emergence of the mind by saying it comes from nothing. One can't use evolution as an explanation for why the mind should be considered trustworthy, because theoretical thinking does not contribute to survival value.

One could no longer hold that physical laws could exhaustively describe the casual processes of the universe. Once one grants the existence of the mind, then the question

arises as to where it came from. Richard Swinburne says that science will never be able to explain where mental properties come from or why they emerge when they do – mental properties are different from physical properties.<sup>139</sup> The mind appears to be a basic feature of the cosmos and its origin at a finite level of persons is best explained by postulating a fundamental Mind who gave finite minds being and design. As Calvin put it, ‘the endowments which we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves. They point to the ultimate Mind and ground of rationality himself’.<sup>140</sup>

According to substance dualism, the mind, distinct from the body, is a real substance which can cause things to happen by acting and which can exist when the body ceases to function. There can be no mind where there is no human matter. But the functions of the mind transcend the properties of matter alone. The property of mind is a system property of the totality of the subsystems that make up the thinking creature, the most significant subsystem being the brain. The properties of the mind transcend the properties of the subsystems.<sup>141</sup> Scientific evidence and philosophical reasoning demand that dualism is necessary to explain the phenomenon of consciousness. Our consciousness came from a greater Consciousness. God has thoughts. He has beliefs, He has desires, He has awareness, He’s alive and He acts with purpose. We start there. And because we start with the mind of God, we don’t have a problem with explaining the origin of our mind.<sup>142</sup>

Also, scientists have done studies and concluded that it is not just the brain that causes things to happen in our conscious life and that our mental state (worry, loneliness, lack of love, etc.) can change our brain chemistry and cause things to happen to the brain. Sometimes it could be a cause-and-effect from brain to mind, but it could also be a cause-and-effect from mind to brain. This implies that our prayer life might cause something to happen to our brain. Most of the evidence for the reality of consciousness and the soul is from our own first-person awareness of ourselves and has nothing to do with the study of the brain.

We have a model for God’s omnipresence based on ourselves. The existence of our soul gives us a new way to understand how God can be everywhere. Our soul occupies our body without being located in any one part of it. Our soul is fully present everywhere throughout our body. In a similar way God is fully present everywhere. God occupies space in the same way the soul occupies the body. Surely, we who are created in the image of God can expect some parallels between God and us. The idea of getting a mind to squirt into existence by starting with brute, dead or mindless matter doesn’t make sense. But when we begin with an infinite Mind we can explain how finite minds could come into existence, and that makes sense.

### **The three-fold creation in the Bible**

In the first chapter of Genesis we read ‘God created’ three times. In verse 1 we read, ‘God created the heaven and the earth’. Here we have the origin of *matter*. We never read of a second creation of anything material. All the matter in the universe is formed out of that which was then created.

In verse 21 we have a *second* creative act: ‘God created great whales and every living creature that moveth’ or as better rendered, ‘Every being that hath *a living soul*’. Here is the origin of life. Scripture knows nothing of life spontaneously generated from dead matter. It differentiates absolutely between the non-living and the living. By no possible process of evolution could the non-living ever become the living in view of the scientific facts mentioned earlier. Therefore, if dependent life is to come into the universe, God must act anew as Creator. *Soul*, a non-material reality, is the natural life with all its capabilities of passion, emotion and instinct.

The soul is common both to the lower animals and to man. The soul of the animal dies when the body dies. The soul of man is linked with his *spirit*. In verse 27, we have a *third* creative act: ‘So God created man in his own image; in the image of God created He them’. The need of this distinctive creative act is because by no possibility could creatures possessing only body and soul have become possessed of a thinking, reasoning spirit, unless it were communicated by God Himself. It is this that lifts man above all else in God’s creation. From Zechariah 12:1 where we read about ‘The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him’, we observe that the formation of the human spirit is viewed as though it were as great a work as the stretching forth of the heavens and the creation of the earth.

The Greek words used are *soma* for body, *pseuche* for soul, and *pneuma* for the spirit. The spirit is the faculty of making us God-conscious. The spirit transcends our limitations, and relates us to God. The soul is the entity that consists of mind, the faculty of knowing, emotions, the faculty of experiencing various emotions and the will, which is the faculty of purposing, choosing and deliberately designing. The source of wrong impulses, commonly called the ‘flesh’ (or *sarx* in Greek), is also an element of the soul. While our soul relates us to others, our body relates us to the surroundings.

The soul and spirit are linked, and these words are also used interchangeably. In 1 Corinthians 2:11, the spirit of man is shown to be the seat of intelligence. It is by the spirit man knows; it is the spirit that reasons. It is the spirit that receives instruction from God. Several other scriptures will help to make this clear<sup>143</sup> where we read ‘the Spirit of God testifies with our spirit’, ‘it is the spirit in a man that gives him understanding’, and ‘a man’s spirit sustains him in sickness’. God illuminates man by communicating His truth to the spirit. The spirit is that part of man to which God, who Himself a Spirit, communicates His mind.

Death is the separation of body and spirit, as at death the spirit leaves the body. When the animal dies, the soul, which is linked with its body, dies too, and that is the end of its existence. But when man dies, his spirit leaves the body. Leaving the earthly tenement behind, the spirit goes into the unseen world and has to do with God who created it.

From Hebrews 4:12 we learn that that God’s Word distinguishes between soul and spirit, when it says, ‘For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit’. The use of the copulative ‘and’ between spirit and soul emphasises it does not separate them, for the two are never

separated, either in life or in death. The spirit can be considered as the higher part of the unseen man to which the Spirit of God speaks. The soul can be the lower part of the unseen man, and is the link between the body and the spirit. It is not merely the natural life, though it is that, but it is a great deal more. It is the seat of man's emotional nature.

Scripture says that the soul *suffers, loves, hates, mourns, desires and longs*.<sup>144</sup> The soul is the seat of the emotional nature. However, the soul is made to designate the man as a whole, because man in the present body is so largely a creature of emotions. Man is distinctly called a soul over and over again.<sup>145</sup> In Revelation chapter 6, John sees in his vision the souls under the altar of those who have been slain. It is correct to speak of man as having a soul to be saved or a soul to be lost.

Materialists insist that the spirit is but the breath. They point to the fact that in both the Hebrew and the Greek languages the words for 'breath', 'wind' and 'spirit' are the same, and they insist that therefore in each instance the word may be translated 'breath' with impunity. We know that even in English the word 'spirit' has a number of meanings, and according to the connection in which it is used, these meanings cannot be confounded without doing violence to the language. The context determines the meaning of the word. If we substitute the word 'breath' in the various scripture passages we have quoted, we realise how ridiculous it is to show that such interpretations refute themselves.

Someone<sup>146</sup> has likened man as originally created by God to a three-story house – the lower story or the basement as the body, the second story or work area as the soul and the third story or the place of communication and study as the spirit. In his sinless condition, man's spirit conversed with God and enjoyed communion with the Infinite Spirit. The fall of man, as a moral earthquake, so shook the house that the third story fell down into the basement. The natural man is therefore the 'soulish' man. The word rendered 'natural' and 'sensual' in the New Testament is really 'soulish'. It is an adjective derived from the word for soul. Man, however, is not bereft of the spirit even though fallen, but he has 'the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance which is in him'. More on this aspect is described in Chapter 10 on 'undoing the damage'.

## **Summary**

### *Scientific data showing intelligent design*

An intelligent designer's involvement better explains the origin of the universe and the life in it. The tremendous new discoveries of modern science during the last few decades provide compelling evidence that a supernatural Creator created the universe as the Bible affirms. Today, we have the benefit of molecular biology and astrophysics that provide important boundaries in evaluating what is possible in regard to the origin of life.

### *Evidence for intelligent primary causes*

The universe had to be fine-tuned, from the very moment of its inception, to an incomprehensible precision for the existence of life like us. Einstein's equations, along with the updates based on experimental physics, indicate that the universe started from nothing. The anthropic principle points to the concept that the development of the universe seems to be aimed at providing an environment suitable for human life.

### *Origin and development of life*

The experiments that support the generation of living matter from non-living chemicals are flawed. If Darwin's analogy for 'natural selection' proves anything, it shows the need for intelligent intervention to produce new life forms. The finely tuned 'machines' of the cellular world adequately points to an intelligent designer.

The huge advances in genetic research in the last five decades have enabled scientists to begin to unlock some of the mysteries of the genetic code that governs the formation of every organ in our body. Among the biggest dilemmas for supporters of naturalistic evolution is how the genetic code information is programmed into the DNA structure. Based on the principle of causality and observational science, we know that this type of information is only produced by intelligent cause. The interpretation of evidence points to an intelligent designer and this is far more 'scientific' than the evolutionary interpretation.

### *Human consciousness*

Evolution cannot reckon with the transcendental nature of man. Many scientists and philosophers are now concluding that the laws of physical sciences cannot explain the experience of consciousness in human beings. The emergence of consciousness is a mystery, and one to which materialism fails to provide answer. When we begin with an infinite Mind we can explain how finite minds could come into existence, and that makes sense.

### *The three-fold creation in the Bible*

Man is created to have a physical body, soul and spirit. Soul, a non-material reality, is the natural life with all its capabilities of passion, emotion and instinct. The spirit is the faculty of making man God-conscious. At death, the spirit leaves the body. The spirit can be considered as the higher part of the unseen man to which the Spirit of God speaks, while the soul is the link between the body and the spirit. However, the soul is also made to designate the man as a whole.

The creation of the universe itself is a great miracle. We can therefore accept other miracles recorded in the Bible. However, the place of miracles today and the purpose of such special acts of God are also matters of our concern here. Let us discuss this in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 6 MIRACLES, THE SPECIAL ACTS OF GOD

### **Are miracles possible?**

The natural world is the world of regular, observable and predictable events. The miracle that we consider here is a divine intervention into the regular course of the world that produces certain unusual events.<sup>147</sup> Francis Beckwith defines, 'A miracle is a divine intervention which occurs contrary to the regular course of nature within a significant historical-religious context'.<sup>148</sup> Ordinarily miracles are above human comprehension, and they cannot be rationally explained or else they would lose their miraculous character. It is the effect of a cause outside of nature acting within nature.

The natural laws of nature tell us that certain kinds of effects follow certain kinds of causes. If some new cause is introduced, it is possible to get new effects. Obviously natural causes produce natural effects and if an unnatural cause is introduced, it is possible to get a new effect. If God is the unnatural cause, He can produce unusual events that would not or could not have occurred otherwise. Miracles need not be a violation of the ordinary laws of cause and effect, but a new effect produced by the introduction of a supernatural Cause. God, the supernatural Cause, reaches into nature and adds another factor or link into the chain of cause and effect to bring about an effect beyond what nature by itself could have done. The miracles in the Bible are integral to Christian theism. Miracles can be used in the verification of the supernatural and the Christian truth claims.

It is essential to the theistic worldview to believe not only in a God, but also that this God created the world as a place of order. Once one defines natural law as 'fixed', 'immutable' and 'unchangeable', then it is certainly irrational to say a miracle occurred to break the unbreakable. When we believe that the very existence of the world from moment to moment depends upon the creative and sustaining power of God and that no natural law has any power of its own to continue, we can come to the conclusion that God's activity in a miracle is not qualitatively different from God's activity in natural phenomena. God acts freely and continuously and He is not constrained by the natural laws. At rare times and in accordance with His specific purpose, God acts freely to produce what we interpret as a miracle.

For most scientists, the universe is an 'open system' in which natural laws are merely statistical averages or probabilities of the ways things behave. If so, there is always the

possibility that there may be exceptions to these ‘normal’ patterns. Our experience is that in the ordinary course of events, such unusual happenings are very rare, and that’s why we call them miracles. Within the Biblical narrative as whole, the miracles are relatively scarce, although it is full of the record of the mighty acts of God in history.<sup>149</sup>

A supernaturally caused exception to a scientific law would not invalidate it, because scientific laws are designed to express natural regularities. In the case of a miracle we have a special and non-repeatable exception. One non-repeatable exception does not call for the revision of a natural law. When a miracle takes place, it is because God wants it to, and one cannot arrange for God to ‘want to’ once again simply so that we can watch. Miracles are not arbitrary violations of natural law to impress the people involved, but they are appropriate evidences of God’s free activity with a specific purpose in view. Scientists and philosophers are interested only in repeatable exceptions to known laws.

Miracles do not change our view of scientific laws, as quantum physics did by the explanation of ‘probability distribution’; they simply step outside of the laws. It is a law of nature that oxygen and potassium combust when they are combined. But these two elements present in our body do not cause any flame, because other factors are interfering with the combustion. The law merely states what happens under idealised conditions. Similarly, if there is a supernatural agent that is working in the natural world, then the idealised conditions described the law are no longer in effect.

The law of gravity also states what will happen under idealised conditions. Catching something falling by any intervention does not require a new law. All interference leaves the natural law perfectly true. The divine art of miracles is not an art of suspending the pattern to which events conform, but of feeding new events into that pattern. We cannot consider a miracle as unscientific as it leaves natural laws intact.<sup>150</sup>

The universe is the greatest miracle of all. The wonder of creation as a whole and in its parts constitutes a sufficient proof of the Biblical wonders. Today we have scientific evidence that the universe had a beginning. The scientific evidence is mounting for a supernatural creation of the space-time universe.<sup>151</sup> Miracles are rational concepts in the context of such a theistic worldview. The beginning of the universe would be a prime example of a kind of miracle. If there is a God who caused the universe to exist and who cares for it, then it is not unreasonable to expect that He can perform some regular activities that can be explained by natural laws, and also some special events, the miracles. Miraculous, as well as non-miraculous, events are equally dependent for their occurrence upon the same creative power of God.

In the case of natural events, it is the natural force that produces things and the law describes the operation of this force. In the case of miracles, their origin is bypassing these laws, although the resulting event operates in accordance with these laws. Natural laws do not account for the origins of all events any more than the laws of physics alone explain the origin of a motor, or the laws of grammar alone can account for a poem. If one grants that the scientific method can describe how an event occurred, this does not mean that the event cannot be miraculous.

To label an event as miraculous does not imply that there are no known natural causes for that event. On some occasions we are invited to see the natural cause, for example in the parting of the Red Sea, 'a strong east wind' for the rolling back of the waters.<sup>152</sup> We attach particular significance to unusual events and regard them as miracles. The secondary means that are responsible for the event are neither more nor less given by God than any other day to day occurrence. Sometimes, the miraculous-ness may be more in its purpose and timing than the means used to accomplish it. As long as the event is naturally unusual and theologically purposeful, it can qualify as a miracle, even if the immediate process is scientifically explainable.<sup>153</sup> An unusual intervention by a powerful outside intelligence, God, is precisely what is involved in a miracle.

The naturalists make assumption that all events will ultimately have a natural explanation, but don't offer any proof for that assumption. Just because an unusual event occurs in the world does not mean it was caused by the world. It may have been specially caused by the God beyond the world. Science cannot demand that the natural laws that govern the functions of the world can account for the origin of every event in the world. It can only explain those that are regular, repeatable and/or predictable. Also scientific laws do not include anomalies.

The integrity of science can be maintained over world processes without giving it the exclusive rights to explain the origin of all events in the world. Scientists can examine all the events, and they may have to place some of them in the class of 'not yet explainable as natural events'. If an unusual occurrence shows signs of intelligent intervention, then the scientists cannot call it merely an anomaly of nature. Some may be of supernatural origin. The cause of the miracle is the activity of God. Its results can follow according to natural law. The miracle and the natural events can be found related. The particular event introduced into nature by the miracle and the results have their common origin in God. If the evidence does not support a natural explanation of the event, then the scientific approach should not rule out the possibility of a miracle.

The naturalist says, 'all can be explained naturally'. This is a philosophical presupposition and a faith commitment without full proof. Certainly the naturalists who attempt to rule out miracles on the basis of a faith commitment to naturalism are in no position to forbid believers (theists) from simply believing that miracles are possible. The naturalist also admits that he cannot always predict events in practice, but only in principle. The believer makes the same claim that a miracle occurs whenever God deems it necessary. Certain events are clearly purposeful and have meaning when understood in their context. Miracles belong to this class of events.

The scientific method also tells us that we should look for intelligent cause. When science points to an intelligent cause for events, one cannot say that miracles destroy science. While observation of a miracle can tell us what has happened, it cannot tell us what could have happened. The Christian viewpoint agrees that it is perfectly legitimate to assume uniformity in nature, but at the same time it is willing to entertain the possibility of miracles. The scientist is free to continue his experiments and the believer to continue his prayers.

Whether miracles have in fact occurred is a matter of history, and must be determined by historical investigation. Miraculous events can be examined and verified by the historical method. The miracles recorded in the Scripture are as open to investigation as any event recorded in ancient history. Because an event is more than objective and factual it should not mean less than historical. Miracles point to something beyond the world, but that doesn't mean that they did not happen in the world. One must be open to the evidence. It may not be possible to prove what had happened, but one cannot disprove them either.

The possibility of miracles can be established philosophically, but the actuality of miracles can only be established historically. However, there is need to find a criterion whereby to judge any particular story of the miraculous. Lies, exaggerations, hearsay and the like make up perhaps quite a lot in what is said and written about miraculous events. If the historical evidence is sufficient, the stories can be accepted without much doubt. A criterion is needed to check the probability of the event. Even when every natural explanation has been tried and failed, there can be improbable explanations such as collective hallucination, hypnotism, lying and the like to exclude a miracle.

In science when the scientists have difficulty justifying certain convictions, they go by the 'sense of the fitness of things'.<sup>154</sup> Along with a close inquiry into the historical evidence we can judge the probability by that same sense of fitness which led us to anticipate that the universe would be orderly. C.S. Lewis said, 'More than half the disbelief in miracles that exists is based on a sense of unfitness',<sup>155</sup> which is a conviction that they are unsuitable to the dignity of God or of nature.

If an event is scientifically inexplicable and has historical-religious significance, we are justified in concluding that the event was supernaturally caused. When someone says nothing can happen outside the scope of the laws of nature, it is not a scientifically verifiable statement because historically many such events have occurred all around the world. There is no good reason to postulate improbability against miracles. There is good reason to believe in God and so not to rule out miracles in advance as intrinsically improbable.<sup>156</sup> The evidences for Biblical miracles are found to be compelling.

Miracles are possible, believable and historical. They don't violate science and can be distinguished from other supernatural events. Only Christianity has unique miraculous confirmation of its truth claims. Christianity has better evidence and more witnesses who recorded events closer to the actual time of the events than any other religion. No religion offers the kind of miracles that Christianity can claim. No other religion has the record of specific prophecy or divine deliverance that the Bible gives. No other religion has any miracle that can be compared to the resurrection of Jesus Christ in its testimony.

Given a theistic worldview, the Biblical miracles provide positive evidence for the truth claims of Christian faith. God communicates truth to us in propositional form, and included in this truth is the fact that God has done certain miracles. Miracles are part of God's authoritative, self-attesting revelation. When we are convinced that the Bible is God's unerring Word, we can believe the Biblical accounts of miracles without an assessment of the evidence for each miracle. The Bible is a book of miracles. Christianity

is precisely the story of a great miracle. A naturalistic Christianity leaves out all that is specifically supernatural.

### **Virginal conception and resurrection**

Some people who believe in other miracles recorded in the Bible are found to 'draw the line' at the virgin birth. In normal conception, a microscopic particle of matter from the man's body and a microscopic particle from the woman's body meet. With that there passes all the genetic characteristics on to the newborn. In a normal act of generation of life, the father has no creative function. The momentum behind the actual conception is from God who created nature. The human father is merely an instrument, a carrier in a long line of carriers, a line that stretches back far beyond his ancestors, back to the creation of matter itself. That line is in God's hand. It is the instrument by which He normally creates a man. No woman ever conceived a child with out Him. But once, and for a special purpose, God dispensed with that long line which is His instrument. There was of course a unique reason for it. God was creating not simply a man but the Man who was to be Himself, by performing this miracle. He did this miracle for the purpose of redeeming humanity, taking flesh and blood, without a line of human ancestors. Surely, He is doing now in a different fashion, which is normal, for every woman who gives birth to a child but by using a line of carrier, the human instrument.

The miracle of the resurrection and the theology of that miracle form the basis of Christian faith. The resurrection and its consequences were the 'Gospel' or Good News that the Christian brought. The first fact in the history of Christendom is the number of people who say they have seen the risen Christ. The resurrection is the central theme in every sermon reported in the Acts. They had all, at one time or another, met Jesus during the forty days that followed His death. Paul says that the majority of the 500 who saw Jesus were still alive when the first epistle to the Corinthians was written in about AD 55. The New Testament writers speak that Christ's achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole history of the universe. He is the 'first fruits', the 'pioneer of life'. He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. A new chapter in cosmic history has opened.

The body, which lives in that new resurrection mode, is like and yet unlike the body His disciples knew before the execution. It is differently related to space and time, but by no means cut off from all relation to them. He 'appears' and 'disappears', and closed doors are no obstacle to Him. He Himself asserts that He is corporeal and eats fish. All the accounts suggest that the appearances of the risen Body came to an end after about six weeks. A phantom can just fade away, but an objective entity must go somewhere. If the risen Body were not objective, then all, Christians or not, must give explanation for the disappearance of the body kept in the tomb. If it were real, then something happened to it after it ceased to appear.

The records represent Christ as passing after death into a life which has its own, new nature. It represents Him as withdrawing into some different mode of existence. It says, He says, that He goes 'to prepare a place for us'.<sup>157</sup> This means that He is about to create that whole new nature which will provide the environment or conditions for His glorified

humanity and, in Him, for ours. It is the picture of a new human nature, and a new nature in general, being brought into existence. As precursors, we get ‘law’ before the ‘Gospel’, ‘animal sacrifices’ foreshadowing the ‘great sacrifice of God to God’, John the Baptist before the Messiah, and those miracles before the resurrection.

The raising of Lazarus differs from the resurrection of Christ Himself. Lazarus was not raised to a new and more glorious mode of existence, but merely restored to the sort of life he had had before. At death, matter that has been organic begins to flow away into the inorganic, to be finally scattered. The resurrection of Lazarus involves the reverse process. On the inorganic level, nature never restores order where disorder has once occurred. We live in a universe where organisms are always getting more disordered. These laws of irreversible entropy and irreversible death cover almost the whole of what Paul calls the ‘vanity’<sup>158</sup> of nature. The miracle of Lazarus is anticipatory to the new nature. The transfiguration of Jesus<sup>159</sup> – ‘the shining whiteness’ – is also no doubt, an anticipatory glimpse of something to come. A similar whiteness characterises His appearance at the beginning of the book of Revelation.<sup>160</sup>

### **Miracles differ from other unusual events**

Miracles are not anti-natural. Biblical miracles show invasion of nature by a Power that is not alien. Nature is invaded not simply by a god, but by the God of nature, a Power that is outside nature’s jurisdiction, not as a foreigner but as a sovereign. Many of the Biblical miracles are largely a speeding up of natural processes. Both normal events and miracles find their root in God. Nature is the result of the first great miracle, the creation. A miracle is an event in the natural world that would not have happened were nature left to itself. Biblical miracles are far from against nature. They are for nature by coming from beyond it and by working to perfect what is in it.

Miracles differ from anomalies. Because an event is unusual, the believer has no right to claim it is miraculous. Anomaly is an exception with no known natural explanation, and in this sense anomalies and miracles are alike. They differ in that a miracle, in its theistic context, gives evidence of intelligent divine intervention to produce the unusual event, and there will be some theological purpose in it.

Miracles differ from magic. While miracles are God-ordained supernatural interventions, human magic is man’s manipulation by normal or supernatural forces. Magic, simply illusions, sleight-of-hand or trickery, is amazing to those who do not know the trick. Only the magicians know the explanations. Given the proper circumstances, anyone can be made to believe he has witnessed something that never took place. There is no divine truth connected with it, although some use magic to attract the attention of people to listen to the message that follows. If there is any supernatural claim in magic performance, other magicians will expose it or scientific tests reveal the hidden things used to create illusion.

Miracles differ from demonic activity. Some use occult means to perform signs and wonders. There are practices that claim to conjure powers from the spirit realm. There are evil spirit beings that can perform highly unusual acts. The Bible says, ‘Dear friends, do

not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world'.<sup>161</sup> Satanic signs have evil characteristics and divine miracles have good characteristics. Biblical history shows that good triumphed over evil by an even greater miracle than by magic or satanic signs.

### **Purpose attached to miracles**

Miracles are special acts of God in which He reveals Himself and His purposes. They are characterised by some unusual awe-inspiring and distinctive feature. The nature of miracles is that they are wonders that inspire awe in those who see them because they are astonishing. The power of miracles comes from a God who is beyond the universe. They imply that there is a God beyond the universe who intervenes in it. Through the events, they are seen as mighty acts of divine power. Miracles occur in such a way that purpose is attached to them by virtue of when and why they occur. They confirm God's message and His messenger. There the purpose is to fix men's attention upon the message that accompanies the event.

Events of this kind are open for the eyes of all to see, not merely through the eyes of faith. They tell us which are true prophets and which are false. The events can bear witness to the divine character of something that is proclaimed. A miracle is God's way of accrediting the message as true, as a sign to substantiate its content and an act of God to verify the Word of God.<sup>162</sup> The nature of a miracle is an unusual event that conveys and confirms a divine message by means of unusual power.

While miracles provide evidence for belief in God,<sup>163</sup> it is an act of God to attract the attention of the people of God to the Word of God. Miracles are visible acts that reflect the invisible nature of God. They are also signs or pledges of an age to come. For example, the miracle healing can be a sign and a pledge of an age yet to come, when all disease and sickness will be done away with. Miracles are God's means of attesting His promises. Miracles are never performed for entertainment, but have the distinct purpose of glorifying God and directing men to Him. The God-ward purpose is to glorify the Creator. The man-ward purpose is to provide evidence for people to believe.

### **Miracle of healing and exorcism**

Miraculous healings, in contrast to natural healings, are the way God works on special occasions. It is healing by direct intervention of the one and only true God, the living and personal God revealed in Scriptures and in particular in Jesus Christ. When Jesus healed the man with leprosy, the cure was instantaneous, not the result of self-rejuvenation of skin tissues.<sup>164</sup> Jesus healed people born blind and lame.<sup>165</sup> The apostles cured a man lame from birth.<sup>166</sup> Jesus restored a withered hand immediately.<sup>167</sup> In the New Testament, the Gospels contain twenty-six accounts of the physical healing of individuals. The book of Acts contains five. God is the One who heals all diseases.<sup>168</sup> God is the healer using men to do His work of healing.

John Wimber categorises and explains three kinds of healings recorded in the Gospels and book of Acts.<sup>169</sup> The organic disorders are those in which damage to body tissue or structures can be observed or detected by a physician. Examples of such disorders include

fevers,<sup>170</sup> an incised wound,<sup>171</sup> paralysis,<sup>172</sup> blindness,<sup>173</sup> deafness and defective speech<sup>174</sup> and a fatal head injury.<sup>175</sup> Functional disorders are those in which there is definitely a disturbance in the way the body is functioning but the offending organ or organs appear to be structurally normal. Examples of functional disorders include some forms of headaches, backaches, and high or low blood pressure.<sup>176</sup> Because functional diseases cannot be diagnosed as having an organic cause, their healing may be attributed merely to psychological influences. Therefore the miracle healings are limited to this category by some people.

When a functional disorder is psychological in origin, the Holy Spirit has the ability to untangle disorder in every area of our lives, including complex psychological disorders. In the category of mental illness, emotional disturbances result from brain disease, emotional factors or occasionally demonic influence. They include schizophrenic disorders, paranoid disorders, anxiety disorders and disorders like sudden paralysis experienced during stressful conditions. The origin of physical illness may be emotional, spiritual, chemical or demonic. The healing of the past hurts is commonly called 'inner healing'.

We believe that God is able to heal our bodies from disease, deformity and weakness, just as well as to forgive our sins, or to save us. God does heal whenever it is His sovereign will to do so. Scripture mentions Jesus healed only the man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years<sup>177</sup> at the pool of Bethesda, while He healed all whom were brought to Him<sup>178</sup> on other occasions. It could be that Jesus was selective in healing only that one person at that place.

Mankind is destined to live in a world that is cursed by sin and because of this, illness and suffering are everywhere. Sickness is part of life in this sin-cursed world. Surely, God sometimes heals miraculously in answer to prayer according to His will. But when healing does not come, the very same God who gave Job the strength to endure great affliction will give us grace for every trial, and strength for every ordeal. Faith is the medium through which God releases His healing power. But lack of faith is not necessarily the reason for a person failing to be healed.

While faith is desirable in some cases, and necessary in others, it certainly was neither essential nor present in all healings.<sup>179</sup> We are to trust God to know what is best for us. It is better to be obedient and submissive than to be healed. God may delay His answer to prayer, as we saw in the case of Lazarus. Jesus had something better for them than a miracle of healing.<sup>180</sup> Also the fullness of the Kingdom of God and resurrection is yet to come.<sup>181</sup>

God uses medical treatment to produce healing, as He heals through a variety of means. Even in Biblical times, when so few treatments for diseases existed, men were encouraged and expected to use the means that were available.<sup>182</sup> Various terms are currently used to describe healing that occurs without the use of means and in response to faith. So far as miraculous healing in the Scripture is concerned, they were dramatised signs and enacted parables intended to teach a double lesson. They were to authenticate the word of the person who performed them.<sup>183</sup> The significance of the healing miracles was theological, not medical, even though Christ's purpose was to heal.

The many who were healed at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, of the early Church and of individual believers<sup>184</sup> gradually became fewer as the essential lessons were learnt. We notice that miracle healings happen today all over the world. But reports state that they occur today especially in an area of new evangelisation in the mission field, authenticating the word of God and the servants of God. Praying for the sick was taken for granted by the early Christians, and there is no hint that divine healing was controversial or divisive in the early church. Today the church in general receives the healing ministry as an integral part of the total Gospel of wholeness, and in many churches of all shades, the sick are regularly prayed for.

Christ's miracles of healing not only have an individual, local and contemporary physical significance, but also a general, eternal and spiritual meaning. Cases of illness among Christians in apostolic times are mentioned. The fact that they occur indicates that the apostolic commission to heal could not be used indiscriminately to keep themselves or their friends free from illness.<sup>185</sup> The passage of prayer for the sick emphasises the power of prayer, and also shows the involvement of the Church with concern for the individual.<sup>186</sup> There is healing for the body in the atonement of Christ, but its full realisation awaits the coming of the Lord. By performing healings, our Lord was fulfilling Isaiah 53:4 and Isaiah 35, knowing that on the cross He would soon pay the price for sin, destroy the power of death and provide for the complete redemption of these mortal bodies when He comes again.<sup>187</sup>

There can also be psychological explanations for some healings. While we encourage people to have faith in the miracle working power, we need to realise also that the effect of the mind has an incredible influence on the body. Psychosomatic or 'mind-body' sicknesses and cures do occur. An ulcer is a psychosomatic illness, if it was caused at least in part by nervousness that disrupted the digestive process and induced over production of acids or other enzymes. Since they have an emotional basis, such sicknesses are prone to healing by the mind.

The mind can effectively control pain by stimulating production of endorphins. Acupuncture is an example of adding sensations to disrupt pain. In the placebo effect, faith in simple sugar pills stimulates the mind to control pain and even heal some disorders. The placebo tricks the mind into believing relief has come, and the body responds accordingly. The emotionally induced diseases can often be reversed by psychological therapy where the proper mental attitude occasions a healing effect.

God created the mind with wonderful abilities and the body's curative powers. The Bible recognises the effect of the mind on one's health.<sup>188</sup> One can actually get sick when saddened by tragedy, or well upon hearing some good news. Since God has created us with our minds and bodies united, He should get the credit when this marvellous relationship of mind affecting body is used to bring healing.<sup>189</sup> Psychological healings do not take place on any organic healings such as the blind seeing or the lame person healed. They are usually effective only on functional disorders. Most often they only aid or speed recovery. Never do they instantaneously cure or restore the incurable. However, most

physical healing is a process, because there are emotional, psychological and demonic factors also to be dealt with.

### **Exorcism and deliverance**

There is undeniable evidence for belief in demons throughout the history of the early church. All of the church fathers and all of the reformers believed the devil exists and that his works are partially manifest among us.<sup>190</sup> The New Testament indicates demons are angels who sinned and were cast into hell or down to earth. Scripture describes that the physical, mental and spiritual areas of our lives that may be affected by demonic influence.<sup>191</sup> The demonised suffer under varying degrees of bondage. In all instances of bondage, people are subject to periodic attacks by one or more demons that may affect them physically, mentally and spiritually.

Demon possession is real and cannot be ‘explained away’ simply as the current interpretation of purely physical and mental disorders. It is recorded as having occurred at the time of Christ more frequently than at any other time. Jesus Himself made this diagnosis and accepted it. Demon-expulsion was a direct attack by Jesus on Satan. The reason Jesus came was to destroy the works of the devil.<sup>192</sup>

Those who were ‘demon possessed’ could be used as a mouthpiece by the possessing spirit. They often had accompanying physical manifestations such as dumbness, blindness, epilepsy or mental disorder.<sup>193</sup> They were able to recognise the divinity of Jesus and knew they were subject to His authority. Demon possession is clearly distinguished by the Synoptists and in Acts<sup>194</sup> from the general run of diseases. The disciples were commanded by Jesus to ‘heal’ the sick and to ‘cast out’ demons and unclean spirits.<sup>195</sup> Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy.<sup>196</sup> The presence of the unclean spirit, which was rebuked, was associated with, but distinct from, any mental disease that was healed. There is no good reason to doubt the Biblical view of it as a ‘possession’ by an evil spiritual being on the personality and body of the person concerned.<sup>197</sup>

Peter and Jude tell us that those angels who sinned at that time were sentenced by God.<sup>198</sup> They were restrained in chains – not literal chains, but chains of darkness. These demons, or disobedient angels, had been cast out into a realm of spiritual darkness. Today, as in the days of Jesus, these demons take possession of human bodies. They get into a person’s body in order to continue themselves in their desires to live as humans, and in so doing they continue themselves as servants of Satan the Devil.

We read that on one occasion, there was a legion of these demons in one man. They said: ‘My name is Legion, for we are many’. God has given all of us will whereby we may resist these intrusions. It seems these demons are working more actively today than ever before. They represent themselves as being ‘ghosts’ or ‘disembodied spirits’, and certain experiences show that they even possess a person giving them ‘visions’ of ‘gods’, ‘saints’, ‘prophets’ or whatever else a person might have a tendency to believe in. It is possible that these demons know about people who have died, so they can easily impersonate a dead person. Likewise, they give people all sorts of visions or false ‘memories’ about things that never really happened, or of another person’s life.

The fact of Satan's open warfare means we are locked in spiritual warfare until Christ's return. As we succeed in this warfare, the victims of Satan's power are released and the time for the ending of Satan's dominion and for the establishment of God's rule comes near.

In the New Testament mention is made of a plurality of evil spirits, with Satan as their head.<sup>199</sup> They were endowed with high talents, power and knowledge.<sup>200</sup> Those who take the Bible seriously are obliged to believe in Satan's existence. A real personal Devil is given distinctive traits of personality, including intellect.<sup>201</sup> Ascribed to the Devil are the emotions of desire, jealousy, hatred, anger and will.<sup>202</sup> The personal encounters and conversations of Christ with Satan and demons make it evident that Jesus believed in a real personal Satan. When Jesus sent out the Twelve, and later the Seventy-two, He increased the possibilities for people's deliverance from the devil. Several people experience chronic spiritual, psychological and physical problems from which they never find true healing through medicine or psychiatry. Release from the bondage of demons is called deliverance.

The increasing evidence of true demonic possessions is an extra-Biblical source of support for the reality of demons. Considered as a whole, the direct and indirect evidence for the existence of a personal evil power behind this world is substantial. It is based both in history and in personal experience. At least some demonic activity manifests distinctive spiritual characteristics not present with natural sickness. These symptoms could include such things as opposition to God, a violent reaction to Christ and the manifestation of supernatural strength.<sup>203</sup> They do not respond to any natural treatment. Satan uses different strategies among different peoples. He deceives the sophisticated anti-supernaturalists by leading them to believe he does not exist.

The Bible declares that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.<sup>204</sup> It is not true that demonic manifestations occur only among rural populations. Educated ones in urban areas see these days more occultic activity and reports of demonic manifestations. If a person has been involved with the occult, it almost inevitably means he or she has a demonic problem. It is not the degree of intelligence or education that determines whether one believes in a personal Satan. Rather, it depends on whether one has rejected God and Jesus Christ and the supernatural revelation of Scripture.

The New Testament is sure of Satan's limitations and defeat. Satan's power is derivative, and he can exercise his activity only within the limits that God lays down.<sup>205</sup> The witness of the New Testament is clear that Satan is a malignant reality, always hostile to God and to God's people. The believers can be oppressed by the devil and can be affected; evil spirits can even control them if they live in unconfessed sin. It is analogous to our situation with the flesh and the world. If we choose to believe the lies of the world and yield to our flesh, we will live in sin. The Bible teaches that when believers live in sin, they risk being turned over to Satan.<sup>206</sup> We can still be affected by the demons. Jesus performed miracles that demonstrated His reign over demons, disease, destructive nature and death, the areas through which Satan works. Satan has already been defeated in Christ's life and death and resurrection. We are given the authority to rebuke Satan in the authoritative name of Christ. Satan's defeat will become obvious and complete in the end

of the age. But we have yet to exercise that authority fully until Christ's return. Until Christ's return we live in enemy territory, a sinful world that is in bondage to Satan's terror. Divine enablement and human co-operative are the keys to overcoming the forces of evil. A couple of cases of healing and demon expulsion are given in chapter 12.

### **Reference to angels**

A Biblical angel is, by derivation and function, a messenger of God, familiar with Him face to face, therefore of an order of being higher than that of man. The angel is a creature holy and uncorrupted spirit in original essence, yet endowed with free will, therefore not necessarily impervious to temptation and sin. There are many indications of an angelic fall, under the leadership of Satan.<sup>207</sup> Angels are spirit beings separate from God, yet, unless they are fallen, of unquestioned integrity, good will and obedience to Him.<sup>208</sup> Angels may appear to men as bearers of God's specific commands and tidings.<sup>209</sup> God's throne is surrounded by countless myriad of angels.<sup>210</sup> The incarnate Christ received the angelic ministry on several occasions and He could have commanded thousands of angels, had He prepared at Gethsemane or anywhere else, to deviate from the appointed sacrificial path.<sup>211</sup>

We depend wholly upon the Scriptures for our knowledge on angels. We see harmony between the teachings of our Lord concerning angels and those of the apostles and the Scripture writers. The revelations of Scriptures remind us of our high rank as human beings and our exalted destiny as believers.<sup>212</sup> We who are 'made but little lower than the angels' may become as the angels of God in heaven.<sup>213</sup> We can pray for protection by the angels.

Miracles make a significant difference to the truth of Christian faith. Historic Christianity claims them to be an essential part of its belief. Miracles are not irrational; but they are beyond rationality. John Wimber said, 'Signs and wonders validate Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his lordship over every area of our lives, a relationship that can be described and understood'.<sup>214</sup>

### **Summary**

#### *Are miracles possible?*

Miracles are above human comprehension and they cannot be rationally explained. It is the effect of a cause outside nature acting within nature. God can bring effects beyond what nature by itself could have done. At rare time and in accordance with His specific purpose, God acts freely to produce miracles.

Miracles would not invalidate scientific law. We cannot consider a miracle as unscientific as it leaves natural laws intact. Miracles belong to a certain class of events that are purposeful and have meaning, though they cannot be explained naturally. Miracles are possible, believable and historical. Christianity has better evidence and more witnesses writing closer to the time of the miraculous events than any other religion.

#### *Virginal conception and resurrection*

The Biblical miracles provide positive evidence for the truth claims of Christian faith. We can believe the Biblical accounts of miracles without an assessment of the evidence for

each miracle. Through the miracle of virginal conception, God took flesh and blood without a line of human ancestors for the purpose of redeeming humanity. The miracle of resurrection and the theology of that miracle form the basis of Christian faith.

*Miracles differ from other unusual events*

Miracles are not anti-natural. They are for nature by coming from beyond it and by working to perfect what is in it. Miracles differ from anomalies. Miracles differ from magic. Miracles differ from the demonic activity in which evil spirit beings perform unusual acts.

*Purpose attached to miracles*

God reveals Himself and His purposes through His special acts. A miracle is God's way of accrediting the message that accompanies the event. The unusual event conveys and confirms a divine message by means of unusual power. They are visible acts that reflect the invisible nature of God. Miracles are also signs or pledges of an age to come.

*Miracles of healing and exorcism*

Miraculous healings are the way God works on special occasion. God is the one who heals all diseases. Praying for the sick was taken for granted by the early Christians. Cases of illness among Christians in apostolic times are mentioned. But they did not use it to keep themselves or their friends free from illness.

*Exorcism and deliverance*

Demon-expulsion was a direct attack by Jesus on Satan. Release from the bondage of demons is called deliverance. If a person is involved with the occult, it indicates something demonic. Until Christ's return we live in 'enemy territory', a sinful world that is in bondage to Satan's terror. We can overcome evil forces by divine enablement.

*Reference to angels*

We see references to angels in the teaching of our Lord and the apostles. Angels are spirit beings separate from God, yet, unless they are fallen, of unquestioned integrity, good will and obedience to Him. We can pray for protection by the angels.

Historic Christianity claims miracles to be an essential part of its belief. Miracles are not irrational, but they are beyond rationality.

Even though we believe that God is able to miraculously intervene in the affairs of this world, the question often asked is about the evil and suffering we face every day in our lives. This is the subject of discussion in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 7 FACING EVIL AND SUFFERING

### **The causes of evil and suffering**

The Gospel must adequately face the challenge of the problem of evil and suffering. One of the questions that keep coming up is about how one can reconcile all the suffering in the world with the existence of a God who is said to be both good and almighty. Scripture is very clear on the problem of evil and how the Biblical characters had to grapple with this problem.<sup>215</sup> However, we notice that in the past, suffering was an incentive to inquiry and not an excuse for unbelief. Only since the Enlightenment (the key concept of which is the supremacy of reason and the confidence that there are answers to every problem), has the problem of suffering been seen as ground for unbelief.<sup>216</sup>

The inadequate approaches to suffering include Docetism which says suffering is an illusion, Stoicism faces suffering with passive acceptance, Hedonism overcomes or avoids suffering by pleasure-intoxication and Existentialism recklessly defies suffering. Evil cannot be explained in scientific terms, and rationalism has no answer to evil. Our understanding of it must come from ‘revelation’.

The Bible does tackle the problem of evil and suffering. It says that evil originated in human history at the Fall in Eden. When humankind sinned, the whole of creation lost its equilibrium. The presence of order in the creation does not eliminate the possibility for disorder. Evil is an intruder into this universe. God made Satan the most beautiful of all creatures, with the gift of free will. Evil is traceable to the free will of God’s creatures. Satan rebelled against God, and that was the first sin and the pattern for all sin that followed. Nothing outside his own free will caused Satan to sin. He was the first cause of his sin, and we can’t go back any further than that. As the story of the Garden of Eden shows, Satan has passed his sin down to man. Man (generic sense) brought evil upon himself, like Satan, by selfishly choosing his own way apart from God’s way.<sup>217</sup> Satan obtained a foothold in creation through the rebellion of humanity.

God made everything perfect, and one of the perfect things God made was freedom of choice. Such free will opens the door to evil. We, by our wills, are the cause of the evil we do. God allowed for that possibility by making us free creatures. He actually took the risk of giving us freedom. Both the opportunities – to choose good and the ability to choose evil – are included. Freedom of choice endows us with responsibility and

accountability. God created the fact of freedom, and we perform the act of freedom. And sadly, those actions are all too often foolish, sinful and unwise. Thus imperfection arises from perfection – not directly, but indirectly through freedom.

Sometimes, however, suffering is directly due to human sin. Exploitation, dehumanisation and unjust economic systems of individuals and society inflict suffering. Drunkenness and immoral lives lead to ailments. Although the Bible says that sometimes the suffering of individuals is a punishment from God for their sins,<sup>218</sup> this does not mean that all that we suffer is because of our sins.<sup>219</sup> Jesus said that the works of God would be manifested through the blindness of the person who was born blind. Yes, we can use even the incurable illnesses for the manifestation of the works of God.

Paul describes the fallen state of creation as a subjection to frustration.<sup>220</sup> All of life in the present is darkened by the reality of frustration. Man was sinless when God created him. If God had prevented man from sinning, man's will would not be free. God could not make free creatures who could not sin, for that would be to make free creatures that were not free. Without free choice real love is impossible. God cannot force people to love Him. God respects people's freedom, and concurs with their choice.

It is difficult to say whether moral freedom could exist in a world where people always choose what is right. Evil cannot be destroyed without destroying the freedom. If freedom were destroyed, that would be evil in itself, because it would deprive free creatures of their greatest good. God is morally free, in that nothing can make Him do anything against His nature. God's nature is perfectly good. But, having exercised His omnipotence in creating the universe and endowing His creatures with freedom, He does not block the outcome of that freedom – even if that outcome is suffering and pain. Evil is not evidence of a limit to God's power. The idea of a good and powerful God is not irreconcilable with the existence of evil. God's existence and the reality of evil are not logically contradictory.

Surely, evil cannot be part of the infinite God. Someone has said that evil is a substance that grabs hold of certain things and makes them bad – like a virus infecting an animal. There are evil acts like murder, evil people who commit crimes, evil books of pornographic nature, evil events like earthquakes and evil sickness like cancer, blindness and the like. There may be evils produced by natural processes that men are unable to prevent, or evils produced accidentally by men.

Evil can also be a lack in something – when good that should be there is missing from something. It can be a bad relationship, because the relationship is lacking something. Blindness is evil because we have the goodness called sight. When we talk about certain things, say, in terms of sight, an umbrella has no sight, but the blindness in the umbrella is not evil. In reality, evil cannot exist except as a 'hole' in something that should be 'solid'. If there is such a thing as evil, then we assume that there is such a thing as good. If there is such a thing as good, we must affirm a moral law on the basis on which to differentiate between good and evil. But there is so much good in the world. A good God would have reason to create a world in which we find potentiality for both good and evil.

God is justified in permitting evil even if we do not know what His reasons may be. Later on we will look at some of the possible reasons for permitting evil. One cannot use the reality of evil to deny God or to disprove the existence of God.

### **Coping with suffering and pain**

While the Bible says that evil is the result of God's curse upon sin, it also presents God as a being, looking forward to restoring creation to the glory He had intended for it. God grieves over tragedy, sin and evil. God is opposed to evil and its effects on creation, and He acts in compassion to liberate humanity from them. God can work in the area where there is evil, rebellion and sin, no matter how great the evil is.<sup>221</sup> This was clearly shown in the life and work of Jesus. We can pray boldly to God in times of suffering. It is our responsibility to oppose all evil and seek to alleviate suffering. One cannot dispute the unrivalled record of Christians in history in the alleviation of suffering. Believers in Jesus are not immune to the pain of this world. We share in it, and through that sharing we become a redemptive community in this hurting world. Jesus 'was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not'.<sup>222</sup> If that was what Jesus experienced, His followers cannot expect an easy life removed from pain and sorrow. We are challenged to do good and noble things and to overcome evil tendencies.

We may not know God's purpose in allowing evil. Just because we don't know what the purpose could be, we can't assume that there is no good purpose for something bad that has happened. God will have good reasons for allowing evil. Whenever God wills, He can enter the arena of evil and turn it to His purposes. Remember that God allowed the occurrence of evil in His universe from the very beginning. God may use some physical evil as a warning about moral evils or greater physical evils. God wills the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run. But God does not employ evil means to bring about good. Even the worst that men can do can be a praiseworthy plan of God. What sinful people mean for evil, God means for good, and indeed God can and does work all things together for the good of those who love Him.<sup>223</sup>

There is no one explanation for each instance of evil. Bad things happen for a variety of reasons: to develop and refine a person's faith and character, to bring about a revelation of God's glory, to experience suffering vicariously in someone else's place, to punish people for their own acts of evil, to alert people to physical dangers, to learn the consequences of evil, or to alert people to their need for salvation.<sup>224</sup> Sometimes, evil keeps us from self-destruction. In some sense, we need pain so that we are not overcome by the evil that we would choose were it painless. God alerts us to the fact that there are better things than misery.

Suffering creates a climate in which our thoughts are gently directed toward Him whom we might otherwise ignore. One purpose of suffering in history has been that it leads to repentance. Only after suffering did the Old Testament Israel turn back to God. C.S. Lewis said, 'God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world... No doubt pain as God's megaphone is a terrible instrument; it may lead to final and unrepented rebellion. But it

gives the only opportunity the bad man can have for amendment. It removes the veil; it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul'.<sup>225</sup> Since God is the source of all joy and life, repentance leads to the outcome of blessedness, which is an outcome better than good. Pain and suffering are frequently the means by which we become motivated to surrender to God.

Paul says, 'Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope'.<sup>226</sup> While endurance is to stand up to adversities and problems, perseverance is to make progress in spite of difficulties and suffering. James says, 'Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything'.<sup>227</sup>

We wait patiently for the good that will result from the suffering. Biblical patience conveys the idea of positive endurance rather than quiet acceptance. When we seek to make the best of the situation, God will turn the suffering into something good. God is sovereign over evil and He achieves something good out of all situations of suffering. When we consider the thing that causes us pain, the hope that God will sovereignly turn it to good fills us with unmixed joy. E. Stanley John said, 'Lotus flower reaches down and takes up the mud and mire into the purposes of its life and produces the lotus flower out of them, so you are to take whatever happens and make something out of it'.<sup>228</sup>

### **God's answer – the cross**

God's answer to the problem of suffering is that He came right down into it. John R.W. Stott says, 'He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. God identifies personally with the sufferings of human beings. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in light of his'.<sup>229</sup> The cross sounds forth the message that God is not distant from pain and suffering. Not only has God done something about evil, but He has also transformed that evil in the cross to counter it with good, and to define the solution to evil.

The cross uniquely reveals not a God who is disengaged from the human scene, but a God who is right in the middle of our conflicts and struggles. He is at work through His Spirit to restrain evil, to call people to repent of their evil and to submit to His authority over their lives. In the cross alone, pain and evil meet in consummate conflict. In the cross alone are love and justice integrated. In the cross we experience in our own heart the heart's rebellion against God. It was the fact of sin that sent Christ to the cross.

In the cross, we see the marvel of forgiveness as a starting point for rebuilding our own lives. God's forgiveness gives us a fresh start. The cross does not minimise evil, rather it shows evil at its ugliest, even while offering a new beginning. The grace of forgiveness is a Christian distinctive and stands splendidly against our hate-filled and unforgiving world. Christ's arms are outstretched toward the stubborn will of humanity. The Bible says also that to some the cross is a laughing stock and stumbling block;<sup>230</sup> greed, power

and indulgence will always find sacrifice, humility and virtue repugnant, for they stand in the way of self-aggrandisement.<sup>231</sup>

At the cross we see the immensity of God's pain as He endured the sacrifice of Jesus. God experienced that pain of the cross from the time He created the world. The Bible describes Jesus as 'the Lamb of God that was slain from the creation of the world'.<sup>232</sup> The Bible presents God as suffering over the pain and disobedience of His creation.<sup>233</sup> Jesus experienced this same pain when He lived on earth, and He often gave expression to it.<sup>234</sup> The impact that God's pain makes on suffering humanity is immense. God is really trustworthy because of His personal, sacrificial involvement in the consequences of evil through the suffering and death of His son Jesus Christ.

Suffering is an essential ingredient of our union with Christ. There is a depth of oneness that we share with Christ that can only be achieved when we are one with Him in suffering. Christ and the church had become one in suffering. On the road to Damascus, Paul was hitting the church, but Christ was feeling the pain.<sup>235</sup> There is immense comfort for the suffering person in this truth. As the most important thing in life is our relationship with God, we can look at suffering with bright hope if it is going to help deepen this relationship. We read about Paul's desire to know 'the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings',<sup>236</sup> and his teaching on sharing in His glory as a child of God. 'Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory'.<sup>237</sup>

We need not let sufferings confuse our mind between what God wills in His goodness and what Satan wills in his wickedness. God's plan is to develop eternally perfect people without disturbing free will. This plan can only be achieved by the operation of God's perfect mercy and justice through pain and suffering. The perfecting process takes place via the interaction of our will and Christ's in opposition to Satan's will.<sup>238</sup> It is better to learn to live with suffering and pain, while trying our best to alleviate it. Let us therefore approach the problem of evil with humility and openness.

We can draw some practical guidelines from the propositions that C.S. Lewis<sup>239</sup> gives about human suffering. Although 'blessed are the poor', we are responsible to remove poverty wherever possible. What is good for the sufferer can be his submission to the will of God. In the case of spectators, the compassion aroused during such a situation should lead them to do acts of mercy. We need not wait until all the sufferings are handled in order to serve the needy. Rather, a strong sense of our common miseries can at least be a good spur to the removal of all the miseries we can. The degree of obedience that a creature owes to its Creator is unique, because such a relation is obviously unique. Therefore, our doctrine of self-surrender and obedience is purely theological, and not a political one. Our socio-political involvement to alleviate pain and suffering must be held within the context of our responsibility to God.

It is a right thing to seek settled happiness and security in this world. God in His mercy may give us opportunities, during this journey of our life, to enjoy beautiful settled conditions free of troubles. But Lewis warns us here, 'Our Father refreshes us on the

journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home'.<sup>240</sup> The sufferings and pain remind us that this life here is after all a probationary existence. It is part of our probation to go through trials and difficulties. Sufferings within God's will, purifies the soul and communicates to the world the surpassing value of the spiritual over the physical, the eternal over the temporal.<sup>241</sup>

Lewis also advises us that we must not make the problem of pain worse than it is by vague talk about the 'unimaginable sum of human misery'. Surely, God 'will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear'.<sup>242</sup> God's help and comfort are always available to those who depend upon Him.

Just because we recognise God works through evils does not mean we react passively to suffering. We must pray for deliverance. We must prayerfully seek help for deliverance. We should not allow sickness and afflictions to defeat us. Praying for healing and growth through suffering are not mutually exclusive concepts. Wimber and Springer give four ideas on reconciling human suffering and divine healing. '1. God does not directly will evil. 2. God does directly remove evil. 3. God sometimes overcomes evil not by removing it directly but by accomplishing his purposes through it. He frustrates evil and turns it to his good intentions. 4. What this means in practice is that there are many kinds of evil we experience that we do not approach passively'.<sup>243</sup> The deepest sickness is sin – and all other consequences of sin, including physical sickness and poverty, are subordinate to that. Now forgiveness of sins is available to all and for some there will be physical healing. In the age to come, there will be complete healing of all that turn to Christ: the eradication of all diseases and poverty, hatred and sin.

We suffer as we live in a world full of sin, the flesh and the devil; we suffer as sinners. Christ was the sinless One in daily association with the world, the devil and sinners. His sufferings were unique because none were for His own sake. Peter writes, 'Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you'.<sup>244</sup> Jesus must have suffered deep hurt when those whom He loved came against Him, but He did not allow that hurt to impede Him from doing His Father's will. We are told to have the same attitude of Christ.

Ours is a religion of life and victory over the world, the flesh and the devil. In answer to prayer God brings deliverance. I can either be delivered *from* suffering or delivered *in* suffering. God can even bypass the medical treatment or even the natural processes of healing and bring deliverance from sickness. This is deliverance from sickness. In the case of deliverance in sickness, the problem may remain, but it is not going to defeat us. We are enabled even to attempt to do things that we would not have accomplished otherwise. We can only pray for deliverance; it's God's choice to bring the kind of deliverance He intended for us. Whatever be His choice, it is our responsibility to love God and serve God regardless of His choice.

### **The final victory**

Scripture says that God is the victor. Although God has not yet destroyed evil, He will do so, and in a way that leads to the best possible world. The devil is not out of hand. Evil is not running loose and unchecked. God will triumph over all the evils of the world. This is declared on the basis of revelation in God's Word. Jesus will finally defeat His enemies and complete the work He began at the cross. Paul says, 'Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power... so that God may be all in all'.<sup>245</sup> In the meantime, 'the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies'.<sup>246</sup> The memory of suffering and pain are to be wiped out. Faith demands that we raise our sights and look toward what lies ahead.

The promise and hope of our transformation and renewal, and of the glorious transfiguration of suffering, are integral parts of our faith. It was with this destiny in mind that God created the world. Heaven is not thrown in as some kind of consolation in order to keep us going here below. The book of Revelation describes this glory, not as one achieved in a vacuum but as one achieved through triumph of evil and pain. In the new heaven and the new earth, the effects of evil will be eradicated.<sup>247</sup> There we will see the Cross in all its glory, and we will fully understand what Jesus meant when he described His cross as being His glory.<sup>248</sup> In Jesus we see God's answer to the problem of evil.

I have learned from C.S. Lewis that pain is not pain when we see the purpose in it. Let me try to illustrate it. In my area where I live in India, we have many educated, unemployed youth. A good number of them from my town, the 'lucky ones', have gone to work in Middle Eastern countries. Many are waiting for their chance to get a job in one of the countries in the Gulf region. Just assume that one of them came to me one day when I was looking for someone to run an errand for me. Assume that no vehicles were allowed on the road that day due to a statewide '24 hour strike' called by some opposition political party against the ruling party. Now, suppose I wanted this young man to walk all the way, (for six or seven miles at night, while heavy rains were pouring down), to collect an envelope containing some important documents I urgently needed. He would have to walk alone with an umbrella and flashlight all night. The odds are that this young man would ask me why I had not asked him to go the previous day when he could have used a vehicle, or he probably would ask if the errand could wait until the next day. My only response is that he must go and collect the envelope that very night. Imagine him, walking in the dark, getting soaking wet in the rain, and cursing me in anger and agony. He might curse me even more if he stumbles into some ditches. He will be very upset if his sandal straps break. He will consider that particular trip a real trial. He may even think I purposely allowed him to suffer.

Now assume that before the young man left, I told him that, along with the envelope, he would be given a job offer and visa papers for him to go to one of the countries in the Arabian Gulf. Now, how will he react during that night trip? He probably won't mind it at all. He might even run to get that envelope, because he was told it contains the

appointment letter, job visa paper and confirmed air ticket for the next day. And if he hurt his foot on the way, he would rub it off thinking of the job waiting for him. If he breaks his sandal straps, he would only think of buying a better pair when he earns his fat salary from abroad. The suffering and pain of the journey will not be felt as pain because of his focus on the good job that he is going get soon.

Paul says, 'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us'.<sup>249</sup> When you know you suffer for a purpose, your entire perspective is different. We know also that purposeless pain is paralysing, and that's why some people are paralysed and disappointed.

We can pay more attention to the intimacy of the connection between suffering and glory. Suffering and glorification are part of, but represent different stages in, the same process of growth in the Christian life. It is this hope that keeps us going in this life of sadness, which must end in death. This hope must spur us to action within the world, rather than encourage us to neglect it. It does enable us to cope with suffering in the present life in which suffering will continue until it outlives its purpose.

Norman L. Geisler says, 'This may not be the best of all possible worlds, but it is the best way to the best world. If God is to both preserve freedom and defeat evil, then this is the best way to do it. Freedom is preserved that each person makes his own free choice to determine his destiny'.<sup>250</sup> Revelation 21:8 and 27 foretells a day when everyone has free will but no one will sin. In the new creation man will retain his free will, but there will be no sin, no suffering, no death and no evil.

Just as suffering is real, so are the promises of God and the hope of eternal life. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ linked with the giving of the Holy Spirit are pledges, sureties and guarantees that what has been promised will one day be brought to glorious realisation.<sup>251</sup> In this world of suffering and evil, we know that wherever we go, the God of all compassion goes ahead of us and journeys with us, consoling and strengthening us until we see Him face to face.

## **Summary**

### *The causes of evil and suffering*

Some people see the problem of suffering as a ground for unbelief. Evil cannot be explained in scientific terms. The Bible does tackle the problem and it says that evil originated in human history when the humankind sinned. Having exercised His omnipotence in endowing His creatures with freedom, God does not block the outcome of that freedom even if it is suffering and pain. Evil cannot be part of the infinite God.

A good God would have reason to create a world in which we find potentiality for both good and evil. We cannot use the reality of evil to deny God or to disprove the existence of God. It is our responsibility to oppose all evil and seek to alleviate suffering.

### *Coping with suffering and pain*

Believers in Jesus are not immune to the pain of this world. We are challenged to do good and noble things and to overcome evil tendencies. God can enter the arena of evil and turn it to His purposes. But God does not employ evil means to bring about good. Pain and suffering are frequently the means by which we become motivated to surrender to God in repentance.

### *God's answer – the cross*

Biblical patience conveys the idea of positive endurance rather than quiet acceptance, believing that God will achieve something good out of all situations of suffering. God's answer to the problem of suffering is that He came right down into it. God is not distant from pain and suffering. God is at work through His Spirit to restrain evil, to call people to repent of their evil and submit to His authority.

We need not let sufferings confuse our mind between what God wills in His goodness and what Satan wills in his wickedness. It is better to learn to live with suffering and pain, while trying our best to alleviate it. Praying for healing and growth through suffering are not mutually exclusive concepts.

### *The final victory*

God will triumph over all the evils of the world. Although God has not yet destroyed evil, He will do so, and in a way that leads to the best possible world. The promise and hope of our transformation and renewal, and of the glorious transfiguration of suffering, are integral parts of our faith.

When we know that we suffer for a purpose, our entire perspective is different – pain is not felt as pain. Just as suffering is real, so are the promises of God and hope of eternal life. In the new creation man will retain his free will, but there will be no sin, no suffering, no death and no evil.

It is true our faith is based on the uniqueness of the Biblical view of reality. We normally accept that our view is the right one. We construct our mental pictures of reality and interpret it accordingly. We need to be opened to understandings that lie beyond what we know. Let us look into the worldview assumptions of others and try to compare them with ours in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 8 WORLDVIEWS AND FAITH

### **Influence of worldviews**

We perceive reality in a limited and biased way because of our humanity. In the case of God, everything is seen and known absolutely. Our view, unlike God's, is fuzzy and partial. In our human state we never see the whole picture as it really is. Most of us learned only one view as we grew up. Even if we become aware of other views, we assume that our view is the right one since we trust those who taught it to us. If our views are logical and right, any other views, any alternative view of reality, must be illogical and wrong. We construct our mental pictures on material, psychological, social, spiritual and religious reality. But they are constructed on the basis of our limited and distorted understandings provided by such things as our present and past experience, psychological make up and socio-cultural training. We must therefore be open to understandings that lie beyond those we now have.

We are taught by those who raise us certain socially acceptable patterns concerning what to focus on and how to interpret things. The basis for these patterns is a large number of underlying assumptions that focus our perspective. These assumptions and the guidelines we formulate make up what we call worldview. Charles H. Kraft defines worldview 'as the culturally structured assumptions, values, and commitments underlying a people's perception of Reality'.<sup>252</sup> Such assumptions, beliefs, values and allegiances may give a people identity and make them even feel unique. A society structures in terms of its worldview such things as what its people are to believe, and how they are to picture reality. People interpret and react on this basis even without much thinking. There is great social pressure to keep us perceiving reality according to the worldview of our society.

A worldview provides an explanation of how and why things are as they are, and how and why they continue or change. These explanations are passed on from generation to generation, giving them legitimacy in their minds. It serves as the basis for judging and validating experience. It is a yardstick with which people measure events and circumstances in the society giving them the criteria of acceptability. By accepting and living out the society's worldview, one feels a part of the larger group. This provides a sense of safety from fear of foreign values that might disrupt family, occupation and religion. Not all new understandings that are contrary to a society's worldview are rejected outright. Some are accepted and allowed to alter the perceptions of those who

accept them. This creates a change in worldview. When the majority in the group vouch for such changes, those who hold to old worldviews and resist change isolate themselves.

The worldview assumptions keep people's eye focussed on certain areas of life they consider important. Those whose focus is on the spirit world and spiritual reality accept ideas and behave quite differently from those whose focus is entirely on the material reality. Certain people, although they may pay some lip service to spiritual reality, live and act as if the spiritual reality doesn't exist. When the emphasis is on material concerns to which other concerns are subservient, they virtually ignore the spiritual reality. They demonstrate this in what they believe and how they live their lives. Secularised worldviews are influencing through the common pursuit of accumulating material possessions.

Secular people are more naturalistic. They largely disregard the supernatural and focus on the natural world with little attention to spiritual reality. The universe and all within it is seen as machines, operating according to rules in line with the modern 'technological mindset'. They act as if God is largely unconcerned with day-to-day affairs. The majority of them ignore the spiritual nature of humans, and the concept of humans made in the 'image of God' seems puzzling to them.

Material things make them more comfortable because such things enable them to be more in control to gauge superiority over others in the race to get even more. People seek such objects to help them remain in their comfort zone, viewing it as a cushion against an unfriendly world. They define wealth and poverty in material terms. They devote their energy to gain as much as possible in order to fill their lives with the seeming security of material things.

It seems they believe that there are no limits to human accomplishments and that no outside spiritual assistance is needed. They seek expert advice on how to improve the body and mind to live up to society's unrealistic expectations of achievements. When problem arises they follow after some 'quick-fix' means to solve it. As God is dethroned, the human mind came to be seen as saviour, and their weapons are human minds and technology. God, if there be God, only helps those who do it all themselves.

They seek explanations for all things based on human logic and reason. Having taken the material world as the central focus, the application of logic and reason became the primary approach to understanding. Any claim to nonmaterial things is scorned. They seem to value highly individualism and independence, creating a kind of private world within which one is captive alone and hiding from others. Such social isolation makes a hunger for the satisfaction of the innate need for relationships with others and with God. We know that when the answers of science, materialism, humanism and naturalism fall short, people will begin to look for spiritual answers. There is hope for change. Although worldviews are powerful forces in the lives of people, they are not totally determined by them.

Sometimes the term worldview is used synonymously with religious and other ideologies. A worldview is a pair of intellectual glasses through which someone views the entire cosmos. These 'glasses' take the data from the world and focus it on the mind to create a

particular perception of reality, and so can become the instruments by which different conclusions can result from the same facts. The data can be biased by our perception of reality. The worldviews of various societies differ from each other. This fact is of importance to those who want to communicate from one society to another. As we face people of different worldviews in the pluralistic society, it is important to understand and consider their thought forms in sharing faith. Moreover, the worldview brings allegiances or loyalties to certain beliefs and values. When the degree of emotional attachment to their commitments is strong, they relate themselves to other worldviews weakly or even indifferently. In general, the more intense the allegiance of groups or individuals is to an assumption or practice the less likely they are to change it. But if they become dissatisfied with the custom or discover an attractive alternative, the strength of their allegiance is likely to weaken, and they become more open to change.

The influence of our worldview on our view of God is no less important. The way we think of God determines a lot about the way we see other things in our everyday lives. Because of the diverse views of God, those who adhere to a particular view look differently on solving the problems of the world. As we look at different worldviews, no one can consistently believe in more than one because the central premises of each are mostly opposed to by the others. Logically, then, only one can be true and the others must be false. Since all non-theistic worldviews engage in unaffirmable statements germane to those views, we can reject them as false. However, we have to remember that these are the grids through which people interpret everything around them. Here our task is to show that theism is the only affirmable view and statements germane to it are undeniable, and to establish the true worldview. Let us look at some major worldviews, although here we defer from any detailed critique due to limitations of space.

### **Faith in the context of diverse worldviews**

#### *Atheism*

Atheism is the view that there is no God. The atheist claims that there is no God, and there is only the world and the natural forces that operate it. Some of the more famous atheists were Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre. According to the atheists, God is simply a creation of human imagination. They believe that the world came into existence out of nothing and by nothing, and that it is self-sustaining and self-perpetuating. They define goodness as whatever works to achieve the desired results. They don't see any reason to believe that anything has eternal value. They affirm the reality of evil, which they consider as one of the primary evidence that there is no God.

The atheist risks everything for the present on the basis of a belief that he is uncaused by any intelligent being. Postulating the non-existence of God, atheism commits the blunder of an absolute negation that is self-contradictory. An atheist may have personal moral values, but he cannot have any sense of compelling and universal obligation. There is no logical basis left for morality with the attempt to choke the concept of God. The right and wrong are ideas without any point of absolute reference. The morality that atheism teaches is unliveable, for it brings us to a dead end street. It is easy to see why atheism must be rejected as a worldview.

When we look at contemporary society, we find many factors that drive people to atheism. Some of the worst that men can do can be a praiseworthy plan of God. What sinful people mean for evil, God means for good, and indeed God can and does work all things together for the good of those who love Him.<sup>253</sup>

### *Deism*

Deism is the view that God exists and God made the world but He just lets it run on natural principles. Although deists believe everything that theists do about God, they believe that God never specially intervenes in the world to help mankind. They believe that God has given man reason to understand Him through the things He has made. They recognise an evil principle at work within man and so man's actions are the source of evil. Regarding moral laws they believe that the laws are applied as reason dictates. Lord Herbert Cherbury (1583-1648) is credited with this view. Deism is represented by Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine and Martin Gardner.

Here our response can be that it is reasonable to assume that a God who is good enough and powerful enough to create the world could and would take care of it. A personal God shows his perfection by his miraculous personal commerce with his creatures. Indeed there is ample evidence to believe that God has miraculously interposed Himself at the world.<sup>254</sup> True, natural laws describe what we see in nature, but only God can dictate what ought to be. The historical intervention of God in Jesus shows that God is not an absentee landlord. Deism is defunct both historically and philosophically.

### *Pantheism*

Pantheism holds the view that all is God and God is all. For a pantheist there is no creator beyond the universe. Creator and creation are two different ways of viewing one reality. Some say that the world does not really exist at all. It is illusion (Maya). In order to overcome the illusion of matter, pain and evil, we must learn to believe that all is God, including ourselves, and the illusion will have no grip on us. Pantheism is represented by certain forms of Hinduism, Zen Buddhism and the New Age movement. Although there is no absolute basis for morality, they have moral appeals to goodness and self-sacrifice. Ethical conduct is a means for spiritual growth. On the interpersonal and social level many pantheists have stressed the need for tolerance and the desire for a spiritual unity among men. However, when we consider pantheism as a metaphysical system, there are numerous problems. When it says 'reason does not apply to ultimate reality', it is self-defeating. Also if I come to realise that I am God, then I have changed. But God cannot change. Not only that, there is no lack of moral foundation, but due to the law of cause and effect (Karma that determines destiny), helping the suffering people is against God.

Their statements about the unknowability of God are meaningless. They do express their views, proving that they are wrong about their own claims and consequently self-destruct. The impersonality of the pantheistic God is untestable, and it is also conflicting with the personal side of God. Pantheism is an invention with no objective justification. We have to find some common ground that is both universal and rationally undeniable.

### *Panentheism*

Panentheism is the view that God is developing along with the world. God is in the universe as a mind is in a body. God needs the world to express Himself. What is beyond the world actualises (makes itself real) itself in the world. God is always changing as the world changes. God is in the process of becoming all that He can be. God has two poles – a primordial pole, which is eternal, unchanging, ideal and beyond the world; and a consequent pole, which is temporal, changing, real and identical to the world. The primordial is His potential pole – what He can be. The consequence is what He actually is at the moment. The world is not different from God; it is one of God's poles. He needs our help to become more perfect. Neither pole could exist without the other at any time. This is called process theology represented by Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne and Schubert M. Ogden.

They believe God is not omnipotent, instead He directs the world only through influence. Evil exists because not all of the world is controlled by His influence. Process thinkers also hold that values are rooted in the nature of God. Since God is constantly changing so are values. Values can only be defined in general terms, and the term most often used is beauty or aesthetics. To be ethical is to seek aesthetic optimisation of experience for the community. Kindness brings beauty; cruelty brings ugliness. All moral standards must be derived from these principles and suited to influence the present experience for the better.

The basic dipolar concept of God as eternal potential seeking temporal actualisation is self-defeating. A finite god cannot guarantee the defeat of evil, holds out little prospect of a better world, and seems to be engaging in an extremely wasteful project at our expense for his own enrichment. The claim that such a god is Biblical is unfounded.

When they say that God and the world always have existed together, we have to face the fact that time cannot go back into the past forever. This means it took a creator beyond the process. The Creator of the universe who has existence independent of the creation is different from one who does not have any existence and activity independent of the universe. Also, we need to look at something that is not changing in order to know whether anything is changing.

### *Finite Godism*

Finite Godism is the view that God exists, but is limited and/or imperfect. God is beyond the universe and active in it, is not infinite, but limited in His nature and power. They argue that a finite universe only needs a finite cause and that the imperfection of the universe demands an imperfect source. Although God created the world, the design is not perfect and that is why we see natural calamities that God couldn't work out of the system. William James, Peter A. Bertocci and Harold Kushner hold this view.

Something beyond the control of God's good will is the source of evil in the world. They believe God may or may not have established a moral order. We know a perfect and infinite God is able to overcome evil since He has both the desire and the ability to do it.

### *Polytheism*

Polytheism is the view that there are many gods – many finite gods who reign over separate realms of the universe. Greek mythology and ancient Hinduism offer popular examples of polytheism. They reject the idea of a single God and deny that an infinite God exists beyond the world. They focus on the chaos of the world to show that there are many gods. Nature is usually seen to have its own life principle, which explains why it is possible for it to give birth to the gods. Evil is a necessary part of nature, they believe, and that without opposition there is no challenge to overcome in moral choices. They say values cannot be absolute, and the main motivation for doing good is self-interest. Surely, if the gods have come from nature, they are not the ultimate.

Research into ancient religions has shown that some of these gods are actually ancient heroes later deified. Further, some of the Hindu gods have been identified as ancient heroes in Egypt, Syria and Assyria. The Aryans seem to have brought with them the stories about them and reset them in the Indian context. The chief representatives of polytheism are the ancient Greeks, advocates of popular Hinduism, and the modern Mormons.

### *New Age Movement*

New Age is a diverse group of organisations, religious groups and individuals influenced by Eastern religious thought and the occult. This movement is currently influencing the Western world, including the Christians. Most members of the New Age movement believe in monism, the idea that all is one. Also they believe in pantheism, the idea that all is god. They subscribe to the idea that humans must realise that they are god, and that all religions are one, as in syncretism. They look to the future with the idea that this age is heading toward a ‘new age’ of consciousness and unity by cosmic evolution.

Monism subscribes to reincarnation or the theory of transmigration. By putting the guilt back one lifetime, one begins an infinite regress of explanations that never really pay off with an explanation. *Karma* is not a moral prescription. It is a system of retribution only; it has no content that tells us what to do. For the new agers all is relative. *Karma* is not a moral law. Rather than solving the problems of unjust suffering, reincarnations simply says that it is just.

Unless something is absolutely right, nothing can be actually right. If nothing is right or wrong, then *Karma* has no business punishing anyone for it. Helping people is just out of question in a society that believes in reincarnation. Also reincarnation does not guarantee spiritual progress. No matter how many finite lifetimes it takes, we can never progress to the same level and the infinite goodness of God.

### *Naturalism*

Naturalism holds that ‘what we see is all there is’. Carl Sagan said ‘the cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be’. Marquis de Laplace said, ‘The God-hypothesis is an unnecessary intrusion into the assured results of scientific investigation’. Accordingly one can decide what is right or wrong and what he will do with his life. Having no responsibility for actions and without ethics or any barrier of guilt, it ultimately leads to a despair of the human situation.

### *Scientific Materialism*

Scientific materialism is a worldview that seeks to reduce everything to the level of observables – which by definition excludes God. Scientific materialists believe that materialism and science are inseparable, that the realm of objective reality belongs entirely to science, and that belief in a supernatural creator is a holdover from the past that has no place in a rational mind. Science may be able to tell us exactly how things happen, but it cannot tell us whether anything is good or bad, beautiful or ugly. Only human (or God) can make moral or artistic judgements, and these judgements cannot be derived directly from mere facts. Materialism applied to the mind undermines the validity of all reasoning including one's own.

### *Rationalism*

Rationalism as a test for truth claims was considered in Chapter 4 earlier. This view holds that the universe is built on rational principles and human reasoning power can unlock its mysteries. Starting with a set of 'self-evident' principles, logical deduction from them would lead us to the truths about God and about the physical universe. Its primary originator was René Descartes (1596-1650), the French philosopher and mathematician who invented analytical geometry. In this view, God is not the chief centre of interest. He is invoked for supporting the belief in the rationality of the universe.

The rationalist's chief interest is in unravelling the mysteries of the world. For René Descartes, God was the Infinite Mind, the most rational Being. He arrived at his view of God through logical deduction, starting with the premise that 'he exists', showing that 'he is thinking which in turn proved that he exists'. The starting point of rationalism was the individual self-consciousness, not divine revelation.

Thus rationalism says that we can determine all truth by logic. It says that we can rationally prove the existence and nature of God. All truth is logically necessary to a rationalist. Rationalism declares that all things about God must be based upon human reason. Everyone from Aristotle to the present has agreed that first principles cannot be proven.

The heart of rationalism is the thesis that the rationally inescapable is the real. There is no rationally inescapable way of establishing the first principles of reasoning. Rationalism is without a necessary rational basis of its own. The existence of God cannot be demonstrated with logical necessity. In the Christian faith, divine revelation furnishes truths we cannot obtain ourselves.

### *Idealism*

Idealism is the view that the mind and spiritual values are more fundamental than the material universe. God is believed to be the Absolute Spirit. All reality is the outworking of this Absolute Spirit. The sum total of human knowledge is none other than the Absolute Spirit thinking its thoughts through human minds. George Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), the German philosopher, is the greatest proponent of this view. Idealism offers no evidence for its views.

### *Logical Positivism*

Logical positivism is a view, popularised by the Oxford scholar A.J. Ayer (1936), which uses the verification principle to determine if a proposition is meaningful. Since the language about God, the soul and immortality could not be verified, it was either meaningless, or it meant something rather different from what the speaker intended, they say. This philosophy is used to support atheism and agnosticism. It may be pointed out here that the very 'verification principle' itself should be open to verification which they have not done.

### *Existentialism*

Existentialism is the view of Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) saying that truth cannot be obtained in an impersonal way, especially truth about God. One must make a prior commitment to it without question to experience its truth. Faith and reason are opposites. Faith is to be in inverse proportion to evidence. Thus for him faith is a 'leap in the dark'. The truth about God that one experiences is a subjective truth. The historicity of Christ is uncertain in his view. What is important is the thought of God that prompts a person to react in a certain way. Through this reaction a person enlarges understanding of himself and of human existence, hence the name Existentialism. The existential view took its worst form in the atheistic existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905), the French novelist.

Existentialism is a man-centred view that ignores the historical revelation of God in Christ. Faith should not be a leap, but based on supporting evidence. Christian truths are absolute propositional truths revealed by God.

### *Fideism*

We considered fideism also as a test for truth claims in Chapter 4. Fideism holds that the only way we can know anything about God is by faith. Fideists require men to believe in God without allowing them to first understand that there is a God to be believed. Here we don't want to demean the importance of faith. Irrational fideism denies that we can or should think rationally or logically about matters of faith. Responsible fideism or rational fideism, as Evans calls it,<sup>255</sup> offers a reasoned case for viewing faith as justified even though what it believes is above, beyond, or in some sense against reason.

### *Views of 'the post-modern' mind*

It is a mixture of views and opinions where everything is considered as relative in its own terms. Secular ideas are brought in even to explain religious matters, and some such people are prejudiced to anything religious. They are afraid that religious people might bring in their dogmas in decision making, for example in matters such as prayer and scripture lessons in schools, views on abortion, suicide, homosexuality and the like. They interpret with prejudices when religious persons speak on moral matters. It seems they relate more to computers than to people, and only later some of the 'high-tech' people realise problems about even relating to their own family. They are forced to find meaning in private television, and headphones, and in getting out in solitude. Finally their pursuit leads only to empty headedness. That which they thought would lead them to success, they find, eventually let them down.

However, the people of such views normally do not interfere with the views of others. They don't try to impose their views or consider theirs absolute either. If something is meaningful, even suicide for example, to a person, they leave him alone. In the post-modern mind we see also a willingness to change their views, as they are not absolute about their views and opinions. Some even say one can decide about good and bad according to his own 'feelings'. As people of such views are not sure about the stability of the views they hold, they are willing to accept other views, including the Gospel.

### **Ultimate reference point**

These 'spectacles', along with the cultures and religions around us, are something through which we see through in order to see the world. It is only when we are exposed to a totally different system of beliefs shaped by a different history that we turn back and see that what we always took for granted is only one way of seeing things. We assume that the way we understand life is how everybody should, and that our understanding of the world is reality. A person's prejudices also control his perceptions. So we have to be ready to reshape our tools and instruments understanding those who subscribe to other systems of faith and ideologies.

Although religious pluralism and moral relativism are quickly becoming ingrained in modern culture, the majority of people still think in terms of absolutes and accept the reality of logic and reason. These people need their intellectual obstacles to faith removed. People's worldviews can and do change when they take seriously the factual claims of the Gospel.

The advocates some secularist ideologies used in the past were non-spiritual means to liberate people from bondages of various kinds. Some of them recognised that pure secularism and rationality is not the ultimate solution. History shows that people have always had a sense of longing for the spiritual or the divine. Various methodologies were tried to satisfy their needs and fill in the vacuum of relationship with the ultimate reality, and found that it is not the rationality of the secularists, but the spirit that matters.

Only theism, the belief that the world was created and is utterly dependent on an infinite yet personal creator, is a philosophically viable worldview. Christian theism presents a worldview or a transcendent point of reference in terms of which knowledge and ethics are possible. It makes God truly ultimate and presents the means by which sinful man can come to recognise and honour God as the absolute personal creator. The historical focus on a 'once-for-all' incarnation of God in Christ sharply distinguishes the Christian faith from mythical and mystical religions. There is plenty of evidence for the historicity of the central events of the Christian faith, and it represents God's direct intervention into human history to redeem mankind.

The belief that all religions are basically the same does not take seriously the facts about the different religions. While we can advocate a peaceful coexistence of all, we must remember what Francis Beckwith said: 'God cannot be impersonal, personal, transcendent, polytheistic, pantheistic, monotheistic, able to beget, not able to beget,

relevant, and irrelevant all at the same time...Irreconcilable data gives us no knowledge of God whatsoever'.<sup>256</sup>

Religious toleration does not mean equal validity of truth. We must keep in mind the difference between religious toleration as a matter of legal rights and the concept of the equal validity of truth claims. Attempts to make all religions 'basically the same' involve the serious problem of reducing everything to a broad common denominator. To understand the uniqueness of Christ we must understand the whole pattern of Biblical history. The uniqueness of Christ can be established on the basis of objective evidence rather than by personal preference.<sup>257</sup>

Recognising the inadequacy in the above mentioned worldviews of other faiths, it becomes important to help people to find the ultimate reference point of meaning in life by commending the Christian worldview as the only one able to provide a secure footing for meaning and purpose in life. Here things can be explained in terms of purpose, because purpose is a function of the beliefs. When the world is viewed as a 'closed world of cause and effect', (a world from which purpose has been excluded), there can be no judgement of 'good' and 'bad'. The concept of a purely mechanical system operating without any place for purpose is mistaken. A machine that creates itself and exists for no purpose is something that in most periods of history would have been thought to exceed the imagination of even the most credulous. We are fashioned by God for His purpose, and our sense of right and wrong is born out of that purpose.

Earlier we had an optimistic view of the possibilities of human history with development, but had failed to recognise the power of that which works to destroy human life. Progress which seeks to give meaning to history by fixing attention on a future earthly utopia also is collapsing. With the death of modernity, new challenges arose. No longer does science by itself seem capable of making sense of the universe. The future 'personal blessedness' of the soul after death is the hope for many, it seems. Sometimes, these lead only to a private kind of piety, closing eyes to the struggle and conflict of public life.

The goal and hope in a meaningful future should be beyond the reach of death, and yet not in such a manner as to destroy the significance of all that lies this side of death. The curtain of death lies across the path to the future. Jesus has opened a way through the curtain and has come to lead us on the way, which he is. We can go forward with confidence because Jesus has gone before us. We can go forward confidently even when the future is hidden, as we have a reliable track. Jesus is not an inaccessible figure. He is still around. Our varying perceptions can be checked in the same way that all our claims to perceive reality have to be checked. What sets the Christian faith apart from other faiths is that it is rooted in facts that are in principle verifiable on the basis of publicly accessible evidence.

In the modern consumable society, the intent appears to be immediate consumption rather than an investment for the future. But even in the post-modern mind we see the built in capacity to make sense of things. More people these days realise that only faith in God gives them stability and purpose. The sufficiency of God to satisfy the deepest human

longings and the overwhelming love of God as seen in the death of Christ give a framework that makes sense. By giving a basis for morality in the God who gives stability and purpose, the Christian faith offers something that can satisfy the longings of modern man. Christian faith not only makes sense, but all of life and the future course of the world are explained by it.

I conclude this section by endorsing certain ideas regarding the subject I gathered from Lesslie Newbigin who said, 'Truth cannot unite the ununitable; only love can. Christian mission must be an affair of love, not an affair of truth. But it is not love that encourages people to believe a lie. As a human race we are on a journey and we need to know the road. In Christ, we have been shown the road'.<sup>258</sup>

## **Summary**

### *Influence of worldviews*

Worldviews are the grids through which people interpret everything around them. In atheism the right and wrong are ideas without any point of absolute reference.

### *Faith in the context of diverse worldviews*

The morality that atheism teaches is unliveable. Deism can be answered by stating that a God who is powerful enough to create the world could and would take care of it. Pantheism can be answered by affirming that the Creator is beyond the creation and that He is unchanging. When the pantheists say that God and the world always have existed together and that God is in the process of developing along with the world, they can be asked to look at the Creator beyond the process and also find something that is unchanging in order to know whether anything is changing. The advocates of finite godism can be asked to recognise a perfect and infinite God who is able to overcome evil. Polytheists can be told that their gods are not the Ultimate if they are given birth by nature. Naturalists and scientific materialists can be answered by pointing their deficiency of their views in making moral and artistic judgements. Similarly Christian answers can be given to the rationalists, idealists and to the existentialists. The views of the post-modern mind and the possibility of openness to the Gospel among people of such views also is referred.

### *Ultimate reference point*

Christian theism presents a worldview or a transcendent point of reference in terms of which knowledge and ethics are possible. We need to help people find the ultimate reference point of meaning in life by commending the Christian worldview as the only one able to provide a secure footing for meaning and purpose in life. What sets the Christian faith apart from other faiths is that it is rooted in facts that are in verifiable on the basis of publicly accessible evidence.

The objective reality of the Christian faith is centred on the person of Christ. In the next chapter we shall discuss the need and relevance of such a disclosure of God through the medium of human personality.



## **CHAPTER 9**

### **GOD'S MESSAGE WRAPPED IN A PERSON**

#### **Incarnation and the uniqueness of Christ**

What we can know about God in the natural world is quite insufficient to enable us to worship Him with mind and heart, for it only leads us to believe that He exists. It does not give us sufficient grounds for beliefs about God's nature. But if God's nature is pure love that accords with the human experience of love, it is congruous that God should reveal Himself to us in a way by which we can truly know Him. We would expect Him to disclose to us something of His nature that meets the demands both of our human nature and of His will for us. In order to reveal Himself to human beings, it seems congruous that He should do it through the medium of human personality. Human beings can then understand best. Since humanity is made in His image, we are able to reflect His nature. In Jesus, God disclosed Himself in a fully personal way. This is what he has done. Incarnation refers to God becoming flesh.<sup>259</sup>

The relationship between the infinite God and finite men of flesh is revealed to us in the incarnation of Christ. Although Christ is one in being with the Father, in space and in time, He partook of flesh and blood and became the same as we are,<sup>260</sup> but without sin. This is incarnation, a being having two lives, human and divine, living together as one life, and having two natures, humanity and divinity. The incarnation of Christ denotes the addition of God into humanity and mingling, the union of God with humanity. God became one with man and man became one with God. To our understanding, the notion of God mingling Himself with man is inconceivable, yet this mysterious union was fully accomplished in the person of Jesus Christ.

The incarnation of Christ was purposed and planned by God before the foundation of the world.<sup>261</sup> We can find a number of scriptural references that prophesy of His entrance into the human race. A seed would come forth from the woman to bruise the serpent's head;<sup>262</sup> a virgin would conceive and bear a son whose name is Immanuel – God with us;<sup>263</sup> a child would be born whose name would be called the mighty God, the everlasting Father;<sup>264</sup> out of Bethlehem would come forth a ruler in Israel, a man born in time yet existing from eternity past.<sup>265</sup>

The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus was 'God manifested in the flesh'.<sup>266</sup> He was the complete God and in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.<sup>267</sup> The Word

which was with God and which was God became flesh.<sup>268</sup> The first three verses of John use many statements that proclaim that the Word was the Absolute. John is saying that the Absolute has become concrete by becoming fully human. Though the three of the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – are distinct, they can never be separated, for there is no God but one.<sup>269</sup> Jesus Himself also testified that He and the Father are one.<sup>270</sup> Thus the entire Triune God was incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ.

The apostolic eyewitnesses saw and experienced Jesus and interpreted what they saw and experienced through what Jesus taught them under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Himself promised that the Spirit of truth will tell them what is yet to come. The New Testament is the result of this activity of the Spirit and through that we are able to get to know the absolute truth.

When the Scripture says ‘a child is born’,<sup>271</sup> it denotes the humanity of Christ, and when it says ‘a son is given’, it speaks of the divinity of Christ. When man commits sin against the infinite God, the punishment must fit the crime. When we violate the justice of God or the holiness of God, the act itself is not the only thing we consider when determining the sort of punishment a crime deserves. The determining factor involves the status of the one against whom the crime is committed. If it is sin against someone perfect and holy, it will have infinite consequences. It then takes eternity for us to experience infinite punishment. Through incarnation we find the only one who is capable of bearing the infinite punishment in a finite time. The person who can substitute in our place must be infinite himself. As a perfect man, Christ could properly represent those for whom he took the punishment on himself. As God, His payment could be infinite enough to satisfy the infinite justice and holiness of God. His divine-human personality and his human nature as well as divine nature made it possible for Him to suffer and die and rise again.

### **Divine-human person**

We must be careful not to confuse the incarnation with a metamorphosis. God did not change into man, as in Greek mythology. Instead the Son of God adopted human nature and united it with His divine nature in the unity of one person. He is not God alongside of man but God in man. The perfect manhood of Jesus was not assimilated into deity but instead was made its chosen vessel. Archbishop Arthur Michael Ramsey rightly said: ‘God is like Christ and there is nothing unlike Christ in God’.

Incarnation denotes the mingling of God with humanity. In Jesus Christ, the divine and human natures were joined in such a way as to be thoroughly and inseparably ‘mingled’, retaining the individual characteristics of the two natures such that a third nature was not produced. He is set apart from the human race in that his origin is in heaven. Yet he has assumed human nature in order to identify with the trials and tribulations of mankind. It is this incarnation that made it possible for Him to be the One who is both the complete God and a perfect man, possessing the divine nature and the human nature distinctively.

‘A child was born, and a child was called the Mighty God’.<sup>272</sup> The birth of Jesus was very different from ours. Most notably, He was born of a virgin, a fact attested to by both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. We can conclude from this crucial fact that

Jesus Christ is no ordinary person. The union of the two natures in Christ is to be regarded as unique and incomparable.

The major aspects of Christ in His incarnation include the truth that He is the complete God, since the incarnation was 'God-manifested in the flesh'. His personality was divine-human, but He has two natures, human and divine. He is the Son of God as He was conceived of the Holy Spirit. In response to Mary's question as to how it was possible for her, as a virgin, to conceive and bear a son, the angel Gabriel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore also the holy thing which is born will be called the Son of God'.<sup>273</sup> He is Son of Man as He was conceived in and born of a human virgin. As the Son of Man, Jesus lived a normal human life as a prototype, a model for His believers. He prayed to the Father ceaselessly, depending on God for everything. He never did anything of Himself.<sup>274</sup> He never spoke anything from Himself.<sup>275</sup> He denied and rejected Himself. He always took God as His life. Even in dealing with Satan, Jesus maintained His position as a man fully dependent on God<sup>276</sup>. He set forth for us a full, flawless pattern of the divine life living in and expressed through the human life.

The Bible presents Jesus as one who had feelings just like ours and who was thus capable of being tempted. But it also presents Him as being sinless. He was not a superhuman being above human struggle, which would make it impossible for us to identify with Him. His humanness is well expressed in His vulnerability to tiredness and physical weakness. Wearied as He was with all his labour, He fell asleep. In contrast to the usual practice of the condemned criminal carrying his own cross to the site of crucifixion, Jesus was too weak to carry it beyond a certain point on the way to Golgotha. When He took humanity, He did not make Himself immune from the frustrations common to humans. His full humanity certainly qualified Him to be our mediator. He Himself claimed to be without sin. Yet he said so much about the importance of admitting our sinfulness.

The name Jesus implies He is Jehovah the Saviour. Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua,<sup>277</sup> which means Jehovah the Saviour, or the salvation of Jehovah. Hence Jesus is not only a man but also Jehovah, and not only Jehovah but also Jehovah becoming our salvation. He is also our Joshua, the One who brings us into rest.<sup>278</sup> The name Immanuel implies He is God with us.<sup>279</sup> Jesus is God, and He is also God incarnated to dwell among us.<sup>280</sup> The term Second Man implies He is the Man who will fulfil God's plan.<sup>281</sup> From God's point of view there are only two men in the entire universe: 'the first man, Adam, including all his descendants, and the second man, Christ, comprising of all His believers'.<sup>282</sup> By natural birth all human beings belong to the first man, Adam, who, though created with the purpose of representing and expressing God, has failed God. However, through regeneration a person can be transferred out of Adam and into Christ to become a part of the second man, the new man, who will fulfil God's plan. The first man, Adam, failed and ruined His design. Instead of creating another man, God Himself came to be the second Man.

The use of the term Last Adam used implies He is the termination and conclusion of the old creation. The old creation ends with a man, the last Adam. This man who terminated

the old creation became, in resurrection, a life-giving Spirit. Now this Spirit is the centre and lifeline of the new creation.

### **The purpose of incarnation**

In His majesty, God, who has dwelt alone in unapproachable light<sup>283</sup> has now become approachable and available to us. In the fullness of time,<sup>284</sup> God came to mankind in a most significant setting – in a manger. Jesus was available to all that approached him for help. The sorrowing and the afflicted, the open sinners and even the self-righteous ones could reach him. He showed His power over nature, and worked miracles to comfort people in need. He was able to live with people and show how he could get firsthand information about their fears and aspirations. Incarnation made it possible for people to touch Him. He was sensitive to the needs of people. When a woman touched His garment in faith in the midst of a crowd around Him, He identified the sickness she was suffering from for twelve years in one look and healed her.<sup>285</sup> He went about doing good and preaching the Kingdom of God.<sup>286</sup> He was moved with compassion when he saw that the multitude was lost and was meeting their physical and spiritual needs.<sup>287</sup> Jesus loved people personally, and demonstrated to His disciples serving love.<sup>288</sup>

Principles become real and meaningful when expressed through a person. Here through the incarnation, the ‘as I have loved you’ message was communicated very personally and meaningfully. In fact God sent the greatest message to mankind ‘wrapped up’ in the person of Christ. We learned later that the best way to communicate a message is to wrap it up in a person. The infinite God revealed Himself to the finite man through incarnation, and His message is now ‘packed’ in the believers for the world to see it (in our lives). The questions ‘what Christ made possible for us to be’ and ‘what the world needs to see us to be’ are for us to answer daily. Someone has rightly put it as ‘Jesus loves us, but we need to be Jesus to others’.

The incarnation of Christ also points to the nature of the relationship God desires to have with us. God wants to unite and mingle Himself with the beings He created in His own image. Eventually, through His complete salvation work, God will produce for Himself a counterpart that matches Himself absolutely in life, nature, mind, being, image and glory. By receiving Him and partaking of Him as the Spirit, we are regenerated,<sup>289</sup> sanctified,<sup>290</sup> renewed,<sup>291</sup> transformed<sup>292</sup> and glorified.<sup>293</sup> The believers in Christ, that is, those who receive Him,<sup>294</sup> grow unto such a full salvation by continually tasting that the Lord is good.<sup>295</sup>

Man, the object of God’s love and target of His dispensing, became alienated from Him, constituted with sin, and destined to die. While the justice of God cried for punishment, and the love of God pleaded for showing mercy, God was able to do justice without doing violence to His character by allowing His son to be made atonement for man’s sin. The incarnation of Christ displays the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God in that He initiated the process whereby He would both redeem man and destroy the devil.

### **Unity and diversity in Trinity**

It is only natural to assume that the Creator God belongs to a higher dimensional reality. The concept of One God in Three Persons is not a human invention based on our own

experience or rational argument. It is based on Biblical revelation by God Himself. While it is admittedly a difficult concept for us to understand, it is not contradictory. Our one God is a complex unity, to whose personal life oneness and three-oneness are equally basic. For this unique and unparalleled fact the New Testament has no technical terminology, and it took Christians three hundred years of debate before they learned to express and safeguard it by confessing one God in three persons and declaring the Son and Spirit to be one in essence with the Father. We are saying that God is One Being that exists as Three Persons. The plurality of God is obvious in the Genesis record 'Let us make man in our image'.

But Trinitarian thinking about God is found constantly throughout the New Testament, most strikingly so when Jesus explains that after his going to the Father 'another counsellor', the Holy Spirit, will be sent to replace Him, and that through the Spirit's coming He Himself will come to the disciples in the present. The New Testament writers consistently see salvation as the joint work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Father arranging it, the Son accomplishing and administering it and the Holy Spirit applying it. It is thus basic to Christianity, as distinct from all other world religions, always to think about God in Trinitarian terms.

The Scripture doctrine of the Trinity is set forth as 'God is revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence or being'. The Scriptures teach everywhere the unity of God explicitly and emphatically. There can be no doubt that they reveal a God that is exclusively one. The Scriptures also teach that there are three divine persons. It is this peculiar twofold teaching, which is expressed by the word 'trinity'. It is not simply of three-ness, but of three-oneness. That this word is not found in Scripture is no objection to it, when the doctrine, expressed by it, is so clearly set forth. Although the word 'Trinity' itself is not used, we have the revelation of God being three distinct persons, yet only one God. The concept behind the doctrine of Trinity is there.

We do not have any examples of three persons operating in perfect harmony with one will. Yet that is God's goal for us, that we will have perfect unity like the perfect unity in the Godhead. The oneness contrasts with the diversity of persons in polytheistic concept of God. For there are many persons regarded as gods, yet they are very different, often conflicting in nature. So they don't have one God in the sense of the Triune God. They have many gods who are different.

The doctrine is derived from more than one stream of evidence. When it is said that within the one being of God there exists eternally three persons, John Wesley commented once: 'Tell me how it is that in this room there are three candles, but one light, and I will explain the mode of divine existence'. There is within the one being that is God three co-equal and co-eternal Persons - the Father is not the Son, the son is not the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Father. Each is eternal - the Father has always been, the Son has always been, and the Spirit has always been. No person precedes the other, none follows another.

The Bible presents a number of categories of evidence that demonstrates the existence of three persons all sharing the one being that is God. First the persons are described as personal; that is, the attributes of personhood and personal existence are ascribed to the three. Secondly, clear distinctions are made between the Persons, so that it is impossible to confound or confuse the three. Finally, we see real and eternal relationships between the Persons. Characteristics such as the ability to reason and will,<sup>296</sup> and the ability to love<sup>297</sup> can be found.

As the term ‘Trinity’ is not a Biblical term, the answer to the question of using limited terminology is addressed by B.B. Warfield as, ‘And the definition of a Biblical doctrine in such un-biblical language can be justified only on the principle that it is better to preserve the truth of Scripture than the words of Scripture... the doctrine of the Trinity is given to us in Scripture, not in formulated definition, but in fragmentary allusions; when we assemble... we are not passing from Scripture, but entering more thoroughly into the meaning of Scripture’.<sup>298</sup>

In this world of effect, diversity is present, but unity is sought. The words we use do not adequately convey all that is involved in the dynamics of Trinity. However, the Trinity of God is a philosophical necessity. God has to incorporate within His being both unity and diversity in order to explain satisfactorily unity and diversity in the creation. As there is unity and diversity in the effect of existence, there must be unity and diversity in the First Cause of our being. The attributes of love and communication that God has cannot be explained if God has always been one person. The triune God is an eternal fellowship of love and communication. Such a God created man, loves man, communicates with man, and desires perfect fellowship in unity for mankind. The perfection of virtue is love, which is not possible unless God in His own being is relational – the Father loving the Son, etc.<sup>299</sup> No knowledge is possible without personal acquaintance and relationality. It is only because God made humans in His image, that the Second Person of the Trinity could become human without in essence, ceasing to be God. Although incarnation is a mystery, it is neither absurd nor illogical.

A proper understanding of the Trinity not only gives us a key to understanding unity in diversity, but also brings us a unique answer to the great struggle we face between races, cultures and even genders. Trinity provides us with a model for a community of love and essential dignity without mitigating personality, individuality and divinity. Also the Trinity provides a blueprint for the love and communion we can share with our fellow human beings, retaining a wonderful diversity that is brought together by a spiritual unity. In John 17:22, the Lord Jesus prays for the believers that ‘they may be one even as we are one’. The statement that the believers are one does not imply that there is only one believer. The idea behind the oneness of the believers is that they have one mind with no conflict of wills, which is perfect unity. The believers are one in two ways, one the oneness in nature, the other oneness in will. This goal of oneness is based on the oneness of God. Even individually, we live with a diversity of desires in search of a unity in purpose.

### **Virgin birth**

When Jesus came into this world, He was not a newly created individual such as we are, but was rather the eternal Son of God. To be born into this world required divine intervention. From the day he was born until the day He died he was without sin. Since our race is contaminated with sin, a miraculous entrance into the world was required and hence the Virgin Birth.

The full meaning of the incarnation is tied to the Virgin Birth of Christ. It is important to understand that the Virgin Birth signified the conception not of an independent human personhood but of a human nature. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth safeguards and communicates the significance of the event of the incarnation. It does not prove the incarnation in the scientific sense but serves to convey the reality of the incarnation from one generation to another. This doctrine is necessary for the preservation of the integrity of the faith. It is to be remembered that the Virgin Birth narratives form part of the authentic New Testament witness and were overwhelmingly accepted by the apostolic church. Matthew describes the virginal conception from a man's point of view, and Luke writes the infancy narratives of Jesus from a woman's angle. John is affirming the Virgin Birth by using the singular 'who was born'.<sup>300</sup> The prophecy of Isaiah firmly points to this birth.

His birth was the result of a virginal conception. It was a sign that Jesus had a very special divine mission that was going to prove Him more than an ordinary human being.<sup>301</sup> It seems a biological impossibility of a birth of miraculous nature. It was a usual nine months pregnancy and natural childbirth. According to modern knowledge of genetics, to be a human person, Jesus would have had to have twenty-three father-derived chromosomes as well as twenty-three mother-derived chromosomes. We have no means of knowing about half his human chromosomes. It requires the necessity of accepting the possibility of a miracle of a supernatural agency providing it. In fact God's creative powers are necessary in every childbirth. While one is the direct use of God's creative power, the other is the indirect use of God's creative power. The miracle of virginal conception without a line of human ancestors was discussed earlier in chapter 6.

The Virgin Birth of Christ itself is not the central mystery of faith, but like the empty tomb it is a sign that serves to communicate this mystery. It is not itself the stumbling block, but it is a portent to the real stumbling block of faith – the Son of God becoming man and taking upon himself the sin and guilt of humankind.

### **Vicarious suffering and the death of death**

The Bible makes it clear that all humans are morally accountable to God. Due to our rebellion against God, the human race has become guilty before God, deserving eternal punishment. Christ took this punishment which His people would have suffered. The nature of Christ's vicarious punishment is a good indication of the nature of divine punishment of rebel sinners.

The fact of animal sacrifices in all parts of the globe in ancient religions is an indication of the necessity of atonement. The fact of atonement reveals the necessity of divine

punishment for sin. Because God's infinite laws were violated it has to be repaid by violence to the life of the offender. Animal sacrifice in the Old Testament was figurative of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ<sup>302</sup> as substitute for the human beings. We learn from the Old Testament that the sin-offerings were burnt on the altar of sacrifice. This altar symbolises the cross on which Christ was crucified as a 'sin-offering' for mankind. The brazen altar was five cubits wide and five cubits long,<sup>303</sup> which represented the grace with which sinners were saved on the cross. The height of the brazen altar of sacrifice was three cubits, which stands for the Triune God to show that the entire Godhead was involved in the work of the salvation of mankind. God gave His son;<sup>304</sup> the Son gave or surrendered Himself;<sup>305</sup> Christ offered Himself through the eternal Spirit.<sup>306</sup>

When it is said that the rulers of this age 'crucified the Lord of glory',<sup>307</sup> though Christ died in human terms, it is the divine Person who is said to have been crucified. Christ who is God incarnate, became that unrepeatable sacrifice for the sins of human kind. Jesus Christ has endured the thirty-nine lashes and the cruel nails piercing his feet and palms. He has endured the crown of thorns. Blood dropped from his head, palms and feet, even from his side. Now we can put our faith in His Son Jesus Christ whose substitutionary and representative death has procured salvation for a lost humanity.

It involves the idea of redemption in Christ's death.<sup>308</sup> Redemption is a release resulting from the payment of a price. Not only that we are released from the bondage of sin, but also removed to a new state and are not subject to resale. Once we were enemies and now we are reconciled to God.<sup>309</sup> Reconciliation is restoring the right relationship with God, and we are given son-ship, and are joint heirs with Christ. It also involves the idea of propitiation in Christ's death.<sup>310</sup> God is infinitely satisfied with the work of Christ. His death became a totally adequate solution for all the problems raised by sin.

The death of Christ was also the death of death.<sup>311</sup> The fear of death is replaced by the death of fear. As someone has said, if we are born only 'once', then we die twice, which means both the physical death and the eternal separation from God. But on the other hand, if we are born 'twice', or born again also, we die only the physical death. Christ suffered the condemnation of sin in our place, and this means not only the eternal consequences of sin but also its temporal consequences. We no longer have to carry the curse of the law, though we now suffer the trials of faith as we follow Christ in costly discipleship. We need to work out the consequences and implications of our salvation,<sup>312</sup> but we do not procure our salvation through our works. The law of sowing and reaping<sup>313</sup> still holds true for the Christian, but in a new way.

The Christian is impelled to do good works out of gratefulness for what Jesus Christ has done on his behalf. He is inwardly motivated to give glory to God by upholding Jesus Christ in his words and actions. He is obliged to take up his cross and follow Jesus Christ in costly discipleship in order to demonstrate his love and gratefulness for the supreme sacrifice of his Saviour.

The incarnate Christ rose again, and 'when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high'.<sup>314</sup> This Jesus who set aside His glory and came

in human form made it possible for us to be called His children and heirs. ‘Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory’.<sup>315</sup>

## **Summary**

### *Incarnation and the uniqueness of Christ*

In order to reveal Himself to us in a way by which we can truly know God, it seems congruous that He should do it through the medium of human personality. In Jesus, God disclosed Himself in a fully personal way. The entire triune God was incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ. His divine-human personality, and His human nature as well as divine nature made it possible for Him to be capable of bearing the infinite punishment in a finite time.

### *Divine-human person*

He is set apart from the human race in that His origin is in heaven, yet He has assumed human nature in order to identify with the trials and tribulations of mankind. His personality was divine-human, but He has two natures, the human and the divine. When He took humanity, He did not make Himself immune from the frustrations and pain common to humans.

### *The purpose of incarnation*

Through incarnation, God has now become approachable and available to us. The greatest message to mankind was communicated through His incarnation by expressing through the person of Christ. The incarnation of Christ also points to the nature of the relationship God desires to have with us.

### *Unity and diversity in Trinity*

The Trinitarian thinking about God is found in the New Testament, although the word ‘trinity’ is not used. The Father has always been, the Son has always been, and the Spirit has always been. God has to incorporate within His being both unity and diversity in order to explain satisfactorily unity and diversity in the creation. Trinity provides us with a model for a community of love and dignity.

### *Virgin Birth*

His birth was the result of a virginal conception which signified not of an independent human personhood but of a human nature. It was a sign that Jesus had a very special divine mission that was going to prove Him more than an ordinary human being.

### *Vicarious suffering and the death of death*

The nature of Christ’s vicarious punishment is a good indication of the nature of divine punishment of rebel sinners. Christ who is God incarnate became the unrepeatable sacrifice for the sins of humankind. We are obliged to take up the cross and follow Jesus Christ in costly discipleship. Jesus who set aside His glory and came in human form made it possible for us to be called His children.

Christ made it possible for us to have the right relationship with God. The matter of restoring God's favour and the possibility for a life transforming experience are discussed in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 10 UNDOING THE DAMAGE

### **Man's alienation from God**

Although man was created in the image of God, he was despoiled of the goodness due to the Fall.<sup>316</sup> The image was defaced due to sin. Man is given freedom, but not autonomy. Full autonomy belongs to God alone. Man's freedom is within limits. In the Garden of Eden situation, man was enjoying freedom, but it was not unlimited freedom. Man is free and responsible, but he is responsible to the laws of God. The question by the devil, the serpent, was presented in such a way as to distort the commandment. The distortion implies the notion that without autonomy there is no freedom. 'You are responsible' is clearly implied in the statement.

The essence of the temptation was 'to be like God', to have no restraints, no limits, no crowding of self-desire by the rule of another. The deification of man was offered. But human freedom was not augmented, but was diminished by the Fall. Even now the quest for autonomy continues. The rule of God is regarded as ropes and chains binding the people and keeping them from unbridled pursuance of their desire.<sup>317</sup>

Man's inclination is to flee from the truth due to the corruption. Natural man suffers from prejudices and he operates within a framework of insufferable bias against the God of the Bible. Though it is acknowledged that and granted that man would be pleased to receive the benefits that only God could give, it is questionable whether men desire the God who makes those benefits possible.

Because man's relationship with God was damaged in the spiritual dimension, man began to feel insecure and experience emptiness, purposelessness, anxiety, futility and even despair. This resulted in estrangement from himself in the psychological dimension. Man is divided and pulled in various directions by conflicting goals. He feels guilty and unable to accept himself or even understand himself. This has added to the estrangement from others as well in the sociological dimension.

Man became self-centred and got isolated because of insecure feelings. He is anxious about the impressions he is to make and so puts on false fronts (wearing masks) to build up his status. These false fronts are barriers that are cut off from each other. At the corporate level, we see alienation among groups and nations. The damage has long range

consequences, and now we know man's relationship with the environment also is affected in the ecological dimension. Man is destroying the fruitfulness of the earth and the life sustaining capacity of the planet by raping nature.

Sin is not some nasty by-product of social birth pangs. Sin, within man, is action perpetrated by personal influences. But we have the good news that this defaced image is restorable through the life transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's love and forgiveness overcomes our separation from Him. We need to recognise that God accepts us as we are. We are accepted by that which is greater than we are, and must simply accept the fact that we are accepted. Anxiety about the threat of meaninglessness can be overcome. We receive new possibilities of trust, new purposes for living and motives for action.

We can have a right relationship with ourselves. In the new security, we are free to look at ourselves more honestly. Because God accepts us, we can now accept ourselves. We can drop the 'masks' in the presence of God. We can let go of some of the defence mechanisms and pretences. In the experience of repentance and forgiveness, we can be released from guilt and self-hatred. Also we can be released from pride and self-righteousness. The new peace with God and internal integration can replace conflicting ideals and internal divisions.

When we know God's acceptance of ourselves as we are, we can accept other persons as they are. Only when a person is liberated from excessive self-concern can he forget himself for while. Seeing the new possibilities, we can work for reconciliation between man and man in our society. We can enjoy a freedom with others that the self-centred person who is anxious about his own status can never know. Such a reorientation may not be complete immediately, but we can see it as a genuine possibility.

While man is trying to rape nature for his self-chosen desires, we are given the opportunity to crucify our desires and look to God for meeting our needs. We can reorient ourselves to meet our needs, not 'greeds', without harming the ability of others to meet their needs. Non-renewable sources of natural energy can be carefully handled in view of exercising responsible stewardship in nature. Such stewardship leads us to leave some of the gifts of nature for the future generation as well.

When the alienated individual is brought into right relationship with God through the personal and individual transformation, such a person can show his faith through his actions by working toward social, economic, political and religious parity among his fellow men.

### **The fact of free will and the act of freedom**

While God is responsible for the fact of freedom we are responsible for the act of freedom. The sovereignty of God is reconciled with human freedom and responsibility. Donald Mackay says that a choice is free and consistent with human responsibility if there is no deterministic specification that is binding on anyone before one makes up his mind.<sup>318</sup>

God made everything perfect. One of the perfect things God made was freedom of choice. He actually took the risk of giving us freedom. Man is thus morally free. Both the opportunities – to choose good and the ability to choose evil are included. God allowed for those possibilities by making us free creatures. But freedom of choice endows us with responsibility and accountability. It is our freedom that makes sensible the praise for doing something right, or the blame for doing something wrong. Because we are capable of doing right or wrong, we are susceptible to praise and blame. Someone who is not capable of such free choice is not susceptible to praise or blame.

Moral freedom is the freedom to act consistently with one's own moral nature, if that nature is good. God is morally free in that nothing can make Him do anything against His nature, and His nature is perfectly good. In fact, it is the perfection of His moral nature that makes Him most worthy of praise.

Man, by selfishly choosing his own way apart from God's way, brought sin and evil upon himself. If God had created a world without free creatures, there would not have been a moral world. A non-moral world cannot be a morally good world. There is considerable difference between what has no moral value and what has some moral value, however much it is. Just because there are no free creatures does not mean that there could be no physical evil. There could still be physical corruption or degeneration and decay among the animals and other things.

Think of God creating free creatures that would not sin. It is logically possible to have free will and not sin. The Bible says that there will some day be a world in heaven where every one has a free will but there won't be any sin.<sup>319</sup> But now, in this system not everything that is logically possible became actually real. Getting such an order to happen is another matter. Someone may think of a possible choice for God to create free creatures who would sin, but would all be saved in the end. No. God cannot manipulate human freedom and make them to choose only good. God cannot force people to love Him. God respects people's freedom, and concurs with their choice.

Free will is incompatible with physical determinism. If one is to be rational, one must be free to choose his beliefs based on reasons. For a belief to be a rational one, he must be able to deliberate about whether or not he accepts it. He must be free to choose it. As the image-bearer of God, man is created to reflect God's free and sovereign will in subduing the world.<sup>320</sup> The world was not made to control man in some mechanistic or deterministic way, but man was made to control the world in a personal and rational way.

From the perspective of cosmic significance, the sovereignty of God is the best picture, and from the perspective of man's activity and day-by-day response to God, however, the responsibility of man is the best picture. The relationship between God and man blends the sovereignty and responsibility pictures, ultimately removing the apparent paradox.

### **Satan's lie and self-deification**

Satan's lie is that man would become like God Himself,<sup>321</sup> which is a temptation to self-deification. This lie is the driving force behind the view that man is God or part of God.

Several cults were evolved based on this promise that we would become God. The development of religious cults to do away with the fact of a personal creator, denying man's creaturely-ness, is grounded in this lie. When we look at ourselves in a mirror, we see our dark side as well as our noble side.<sup>322</sup> Indeed, there is no way to escape the reality of man's sin and its tragic effects by way of explaining away our responsibility toward God.

As the story of the Garden of Eden shows, Satan passed his sin down to man enticing him with this lie, when God's original intention was for man to be and to do on a finite level what God was and did on the infinite level. Man was created to reflect God in the created order, in that man was to reflect his creator in those capacities and capabilities that separate him from the rest of the creations. The nobility, uniqueness, meaning, worth and significance of man<sup>323</sup> were influenced and affected by Satan's lie. The image was marred and men became Satan's image-bearers to do on a human level what Satan did on a demonic level. Man is still man made in the image of God, but now a sinful man. There is evil present in all we do. Sin entered the world through the rejection of God, when man refused to allow God to be God, and wanted to be like God.

By falling into the trap of Satan man began to pursue a self-indulgent glory which ends in shame. Although many these days feel protected and secure in their unbelief, we find people going after whatever gives them fulfilment in their pursuit of meaning in life. As the German sociologist Max Weber puts it 'man embraces religion at the point of meaning'.<sup>324</sup> While man may own religion at the level of meaning, he often disavows at the level of reasoning. Mechanistic explanations are given even for prayer and providence. Man is left to find his own path and light whatever lamps he chooses. When religion is reduced merely to sociological functions, it will naturally disintegrate through abuse. Pragmatism, which by definition is to do whatever works, in the long run, does not work because it is captive just for the moment.

Also to believe in the defence of morality is considered no longer intellectually tenable. The Platonic deduction that all politics is law, and all law is ethics is no longer believed. Honour, truth and morality have been sacrificed at the altar of autonomy and self-worship. The modern man is left with the presupposition that right and wrong are ideas without any point of reference.<sup>325</sup> It seems people are finding that it is easier to live with a lie rather than with truth. A mind that is bent on suppressing the truth will finally find the lie it is chasing. As George MacDonald has put it, 'To try to explain truth to him who loves it not is but to give him more plentiful materials for misinterpretation'.<sup>326</sup> G.K. Chesterton aptly puts it, 'What we want is a religion that is right when we are wrong'.<sup>327</sup> Man needs to recognise his shame before God in order to be spiritually transformed to see the glory for which he was created.

### **Darkened mind denies truth**

Sin works destructive effects in our minds. The Bible says that man's 'thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened'.<sup>328</sup> Man has been made filthy by sin. He has become utterly debased and corrupt, and now he loves what God hates, and hates what God loves. His body is weakened by disease and infirmity, the direct result of sin into the

world. He is gone out of the way, and is become altogether unprofitable. In other words, man is a hopelessly ruined creature, apart from the regenerating grace of God.

Unbelief is generated not so much by intellectual causes as by moral and psychological ones. Because the mind was darkened there is a natural hostility to the being of God. Reason is no longer God's viceroy because of the darkening of man's nature in his understanding. Because man is estranged from creation, he is not able to know creation as he should. He only uses nature for his selfish purposes. He experiences discord within his innermost being as he is estranged from himself. Of course the estrangement resulted in his impairment to know God as he should. The personhood is fractured by sin into an aggregate of individuals craving for ego inflation.

As sin exerts its continuous pressure upon us and our moral motives, our motivation and decisions are also tainted with sin. We have become experts in asserting falsehoods. It leads us to unintentional mistakes. We are exposed to self-delusion and self-deception. Our power of imagination is distorted. It makes us ready victims to the evil communications of other minds. Physical maladies are caused in us due to the spiritual maladies to which our soul is exposed. It not only fractures the inner harmony within us, but also works destructively in our relationship with other people.

Ungodliness involves a state of opposition to the majesty of God. Man's desire now is not that the omnipotent, personal God exists, but that He better not exist. Human-fabricated religions find their ground in such antipathy toward the true God. Corrupted religions of men cannot be based upon the knowledge of the true God. Man's unrighteousness indicates an assault against the righteousness of God, especially the wickedness that suppresses the truth.

As man is trying to become God or is playing God, it only leads to his despair. Without any desire for spiritual nourishment, man wrongly considers his body as soul and runs into emptiness. As life is more than the accumulation of materials, he finds that the 'god of materialism' cannot quench his thirst. It is found that meaninglessness is not because of woe, but because people are weary of pleasure. As the main interest is only to live now, man began to treat time as eternity and became fearful of death.

Intense philosophical thought cannot remedy the darkness of mind. Enlightened and powerful human reason, as exhibited among the philosophers, is no match for the depraved condition of man. People can be sincerely wrong. But Christ's answers correspond with reality. 'For God, who said, "let light shine out of darkness", made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.'<sup>329</sup>

### **The uniqueness of the Gospel message**

When sin entered the world the image of God was distorted, and the way back to God can now be only by faith. Faith is the declaration of dependence, whereas sin is man's declaration of independence. Now the question is about affirming our faith in the kind of intellectual and cultural climate in which we find ourselves. The task involves the

announcement of the ‘fact of Christ’ as of decisive importance for all peoples everywhere, challenging them to revise the various kinds of assumptions people hold.

Since we are aware of the racism that affects us so deeply, there are strong emotional reasons for considering religious pluralism these days. The pluralistic society has patterns and practices of beliefs that determine which beliefs are plausible to its members and which are not. At the same time each person is free to believe what he prefers and the determining factor is often whether he is sincere in holding the belief rather than whether it is true. In science we ask whether the belief is correct, we do not normally ask whether the scientist is sincere in his belief. In religious pluralism each one is entitled to have a faith of his own. It is a fact that there are devout and godly people in other religions and their belief means much more to them than Christianity means to the majority of nominal Christians. The differences between the religions are not a matter of truth and falsehood, but of different perceptions of the truth, pluralism may advocate.

The clarification of the truth is also based on purpose. The purpose for which something is designed will tell whether the matter is good or bad. If we do not know the purpose for which human life was designed, we have no basis for saying that any kind of belief is good or bad, except that it can be truly personal. Pluralism has no objective fact by which to test the validity. In the context of multi-faith, multi-culture and multi-world today, there should be ‘one absolute’ against which everything else is to be maintained in all the infinite pluralities and relativity of human affairs.

Here the proclamation of the truths of the Gospel invites belief as it is announced as the truth, not as one possible opinion among others. We affirm it since we are told what the purpose is in the story of creation and fall as embodied in the Bible, of God’s election of a people to be the bearers of His purpose for human kind and for the coming of the One in whom that purpose is fulfilled. Our aim is that we would like the listeners to receive it in faith as a gift of God’s grace. When we affirm that Jesus is the way, the true living way by whom we come to the Father,<sup>330</sup> we are not claiming to know everything, but claim it as unique and absolute. We are inviting others to join as we press forward toward the fullness of the truth, toward the day when we shall know as we have been known.

The Christian faith rooted in the Bible is to be understood as an interpretation of the human story set within the story of nature. No human story is possible without some idea about what the story means. Ours is a historical faith not just in the sense that it depends on a historical record, but also in the sense that it is essentially an interpretation of universal history. Its defence will be as much concerned with how we act as with what we can say. We need to remember that the Bible is a book that is very obviously in a specific cultural setting. Its language is Hebrew and Greek, and all the events it records and all the teachings it embodies are shaped by specific human cultures.

At the same time the Gospel is not an empty form into which everyone is free to pour his own content. The content of the Gospel is Jesus Christ in the fullness of his ministry, death and resurrection. The very heart of the Gospel message is that the particular life-story which it tells is the decisive manifestation, within history, of the One who is the

source and goal of all history. God's love for all his creation, His purpose of blessing all human beings is fundamental from beginning to end. The purpose is fulfilled by way of choosing of the one for the blessing of all. The Holy Spirit by whose working the Gospel comes alive to the listeners.

The Gospel endorses an immensely wide diversity among human cultures, but it does not endorse a total relativism. There is good and bad in every culture which may be either creative or destructive, either in line with the purpose of God as revealed in Christ for all human beings or else out of that line. The criteria for making judgements between the one and the other cannot arise from one culture. There can only be criteria if God has in fact shown us what His will is. He has done so in Christ. If that is denied in the name of religious pluralism, then there is no valid criterion by which the positive and negative developments in human culture can be assessed.

The teachings of Jesus are linked with His claim about Himself. The most unique thing is His death and resurrection for the salvation of the whole world. The way to, and experience of, salvation provided by the Saviour makes the Gospel unique. The Creator of the universe has presented the complete solution to the human predicament. The glorious experience we have from realising that Jesus is the Truth, is an experience unmatched by other faiths. All other religious systems fall short in their effort to make things right between the Creator and the human beings and to open the door for the rich blessings that God seeks to bestow on His children. Suffering and pain are no longer to be viewed as the sign of the displeasure of God, as the Gospel hints toward an adequate solution to this problem. Nothing compares to the Christian certainty of resurrection. We can speak in terms of absolute categories when we refer to the Gospel.

### **Escaping the reality of the effects of sin**

The Gospel is meant for sinners. Sin is a barrier to God, but a barrier that has been broken down by God. The penalty is cancelled, the power is broken and its continuing presence is being diminished. We know some people are not willing to acknowledge that they are sinners. Although they have no sense of sin, they are subject to much fear, especially the fear of displeasing the gods. Modern man may ignore the reality of sin. But we know deep down there is a sense of sin in them, as their conscience has not been totally obliterated. Also we find people involved in unlawful things struggling with guilt over their actions. The fallen man in his bid to regain his lost self-esteem tries to offset the effects of sin by self-effort. But man cannot adequately solve the problem of guilt.

It seems in modern society, most people would like to save themselves. The sin of Adam and Eve was that they wanted to save themselves, independent of God. People like to think that they are able to save themselves and no outside intervention is required. It makes them feel good, but the insecurity and emptiness continue. These days we find more people trying for self-salvation in new religious systems, because it gives them a sense of achievement. They have the satisfaction of earning their own salvation even through successive lives (by deaths and rebirths), since they do not have to humble themselves and confess that they cannot help themselves. It may not be easy for them to agree with Paul who said that 'we lose our grounds for boasting because salvation is by grace'.<sup>331</sup>

The Gospel says that God, seeing our helpless condition, did not abandon us. He brought into operation the law of love to save us. God did this without breaking the law of justice or cancelling its demands. The demands of justice were fully satisfied by having His 'only begotten Son' take the punishment that was due to us. God's grace made this possible. When we cannot help ourselves, our only hope is to receive help from another. Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. This makes the Gospel very different compared to the other religions. John T. Seamands puts it as, 'Religion says "attain"; the Gospel says "obtain". Religion says "attempt"; the Gospel says, "accept". Religion says "try"; the Gospel says "trust". Religion says "do this"; the Gospel says "it is done"'.<sup>332</sup>

The historical event of the death of Jesus is the proof that our God loves us. The Bible says, 'God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us'.<sup>333</sup> Christ took our place and bore the punishment for our sins. The Bible says, 'For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God'.<sup>334</sup> His death was necessary for the forgiveness of sins. 'In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness'.<sup>335</sup> On our part, we must confess sin. On God's part He forgives us. In so doing, He is faithful and just.<sup>336</sup> The message of forgiveness is one of the most revolutionary aspects of the Gospel.

Because we have the image of God, the Holy Spirit reminds us through our conscience about our unclean condition until it is cleansed. When we receive forgiveness, our conscience is cleansed. The discovery of a cleansed conscience is a liberating experience. God's anger against our sin has been fully spent on Jesus. God is infinitely satisfied with the work of Christ to purchase our salvation by paying his life as the ransom, the price.<sup>337</sup> We receive freedom from the captivity of sin since we are redeemed by Christ's blood.

We are able to understand God's way of making us right with Him by declaring a verdict of acquittal, pronouncing us as just. 'Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men'.<sup>338</sup> Rebellion against God results in enmity between God and man. 'When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son',<sup>339</sup> the result of which is peace with God and adoption into his family. God enters into a relationship of love with us in reconciling us to Himself.

Our sin needed to be punished. Because there would be no hope for us if we were punished, Jesus was punished in our place. God cannot simply pronounce forgiveness for our sins. To simply forgive would make a mockery of justice. A world without justice is an insecure and chaotic world. Something serious must be done when wrong is done. Sin has tainted every part of our being and clouded our minds. The message of the Gospel is both a simple and a profound truth. We see the immensely condescending love of God. Also, we see the wretchedness of our sin that took Jesus to the cross. The benefit of the message can be appropriated by all in the way of childlike trust. The Holy Spirit can help the person to accept the truth of God's provisions for man's malady and yield to its implications.

### **Restoring God's favour in sinful man**

No act on man's part can ever restore him, for all his faculties have been perverted by the Fall. Man's significance as the image-bearer of God is magnified by the lengths to which God went to redeem him. God viewed man as not only redeemable, but also worth redeeming. It was divine initiative that restored man with the intention of taking him back to the position he had before he fell from grace. Here God's relation to the sinful man, as well as the sinner's relation to his sin, is changed. Out of these changed relations the sinful man is given a new status in his relationship with God.

The change in relationship opens the door for us to become people who can live the way God made us to live. Our lives bring glory to God and also help restore the goodness of creation that was lost in the Fall. It is in the mind of God not only to restore man to favour, but also to lift him to a higher plane than unfallen man ever knew. A new life is communicated to the man once wrecked and ruined, and this life is felt in every part. He is able to take in and understand the mind of God, and to discern what is according to the Word. His longings and yearnings are now turned from things evil and things mundane to things holy and heavenly. The new life enables man to resist physical appetites that once threatened to ruin his body, and he is able to recognise his body as the temple of the living God.

Scripture implies the fact that provision was made for sins committed even before Jesus died.<sup>340</sup> This means people those days were making sacrifices in an attitude of repentance, and God was forgiving them through the merits of the blood of Christ's eternal covenant. It was only because Jesus was the suitable One who could make a sacrifice that could suffice to save us.

Restoration includes a personal relationship in which God brings His healing to us for the hurts that have come to us due to the selfishness and wickedness of people who fail us. We can taste the beauty that Jesus expressed by dying for us in a love-relationship with Him that is deeper and sweeter than all the ugliness of the world. The world's hunger that takes away our joy is replaced by a new thirst for God. Such a fulfilment is explained by Jesus saying, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty'.<sup>341</sup>

The favour includes the granting of a peace of mind that can weather the rigors of this world,<sup>342</sup> as our internal conflicts begin to disappear, and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, sweeps over us. We need not be afraid of ourselves, because we know that we have been accepted in spite of our unacceptability. Also, we no longer have to protect ourselves from ourselves in order to make up for the self-worth that had earlier forced us to pretend and to impress others. The peace is such that we are free to become the people that God wants us to be.

We were actually sinners and enemies of God before. Now we are justified in the sight of God. God declares an ungodly man to be perfect while he is still ungodly. God has buried our sins in the depth of the sea and placed them behind His back of forgetfulness. Every sin is completely wiped out. We have become reconciled to God. He gave us the status of

a child of God with all privileges. ‘Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will’,<sup>343</sup> we are now made members of the royal family of heaven.

As the cross broke earthly distinctions between people, we are able to experience oneness with others who are also redeemed. In the early Church, the barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles was broken.<sup>344</sup> The social distinctions have become insignificant as the slave-free-barrier was broken.<sup>345</sup> The unity of the church had a marked impact on the people outside. Jesus recognised that the unity of the church was a key aspect of the witness, and He prayed ‘... that all of them may be one... to let the world know that you sent me’.<sup>346</sup> After all, in God’s sight all are sinners and are equally in desperate need for salvation. But we became princes and princesses of the King of kings and the Lord of lords when we entered into the kingdom of God. As the glory of being a prince of God cannot be compared with any earthly glory, our worldly status becomes insignificantly small. The cross destroys our false pride and becomes the basis of our new glorious identity.<sup>347</sup>

The restoration made it possible to have a new moral strength so that we can begin to achieve the good things that had seemed so elusive and to live progressively more as we know we should. Because of Christ who never ceases to make us able, we can do all things He wanted us to do.<sup>348</sup>

### **The life-transforming experience**

Each person’s experience of God’s mercy and grace is a window through which we see the mercy of God toward the whole creation. The work of God’s grace is the means by which we see the unfolding of His work of redemption and transformation in the lives of others and in the whole cosmos. Conversion is the human response to the saving work of God through Christ, and is the means by which we enter into a redemptive relationship with God. Salvation is unequivocally God’s work alone. The salvation and transformation that we see comes wholly from the hands of God. But conversion has an obvious human element. Although conversion emphasises the priority of God’s initiative and the unilateral character of salvation, the uniqueness of each person and the distinctive character of each person’s experience counts a lot. In other words, each person is a story of God’s grace.

Conversion is a complex experience and we need to allow for the complexity of the actual experience. Experience of any kind can be understood and appreciated only from within. Louis Depre says, ‘We cannot prove something to be true by appealing to a “truth” that stands outside of it’.<sup>349</sup> He continues, ‘experience defines its own meaning: those who experience learn in the process itself what they are experiencing’.<sup>350</sup> This does not mean, Depre insists, that the experience is then purely subjective, for the reality we experience ‘defines the nature of the experience and endows it with its own authority’.<sup>351</sup> Our conviction is that the Word of God testifies to itself and that the Spirit testifies to the Word in the heart and mind of the believer. Conversion is always a response to the invitation, love and work of God in Christ. It is not an end, it is the bridge to the goal of our salvation, which is nothing less than transformation into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. We seek to be what we were created to be.<sup>352</sup>

To be transformed is to know the love of God and to love God in response. A person who is transformed into the image of Christ necessarily knows how to be loved by others and to love others, how to forgive when wronged, how to bear with others' weaknesses and how to serve others sacrificially. Emotional maturity, the capacity to live honestly from the heart, with emotional depth, expressing the appropriate emotion in the appropriate context, is a critical indicator of spiritual transformation. We are enabled to live under the kingdom reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. Transformation is the fruit of an intentional program of spiritual formation.

The experience of conversion enables us to know the transforming grace of God in this life, but it is given to us only as a 'down payment' of the final and ultimate experience of God's grace, which will be experienced at the consummation of the kingdom. Although we are new creatures, the full experience of what it means to be a new creature is not yet experienced. But it is not solely intended to take care of matters of the afterlife; here we begin to walk a new 'walk' with a new ethic. The transformation enables us to be whole persons involving our worldview, emotions, relationships, bodies, volition and our vocation. The Biblical thought is that God brings us from death to life, from darkness to light and from no mercy to mercy.<sup>353</sup> It is enabling a life that is misdirected and confused to find purpose, direction and meaning.

Only the Holy Spirit is the sole defining influence that enables a person to come to faith. Conversion is initiated and sustained by God. Because of the depth of the human predication, human beings are incapable of self-transformation. God's grace is sovereign in the lives of individuals and in the world. The work of the Spirit is often mysterious and cannot be quantified. Often the work of the Spirit is simultaneous with our response. The Spirit convicts us of sin. We become aware that our lives are inconsistent with the holiness of God.<sup>354</sup>

We are enabled to see our hopelessness, but we are enabled to see that there is hope in Christ. The Spirit is the means by which we hear the call of God. The Spirit illumines our hearts and minds with truth, and guides us into truth.<sup>355</sup> The Spirit enables us to repent, as the human will, apart from the Spirit, is in sin and bondage. The Bible speaks of the Word of truth as the means of transformation.<sup>356</sup> While God takes the initiative, God takes the human response seriously as well. It is one's absolute dependence on God's mercy and submission of his will to the will of God. Although there are common elements to each conversion, each conversion is unique, a distinctive union of intellectual, experiential and social factors. In coming to faith, we are choosing to love Jesus in response to his love for us.<sup>357</sup>

### **Witnesses of the Kingdom of God**

The Kingdom of God is the rule, the reign, and the government of God in this age, in the hearts and lives of those who yield themselves to Christ, and in the next age. There is a present realm and a future realm of God's reign in which man may experience God's blessing. God's government demands complete submission and His subjects must put Him first. For all Old Testament saints and New Testament believers, the Kingdom of God is also where they will spend eternity. It could well be the singularly most important

subject of the Bible and it is a very important one in our lives. We submit ourselves to Jesus Christ as King over our lives in order to become part of His Kingdom.

The central theme of Jesus' message is about the Kingdom of God. He tells us that the way that we will have the necessities of life is to keep on seeking, continually craving His righteousness and also the Kingdom of God.<sup>358</sup> It means that if we would start craving to be doing right, and would continually be seeking His Kingdom, we would find that the necessities of life would take care of themselves. The King would direct us to do the things that would bring us the necessities of life. We are supposed to spend a significant portion of our prayer time centred on the Kingdom of God.<sup>359</sup> When we repent of living a life independent of God, and turn around in the other direction, we encounter a door, and Jesus is that door, the entryway to the Kingdom. When we thus repent and turn in the direction of Jesus, believe in Him and obey Him, then spiritual birth occurs.<sup>360</sup>

Unless there is a spiritual birth, we cannot enter the Kingdom and have eternal life. Spiritual birth will bring a repentant, believing, obeying sinner into the status of having eternal life. The only way we can enter into the Kingdom of God is by being saved through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Being born again spiritually is absolutely the first requirement for being a citizen and inheriting the Kingdom.<sup>361</sup> Everyone on earth is in God's universe, but only those who voluntarily submit to the rule and the authority of God are part of the Kingdom of God. God has very strict laws for His Kingdom. The old covenant demanded obedience. The new covenant enables us to obey out of a heart of love, and it produces life. Now we have His own Holy Spirit living inside of us to tell us all the details of how to walk and live in a manner pleasing to Him. The Holy Spirit must be allowed to guide us moment-by-moment.

In order to get into the Kingdom, not only do we have to stop living lawlessly, but we also must have a righteousness that surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees.<sup>362</sup> This means it touches so many of us at the root of our everyday lives. The Scriptures say that if we have outbursts of anger or create disputes, dissension, factions with the body of Christ, then we shall not inherit the Kingdom.<sup>363</sup> It seems to imply that anything we say or do, including how we dress, that would create lust or desire in others would also fall into this type of behaviour. God expects us to control our bodies so that they glorify Him.

To become a citizen of the Kingdom, the Lord Jesus tells us that we must be converted and become like little children.<sup>364</sup> The Lord hates pride and appreciates humility. Being humble is one of the requirements for being great in the Kingdom of God.<sup>365</sup> The Kingdom of God is wherever God is in rule, and exercises the authority in a very direct way. When it says the Kingdom of God is within us,<sup>366</sup> it means the Kingdom of God exists anywhere that the King truly rules and reigns. When He rules in our hearts and lives, we are an island of the Kingdom.

The ultimate inheritance of the Kingdom will occur when we receive our immortal, imperishable bodies. The Kingdom is both present and future. When Jesus returns to rule and reign we will see the final perfecting of the Kingdom. At that time the Kingdom of

God will take on a new dimension.<sup>367</sup> We are, therefore to build our lives, not on the instability of the temporal, but on the permanence of the eternal.

It is an honour to be part of His Kingdom. He is the God of the universe and beyond, yet He is concerned about the details of our lives. He has displayed His infinite love for us through the sacrificial death of His own Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the one after whom we should model our lives. We are official ambassadors of the Kingdom of God to this world in which we live. As His representatives, we have certain responsibilities to ‘walk in a manner worthy of the Lord’.<sup>368</sup> He calls us into His service. We want to be careful to be an accurate reflection of His messages and to do the works that He wants us to do.

### **Summary**

#### *Man’s alienation from God*

Although man is an image bearer of God, the good image was defaced by sin. God wanted man to be responsible to the law of God. The good news is that this defaced condition can be restored in Jesus by His love that overcomes our separation from Him. In the experience of repentance and forgiveness, we can have new peace with God, and the internal integration can replace conflicting internal divisions.

#### *The fact of free will and the act of freedom*

Our freedom of choice makes sensible the praise for doing something right, or the blame for doing something wrong. God cannot manipulate human freedom and make us to choose only the right. God respects people’s freedom and concurs with their choice. The relationship between God and man blends the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man.

#### *Satan’s lie and self-deification*

Satan’s lie that man would become like God Himself, is the driving force behind to explain away our responsibility toward God. The good image was marred and men became Satan’s image bearers to do on human level what Satan did on a demonic level. Man is left to find his own path and light whatever lamps he chooses. But what worked is found captive just for the moment.

#### *Darkened mind denies truth*

Unbelief is generated not so much by intellectual causes as by the moral ones, because of the darkening of man’s nature in his understanding. Man’s desire became that the omnipotent personal God better not exist, and human-fabricated religions find their ground in such antipathy toward the true God. Intense philosophical thought cannot remedy the darkness of mind. The way back to God can now be only by faith, which is the declaration of dependence, whereas sin is man’s declaration of independence.

#### *The uniqueness of the Gospel message*

Since we are aware of the racism that affects us so deeply, there are strong emotional reasons for considering religious pluralism these days. In the context of multi-faith and multi-culture today, there should be ‘one absolute’ against which everything else is to be maintained in all pluralities of human affairs. The way to, and experience of, salvation

provided by the Saviour makes the Gospel unique. We can speak in terms of absolute categories when we refer to the Gospel.

*Escaping the reality of the effects of sin*

The fallen man, in his bid to regain his lost self-esteem, tries to offset the effects of sin by self-effort. People try to save themselves without any outside intervention, but the insecurity and emptiness continue. Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. The Gospel says that God, seeing our helpless condition, did not abandon us. On our part, we must confess sin. On God's part, He forgives us. The message of forgiveness is one of the most revolutionary aspects of the Gospel. God entered into a relationship of love with us in reconciling us to Himself. The Holy Spirit helps us to accept the truth of God's provisions for man's malady, and to yield to its implications.

*Restoring God's favour in sinful man*

The sinful man is given a new status in his relationship with God. This opens door to become people who can live the way God made us to live. Scripture implies that people who were making animal sacrifices in an attitude of repentance were forgiven through the merits of the blood of Christ's eternal covenant. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, sweeps over us.

*The life-transforming experience*

Conversion is the human response to the saving work of God through Christ. The uniqueness of each person and the distinctive character of each person's experience make each person a story of God's grace. Transformation enables a life that is misdirected and confused to find purpose, direction and meaning. Each conversion is a distinctive union of spiritual, intellectual, experiential and social factors.

*Witnesses of the Kingdom of God*

When we submit ourselves to Jesus Christ as King over our lives we become part of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the reign of God. If we would continually be seeking His Kingdom, the King would direct us to do the things that would bring us the necessities of life. Only those who voluntarily submit to the rule and the authority of God are part of the Kingdom. When Jesus returns to rule and reign, the Kingdom of God will take a new dimension. Jesus Christ is the One after whom we should model our lives, and should be careful to be an accurate reflection of His messages.

The Kingdom people are given victory over sin and death. We therefore need not allow death to defeat us. The Biblical view of immortality and the life after death are discussed in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 11 LIFE AFTER DEATH

### **Rationale for life after death**

Reason creates a presumption in favour of an existence beyond the grave. Belief in life beyond the grave is common in nearly all cultures. As one studies the history of man it is almost impossible to find a people who did not have faith in some form of existence after death. God planted the sense of eternity into the hearts of men.<sup>369</sup> This 'hope of immortality acts as "homing" instinct that is so deeply rooted that it has caused man to seek his Creator throughout the ages'.<sup>370</sup>

Today, there are many viewpoints about what happens to a person when he dies. Different worldviews give different explanations. Science tells us that the human body is composed of many elements. These same elements are found everywhere in the earth around us. God is the author of the laws governing the universe as well as human reason. Matter was created by God and is good.<sup>371</sup> Man was created by mixing dust plus breath – body and spirit<sup>372</sup> – and is to be perfected in body and spirit. 'It is appointed to men once to die but after this the judgement', is central to the Bible's view of death. Death associates with judgement. God judged Adam's sin by introducing death, the separation of soul from the body. Perfection comes when this curse is removed, when sin and all of its effects are done away with.

Science recognises the vitality or energy of life. It tells us that the body is composed of innumerable cells. The energy of life animates every one of these cells. This energy of life is dependent on certain continual processes of waste and repair. If these processes become hindered there is disease. If they stop completely there is death. Death of the body then simply means cessation of the life-processes of waste and repair. It is the same in the case of the lower animals and of plants. They also are composed of innumerable cells in each of which is the energy of life. Science doesn't tell us whether the energy of life is a 'being' that continues to have an independent existence after death.

Philosophy reasons that there must be a future state where the virtuous will be rewarded, and the vicious punished. But philosophy cannot reach a solid conclusion as to what or where the future state after death will be. If we cannot get the answer from science or from philosophy, evidently we must expect a revelation from without. We must look to God Himself, and expect to get our answer through the Word of God.

After the life is completely gone, man is unable to give it back. At death the Biblical claim is that the spirit is set free from the body and continues to exist forever. We read in Ecclesiastes 12:7, 'Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it'. God alone can restore the spirit or power of life.

The result of the breath of life having been breathed into Adam was that he 'became a living soul'. In other words, the spirit or soul is not the body, nor is it merely the energy of life. Earlier, in chapter 5, we saw that the soul and spirit are linked, and the word 'soul' is used to designate man as a whole. We also reviewed the conviction of many scientists that there is more than just the physical brain at work, but there also is a nonmaterial reality called the 'soul', 'mind' or 'self' that accounts for our sentience. A living soul can be a being capable of knowing of its existence and environment. We have seen the distinction between the spiritual and the material parts of man discussed in chapter 5, especially under the section on *the three-fold creation*. Since the words 'spirit' and 'soul' are used interchangeably, let us consider soul as the non-material entity and body the material part of man in our discussion here. We see the possibility of the soul surviving death and speak of immortality of the soul. Both the Old and New Testaments give an affirmative answer on this. Materialism, of course, is bound to deny a future life. Pantheism forbids the thought of personal immortality, exalting instead the blessedness of absorption in the 'infinite'.

The only scientific plea on which the possibility of immortality can be denied is based on the fact that the mind in this life is so intimately bound up with physiological conditions. This negative evidence is not so strong as negative evidences often are. Science cannot negate the idea of immortality.

It is a fact that nearly every tribe and people on the face of the earth, savage and civilised, has held in some form this belief in a future state of existence. This suggests that the belief is one which accords with the facts of human nature, and to which the mind is naturally led in its inquiries. Also it is a fact that nearly all tribes and families of mankind have gone on dreaming this strange dream of a life beyond the grave.<sup>373</sup>

The make and constitution of man's nature are not explicable on the hypothesis that he is destined only for a few short years of life on the earth. Several factors point to a nobler and enduring state of existence. Look at the ideas which man's mind is capable of containing. His mind spans the physical universe and it reaches out in desire for further heights. His mind can take in the thought of God, of eternity, of infinity. These endowments are not destined only for threescore years and ten. Compared to other creatures, man is a creature whose powers, whose capabilities, whose desires, stretch far beyond the terrestrial scene. Even if we get all the satisfaction that the earth could give us, our desires would still go beyond that earthly bound.

When we consider life from the point of view of moral discipline, everything leads us to put a high value on character. God's dealings with us are to purify and develop character that strengthens our belief in immortality. The perfecting our character through sharp trial and discipline is not to end up in nothing. We can put rational meaning into the

experiences of life in the context of life to come. Our sense of justice and injustice force on us the conviction that the present life, with its anomalies, imperfections and iniquities, is not God's last word to us. It would be difficult to believe that life is good if we knew there was nothing beyond the grave to compensate for problems of inequality and unfairness. The sense of accountability that we all carry with us instinctively anticipates a day of final reckoning. Indeed, there must be another chapter to our existence than that which closes on earth.

Under the influence of this hope of continued existence do the human faculties find their largest scope. It makes life and human nature a far greater thing to the feelings, and gives greater strength to all the sentiments that are awakened in us by our fellow creatures, and by mankind at large. Belief in life after death is a source of personal security, optimism and spiritual betterment. Nothing offers more courage than the confidence that there is a better life for those who use the present to prepare for eternity. Belief in the unlimited opportunities of eternity has enabled many to make the ultimate sacrifice of their own life in behalf of others. Without this hope of life beyond the grave, every question from love to justice becomes a mockery of the mind.

The unforced testimony of our nature to a life beyond does not disappear, but only grows clearer and more solemn as the history of humanity advances. Reason does create a presumption in favour of a future life. The soul of man is naturally fitted for immortality. The above claims cannot give absolute certainty. But they can be accepted as a corroboration and confirmation from the side of nature and of the Biblical view.

### **Biblical view of immortality and life after death**

According to the Bible, and according to fact, man is a being made up of body and of soul. The soul is intended and adapted for life in the body, and body and soul together make the man, the complete human being. With the entrance of sin, the body sank under the law of death. Had sin not entered, we can suppose that man would have enjoyed immortality. The soul in separation from the body is in a state of imperfection.

The person who is rightly related with God in union with Christ can retain the blessedness even in the state of separation from his body.<sup>374</sup> But still, so long as he remains in that disembodied state, he cannot be perfectly blessed as he will be after his body in renewed and glorified form. The true immortality is through redemption, which embraces the resurrection of the body. Resurrection sees man as a soul-body unity. Resurrection is a perfected state, an ultimate state in which the whole person, body and soul, enjoys the goodness of God. It is redemption of man in his whole personality.

Everyone is going to get a new immortal body. The question is where that body will spend eternity – with God, enjoying His goodness and love, or separated from Him forever. The aim of God as regards believers is conformity to the image of His son Jesus Christ.<sup>375</sup> We know that our destiny is to be made like Him. This conformity to Christ includes not only moral and spiritual likeness to Christ, but also likeness to Him in His glorious body. The redemption of the body is an essential and integral part of the Biblical view. In the disembodied state, the believer is indeed with Christ and rests in the

blessedness of unbroken fellowship with Him, but it is the resurrection that is the perfection of his life.

Immortality has to do with the soul (linked with the spirit) – the continuance of existence of the personality after death. Resurrection concerns the raising of the body, its transformation and renewal. Immortality is the belief that a personality survives, despite death. Resurrection is the faith that the individual person overcomes and conquers death, because Christ was resurrected bodily. The believer sees immortality in terms of growth, fellowship and service with Christ, and this makes heaven a delight toward which he looks with keen anticipation. Immortality in the Biblical sense is more than mere continued existence. It is ‘eternal life’, a phrase used in the Bible to describe a quality of life as well as length or duration of existence. Or life remains as long as God remains. Alive with vitality, creativity, joy – this is what eternal life means. A true believer is known by that ineffable quality of life, which is unquenchable, effervescent, inner directed and God related.

We cannot understand resurrection from natural causes but only, as Christ teaches us, from the power of God.<sup>376</sup> It is a miracle, and Paul gives the answer touching on the point of identity between the new body and the old.<sup>377</sup> The resurrection is a future event connected with the consummation of all things. The consummation carries with it the idea that together with the perfecting of the believer, or of the sons of God, there will be a perfecting or glorification even of outward nature. If there is to be a glorified corporeity, there must be a new heaven and earth. Scripture makes clear that the creation also will be delivered from the bondage of vanity and corruption under which it is at present held.<sup>378</sup>

Generally speaking, the words in the Bible for heaven refer to the ‘three heavens’, namely, the lower heaven which we call the atmospheric heaven, the air and the clouds about the earth. The second heaven refers to the planetary or the astronomical heavens, which is also called the starry heaven. The third heaven, the upper or the uttermost heaven beyond the sky, called the ‘heaven of heavens’, is the dwelling place of God. The third heaven is where the Throne of God is, to which Jesus went at His ascension, where our departed loved ones who died in the faith are now awaiting us.

Some of our understanding of heaven is derived from the beautiful pictures and figures of speech in the book of Revelation. While we must be careful to realise this book is filled with imagery and is not always a literal description of things, there is no reason to question the existence of a literal heaven or paradise of God. A picture of a sunset may not really convey the full scientific and artistic wonder of an actual sunset, but it stands for more than is pictured, not less. We are not going to be less in heaven, but more than we were on earth. In heaven, there will be no change, no decay, no competing and no ageing.

Heaven is the place where we will live forever with all the good people who lived on this earth at one time. It is also a place where we will live with God. The people who live there are alive. They will never die again. Jesus promised that we could live with Him in heaven.<sup>379</sup> It will be wonderful when we are in the presence of God to enjoy His love and

goodness every moment of eternity. God's close presence brings a special joy and peace. The people there and the way we live will be much different than our life here on earth.

We cannot compare heaven with anything on earth. Once we get to heaven we would never want to return to this earth. The Bible does not tell us everything about heaven. We could not understand it even if it did, because heaven is so much different than what we see on earth. The Bible does tell us a little bit. It tells us about some of the blessings when we get there.<sup>380</sup> Heaven's blessings are beyond our full understanding. Everything that happens in heaven will make us happy and joyful. Eternal salvation means that God will not punish us in heaven for the bad things we did on earth. There is no sin there. Nothing will tempt us to do wrong. All sickness, death, pain and sorrow are gone when we go to live in heaven forever. God had a serious purpose in making us. He did not send Jesus to the cross to make us merely nice, or remain idle throughout eternity. We will continue to serve God without any limitations.<sup>381</sup> The main thing is that we shall serve God and find new tasks for our hands and minds.

Only a few men have been privileged to get a glimpse into heaven while still here upon the earth. Isaiah caught a glimpse of it in Isaiah 6 and was utterly confounded. Stephen caught a little glimpse just before he entered into heaven itself and that glimpse of heaven with Jesus standing there transformed his whole being. Paul too caught a glimpse of heaven. So wonderful was this sight, so glorious the scene, so indescribably beautiful, that Paul said it defied all description. Peter, too, had just a wee glimpse of heaven when he saw the great sheet descend, but evidently was not able to look inside. John, the Apostle, had two glimpses of heaven. Once when the door was opened in Revelation 1 and he fell down as one dead, and again when the door was opened in Revelation 19 at the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus.

The Bible teaches that those who are in heaven are keenly aware of what goes on in this life on earth. In the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews, the writer describes the great heroes of the past, then in the same passage, which continues through chapter 12, the significance of the heroes of faith is stated: 'Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, ...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us'. The 'saints' who went before us are watching us run our race! The picture is that of an arena where former participants in the games have retired to the stands to watch those who come after them to see how well they play their turn. This is confirmed in Revelation 6:9, where the souls of martyrs are said to be in heaven calling for God to judge the oppressors of earth.

Tragically, there is also an eternity for those who reject and rebel against God and His goodness. It is referred to in the Bible as 'hell'.<sup>382</sup> The Bible doesn't describe hell very specifically other than that it is a 'lake of fire' where evil people will live outside the love and presence of God for eternity.

Physical death is not the ultimate end of life. According to the Bible, there shall be a general resurrection of all the dead. Every person who has ever lived shall be resurrected, including all those who have done good and those who have done evil. Those who have accepted God's great salvation will live in an eternal reward known as heaven. Those

who have rebelled against God on earth shall live in an eternal punishment known as hell. The justice of God demands punishment for evil as well as reward for good. God sends no one to hell. He has done everything within His power to keep us from going there. Anyone who ends up in eternal torment will do so against the tender and loving urging of God throughout his or her life. Every human being has the freedom to choose God or to reject Him. We can accept God's salvation to serve and worship Him or we can rebel to remain sinners. It is a personal choice that we make for ourselves.

The Bible declares that wickedness is a condition of how we stand in God's sight. The very fact of refusing God's remedy for sin is itself a sin, which adds to the reason for judgement.<sup>383</sup> The day of judgement is associated with the coming of Christ.<sup>384</sup> While we may not know when the judgement is coming, we do know that we face it.<sup>385</sup> Death is not ceasing to be. It is separation of the source of animation from the vessel of that animation. When we are not connected with God through a vital relationship, we are separated from the source of spiritual life.<sup>386</sup> This death remains forever unless we are brought to life through God's gift of life.<sup>387</sup> Hell is the place and condition of those that are separated from the body by physical death and separated from God by continued spiritual death. In a limited way, it begins now and continues forever, unless we accept God's life through Christ.

### **Eternal punishment from a loving God**

It may be that 'hell' is a word used in swearing. It is a place to which people are consigned when the speaker wants to get rid of them. As no tongue can describe the glories of heaven, so no words can depict the woes of hell. In fact, all that eternity holds is beyond human comprehension. However, hell is a very serious matter. Remember it is eternal punishment and you don't want to end up there finally by not taking the subject seriously.

The Bible says God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.<sup>388</sup> When we consider the virtues of God, it is wrong to think God is simply a loving being. We normally tend to care only for the softer virtues like love and tenderness, while we forget the hard virtues of holiness and justice. Hell is a punishment, but it is not a *punishing*. It is not torture. The punishment of hell is separation from God, bringing shame and regret. Hell is the final sentence that says people refused regularly to live for the purpose for which they were created. The only alternative, therefore, is to sentence them away for all eternity. It is the natural consequence of a life that has been lived in a certain direction.

Hell should not be seen as a torture chamber. We can look at the passages in which our Lord clearly states His mind on the frightful, fearful end of those who refused to obey His offer of salvation. The most solemn warning of the final consequences of sin is about the danger of *hell fire*.<sup>389</sup> The *broad gate that leadeth to destruction*<sup>390</sup> is eternal banishment from the presence of the Holy One. The end is dark and irretrievable. The *outer darkness*<sup>391</sup> of hell is the darkness of final judgement in contrast to the light and glory of heaven. The *gnashing of teeth* is an expression of rage at realising that one has made a huge mistake. This is an expression of the type of personality of people who will belong in hell. The phrase *the day of judgement*<sup>392</sup> indicates that increased light brings with it increased

responsibility. Greater privileges spell greater obligations, and therefore a sterner judgement for failure. Punishment is proportionate to guilt.

The Lord was teaching a dreadful truth when He spoke so often about *a furnace of fire*.<sup>393</sup> He used the strongest language to describe the certainty and severity of final doom. Christ's words *everlasting fire...everlasting judgement*<sup>394</sup> teach nothing else but eternal separation from Him. It is everlasting punishment. Christ's phrase about the *undying worm and the unquenched fire*<sup>395</sup> represent the eternal pain of the body, the eternal sting of an accusing conscience, the eternal remembrance of opportunities neglected and of Christ despised. The worm represents the gnawing, self-reproach of conscience, a remorse continuous and an unavailing sorrow of sin. The fire testifies to torments without. These words and phrases indicate the terribleness and eternity of future punishment.

Christ's own teaching gives the significance of finality to the moral decisions of life. In His own words, the last issues of life are given with a notable frequency in different forms of discourse. Exclusion from the Kingdom and banishment from Himself are the end of those who have the language of faith, but not its fruits.<sup>396</sup> Repudiation is the sentence of those who deny Him before men.<sup>397</sup> Inability to enter the Kingdom is the judgement of the merciless and ambitious,<sup>398</sup> and weeping and gnashing of teeth is that of the selfish.<sup>399</sup> The outer darkness is the destiny of the unprofitable.<sup>400</sup> Christ never softens the awful responsibilities of this life. Nowhere does He speak of a place in the other world where repentance unto life can be made. The teaching of the apostles also is in line with what Christ has said.

Paul speaks of a day appointed when God will judge the world.<sup>401</sup> Peter emphasises the judgement of the wicked and the destruction of this earth.<sup>402</sup> Jude, in his intense little letter, tells us about the blackness of darkness.<sup>403</sup> John talks about the lake of fire and the second death in the Revelation.<sup>404</sup> The reference to the lake of fire leaves no doubt that such a lake is to be the final depository of Satan and all associated with him. Fire is expressive of divine hatred for all that is evil. Fire declares that God is hostile to sin, and that man must suffer for committing it. The flames stand for Christ coming in judgement. The flame language of the lake of fire is meant more to be a figure of speech for judgement. The lake of fire describes the unity of mental agony and corporeal suffering, which must be endured in a degree proportional to the guilt of those who die lost. The second death indicates the eternal separation of the wicked from God, the source of all true life. All the terms used carry an air of finality.

A person's character is not formed by decisions all at once. Each day we are preparing ourselves for either being with God and His people and valuing the things He values, or choosing not to engage with those things. Hell is not simply a sentence. It is a sentence, but it is also the end of a path that is chosen, to some degree, in this life right here and now, day by day.

God has given people free will. God respects human freedom and it would be unloving to force people to accept heaven if they didn't really want it. The option of forcing everyone to go to heaven is immoral, because it strips people of the dignity of making their own

decision, denying them their freedom of choice. Snuffing people out of existence also is something that God cannot do, because they were made in His own image. In the final analysis, hell is the only morally legitimate option for God, especially concerning those who refuse His offer of salvation.

### **Interpreting the indications of the mode of existence**

There are many things about the afterlife that God has not been pleased to reveal to us now. However, the Holy Spirit is careful to remind us that the certainty of a glorious life beyond, in spite of interpreting differently the truths revealed in God's Word. As finite human beings we are very much limited in our interpretation of the things of eternity. While we do not know where heaven is, or how long it is since it was created, or how large it is, there are certain things we know our Lord revealed to us through His teaching while on earth and through the Revelation given to John. As man is a fallible interpreter of the infallible truths of infinite God, we run into the problem of misinterpretation, especially in the light of our tradition, present knowledge and theological positions.

According to the Word of God, at death the body goes back to the earth from whence it was taken. The place where the soul goes at death is called 'sheol' in the Old Testament. In the New Testament it is called 'hades'. The word 'sheol' is translated by various words – 'death', 'grave', 'pit' and 'hell'.

A broad outline of the teaching of Scripture indicates, in the case of the Old Testament days, the soul of both the good and wicked went into 'sheol', while in the New Testament the place is called the 'hades'. Until sin was atoned for, no one could enter into the presence of God. When Jesus died on the cross and put away sin, He descended into hades and proclaimed the good news of redemption to all the redeemed in sheol, and on the day of His resurrection led them triumphantly into heaven. Since then, all that have died in the faith never go into sheol, but pass directly into the presence of God. But the wicked dead remained in sheol and are there today, as well as all the wicked who died since the cross of Calvary. Because the word sheol is translated also as 'grave' and 'pit', there is some confusion concerning the place of the soul after death.

In spite of the different views prevalent based on the interpretation of Bible passages, several views hold the belief that every human soul, whether saved or lost, begins a conscious existence in another world. As mentioned earlier, people give different interpretations to the narratives of Bible passages. Let us consider some of these interpretations concerning the mode of existence after death, especially about the state of the soul between death and future resurrection.

The first portion of Scripture relating to the state of the soul between death and the resurrection of the body is Luke 16:9-31, where Jesus' story about the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar, is recorded. The rich man fared sumptuously here on earth. But Lazarus, with diseased body, sat begging at the wealthy man's gate. They both died and their conditions were reversed. The rich man was in torment, but Lazarus enjoyed blessing. Then the Lord told us of this interesting encounter: They saw one another. They knew each other. They knew where they were. They knew why they were there. The rich

man was in the realm of the lost, suffering punishment. Lazarus, on the other hand, was in 'Abraham's bosom' where he was 'comforted'.

The questions to conclude whether this was a real life-experience or a parable, may include: 'would Jesus have included details completely contrary to the real situation?', 'would He have spoken of Lazarus as being conscious if the intermediate state were mere unconsciousness?' and, 'would He have depicted the rich man as being in torment, and yet concerned about his brothers on earth, if this portrayal would give a false impression about the actual condition of the unsaved dead?' Whether one sees this incident as an actual occurrence or a parable, one is likely to draw the conclusions that in the intermediate state, between death and the resurrection of the body, there is a *consciousness*, and there is a *remembrance*.

A second passage of Scripture relating to the intermediate state of the soul, that is, the time between death and the resurrection is Luke 23:42, 43 where the Gospel writer records Jesus' conversation at Calvary with one of the criminals hanging on a cross beside Him. Although at first that man had joined his companion in ridiculing Christ, he changed his mind, acknowledged his guilt, and made this request: 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom' (v. 42). In response, Jesus gave him this assuring word: 'Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise' (v. 43). Jesus gave him the assurance that he would enjoy the Lord's presence in glory that very day.

The third passage of Scripture relating to the intermediate state of the soul between death and the resurrection of the body is Philippians 1:21-24 where the apostle Paul says, 'For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body'. Paul wrote this letter from prison. Even though expecting to be released, Paul was also aware of the fact that he might be executed. His strong desire to help the Philippian Christians made him want to stay alive. But when he thought of the blessedness of being with Christ, he was eager to go to his heavenly home. He saw it as 'gain'.

If 'to depart' from this life through death and 'to be with Christ' were not simultaneous, Paul certainly could not have considered dying and separation from his friends as 'gain'. Since to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, the apostle could say, 'to die is gain'. Another passage related to the intermediate state is 2 Peter 2:9, where Peter writes, 'If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgement, while continuing their punishment'. This implies that the unbelieving dead are being punished right now, even though they have neither received their resurrection bodies nor stood for judgement at the great white throne.

In our Lord's story about the rich man and Lazarus, we recall that the one in the place of the lost asked for water because he was tortured in the flame. He had not yet received his resurrection body, but he was already being punished. His distress was so keen that he wanted someone to warn his brothers so that they would not share his fate. From these

passages in the Bible it becomes apparent that the unsaved dead right now are conscious of their lostness, and are suffering punishment during this interval between their death and the resurrection of the body. The intermediate state offers no hope for the unbeliever.

#### *Other interpretations*

Here we consider just one other interpretation as an example to show how one can reach certain conclusions. The emphasis of this interpretation is to consider the story of the rich man and Lazarus as a *parable* to teach about the Jewish nation and the Gentiles. It dwells on the expressions in the story as symbolic, a word-picture of something more than the experience of two men after they died. The rich man, with the various details related concerning him, seems to be a symbol of the Jewish nation, while the poor man is a true representation of the Gentiles and the position they were in at the time the parable was given.

The promises of God belonged to the Jewish nation, and upon these they were privileged to feast. Their table was laden with these good things from the Word of God. The purple robe of the rich man represented the royal hopes of the nation. The fine white linen represented the standing of righteousness the nation enjoyed as a result of the typical sacrifices that were made for them. While this righteousness was merely typical of the righteousness enjoyed by spiritual Israel through the blood of Christ, nevertheless, it gave them a standing before God which other nations did not enjoy. Israel died as a nation, and lost all these special favours of the Lord. The successive generation of the individuals has suffered because of being members of a nation.

The poor man, representing the Gentiles, also died to that condition of alienation from God. Believing Gentiles became the children of Abraham through faith, and inherited the promises of God. The whole Gentile world, where the Gospel has been accepted, has benefited from this great change.

The key that identifies the rich man of the parable is in the statement concerning his five brothers. 'They have Moses and the prophets' was true only of the Jewish nation. Those who give this interpretation admit that the parable does not teach that the Jewish nation was to suffer forever.<sup>405</sup>

Similarly, the interpretation of the promise, given to the thief on the cross, is about the blessings of the future messianic kingdom, when he asked for an earthly blessing. The inscription displayed over the Master's head showed that he claimed to be king. The thief possibly reasoned that it could do no harm to show a measure of respect to and recognition of this alleged criminal king by asking to be admitted to his kingdom. Jesus' reply is paraphrased here to mean that 'Your request is in harmony with the divine plan. I am a King, I will have a kingdom, and you will be remembered in that kingdom – Thou shalt be with me in paradise'.

The argument also includes the matter of removing the comma that precedes the word 'today', to read 'Verily, I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in paradise'. It says that the translators of the English Bible inserted the comma in this passage to make it read in harmony with their theological dogmas, since the original writings were not

punctuated. The Lord was assuring the thief definitely and positively that there was indeed to be a messianic kingdom – paradise was to be restored, and he would be there and have an opportunity of enjoying its blessings.<sup>406</sup> Until then, the friendly thief, as well as all that are in the graves, must wait for the promised blessings – when they will be awakened by the voice of the Son of man.<sup>407</sup>

We certainly recognise that the Scriptures do not give a detailed description of what life is like in the intermediate state. The two major views centre on whether the departed believers lapse into a state of unconsciousness, or whether they are fully awake and are enjoying a conscious existence. This also has reference to the unbelievers as to whether they are in torment or not. The questions such as, ‘where does the soul go when a person dies?’, ‘is he conscious?’, ‘does his soul sleep?’, ‘can he recognise his friends?’ and, ‘does he know what’s happening here on earth?’ may be relevant to answer. But these should not in any way lead us to forget our responsibilities here and now, or the assurance of a glorious life waiting for us.

The purpose here is not to enter into any debate on various interpretations, or to develop any theological dogmas. So, the explanations of the different meanings of various other words used, the imageries and word-pictures are not even mentioned or explained. Let us prayerfully try to understand as much of the details as the Lord wants us to know about things to come. We are supplied with revelation as well as the reasoning mind to understand what the Bible has to say about the eternal destinies of both the believers and unbelievers. Our interpretations of the text should not prevent us from having the certainty of hope in Jesus.

### **The meaning of the resurrection**

People are perplexed about their security during these days of terrorism and wars of various kinds. In every century until our own, believers saw this life as preparation for eternity. The basic principle of right living was that ‘only when you know how to die can you know how to live’. Modern society and even believers these days do not think much of the life to come. These days many believers are trying to use God to enjoy the things of this life. Modern materialism, that this life is the only life for enjoying anything, has infected the believers as well.

Seeing the lack of interest of some believers in the task of social justice, believers started receiving accusations that having a hope of heaven destroys one’s zeal for ending the evils on earth. Too much concern for the material things over the spiritual has atrophied the longing for eternity. The technological developments and the artificiality associated with it lead people to place their security in the temporal and unstable world and its attractions.

In fact, as believers, we are given the spiritual resources and the hope ‘that doesn’t disappoint us’<sup>408</sup> to build our life on the permanence of the eternal. Death’s sting is withdrawn, as grace has intervened. So our death-day becomes an appointment with our Saviour, who will be there to take us to the rest prepared for us. Though we will be bodiless, we will be closer to Christ than ever before. Since believers do not know when Christ will come for them, readiness to leave this world at any time is vital Biblical

wisdom. Dying well is one of the good works to which believers are called. The Lord will enable us to die well, however gruesome the physical event itself, especially in these days of increasing terrorism and atrocities. Dying in Christ, through Christ, and with Christ, will be a spiritual blossoming. J.I. Packer rightly puts it, 'As being born into God's spiritual kingdom was our second birthday, so being born through physical dying into the eternal world will be our third birthday'.<sup>409</sup> Indeed, there is no hope for mankind outside the resurrection.

It is an inescapable fact that all men and women of all ages, the righteous as well as the unrighteous, shall be raised from the dead. Our Lord said, 'Those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned'.<sup>410</sup> There is a day of reckoning coming for those refuse to acknowledge the Lord and choose rather to live in their selfish ways.

Paul declared that there is a vital connection between Christ's resurrection and our hope for resurrection.<sup>411</sup> His resurrection is God's pledge that we will experience a similar miracle. Paul used the analogy of the 'firstfruits'. Under the Mosaic law, just before gathering the main harvest they reaped a small part of it and presented it in the temple as an expression of gratitude and an indication of their confidence that a harvest of the same grain would soon be gathered in. The harvest Paul had in mind when he used the term *firstfruits* includes all believers, those who have 'fallen asleep' and those who will be alive at His coming. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we will be like Him in resurrection. We are the harvest of which He is the firstfruits.

Our resurrection will not occur immediately when we die. When we die, we go to be 'with Christ'. Our resurrection will take place at His coming. The Bible doesn't give us a detailed description of this time between death and resurrection. When Christ returns, He will not be alone. With Him will be the spirits of all 'who have fallen asleep'.<sup>412</sup> In resurrected bodies we will meet the Lord in the air and be with Him forever.<sup>413</sup> We live 'in Christ' today. We will be 'with Christ' when we die. We will still be 'with Him' after we are resurrected. Paul looked beyond that wonderful event to the goal of everything, to the eternity in which the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, will be everything to everyone.

The very fact that we will stand at the judgement seat of Christ<sup>414</sup> and be judged according to what we have done in the body clearly indicates that we will still be who we are now, and that we will remember what we did during our earthly pilgrimage. We will retain our personal identity. We will be who we are even though the new body will be as different from the one we have now. But we will begin a brand new existence. We will have a new splendour. We will enjoy a new perfection and we will be designed to live in a new environment. Human language can't give an adequate description of heavenly and eternal realities.<sup>415</sup> In heaven we will all be equals and we will all be perfectly happy. It is possible that we will differ in the degree of glory we receive as a result of the judgement seat. We will be perfectly happy with what we have.

The resurrection body will carry none of the imperfections of the one we now have. It will neither be an instrument of sin nor be subject to the humiliating physical

impairments that so often precede death. Also our bodies will be characterised by power. The body we will receive in resurrection is designed for heaven. Paul developed the idea that our present bodies, being made of earth and designed for earth, are of a lower order than the one that we will receive in heaven. If Adam and Eve had not sinned, they would have reached the place where they would have been translated into their heavenly bodies. The body in which we now live is ours during our probationary period on earth. A realisation of what we now are in Christ certainly should make a great deal of difference in our lifestyle on earth.

God revealed to Paul the wonderful truth that a day is coming when the trumpet of heaven will sound, which will signal the return of Jesus Christ. 'In the twinkling of an eye'<sup>416</sup> believers who have died will receive their resurrection bodies and the living will be transformed from the earthly to the heavenly. All the redeemed will receive new glorified bodies on that day! We have an indescribable glory to anticipate. In the light of this great expectation, we should persist in serving the Lord through thick and thin, gladly going beyond the call of duty. We can do this with the assurance that the reward will far outweigh the cost, no matter how deep the trials or how difficult the way.

The certainty of hope enables us to face life situations today, and to give meaning to our existence. Since we are able to define our future, we can properly define the present. Within a span of three years, I lost not only my wife and two sons, but also both of my parents. Yet at their funeral services, I was able to celebrate the certainty of our hope in Jesus. Because of this certainty, I am able to decide on the priorities of today.

## **Summary**

### *Rationale for life after death*

Belief in life beyond the grave is common in nearly all cultures. We cannot get the answers to the question of life after death from science or philosophy. We expect to get answers though the Word of God. The nonmaterial reality 'soul', which accounts for our sentience, survives death. Compared to other creatures, man's powers and capabilities stretch far beyond the terrestrial scene. We can put rational meaning into the experiences of life in the context of life to come.

### *Biblical view of immortality and life after death*

According to the Bible, man is a being made up of body and of soul. The soul in separation from the body is in a state of imperfection. Resurrection sees man as a soul-body unity. The redemption of the body is an essential and integral part of the Biblical view. Resurrection concerns the raising of the body, its transformation and renewal. Eternal life is described in the Bible as a quality of life as well as the duration of existence. The resurrection is an event connected with the consummation of all things. The Bible is clear about blessings in heaven and punishment in hell.

### *Eternal punishment from a loving God*

Hell is the final sentence that says people refused regularly to live for the purpose for which they were created. Jesus used the strongest language to describe the certainty and severity of final doom. The teaching of the apostles also is in line with what Christ has

said. Each day we are preparing ourselves by choice for either for heaven or hell. As God respects human freedom, and does not force people in their choices, hell is the only morally legitimate option for God concerning those who refuse salvation.

*Interpreting the indications of the mode of existence*

There are two major views about the intermediate state between death and resurrection. One view is that there is a consciousness and remembrance – the believers enjoying consciously the blessings, and the unsaved in torment. The other view holds that the soul lapses into a state of unconsciousness. Our interpretations of the texts should not prevent us from having the certainty of hope in Jesus.

*The meaning of the resurrection*

There is no hope for mankind outside the resurrection. Christ's resurrection is God's pledge that we will experience a similar miracle. While we live in Christ today, we have the hope that we will be with Him when we die, and will continue to be with Him forever. The resurrection body will carry none of the imperfections of the one we now have. The body we will receive in resurrection is designed for heaven. We all will be judged at the judgement seat of Christ. We have an indescribable glory to anticipate. Because of the certainty of hope, we can properly define the present and set our priorities.

What is expected of a human being in view of the insights shared in this book thus far? We shall see, as we read the next chapter, that investing faith in Jesus is a rational and logical step.



## **CHAPTER 12**

### **INVEST IN FAITH AND SUBJECT IT TO TEST**

It is not my intention to claim that a rational or apologetic defence of faith that leads people to faith, but a humble testimony that it is God's way of dealing with people and God's power at work which ultimately transformed people. The fact remains that the Gospel becomes effective to different persons in particular contexts defies logic, reason and even principles of science.

#### **Investing faith in Jesus, a rational and logical step**

God was telling the truth when He said, 'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart'.<sup>417</sup> It was discussed in the foregoing pages of this book that God took the initiative to reveal Himself to man. No one can, therefore, plead ignorance as an excuse for denying Him. We also discussed that Christian faith can stand up to scrutiny. Our faith is consistent with reason, not contradictory to it. Our beliefs are grounded in reality, not detached from it. Faith is a rational response to the evidence of God's self-revelation. And we can allow faith to go beyond our intellectual questions and doubts.

What we believe is crucial because it sets the course for how we live and serve our fellow men. Our faith is not merely a subjective or emotional matter that involves personal preferences stemming from needs and weaknesses. Man may invent a personal deity to protect him from fears and to grant his wishes, but man is not likely to invent a personal deity whose holiness and justice are more dreadful than his fears.

In fact, a man burdened with serious guilt may want very much for there to be no God. A man wanting to indulge his own desires at the expense of others may like the idea that he is not ultimately accountable to a just and holy God. When he commits acts of evil he does not want God to look at him but to overlook him.<sup>418</sup> The desire for absolute freedom is strong in the corrupt heart of man. God must be destroyed or denied in order to achieve such freedom.

The problem of guilt is one of the most paralyzing factors of human life. The guilt can be devastating to the human personality. When guilt is acquired, we can either deny it, or we can seek to have it forgiven. At the heart of the attempt of man to deny the existence of guilt is the need for man to be free of his guilt. Man falsely thinks he can get rid of guilt by getting rid of God.

Christian faith places so much emphasis on the ‘grace’ of God. Grace is the method God employed to give the guilty sinner a righteous status before Him. Secular humanists may say that the heart of man is basically good. As long as a person achieves a certain standard of virtue, they say, he need not be dependent upon God to excuse his failures to achieve these virtues. Self-discipline and effort are called for instead of seeking God’s help. Those among the humanists who believe in God may dwell on the motto ‘God helps those who help themselves’. If we cling to their idea that man is basically good, we must relativize the standard of goodness and reduce it to a low level in order to keep the concept alive. The standard of ‘goodness’ must be low enough that the average person can meet it consistently.

Christian faith does not evaluate the performance of mankind by national averages or a low common denominator of human behaviour. Goodness is not defined by statistical normalcy. Christian faith asserts that normal man is fallen man. The standard of goodness is found in the holiness of God. Man’s role as the image bearer of God carries with it an awesome moral responsibility that cannot be neutralised by a relative standard of goodness.

For a man to do moral works he must have moral powers, a mind and a will. Man has a mind and a will. Man does have the natural ability to be morally perfect, and has the necessary natural equipment to perform moral acts. But he has to have some kind of inner disposition to do what he is required to do. If the standard of his performance were going to be the highest set by God, man would need to have a ‘desire’ to please God with an inclination toward God.

Man, in his fallenness, is in a state of enmity and estrangement from God. According to Christian beliefs, man is fallen but remains free to act according to his disposition. The Bible acknowledges that man has a will, but that will is ‘under the power’ of sin and in ‘bondage’ to sin. In chapter 10, we have discussed the matter of ‘undoing the damage caused by sin’. The Christian Gospel is both a disclosure of our fallenness and an intimation of the possibility of redemption. It is a Gospel of the grace of God, and we need to depend fully on God’s grace for liberation and reconciliation with Him.

Grace does not abolish sin, but it enables God to work through. The grace of God does not destroy our frailty, making us into spiritual superheroes, but it transfigures that frailty to make available His power to triumph over. While sin cripples our efforts for self-improvement, grace allows God to achieve wonders through what little we have to offer Him for His service. God’s grace comes with demands. But those demands are opportunities for a display of our gratitude for those who have experienced the grace of forgiveness. Our response to grace is obedience, and so we can gladly perform the best in our moral works.

Christian faith leads us to moral values and ideals that are able to give moral meaning and dignity to our existence. The idea of Christian faith as a moral improving agent for human society became widely accepted inside and outside the Christian circles, and continues to have influence today.

Many ask today, 'Where can I find security and peace of mind?' This is a question of an insecure person, lacking any spiritual insight. Such questioning may set him or her on the road to finding a gracious God. This human sense of anxiety is ultimately grounded in the absence of the presence of God.<sup>419</sup> It can be discovered that the only resting place that grants true rest is God Himself.

There is something self-defeating about human desire: that which is desired, when achieved, seems to leave the desire unsatisfied. Any human-longing points to a genuine human need. This in turn points to a real object corresponding to that need. Nothing finite can satisfy some deep sense of longing within us, giving meaning to our existence. Ravi Zacharias in *Can Man Live Without God* quotes Jack Higgins: 'When you get to the top, there's nothing there'.<sup>420</sup> Those who found 'success' find it wanting in terms of giving meaning to life, and Zacharias quotes Neil Postman: 'The driving force is to create new hungers to help us forget old ones'. The search for fulfilment never ends.

It seems people are weary of pleasure. And they, we can infer from the paralysing fears around, are afraid not only of death but also of life. David W.F. Wong aptly illustrates this point in his book, *Journeys Beyond the Comfort Zone*, about the battle between man and God characterised in the life of a Bible character Jacob. 'Despite all that Jacob had grasped at over the years – his brother's birthright, his father's inheritance, his uncle's wealth – he now sought only one thing: the Lord's blessing. Such was the purpose of the divine encounter. On the razor edge of life and death, Jacob finally realised that unless the Lord's favour rested on him, nothing else mattered'.<sup>421</sup>

Here Christ explains reality to us. Because the reason of our existence is in Him, we can find fulfilment, meaning and purpose in life. The living Christ gives us a reason to live and a heart to serve others. Paul explains his attitudinal change, 'But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ...'<sup>422</sup> Our discontentment and disillusionment with our present existence can also be a pointer to another land where our true destiny lies.

Faith is entry into the promises of God, receiving what they have to offer. Faith forges a link between the atoning work of Christ and the human situation in which we find ourselves. Faith unites us with the risen Christ and makes available to us everything that He gained through His obedience and resurrection. The essence of Christian faith is to have a living relationship with the risen Christ. Faith is like a channel that allows both the person and the benefits of Christ to flow into our lives. Martin Luther's analogy says, 'Faith unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches us, Christ and the soul become one flesh (Eph. 5:31-32)'.<sup>423</sup> The believer comes to be in Christ through faith.

The most rational and logical step people can take is to invest their faith in Jesus. There we find our security in the right place. Faith is about a choice, a step of the will, a decision to want to know God personally. One need not have to throw away his intellect

to become a believer. There is plenty of evidence upon which to base a rational decision to become a child of God. This is to experience release from guilt, to live the way we are designed to live, to pursue God's purposes in our life, to tap into His power for daily living, and to commune with Him in this life and for eternity.<sup>424</sup>

### **Subjecting beliefs to the test**

I would like to mention in this section about the ways certain people have found to invest their faith in Jesus including myself.

#### *Personal experience*

I faced the difficulty of accepting God and spiritual reality beyond the material when I entered for studies in the university, even though I was raised in the atmosphere of a pious Christian home. The message of the Gospel was explained to me by my parents, grandparents and Sunday school teachers from the early days of my life. I experienced the reality of the risen Christ in my conscious experience only after my intellectual problem was solved. In fact, it was more a moral problem than an intellectual one. I realised that I found it difficult to believe, not because God does not exist, but because something was wrong with me. The Spirit of God convicted me of my sins, and gave me answers to my questions and doubts.

Being a science student I was looking for some laboratory proof for the existence of God. The transformation that the living Christ brought into my life was the first proof I received. Thereafter I began to see many evidences of God's work in my own life and to recognise it in the lives of others. I have described some of such experiences in my life as well as in the lives of my family members in the book *Courage in Time of Discouragement*<sup>425</sup> authored by me, and also in the book *Impossible...but for God*<sup>426</sup> written by my son John George Samuel.

My wife and I had four children – three boys and one girl born to us – but the three boys suffered from Cystic Fibrosis, a life-threatening illness that does not have any cure. Respiratory infection, lack of assimilation food, constant breathing difficulties since birth and further deterioration of internal organs aggravated the situation badly. My wife had to be with them around the clock for over 28 years until she died of exhaustion and stress. Although medical science did not give the boys any hope to live beyond the teen years, the older boy lived for 32 years, and the younger one for 22 years. They both were aware that they would die any moment, as we did not hide the fact of the prognosis. The second child had died in early infancy. The life and death struggles were enormous, but we found such situations to subject our faith to the test.

We found the crisis experiences in our home making us 'better' instead of making us bitter. Both the boys were able to triumph over and were able to attempt to do things that normally they would not have done. Although they were deteriorating and their bodies just skin and bone externally, they were internally strengthened in faith. The younger boy who weighed only 23 kgs at age 22 used to encourage us by his statement, 'My hands are feeble, but God's hands are able, and I place my feeble hands into God's able hands'.

When the older boy was in a very difficult situation soon after his left leg amputation and suffering a skin burn both on his back and chest due to hot water bag application, he wrote, 'Even when everything looks bad God is good'. When he said 'God is good' it was his deep conviction and not merely an opinion. Later on, when he was about to go through the second amputation he wrote, 'When God is going to do something wonderful He begins with a difficulty, and when He is going to do something really wonderful He begins with an impossibility'. Indeed, God has sufficient strength to bear us up and carry us through any hardship that we have to face. When he wrote books, in spite of lack of proper schooling, he said God had a plan for his life, even though he was aware that he could die at any moment. We had to face their near-death situations those days until they finally died. Many times we came to the 'end of the rope', but it was not the 'end of our hope'!

The boys believed that they will get a glorified body and sickness will not bother them anymore. Both of them used to spend time in prayer, especially interceding for others. They dwelled very much on God's Word. They had near death experiences, but they believed they had a mission in this world until their Master would call them. The thought on which the younger boy meditated during his last days on his hospital bed was 'The empty tomb (of Jesus) is the birth place of our eternal certainty. The 'empty tomb' is not a fantasy. Its open passage is our 'visual evidence' that the promise of eternal life is no illusion.

My wife also had this certainty of hope, and she laboured for the Lord in the ministry as well, along with fulfilling her commitment to care for the boys. I was able to travel as she took care of the home. We were able to learn the ways of turning our problems into projects, and tragedies into triumph. We learned that what happened through us is more important than what happened to us. My daughter, struggling through all the illnesses of her brothers and mother and bereavements, proved through her services to them and through her academic achievements that perseverance is to make progress in spite of difficulties and problems. Facing such situations were opportunities for us to subject our faith to the test of experiencing the sufficiency of God's grace.

We realised that we are given the spiritual resources to live above circumstances. Instead of allowing the circumstances to rule over, we were, in a way, able to rule over the circumstances. The children never allowed the life-threatening illness to defeat them. The older boy said the devastating condition of his body is not going to become a barrier to do something good, and so kept on writing, and he published three books. He almost completed the fourth one just before his death. He could view his trials and troubles in a different perspective. He wrote in one of his books, 'I am a student of the University of Tribulations. Here I learn how to pray in a meaningful way. I will graduate only when it is time for me to go to heaven'.<sup>427</sup> When he died the newspaper reporter wrote, 'Johnny (John George Samuel) *graduated*'. When life is over, when we have entered into His glory, we will not look backward at our earthly troubles.

We believed that there is purpose in our pain and that good will somehow result from it. Because we received meaning and purpose in life as a result of our union with the risen Christ, we did not feel suffering and bereavement as painful. The entire family is sure of the central goal of our existence – to glorify God. This enabled us to perform well,

especially by trying to do everything as if we do it for the Lord. My wife imparted to the children what she learned from her parents since her early days concerning the matter of 'seeking the Kingdom first'.<sup>428</sup> No wonder she encouraged me to serve the Lord according to the Lord's plan whether staying home or leaving home even in the midst of the heavy burden of caring for the sick boys. Here on earth I continue to serve God with all kinds of limitations. But my wife and sons also continue serving the Lord, but without any limitations! What a blessed vocation! It is not the question of having faith or no faith. It is a matter of investing faith, and finding security here and now as well as in the life to come. Let us look at certain cases of some people turning from unbelief, or rather from other beliefs, to faith in the Gospel:

*Surgeon who found the Gospel useful in facing unforeseen situations*

Once on a trip by flight I sat next to a passenger who had been given the window seat. When the flight attendant came around with beverages, she poured tea for us. She had to lean over my tray table, as the passenger sitting in the window seat was reluctant to lift his cup for her to pour into it. During the process she spilled some tea on his tray table. Immediately I took my paper napkin and offered to wipe down the tray table, but he refused.

Instead, he began to spill more tea from his cup on the tray and then folded the tray so that the back of the seat in front of him got soaked with tea! He also made sure the materials in the seat pocket in front of him got wet before the attendant returned with more paper napkins. I began to wonder if I would be his next target when the flight attendant collected the tray and cup, apologising for the spill. As she walked away, I glanced at my seatmate, wondering why in the world he was behaving so strangely.

He was supposed to leave the previous day. Because his car had broken down on the way to the airport, he hadn't arrived in time for check-in. Since there were a lot of passengers on the waiting list, his seat had been given away after his name had been announced repeatedly over the public address system – which, of course, he could not hear because he was stranded on the highway! When he finally made it to the airport, his flight was closed and all the passengers had passed through the security area.

It seems he argued a long time with the agents at the check-in counter and exchanged quite a few angry words. He was still angry with the airline staff. He told me he had been promised a seat on the flight the following day, but he'd had to pay for a room in a hotel to spend the night. He also said all night he was thinking of the behaviour of the airline staff, and that they were rude at him.

I asked about his occupation and was surprised to learn that he was a qualified surgeon. Why would such a qualified surgeon react as he had? After all, flight delays and sudden flight cancellations are not uncommon. I wondered how he would respond when something went wrong in the operation theatre; it was frightening to think of his holding the surgical knife while behaving as he did in the airplane. Sometimes even highly educated people behave like beasts, especially when they are angry about unpredictable events.

I mentioned to him about a number of things these days are out of our control. Formerly in my village, water was in our control before we buried the wells due to the availability of tap water. But if something goes wrong with the water works department, including electrical failure, we don't have water from the tap. This means water is no more in our direct control. I mentioned about a few things that are not in our direct control, especially with regards to travel.

When I told him that my great big, wonderful God is in control and so I can relax, he began to listen with keen interest. I told him that I might be about to solve some pressing problems in life when another heap of problems suddenly comes up. Seeing his interest, I told him my great big, wonderful God is much bigger than all my problems put together. He immediately began to share some of his personal problems in response. I went on to tell him that though we know that our God is sovereign and in full control, we often try to make our problems bigger and our God smaller. This is foolishness, plain and simple. I explained how one could find rest and peace in God's power and care.

He commented that I might have learned this from outside nuclear science, realising that I used work in nuclear medicine. Probably because he was looking for peace in the midst of turmoil, he did not show much difficulty in accepting God and spiritual reality. He asked for further help and counselling before we landed. He found the Gospel relevant to his needs. He decided to subject his beliefs to the test of experience. He has discovered, as we all can discover, that if Christ is living in us, we are being transformed every day.

*Taxi driver responds positively upon noticing the passenger's attitude*

I thought I did everything right when I planned a short trip to an evening meeting. I checked the car, started it, and even examined the radiator and battery condition. Satisfied that the car was ready, I went inside for a brief time of prayer. But when I went back to the car, it wouldn't start. I tried for a few minutes, but it was getting late.

Finally, I had to call a taxi. When it finally arrived, I discovered that the driver was new to the area. He had just recently started his taxi business after a stint in the army. Because he was unfamiliar with the roads, he had an assistant with him. As he drove out onto the main road, I thought, *Even a bullock cart can overtake our taxi. He came late and now he goes slowly. It's already time for my speech!* I was tempted to get out of that cab and hire another.

But all I said to the taxi driver was, 'Who knows, the one person who is going to listen to my speech may not arrive until we get there'. He looked at me confused, so I went on to explain. 'I am going to this place just for one person, the one person who needs to hear what I have to say and who needs to know my God. He might be working late somewhere and get to the meeting only by the time I get there'. I encouraged him not to speed just because I was in a hurry. He seemed to relax, and I asked him to tell me about his new business. He told me his plans for settling his children, renovating his old house, and taking care of other personal matters. Then finally, we reached the meeting place – almost an hour late.

I asked the driver to stay for my return trip and then straightway went to the stage. Once there, I found that some of the young people had been singing all the songs they knew to keep the audience entertained as they waited for me to arrive. I spoke for about forty-five minutes and went back to the taxi for the return trip home. As we drove toward the main road, the driver asked me who that ‘one person’ was, the person I had mentioned on my way to the meeting. I told him it must have been someone in the crowd.

‘I am that one person’, the taxi driver said in a loud voice. ‘I had the privilege of entering the Kingdom of God tonight’.

‘There were two persons who entered the Kingdom of God tonight’, his assistant said in a soft voice. ‘I am the second person’. I told the driver to pull over and park on the side of the road for a moment. I wanted them to tell me what they understood from the message I had given from the platform.

‘We were listening to you while you were in the taxi’, one of them said. The other one nodded in agreement. It seems they had been observing my reaction to the delay and listening to my tone of voice as we talked. I’d had every reason to be upset, but God had enabled me to talk to them and encourage them even though we were late.

The two men in the taxi had decided to listen to me speak, and in the course of my talk they met the same Jesus who lives in me. I explained to them the qualities of Christ and the way they can have His new life. I told them how Christ could improve each of them in their character and give them power to react in more positive, encouraging ways.

We can choose to spend our travelling time thinking of our problems, such as car troubles, train delays, flight cancellations, certain words others used against us, etc. We are unnecessarily causing ourselves stress. It is better to go to the one who said, ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’.<sup>429</sup> If we replace the worry-producing thoughts with good and valuable thoughts, we will benefit physically as well.

*Monist intellectual who tried for curiosity sake and found the Gospel relevant*

Monism is the metaphysical view that all reality is *one*. Monists are strong in their belief in *transmigration of soul*, which is the movement of the soul from one body to another after death. They often used to refer to reincarnations in other forms such as animal, vegetable and mineral as well as human, according to the law of retribution or *karma*. But the goal is to become one with the ‘All’ – just like, if, all drops of water finally go and merge in the ocean the soul will do the same and the reality will then be one.

Advocates of monism are careful to see that they will not ‘come back’ in the cycle of death and rebirth. However, many see it also as a process of improvement. It enables one to be careful in his personal life and in serving others with good deeds. The message of the Gospel that includes the fact ‘man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement’<sup>430</sup> is not at all in line with this belief. Since I knew monists hope to improve themselves in the next life (as all are likely to do, by mistake, bad things in this life), I suggested to one of them to try Jesus for some of the problems he and his family were facing. Because they have no

difficulty in embracing all faith in the process of improvement, he showed some interest to hear more about the attitudinal change he could acquire as a result of the transformation that Jesus could bring about. It was difficult for him to admit that he is a sinner since he is taught that 'calling a man a sinner is an error and that the greatest error one can commit is to call oneself a sinner'.

When he analysed the possible causes of his family problem and, realising his inability to do anything positive to solve them, he wanted to try and check, just for curiosity, whether the Gospel would work. He took time to read the New Testament and on his own interest he admitted his sinful condition before God. Conviction of sin comes when we measure ourselves before God. He asked for forgiveness and finally he opened his heart to Jesus. His family members noticed the changes in him in course of time, and he began to hear from them telling about the change that happened in his life. This gave him further proof of his transformation on the inside. He found the message of the Gospel relevant in his personal life. As people are, in some way or other, in the midst of problems, they with expectations may embrace ideologies, and it may work. But if an ideology or belief is found to be workable, it does not mean that what one has embraced needs to be true.

People may follow after God and use Him in order to solve their problems and to enjoy things. But they must be able to find enjoyment in God. God is interested in producing and developing His character in our lives. The attitudinal change should not be temporary, just for the sake of solving some immediate problems. Living a useful life and being a blessing to others require empowering, as well as progress, in conduct and behaviour that include the matter of attitude toward material resources, positions of power and worldly aspirations. I told him I will not say Christian faith is true because it works, rather I told Christian faith is true and so it works.

*Medical student who believed upon hearing about the purpose of life*

This student referred to here was hardworking and intelligent. He had mixed feelings when his parents advised him to prepare for securing admission for medicine. Although his parents had in mind the glamour of the medical profession, this student was not sure of the reason for the option of such a profession. He scored high rank during the admission test and he joined the medical college for the course. He thought he would be able to treat many in medical need and serve humanity as he becomes a doctor.

As the days went by, the air in the medical college was filled with the thought of making money, more money by doing advanced studies for money making, lucrative specialities. He was therefore confused between making money and serving the needy. In fact he was confused about the entire purpose of choosing the medical profession. In addition, the atheistic ideologies of some of his professors began to influence him and cause more confusion. This began to affect even his studies. He saw his classmates seeking God's help for becoming the best doctors so that they could make more money and enjoy life.

When I shared about the central goal of our existence and about glorifying God with what we have, he began to listen. He showed more interest when I told him about seeing each patient as God Himself coming to him in the guise of a patient, and about doing the best

for the patients as if we do for God. The question that came up was the practical outworking of this philosophy. How wonderful it would be if all doctors treat their patients with such an attitude and commitment, he said. He said he never had a chance to see such a treatment given to patients in the course of his training. He rather saw the opposite of treating patients as ‘things’, as ‘organs’ and not even as human beings.

He began to think about these matters, read about them, and he investigated further. He came to realise about the selfishness and self-centredness that motivated people in all they do. How to replace this with a God-centred approach was his inquiry. He learned the possibility of ‘receiving a new heart’ with new purpose in life. ‘Serving God’ among the needy people was the new concept he received. This began to put meaning into his studies as well. He became so helpful to his classmates that even those who were atheists could not ridicule him about his faith. The hope of eternal life and the possibility for defining the future enabled him to serve others with self-sacrifice. He was so glad that he could experience the transformed life even from his student days, since I told him about doing his studies also as if for God and not just for securing degrees or awards.

When we talk about purpose in life we come across many avenues for various services. ‘Why we do what we do’ is important. It is good to have a vision regarding the specific goal before us. It is important to make a commitment to that vision. But real success depends on the purity of motives. One may be able to get to the top by employing even illegal and immoral means. It only makes them feel nothing beyond. On the other hand, when the motivation is as a result of the right relationship with God and the desire to please Him in all things, life gets new momentum and fresh motivations in line with God’s will every day. Life is directed by the concepts and precepts that are revealed by God’s standard and His purpose concerning our lives. We discover the meaning and purpose only when we make God the reference point of our lives.

*College professor believes in finding Gospel useful for maintaining quality of character*  
This professor directed his attention to me when he heard me speaking on the theme ‘developing the personal quality’. I mentioned ‘knowledge without character is useless and dangerous’ and that the character of the student must be the causative force for academic achievements. We were discussing the importance of imparting good values to students in order to make them better persons. A person may become an expert in medical treatment or in information technology, but he should also be a better person or a better human being in order to be of use to the welfare of the society.

He was very much concerned about the irresponsibility of his colleagues that revealed only a low image of character to the students. Punctuality was one of the issues. If the teachers are late, the students also try to copy it. When the students see the teachers behaving badly the students never try to improve on their conduct. The matter of creating the impression that the teachers do not violate any rules and that they appear to be punctual was illustrated by the professor. Some of the teachers, using their own vehicles, reach the college on time in the morning and sign the muster. Then they leave their vehicles on campus and go home by taking some public transport! They return in time for signing the muster in the afternoon, take the vehicle and leave the college. Obviously, the

impression given is that they are very punctual, and that they obeyed the rules concerning their punctuality and presence.

Because of our knowledge of the 'ideals', we tend to give outwardly the impression that we are keeping up with those ideals in practice while we know that we may be just the opposite inwardly. Even some preachers wear such 'masks' in order to make impressions among their audience. This professor felt such a mask that he was wearing was too 'heavy' on him. He admitted that the more he was found successful in creating false impressions himself, the more the heavy the mask became. Also he said such a double life prevented him from seeking for any improvement on the inside. Compared to the others he felt he was good. The inner life was in turmoil while the outer life seemed peaceful. Moreover he could get rid of the guilt temporarily and feel better by comparing himself to some of his colleagues who were cheating through the ways mentioned earlier.

One can try his level best to improve himself. Much discipline is to be exercised on man's part, as pressures of all kinds are trying to fashion us, he admitted. But when he realised about the inner transformation required, he asked for the means. He realised that God alone could help him. He received an opportunity to test the inner work of the Spirit of God by submitting himself to God. The desire to have the quality of Jesus comes from inside. Since then he began to see circumstances, and even people, playing a significant part in shaping his character. Even some of the people who were thought of as his enemies (many of our enemies are usually our former friends!) were seen in a different perspective. The grudge toward them was making his life miserable. The ego satisfaction he used to gain by finding the faults of others was found not worth the wear and tear on his inner person. He began to see the process of becoming a better person. He could forgive others when he found that even the offenders were tools in God's hand to chip away the rough edges of his personality. The highest thing that we can aspire to in this life before we enter eternity is to have the Christ-like character in us.

Sometimes, we look at people with whom we disagree highlighting their bad behaviours and say we will never copy them in our life. We may think of their bad actions and consequences and reaffirm that we would never become like them. But before long we copy those evil characteristics in our lives, because our emotional focus is always on that bad conduct and behaviours. If we prayerfully discipline ourselves to meditate on the qualities of Jesus instead of focussing on the bad conduct of those we don't like, there is the possibility that the living Christ can impart His qualities into our lives. God not only cleanses us but keeps us clean as well. We can be on the ascent in making progress by trusting Him day by day.

*Engineer who believed on realising that man is designed for 'higher things'*

This design engineer designed his own house and outfitted it with all modern amenities by the time the construction was completed. As both the husband and wife are well to do professionals earning a very good income, they did not lack in anything material. They could send their children to the best school available nearby. Their profession brought substantial income and so they could spend lavishly on enhancing their comforts. However, they both

looked gloomy on many occasions and were found expressing their dissatisfaction. Their family life was fairly happy, even though the dissatisfaction continued.

I found that they could not think beyond the material comforts of this world. They were not interested in God or anything spiritual. It seems they were watching my reactions during those most difficult days in my life. When I was caring for my dying wife in the intensive care unit, and at the same time looking after my sick boys in the hospital ward, I had received word during the middle of the night that my father, due to a heart problem, was suddenly hospitalised near my ancestral home which is about 30 kms away. Later on my father was brought home but he had lost his memory and so one day he fell down and fractured his leg. My mother, who was caring for him, suddenly died of a cerebral haemorrhage. I had to run back and forth to get things done. The above engineer who was watching me asked me a funny question: ‘How much liquor do you take every day in order to forget your worries and to be happy like this all the time?’

He became very curious at my immediate response, ‘I don’t need the spirit from the bottle because I have Holy Spirit in me’. I told him the ‘spirit from the bottle’ makes a man like a beast, but the Holy Spirit makes a believer like Christ. This added to his curiosity and he persuaded me to tell him more. Materialism, of course, has no answer to pain and suffering. In the case of this friend, he was not happy with all the material things they accumulated. In the pursuit of accumulating more, people use illegal ways to find money and this has led to a lot of corruption in society. When people are not able to find satisfaction in what they have, they compare with others and try to accumulate more, thinking that it will satisfy them.

It is difficult for him to think of God and spiritual reality in terms of his *scientific materialism*. So I had to use an illustration. I told him, if we make a bouquet of fragrant flowers and offer it to a stray pig which enjoys mud and filth, the pig definitely will be attracted only to the mud and filth and not to the fragrance of the flowers. The pig is probably not designed to enjoy the fragrance of the flowers. But a human being is designed to enjoy the flowers with the ability to differentiate between what nourishes him and what destroys him. He being a design engineer asked me more about the designer of human beings. I told him the important factor is to find fulfilment in God and not just to believe in a designer.

I had to review with him a few matters from my personal life, a little bit of history. My grandfather was a farmer but he educated my father to become an engineer. My father educated me to make me a scientist. Now, when my turn came to educate my boys, they are suffering from a threatening illness awaiting death any moment. This means I must be the most disappointed person from the point of view of scientific materialism. But God made it possible for me to live a *fulfilled life* in spite of many unfulfilled desires.

My wife was a college lecturer and she was talented with music, leadership ability, magazine editing, speaking in conferences, leading Bible study and the like. She was involved in all these until she gave birth to her first baby. Then for over 28 years she was confined to a room struggling with the life and death situation of my children, giving

them inhalation therapy, artificial respiration, suction, cleaning them up after vomiting and diarrhoea, losing sleep several nights. An old classmate of hers visited her in that situation and she asked my wife how she was able to cope with this kind of situation for many years. My wife's reply to her was that she accepted it as a 'calling from God' and so she could happily cope with it. She even commented that her calling was in no way inferior to the calling of her husband who travels around the world, or to the calling of famous men of God. In my opinion, I believe my wife was the most fulfilled person in the world, I explained.

He wanted to seek God to find His plan for his life. He believed he is designed to enjoy spiritual things that are higher than material things. The living Christ gave him meaning and purpose in life. Desires surely give motivation for accomplishments. But the role of desires is only that of a servant and not as a master. Desires should not be allowed to reign over us. When we enter into a relationship with the living Christ, we allow God to rule over us. It is, in a way, a totalitarian authority of God over us. Many people are under the reign of money, sex, alcohol, drugs, power, positions and ego, and so people even rape nature in order to fulfil their desires. The solution for the current ecological problems and maintaining the life-sustaining capacity of the planet also is to dethrone desires and let God rule over the life of each individual.

*Unconverted Christian leader who believed on seeing the true conversion of his own son*  
Because of my acquaintance with pastors and Christian leaders of different shades, I was not surprised when a person told me he was a pastor for 11 years but was a Christian only for the past two years. I was curious to know how it all came about. He told me about his only son who was regularly listened to his sermons in the church but was not at all following God's way. The boy became a drug addict and left home. The pastor did not know where his son was for over four years. One day he returned home with a girl and introduced her to his parents saying that she was his wife, and that they were married.

The boy narrated the story. When he left home he joined a hippie colony with some of his friends whom he met when he was using drugs. There he got married to this hippie girl, and this girl was the cause of his returning home, he said. During a visit to a former member of the hippie colony, this girl was challenged by her former girlfriend that what they needed was not drugs, but Jesus. The girl received Jesus into her heart and became born-again in the course of her further visits with her friend. She shared her newfound faith with her husband, who already had heard the Gospel from his father who, of course, was his pastor. While still in the hippie colony he also was able to experience the transformation that the living Christ brought in to his life. They both left the colony and decided to live a new life in Christ. Some of the former hippies, who by this time had become believers, helped this family in their spiritual growth. Their marriage was regularised in a Church and they started leading several hippie boys and girls to Christ. Of course they were persuaded to visit home and that's how they both came to the pastor's residence.

The first comment the boy made to his father, after introducing his wife and telling him their conversion story, was that he was on his way to hell even though he always listened

attentively to the sermons those days while he was growing up. The pastor was surprised at the testimony of his son and daughter-in-law. The pastor told them he also wanted to have such an experience of the living Christ in his life too. He was giving Gospel messages in his sermons but he did not believe them. By seeing the transformation of his son, he admitted the reality and meaning of his own sermons. In fact the pastor's special subject for his master's degree in theology was 'justification by faith'. It is possible to have the head knowledge but that doesn't mean the person believes it. So the last two years of his 11 years' ministry was found meaningful and fulfilling since he could boldly share the message with personal conviction.

Later the pastor commented that he was tried to persuade his son for many years to change his evil ways. Nothing had worked, and now he found the living Christ producing changes that he or his sermons could not bring about. This change in his own son persuaded the pastor to give serious thought to what he was preaching. It is not enough just to have faith in God. Also it is not enough to know the Gospel message. Someone said, 'every heart that does not have Jesus is a mission field' and this means one can see people without the personal experience of Christ, even in the Christian circles.

When we talk about transformation and changed life, it is not merely something temporary. In fact, the development of Christ-like qualities is a process. The living Christ is continually pouring His power through us. We should not be satisfied with some emotional experience either. Conviction is deeply rooted in our conscience. Christ made it possible for us to have a continuous and consistent life. God blesses us and makes each one of us a channel of blessing to others. We must be kept as clean and usable channels. Renewal is an ongoing process. There are many areas of our lives that are to be 'converted' or surrendered to God's reign. The change mentioned in the case of the pastor's son is only a starting point. Growth in Christ-likeness is intended for all as we grow into spiritual maturity.

*Top scientist who believed upon hearing the convincing testimony of a less educated subordinate*  
I was surprised to see a Bible kept on the desk of a top scientist when I walked into his office. We as Christians may keep a Bible in our bag or even in the drawer of the desk but not on top, visible for everyone to see in our secular offices. Here the situation was quite surprising because this scientist had nothing to do with the Christian religion. I was staring at the Bible during our conversation. Then the scientist told me that he had purchased the Bible from the Bible Society bookstore. He told me the reason for doing so as well.

He pointed to a subordinate, an orderly in his office. He commented highly about his honesty and integrity. He said he could trust him with anything and even with things he could not trust his own wife and children. This scientist had to travel by train sometimes to places he could not reach by flight. He used to take this man to assist him during the journey. Whenever the man did not have anything to do during the journey, the scientist noticed him reading the Bible. By that he concluded that the honesty and integrity he saw in the man was the result of reading the Holy Book. This motivated the scientist to purchase a copy of the Bible and even to keep it in his office.

This incident challenged me in many ways. One need not be highly educated in order to bless others with Christ-like quality. If a person is in Christ he is a brand new person inside. But what is on the inside has direct bearing on the outward behaviour. Surely this subordinate could change the view of the scientist toward God, the Bible and also toward the relevance of the Gospel. I had the opportunity to share more, and later on a servant of God was instrumental in enabling the scientist to submit himself to the rule of God. But the prejudices in the mind of the scientist were removed by the living testimony of the less educated subordinate.

We, surely, communicate what is in us by what we are and by what we do. What comes out of us naturally and spontaneously tell us what we are. If we abide in Christ and bear fruit, the message we communicate will be in line with the character of Christ. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit the fruit of the spirit will become spontaneous. The chief evidence of the fullness of the Holy Spirit is the moral aspect. We are known by what we do. We have the saying that actions are louder than words. Thus those who come across us catch the message from us. People see the Gospel in our lives. If the message the people see is contradictory to the Gospel, we have to examine ourselves seriously and make necessary corrections. The power of life example is so high that a number of questions of the unbelievers will be answered.

*Being convinced of the atrocities of sin led a sceptic to find the answer in the Gospel*

It is very difficult for some people to accept the fact that man is a sinner. One highly educated person even accused me of calling man a sinner. He said man may commit some errors in time of weakness but man is basically good. However, he was aware of the evil acts of people in society and corruption in public life. I had an opportunity the week previous to our conversation to hear from a drug inspector whose job is to select samples of medicines from pharmacies and check whether they are genuine medicine. He said hundreds of samples were found fake on chemical analysis. The white tablet may be wrapped in a foil with the seal of a well-known manufacturer, but on analysis it was found that some white tablets were merely chalk powder instead of the pharmaceutical ingredients claimed. The doctors prescribe medicine and the patients buy something else! When the patients continue to have the troubles, the doctors prescribe stronger medicine.

I remember listening to the open confessions of two medical technicians in a hospital. They said that when they could not cope with the rush of patients and meet the urgency of the doctors' demands to give them the results of blood, urine etc., these technicians used to throw the specimen away instead of analysing, and write something blindly on the lab report and to send to the doctors. Here again some patients get the wrong treatment and some no treatment at all for their illness because the results are false.

I noticed his worried face. He was regularly taking some white tablets and sometimes he was feeling bad instead of good. Suddenly he shouted, 'People should not commit such sins'. He has to admit that man is a sinner. Surely the sinful actions are due to the sinfulness of man. One need not go elsewhere to look for man's sin and its consequences. Several years ago, while in Bombay, I had to travel by the speedy local trains within the city. One day I heard a big noise while getting out the railway platform. Two trains

collided due to some signal error. Several people died. Many were injured. I too helped the paramedical people in sending the injured to the hospital. While cleaning the compartments the sweepers found pieces of fingers, ears, part of the nose, etc. A few weeks later I found some of the fellow passengers of the train in that sector that had lost their ear, finger, etc. They all could trace the date of the train accident in which they were also the victims who lost their fingers or ears. We may say such an ‘accident’ occurred as we read in the Eden story. Since that day the condition of man became bad.

Something should happen on the inside to deal with the sin question, I said. The sinful man cannot save himself from the bondage of sin. We need some outside help, I said. He agreed that people must be responsible to God, especially when they do specimen analysis and pushing medicines in the market. He highlighted these probably because they touched him personally. People become more aware of the sinfulness of sin when they are touched personally. I remember one college principal, though he did not believe in God, telling me to advise the students with some ‘godly things’ to create fear of God so that he could maintain discipline on campus.

The above-mentioned friend found that the message of the Gospel could give the answer to the sin problem, although first he denied sin. People are longing for someone to take away the guilt from their mind. I remember meeting a prisoner, a young woman who killed her own infant. She was about to complete the jail sentence for her crime. She said she is all right in front of the justice of the land since she received the punishment by completing the term of sentence. Her problem was that the ‘two tiny little eyes’ of her child continued to stare at her and blame her every moment. Her guilt was removed as she received cleansing of her heart. It was possible for the above friend also to understand God’s provisions for the problem of sin and to give him a cleansed conscience. He too received forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.

*Quarrelling couple found the sufficiency of the Gospel for reconciliation and acceptance*  
I came across a well-educated and wealthy couple during one of my trips. They could not accept each other, and I learned that they were quarrelling every day for something or the other. They were on their way to find some solutions to their problems and I met them at the airport lounge. When they enquired about my family, I had to tell them the struggles of facing the incurable illness of my boys and how we were enabled by God to triumph over the situation. Although they did not believe in God, they enquired further, especially since several flights were delayed that day.

I shared with them the early days our family life. First I told them about the importance of the ‘God-factor’, which we consider seriously. Many people today leave the God-factor out. God has designed every family with great potential to glorify Him, whatever the psychological make of the couple. Many people take the factors of health, wealth, status and other things into mind when considering marriage. Some take the God-factor into account, but only for their own material prosperity. When such people experience material loss, they question God and at times even blame God.

If we entrust God with anything, we can be assured that everything will be perfect. It may not be perfect according to our terms, but we need to remember that we only have a limited perspective. God makes everything perfect on His terms. Because God is going to supply what we lack, we can relax in Him. When our marriage is ‘God-arranged’ we need not worry about what the husband or wife is going to do either for or against each other. Here God-arranged marriage means an arrangement that involves the ‘altar test’. The altar test is when both parties lay everything on the altar of God and give up their rights and expectations. In a way, God-arranged marriage is like purifying gold in the furnace, where the altar burns away all the unwanted elements and leaves only the best. Some people may misunderstand God’s best because they only view it in terms of material benefits.

However, I had to divulge to them about some minor matters that bothered us when we began our family life. I was in the habit of doing certain things in my way, and my wife was in the habit of doing those things differently. I did not like the way she did certain things. I did not want to tell her about it and force her to change her habit, but I did wish she would do it the way I liked. I thought I would show her my ways so that she would follow my example, but that did not work. My efforts to change her ways did not produce the results I wanted.

Now, what was I supposed to do? Was I going to have to live with such an experience all my life? I began to think about it even when I travelled to my office. I began to get worked up and irritated – and ended up getting on the wrong vehicle! My frustrations continued to bother me even after I reached work. It affected my thinking process, and I began to ask questions like, ‘Why did God give me this kind of wife? Is this the kind of wife God wanted me to have?’

It’s amazing what kinds of things can make us believe our foundations are being shaken. In this situation, God spoke to me and taught me some great and valuable lessons. In the midst of my agitation, He answered my angry questions. But the answer was far different from what I had expected. I felt as if God telling me, ‘Until you change your attitude, your wife will continue to do things in her way. Until you change your attitude, until you stop getting agitated, until you view your wife differently... she will not follow your ways’.

Now I could see more clearly what was happening. I had been saying I wanted to accomplish God’s purposes in my life. God was testing my desires to accomplish the purposes He has given me by giving me the right kind of wife – one who would help me to see my own weaknesses and faults. God wanted to develop my personality, and He provided the right kind of tool with that purpose in mind. He was using my wife as a precious tool in His hands to chip away the rough edges of my personality. My pastor could not do it. My mentor could not do it. My supervisor at work could not do it. The best tool God could use was my own wife. With this in mind, I should not get worked up when we go through hard times. Instead, I must say: ‘Thank you, Lord, for my wife!’

It wasn’t long before my wife discovered the very same thing, especially when I behaved contrary to her expectations. She also began to thank God for me. We both benefited

from being used as God's tools on each other. I could ask God boldly what He was going to do in my life when I saw something in my wife I didn't agree with. In the same way, my wife also asked God the same question when she came across negatives in my life. We could therefore accept each other rather than blame each other. It was exciting to experience God's work in our lives when we took the God-factor for our family life.

God continued to use larger, more serious, seemingly unsolvable problems. Like many others, we faced financial stress and humiliating experiences. We also experienced misunderstanding and strain in our relationship. We were inconvenienced because of immature decisions. Sometimes, we nearly gave up when our prayers were not answered according to our expectations. But we could triumph over, and live above, circumstances. More and more we recognised that even the bitter and painful experiences were not to break us but to make us.

When I narrated the above facts of our life, the couple simply submitted to God's rule like small children. They found in God a new source for solutions to their problems. Although they were quarrelling, they said, they wanted to try all possible means to solve their family problems. They also began to experience the power of living Christ in their lives and to live a life pleasing to God and useful to others.

*Believed on witnessing the peace of God that surpasses human intellect*

During a medical meeting at the hospital where I worked in Los Angeles in the early seventies, my secretary urgently asked me to take a phone call. The message was a cable, relayed over the telephone from Tiruvalla, my hometown in Kerala, India. I knew that both my sons had been ill. The older boy, who was nearly three years old at that time, was especially ill. As I listened to the cable, I heard news no parent ever wants to hear: my younger son had died. They were in India and I was in California. After I received the message, I returned to my colleagues to finish the discussion, which took another twenty minutes. When it was over, I told my colleagues about the death of my son.

They were shocked. They couldn't believe I had come back from this sudden devastating news to continue participating in our discussion. Their love, empathy and condolences were expressed by a pin-drop silence. I finally broke that silence by telling the group that I had been able to go on because I had experienced 'God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand'.<sup>431</sup> That wonderful peace, which I had heard about for years, filled me that day and gave me the strength to do what I needed to do, despite the terrible loss I had suffered.

There are those who are sceptical about the existence of a 'peace that transcends all understanding'. New knowledge is being gained every day. In fact, one calculation states that it would take five years for an average student to complete reading all the new knowledge that is accumulated during every twenty-four-hour period! It is practically impossible for the human mind to comprehend something that transcends all understanding. It pleased God to put this peace within a believer. Because I have within me that which is beyond my ability to comprehend, I am made able to face circumstances that are above me! My colleagues told me now they believe what I tell them since they could see that faith working in me. A

number of them expressed their desire to have this kind of peace. A number of them believed that day and a few others in the subsequent week, totalling 36 individuals, and included doctors, nurses, technicians and some patients too. Let me share about one among them, a typical case:

When I finally left my colleagues, I wanted to find out the details of my child's death. Those days it was difficult to get telephone connections to our hometown. I booked an overseas call to my wife, thinking that I might get through during the night when lines are clear. I reminded the overseas operator about my pending call after I had eaten my evening meal.

In a few minutes, I heard my telephone ringing. I answered it eagerly, hoping that it was my wife. But it was a local call from a troubled man I have helped and encouraged now and then. He was going through difficult time, struggling with feelings of depression, and he asked if I would counsel him. After talking to him for more than thirty minutes, he thanked me and asked me to pray for him. I prayed a short prayer; then, as I was saying 'good night', I asked him to pray for me, too.

'What's the matter?' he asked. 'This morning I received a cable message from home in India informing me that my younger son has died. I've booked a telephone call to speak to my wife and will appreciate your prayers that the call will go through soon', I explained.

Suddenly he began to weep like a baby. 'Your problem is bigger than mine', he said, 'but you took so much of your valuable time to help me. It seems you even forgot that you were waiting for the overseas call'. He continued weeping.

'The God who enabled me to help you is able to solve all your problems', I responded. I did not begrudge the time I had spent talking with this man. I knew that if we nurse only our own wounds, we will not be able to see the wounds of others. I told the weeping man to trust God and not to worry, although he had difficulty to believe in God and spiritual reality. He believed and trusted Christ within a week, and later on he realised that God not only took care of his needs but also blessed others through him.

God tenderly comforts us when we suffer. Even more, though, he helps us use such times to apply what He has taught us, to use our insights and learning for the benefit of others. God has more than enough grace to meet our special needs, regardless of circumstances.

*Atheist scientist who experienced transformation seeing God at work*

I am always friendly to people who come across my path whether they believe in God or not. I had many occasions to work with people whose beliefs, values and habits were totally different from mine. A senior colleague, who had publicly declared that he was an atheist, was a good friend at work. I respected him for his ability to lead the team, and I gave him my full support. He liked me in spite of my intense faith in God. However, he used to ridicule me whenever he heard me say, 'Praise the Lord', 'God will take care of' and other such religious statements.

I was meeting him after a gap of three years since I left my scientific career, especially clinical nuclear medicine research work. Seeing me in the corridor he shouted, 'Praise the Lord' and I knew he was teasing me, probably remembering the occasions he heard this from me quite some time ago. No. I misunderstood him. I came to know only a little later that he was serious.

He took me to his office and explained to me how it all happened. He was treating a cancer case and as part of the treatment he posted the patient for a radioactive isotope implantation therapy. When he examined the patient and his assistants just before a minor surgery in connection with the implantation, they found that the patient was feeling much better that day. On further tests they found that the cancer was healed. The patient explained about the prayer held in his room the previous evening. The fellow believers from his church had come to pray for his surgery and special treatment.

When I looked at him with surprise he told me, 'Your Jesus Christ healed the patient', and this was the reason for him turning from unbelief to faith. And, of course, it was the reason behind shouting 'praise the Lord' at me. My question is that whether such an isolated miracle was sufficient enough for a man of his intellectual status to believe. Others in the hospital told me this doctor not only treats people with medicine but he also prays for them now. He took me home and introduced me to his wife who also had experienced the transformation by the living Christ following his experience of salvation. I came to know that some of his assistants and nurses also believed.

In the case of the healing mentioned above, it was neither a placebo effect nor a psychological manipulation. Such incidents happen but are very rare, in my understanding. People may have different reasons for their unbelief in such miracle claims. The above-mentioned miracle healing in answer to prayer may be explained as a coincidence, especially by those who find it difficult to accept God's special acts, bypassing the normal medical treatment and natural process of healing. Someone has said, 'Coincidence is an event where God remains anonymous'.

Receiving answer to prayer and experiencing God's interventions are beyond scientific explanations. We have already discussed this matter in the chapter on miracles. Medical science, some day, may find explanations for such instantaneous healing. It is true that several false claims and associated commercial gimmicks have made many people resistant to such claims. In my opinion a person need not have to accept the Gospel like the above-mentioned former colleague of mine because of seeing miracles and validating them. Visible manifestation God's power is only one of the ways of authenticating the truth claims. We must aim for a comprehensive understanding of life, its purpose and meaning, whatever is the means used by God to remove barriers to faith. Each person, indeed, is unique both in believing God and rejecting Him, for his own personal reasons.

*Airline pilot found the Gospel useful to solve his problem in relationships*

One morning I was having breakfast in my hotel room since my meetings were over by the previous evening, and I was leisurely getting ready to leave for the airport. I did not expect anyone that morning since my host already had made all arrangements for my ride

to the airport. I was therefore surprised when the hotel receptionist phoned me to let me know there was a man waiting for me in the lobby.

The telephone operator arranged for me to speak to the unexpected visitor over the in-house telephone. 'I came to thank you for your help', he told me in a grateful voice. 'What for?', I was curious. 'For saving my life!' he said, surprising me. 'I was in your audience last night. I thought you were talking about my condition in your speech. Thank you for helping me!' Now I was even more curious! When he asked me to pray with him, I invited him to come up to my room.

While I waited for him, I thought over the previous night. I had spoken at a dinner meeting arranged by some friends who are interested in spiritual things. They had invited some of their colleagues, and they had asked me to speak to the group.

I had talked about our relationship with God. I explained how our other relationships are affected due to damage caused by sin. I discussed the fact that, originally, man was made in the image of God. But due to man's sin, his image was defaced. Of course, the good news is that our defaced images can be restored in Jesus Christ. And when our relationship with God is restored, our relationship with ourselves, with others and even with our environment in the ecological dimension can all be improved. And we can prove this restoration by subjecting our beliefs to the test of experience.

When my visitor arrived, I showed him to a seat. He began talking immediately, 'Several times I have thought of attempting suicide, but then I thought of others and that prevented me from doing it'. He went on to describe his strained relationships at home and at work.

He told me he reached the point where he couldn't even stand the sight of other people talking when he was around them because he always assumed they were talking about him. He said he almost became psychotic. He did not want to live and was waiting for an opportunity to take his life. This was disturbing to begin with, but it became even more so when he informed me that he was a commercial airline pilot! He hinted that he had even attempted suicide.

'Then', he said, a smile lighting up his face, 'I heard you speak. And now everything has changed! I do not want to die; I only want to live. And I know God will help me to do so, and He will help restore me and my relationships'.

After we prayed together and he left, I began to think of people like this man in whose hands we place our lives and safety. By presenting the facts of the Gospel, we may be helping not only people like this person, but also those who could have been passengers in an airplane being flown by a troubled and suicidal person.

*Intellectual who was fed up with religious rituals and found the Gospel relevant*

It is the religion or the community that decides about the participation of its members in performing rituals and following religious customs. The educated ones may not believe in any of the rituals but will have to act like they believe. A colleague of mine in research

work involving radioactive materials and animals wanted to be relieved from an experiment involving a particular kind of animal. I also disagree with experiments that inflict pain on animals. I used to take special care to see that proper anaesthetic measures were adopted, in addition to the other rules on experimenting with guinea pigs. This colleague of mine realised that the particular animal selected for the study happened to be his 'family god' and so he honestly told me about his difficulty.

When I hear such arguments to refrain from doing the experiment, my usual response is that beliefs in gods are definitely hindrance to progress. My atheistic friends had supported me in this view. Atheists used to argue that a certain percentage of the agricultural products are eaten away by certain kinds of rodents because people permit them to destroy the crops, attributing them divinity and considering them as gods. My partner in this study involving his *family god* wanted to be a part of the team but he had this problem due to obvious reasons. However, when I assured him that I would not let others know about his involvement, he gladly accepted it and joined in doing the experiment.

I faced a small problem when I used the term God in this context. While I thought of my great big wonderful God, he thought of the *animal god*. We had some discussion during the break about believing in God or gods. He said he did not believe in any gods but he had to pose as if he is a believer. He mentioned that if his grandmother found him walking without reverence in front of his family god, she would not only scold him but would also beat him. If his villagers came to know that he participated in the experiment involving his family god, he would be blamed for any flood, drought or blaze in his village. In fact, he said, he was fed up with a number of religious rituals in which he had to participate.

I came to know a religious person belonging to the same village of my colleague. He was regularly performing all the prescribed rituals of his village even though we were living in a metropolitan city. There were facilities made available by those that migrated to the city from the villages for performing such rituals. We used to have discussions on spiritual matters based on some common factors. I believed in a personal omnipotent God who is the creator of the universe. The other friend had intense faith in his family god, and my colleague was almost an atheist. One day this colleague of mine brought a copy of a magazine published by the atheists' association. The lead article in it was a thorough description concerning the particular family god of my friends. The believing friend became very upset when he learned from the atheists about the foolishness of believing in such animals as gods. The atheist colleague endorsed the so-called facts exposed by the writer of the article.

The one who hitherto performed all the rituals in faith was shaken. He found it difficult to continue in faith. Although he agreed with the findings of the atheists, he did not want to become an atheist. The atheists rather caused in him a spiritual vacuum of faith. Surely, some intellectuals may congratulate the atheists for the success they achieve in getting rid of faith in God or gods from the minds of people. But in this case atheism could not fill in the vacuum. Experiencing regret and confusion in his mind, the religious one began to do some comparative study of religious beliefs. Finally he came across the living Christ who

could transform him and put meaning into his life. He later became an instrument in giving credible evidences to the atheist friend to consider the Gospel as relevant to his needs too. Sometimes, I feel I should congratulate the atheists to a certain level, especially for removing hindrances from the mind of people to open their hearts and mind to the truth.

*Realisation of the reality of demonic influence led to consider the Gospel*

While I was involved in nuclear medicine work in Los Angeles during the seventies, I was asked to study a patient suspected to have a brain lesion. The neurologist sent this patient to me. He was a 28-year-old young man who grew up in the suburbs of Los Angeles, complaining of some abnormal behaviour for quite some time. When I asked him to fold up the sleeves of his shirt and show me his forearm, I was surprised to see a tattoo of a fearful looking figure just near where I was to give him an injection.

Seeing me holding the syringe he warned me, pointing the tattoo, not to harm 'him'. Then he continued to say that 'he' was the source of his power. He revealed to me that he, being a part of Satan's church, received revelation about the image of Satan and that's why he got the tattoo. It was a terrible looking figure, with moustache and horn. He said he was drawing something and suddenly he found his pencil was making movements in his hand that came out with that figure. He also told me he had never believed in anything spiritual at all. But one day, he said, a friend convinced him of Satan's existence. His friend lit a candle and called 'Satan's spirit' to lift the flame up to the ceiling of the room, and then asked the spirit to bring it down to the original position. Since that day, he said, he started attending Satan's church.

When I was about to complete my studies on him, doing a brain scan followed by further investigations, I happened to mention the term 'evil spirit'. He immediately reacted to it saying that all spirits are holy and good, and that I should not use the term evil spirit. He emphasised his doctrine that Jesus had died and Satan won the victory, and that we have had to approach Satan for anything good since then.

Toward the conclusion of my investigations, I asked his permission to pray for him and to request that the Holy Spirit in me tell the evil spirit in him to depart from him. He got up from the examination table and ran away from me. When I followed him he said I should promise him that I would not pray and only then would he co-operate with the investigations. I agreed and continued my studies. I could not find anything physiologically abnormal in the investigations.

I asked him whether he would permit me to take a picture of his forearm with that tattoo I saw. He not only permitted me, but also showed me a bigger tattoo of the same figure on his entire back. He told me more about Satan's church. Many people are healed of their physical illness and so many go there, he said. He talked about certain other things for which people go there, including seeking Satan's help to change the attitude of a boy or a girl to one's favour during the dating process.

It seems the help sought by people from satanic forces is on the increase during these days, especially because people are not able to control certain things in life by other means. It may be that they find it easier to rely on such methods in place of spending money and effort in the use of modern technology. A person who used to 'expel demons' from 'haunted houses' told me he was in great demand even by nominal Christians. This man, who was formerly an expert in demon expulsion but now a believer, used to spend a week in the haunted house, conducting certain rituals. People were willing to give him anything for the expulsion of demons, he said.

He, being a believer now, told me about a gimmick that he used to employ in those days. Toward the conclusion of his weeklong 'expulsion process', he would call the family members near the closed 'ritual room' (a room was given to him for his exclusive use that week) where entry was restricted to others for that week. In fact people were afraid to enter that room. He would promise them some sign for the departure of the evil spirit or demon from the house. Usually, he said, he used to make a clinking noise in that room where no one else was present except the 'demons brought together' by the rituals. This noise was to be taken as the final departure of all the demons from the house.

His method for making noise involved dropping some iron nails on one of the brass vessels he used for the rituals. He said he would take a long strip of cloth soaked in kerosene and insert the iron nails at different positions and then hang the cloth from a stand. A brass vessel would be positioned just below the hanging wick so that the nails would fall on it and make noise. He used to light the bottom end of the hanging wick with matches and immediately come out to tell the people waiting outside the door about the final departure of the demons.

While they were all waiting outside the room, the fire would naturally spread toward the top, burning the cloth, and then the nails would start dropping one by one. He told me that he would usually insert three nails at different distances on the wick so that the people would be able to hear the noise three times. If their complaints about the demonic disturbances were severe, he might use seven nails, because the numbers three and seven are believed to be special and sacred in this connection. Listening to the noise as he predicted, people would be convinced of the expulsion of the demon! The interesting thing is that the family who lived in that house would be free of the disturbances of the demons thereafter. Such placebo effects are also used to cheat people in need in the name of demon expulsion. But this does not deny the reality of demonic influences and the need for demon expulsion.

People who are delivered from demonic influences, and also people who begin to recognise the reality of demonic activity, look for a true spiritual reality that will really help them. There are a number of such seekers finding relevance in the power of the Gospel. I came across an oppressed man who was shouting to himself when he was being prayed for by a man of God, 'A greater power is coming toward me, and I am leaving'. He was delivered and came into a vital relationship with the living Christ and became strong in his faith. John says, 'the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world'.<sup>432</sup>

*Parents who believed for the sake of raising their children in the 'right way'*

Although in certain countries the youth find their own way through the school and university education without burdening their parents, I found that many parents I came to know are deeply concerned about the future of their children. Most of them try their maximum to give the best education they can to their children. In certain cases the parents invest a lot of money for the education of their children.

It seems the main purpose of educating the children is to teach them 'how to make a living' – to help the children to stand on their own feet to earn sufficient income for a comfortable living by doing a prestigious job. In certain cases the parents 'buy' seats in advance for their children to educate them in professional institutions by paying a huge sum of money. In the mind of the children also, especially among the teenagers, their thought is also 'how to make a living'. In this pursuit, both the parents and the children do not seem to care for teaching or learning 'how to live' - to learn how to face life.

We are familiar with the supply operating manuals when we purchase certain appliances and equipment. The manufacturers insist on the buyer reading the instruction manual properly so that they will be able to get the best use of the appliance. In the case of certain electrical and electronic equipment, the warning about reading the instructions before plugging these items in is even printed in red ink.

When I was speaking to some parents concerning the matter of teaching their children on 'how to live', a couple came to me enquiring about the operating manual they could use in teaching how to live. I suggested to them the Bible as the best operating manual, although they were not interested in anything religious or spiritual. One can receive a lot of instructions on how to live from the Bible, I said.

Later on, their question was about making the Biblical principles practical in daily life. The good principles alone won't do, I said, but we need the inner strength and motivation in order to follow the principles. They decided to learn more about the inner transformation that should happen in them. I used the illustration of a non-radioactive element, after bombardment with neutrons in the nuclear reactor, becoming radioactive. Such a transformation is definitely real they admitted. The transformation that the living Christ brings in the human heart is rather more real, I commented. It is a subjective experience based on the objective reality of the risen Christ. However, what is true for the people who have experienced this reality need not be true for those who are yet to be experienced.

In fact they wanted their children to live meaningfully, learning not only how to make a living but also learning how to live. They said they had to change their attitude and change their ways in order to be an example to the children. They considered the spiritual aspects of life and committed themselves to Christ, knowing that it would help to raise the children in a godly atmosphere.

*Finding the relevance of the victory won on the Cross convinced an atheist to believe*  
Many people must have heard about the cross at least on some occasions. Recently the film *The Passion of the Christ* that was shown worldwide made it possible for many

people to think about the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. The meaning of Christ's death is explained in churches and in other meetings. Forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God and the possibility of restoring a relationship with oneself, with others and even with nature in environmental protection are some of the results of the atonement explained in theological discussions. However, experiencing the power of the cross now, today, on the basis of what happened 2000 years ago is an intriguing matter to question.

A person, while admitting that he was an atheist, asked me a question concerning the relevance of the death of Christ today, since that had happened many years ago. I tried to explain it to him theologically. He listened but was not satisfied with my answers. He returned after a couple of hours to tell me that he had found the answers to his question. He was observing the lives and attitude of many people, including believers and unbelievers, for quite a number of years, he said. When he witnessed personally the experience of many people, he said, he came to a conclusion that there is power in the cross even today. He was very much impressed by the joy and peace the believers enjoyed even in the midst of devastating situations. He took it as an evidence of the transforming power of the cross, and the availability of God's grace through Jesus Christ. He turned to Christ and received Him into his heart. Such a personal experience gave him motivation to live for God the rest of his life.

The availability of God's grace and power is being proclaimed. The door is kept open for all people to receive God's offer of salvation. The cross, in a way, is inviting us daily, offering us some kind of an exchange of the old with something new. Exchanging the old for the new is common in the commercial world. We see people, say, going to a car dealer and exchanging their old car for a new one. In my village where I grew up I remember people exchanging even their old, torn aluminium utensils for new ones. Here, when we approach the cross responding to the invitation, God gives us freely what He requires of us, that is, His own character qualities, because the one who has made atonement on the cross is of infinite qualities. We can leave the old nature with all its cravings and, in its place, can receive the new nature 'created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness'.<sup>433</sup>

We hear testimonies of people in all walks of life from around the world. Let me mention here Sir Lionel Luckhoo, lawyer named by the Guinness Book of World Records, who has been in active practice of the law for the past 50 years in London, Guyana and throughout the Caribbean. Outside of the law he has been honoured four times by Her Majesty the Queen of England and has been Ambassador representing two sovereign nations at the same time. He says, 'But for me, the strongest proof of the reality of Jesus is the evidence of my personal testimony. The evidence of changed lives. I had it all: money, racehorses, distinctions, good health. BUT, I did not have Jesus. My honours by Her Majesty, four times, my Guinness Book Record, all were inconsequential until I asked Jesus to come into my heart and be my personal Lord and Saviour. From that moment, only Jesus mattered. I had found the priceless pearl and my sole desire is to go tell about Jesus. I know my Jesus is alive and in me'.<sup>434</sup>

In all the above encounters of people with Christ, we noticed that each case is unique, and that the Holy Spirit used various situations and means to quench the thirst of their hearts. Some of the insights shared in this book about meeting the demands of the mind, however, will be found to help, I am sure, to clear away the underbrush that may stand between the inquirer and the knowledge of the Gospel. Surely, the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit is needed in every case to make people's hearts open to the invitation of the risen Christ.

### **Summary**

What we believe is crucial. It sets the course for how we live. Man wants to be free of his guilt, and he falsely thinks he can get rid of it by getting rid of God. Grace is the method God employed to give the guilty sinner a righteous status. If the standard of man's performance were going to be the highest, he would need to have a 'desire' to please God with an inclination toward God. While sin cripples our efforts for self-improvement, grace allows God to achieve wonders through us.

Christian faith leads to moral values and ideals that are able to give moral meaning to man's existence. Human-longings point to genuine needs in man as well as to a real object that can meet the needs. Nothing finite can satisfy the sense of longing within man. Man's discontentment and disillusionment with the present existence also point to another life where one's true destiny lies. In Christ, we can find meaning, fulfilment and purpose, and also hope for the future.

Faith is entry into the promises of God. Faith unites us with the risen Christ. Faith is a channel that allows the benefits of Christ to flow into our lives. One need not have to throw away his intellect to become a believer. The most rational and logical step people can take is to invest their faith in Jesus.

A brief account is given of the ways people of different backgrounds, including the author, found to invest their faith in Jesus and to find meaning in their life. The Holy Spirit used various means to meet their needs in unique ways.



## CONCLUSION

Reason and faith are not antithetical but harmonious. We put our faith in something solid. We can convincingly clarify the reasons for believing. The Christian faith is grounded, tested and verified on the basis of reliable authority. Our faith rests on certain historical facts open to ordinary investigations and scrutiny. The validity of the Christian faith arises from the power derived from the re-establishment of the creation-ordained relationship between man and God.

We can trust the reliability of God's Word and its application in daily life. Formerly, until a couple of decades ago, we had to maintain our beliefs *only* by faith in the Bible to face the contrary arguments that were raised by the anti-theists. Now, they have to maintain their unbelief by *faith*, in view of the evidences from modern science. We can stand confidently within Biblical truth, knowing it is in line with mainstream astrophysics, cosmology and biology.

Reason does create a presumption in favour of an existence beyond the grave. We can put rational meaning into the experiences of this life in the context of life to come. In the light of our confident expectation of an indescribable glory in the world to come, it becomes possible for us to properly value and define the *present* and to set our priorities to serve God among our fellow creatures.

I want to say here that, first and foremost, I am a believer in Christ and secondarily a scientist. In my life experience spanning over six decades I could not find anything that contradict science and faith. The more I subject my faith to the test of experience and more I learn science, I find there is no contradiction between the two. I also find that the intellectual enquiry and its result help me to clear the path to faith. I trust the readers will also follow the path I tried. 'These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name'. (John 20:31 RSV)



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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>3</sup> Ralph O. Muncaster, *A Skeptic's Search for God* (Eugene: Harvest House, 2002) pp. 56-61.
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- <sup>6</sup> J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997) pp. 232.
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- <sup>10</sup> Hugh Ross, *The Fingerprint of God* (Orange, CA: Promise Publishing, 1991) pp. 49.
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- <sup>13</sup> John D. Barrow, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) pp. 247.
- <sup>14</sup> Gen. 12:1-3.
- <sup>15</sup> Rom. 1:20.
- <sup>16</sup> John 3:19.
- <sup>17</sup> Ps. 50:21.
- <sup>18</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) pp. 17.
- <sup>19</sup> 2. Tim. 3:16.
- <sup>20</sup> Lee Strobel, *The Case For Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) pp. 181.
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- <sup>25</sup> Berbard Ramm, *Verities of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984) pp. 76.
- <sup>26</sup> Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-3.
- <sup>27</sup> 2 Pet. 1:21.
- <sup>28</sup> 1 Cor. 2:10.
- <sup>29</sup> Bill Wilson, *The Best of Josh McDowell: A Ready Defence* (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1990) pp. 93.
- <sup>30</sup> Luke 24:25.
- <sup>31</sup> Matt. 15:1-6, 5:17-18.
- <sup>32</sup> Gen. 1:28.
- <sup>33</sup> 2 Tim. 3:16.
- <sup>34</sup> Gen. 22:14.
- <sup>35</sup> Ps. 100:5.

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- <sup>36</sup> Ps. 46:1-2.
- <sup>37</sup> Phil. 4:13.
- <sup>38</sup> Song 2:8.
- <sup>39</sup> Hab. 3:19.
- <sup>40</sup> John 14:27.
- <sup>41</sup> Eph. 4:31.
- <sup>42</sup> Phil. 2:5-11.
- <sup>43</sup> 1 Pet. 3:15-16.
- <sup>44</sup> Kenneth D. Boa, and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2001) pp. 36
- <sup>45</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *On Authority and Revelation*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955) pp. 102.
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- <sup>48</sup> Ps. 34:8.
- <sup>49</sup> Jude 24.
- <sup>50</sup> Is. 1:18; Job. 38-41.
- <sup>51</sup> Acts 17:1-4.
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<sup>360</sup> John 1:12-13.  
<sup>361</sup> John 3:3.  
<sup>362</sup> Matt. 5:20.  
<sup>363</sup> Gal. 5:19-21.  
<sup>364</sup> Matt. 18:1-4.  
<sup>365</sup> Matt. 11:11.  
<sup>366</sup> Luke 17:21.  
<sup>367</sup> Rev. 20:4-6.  
<sup>368</sup> Col. 1:9-12.  
<sup>369</sup> Eccles. 3:11.  
<sup>370</sup> Maurice Rawlings, *Beyond Death's Door* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1978) pp. 16.  
<sup>371</sup> Gen. 1:31; 1 Tim. 4:44.  
<sup>372</sup> Gen. 2:7.  
<sup>373</sup> James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1989) pp. 154.  
<sup>374</sup> 2 Cor. 5:8.  
<sup>375</sup> Rom. 8:29.  
<sup>376</sup> Matt. 22:29.  
<sup>377</sup> 1 Cor. 15:36-38.  
<sup>378</sup> Rom. 8:21; 2 Pet. 3:13.  
<sup>379</sup> John 14:1-5.  
<sup>380</sup> Matt. 13:44-46; 1 Pet. 1:2-9.  
<sup>381</sup> Col. 3:2-5; Rev. 21:1-5; 1 Cor. 15:51-58.

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<sup>382</sup> John 5:28-29.  
<sup>383</sup> Heb. 10:29.  
<sup>384</sup> Mark 13:32.  
<sup>385</sup> Heb. 9:27.  
<sup>386</sup> Eph. 2:1.  
<sup>387</sup> Eph. 2:5.  
<sup>388</sup> Ezek. 33:11.  
<sup>389</sup> Matt. 5:22.  
<sup>390</sup> Matt. 7:13, 14.  
<sup>391</sup> Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30.  
<sup>392</sup> Matt. 10:15; 11:22-24.  
<sup>393</sup> Matt. 13:40, 42, 50.  
<sup>394</sup> Matt. 25:41-46.  
<sup>395</sup> Mark 9:43-49.  
<sup>396</sup> Matt. 7:21-23.  
<sup>397</sup> Matt. 10:33; Luke 9:26.  
<sup>398</sup> Matt. 18:3-35.  
<sup>399</sup> Matt. 13:42.  
<sup>400</sup> Matt. 25:30.  
<sup>401</sup> Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:5-9.  
<sup>402</sup> 2 Pet. 2:4; 3:7.  
<sup>403</sup> Jude verse 6.  
<sup>404</sup> Rev. 21:8; 22:15.  
<sup>405</sup> Booklet, *The Truth about Hell* (East Rutherford, N.J: Dawn Bible Students Association, undated) pp. 30  
<sup>406</sup> Booklet, *Hope Beyond the Grave* (East Rutherford, N.J: Dawn Bible Students Association, undated) pp. 46.  
<sup>407</sup> John 5:28.  
<sup>408</sup> Rom. 5:2, 3  
<sup>409</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing Christianity* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1995) pp. 246.  
<sup>410</sup> John 5:28, 29.  
<sup>411</sup> 1 Cor. 15:20-28.  
<sup>412</sup> 1 Thess. 4:13.  
<sup>413</sup> 1 Thess. 4:17.  
<sup>414</sup> 2 Cor. 5:10.  
<sup>415</sup> 1 Cor. 15:39-49.  
<sup>416</sup> 1 Thess. 4:13-18.  
<sup>417</sup> Jer. 29:13.  
<sup>418</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Reason to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) pp. 71.  
<sup>419</sup> Alister McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God & Other Modern Myths* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) pp. 32-34.  
<sup>420</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God* (Atlanta: RZIM Life Focus Society, 1994) pp. 56.  
<sup>421</sup> David W.F. Wong, *Journeys Beyond the Comfort Zone* (Singapore: BAC Printers, 2002).  
<sup>422</sup> Phil. 3:7, 8.  
<sup>423</sup> *Luther's Works, The Liberty of a Christian*, 54 vols. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974-90) 31:351.  
<sup>424</sup> Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) pp. 256.  
<sup>425</sup> George Samuel, *Courage in Time of Discouragement* (Atlanta: Haggai Institute, 1991).  
<sup>426</sup> John George Samuel, *Impossible...but for God* (Tiruvalla, Kerala: Value Education Centre, 1996).  
<sup>427</sup> John George Samuel, *Precious Thoughts for Better Living* (Tiruvalla: Value Education Centre, 2001) pp. 86.  
<sup>428</sup> Matt. 6:33.  
<sup>429</sup> Matt. 11:28.  
<sup>430</sup> Heb. 9:27.  
<sup>431</sup> Phil. 4:7.  
<sup>432</sup> 1 John 4:4.  
<sup>433</sup> Eph. 4:24.  
<sup>434</sup> Lionel Luckhoo, *What is Your Verdict?* (Madison, NC: Power Press, 2003) pp. 16.