Animal Liberation: Do the Beasts Really Benefit?

Are You a Speciesist?

"When it comes to feelings, a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy."(1) That is the moral bottom line for Ingrid Newkirk, founder and director of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (or PETA). I intend to discuss in these pages the contentious issue of animal rights; yet for Ms. Newkirk the issue is settled: a boy has no more (and no less) rights than a rat.

Almost every week there is a story in the media about a research project stopped by an animal rights group, a protest against women wearing furs, a laboratory bombed by a militant animal rights activist, or a media figure protesting the conditions of animals on factory farms. What are all these protests about, and how should a Bible-believing Christian approach these issues? That is our subject in this pamphlet.

In 1975 Australian Peter Singer wrote a book whose title was to become the banner of a new movement: *Animal Liberation*. This book laid the foundation for most of the discussion since 1975, but it also set the tone of that discussion as specifically anti-Christian. Singer is quite clear about his distaste for Christianity: "It can no longer be maintained by anyone but a religious fanatic that man is the special darling of the universe, or that animals were created to provide us with food, or that we have divine authority over them, and divine permission to kill them."(2)

By using the echoes of specific passages from the Bible and claiming that only a "religious fanatic" could still believe them, Singer is making clear not only that his view is not

based on anything resembling a biblical worldview, but that, in fact, the Bible is the root of much of the problem.

It was Peter Singer's book that also made popular the rather ponderous term "speciesism." He writes of this as, "a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species."(3) Singer says speciesism is just as bad as sexism or racism.

So what does "speciesism" really mean? If you think it's acceptable to test a medicine on laboratory animals before giving that medicine to a sick child or a cancer patient fighting for life, then you, too, are a speciesist. If you believe it is all right to eat meat or fish or shrimp, you are clearly a speciesist, just as guilty as someone who thinks that slavery is an acceptable way to treat another human being, according to Singer and others in the animal rights movement.

Why should Christians even bother to think about issues like animal rights when people are not even treated as well as animals in places like Bosnia or Iraq or many inner cities? Christians need to be actively involved in speaking out and acting clearly on this issue because the very definitions of humanity, of human dignity, and human responsibility are being rapidly reconstructed and any hint of man as created in the image of God or of a God who creates and gives value is seen as "speciesist" and dangerous.

Are We the Creation's Keeper?

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them…. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. That's how God describes His coming kingdom in

Isaiah 11.

Clearly God is concerned for all the animals He has created, and they will share a future, a non-violent future, with us. But what of today? How does God intend us to treat animals now?

The animal liberation movement opposes favoring humans over other animals. “Speciesism,” they say, is treating humans as if they were more valuable than other animals. What does the Bible say?

God, in Genesis, tells us we have a responsibility as stewards to care for His creation. We are God’s representatives on earth, but we are not Lords of the earth. In Proverbs Solomon says that “a righteous man cares for the needs of his animal” (Prov. 12:10). It is a mark of righteousness that we give animals the care they need. But at the same time we must understand that both we and the rest of creation have value because a sovereign God created us and gave us value because He cares about us. Our value comes from God and not ourselves.

Our concern for animals does not mean we should give up the Bible’s insistence that we are unique in all of God’s creation because we bear His image, or that we should immediately eliminate all use of animals for any purpose and live resolutely vegetarian lives. What place, then, should animals have? In Matthew 12:11-12 Jesus berates the Pharisees’ willingness to help an animal on the Sabbath but not a human.

> *If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.*

Jesus’ point is clear: we should have compassion on animals in trouble, but have even more compassion for human beings, because they are “much more valuable” than sheep! But

Christians sometimes show little compassion for either.

As Christians we have often not lived up to our responsibilities to animals as creations of God. Frequently we have acted as if all animals are here **only** for our use, to do with whatever we wanted. We have taken God's statement in Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth," as giving us the right of despots, not the responsibilities of stewards. As Christians we have not set an example for the world of valuing the rest of creation because it belongs to God, and we have often abused the creation with no sense of damaging a creation that is not our own.

Next, we will look at what happens when people who deny God try to find an adequate basis on which to build value for themselves or animals, and how far into dangerous territory this can lead them.

From Animal Rights to Abortion: A Small Step from Man to Animal

"Six million Jews died in concentration camps, but six billion broiler chickens will die this year in slaughterhouses."(4) This is how Ms. Newkirk of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals sums up her outrage at the killing of animals. What happens when well- meaning people try to give animals value without God? Ms. Newkirk may think she has improved our view of chickens by comparing them to Jews who were killed in concentration camps. But actually she only trivializes one of the most brutish examples of evil in our century. In her view numbers are everything; if more chickens than people were killed, then poultry farming is worse than Nazi Germany.

What is the foundation of Ms. Newkirk's sense of value? She speaks of Peter Singer's book, *Animal Liberation*, as "the Bible of the animal-rights movement." Singer develops a purely

utilitarian view of the greatest good for the greatest number of beings that can experience pain. For Singer there can be no God over creation. He almost sarcastically says: "The Bible tells us that God made man in His own image. We may regard this as man making God in his own image."(5) So Singer turns to evolution to consider how we are related to other creatures.

Singer believes the evolutionary history of humans and other animals, particularly mammals, makes our central nervous system and theirs very similar. His conclusion? That many animals must feel pain like we do. Since we have no basis, in his view, to see humans as any different from other animals, if it is bad to do something to another pain-feeling human being, then it is wrong to do it to any other pain-feeling animal. The logic is simple, but it leads to just the kinds of confusion that cannot separate Jews dying in gas ovens from chickens dying in processing plants.

Where does a view like this ultimately lead? Singer willingly points the way in its application to new-born children. Writing for physicians in the journal *Pediatrics*, he shows how his ethic applies to humans,

> *Once the religious mumbo jumbo surrounding the term "human" has been stripped away…we will not regard as sacrosanct the life of each and every member of our species, no matter how limited its capacity for intelligent or even conscious life may be.(6)*

With chilling clarity, Singer says that once we come to his position of valuing a life only if it meets certain requirements, it is much easier to take the life, not only of the unborn, but of those who have a "low quality of life." He argues for the right to take the lives of new-born children who do not have certain capacities for "intelligent or even conscious life." Singer concludes:

> *If we can put aside the obsolete and erroneous notion of the sanctity of all human life,…it will be possible to approach these difficult decisions of life and death with the ethical sensitivity that each case demands, rather than with a blindness to individual differences.(7)*

In other words, if a baby does not measure up to Singer's standards, it is not kept alive. The values of animal rights, applied to people, lead coldly to abortion and euthanasia.

While there are many areas where Christians might disagree with the animal rights movement, one might well ask, Have we Christians lived up to the responsibilities God gave us towards animals?

Are Farm Animals Just Machines?

After the Flood, God tells Noah: "Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything." God also makes a covenant, not only with Noah, but "with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth" (Gen. 9:3, 10).

So, while there is no question that God has given us permission to eat meat, we must also remember that we are moving towards a kingdom in which, as we saw in Isaiah 11, all of creation will live at peace with one another. So what should we be doing now, as we await perfection?

We have already looked at problems with the animal rights position. On the other hand, there are some uses of animals that should cause Christians significant concern.

One of the great changes in Western economies has been the change from the small family farm to the huge "agribusiness." With this change has come not only increased production and

lower food prices, but the treatment of animals as machines and land as a commodity. One area where animal rights activists have done commendable work is in showing the appalling conditions under which most farm animals now live.

Chickens live in battery cages that, on average, allow them only 36 to 48 square inches. This means that two chickens live in less space than a page of paper. Generally four or five chickens share a cage, so that they must almost physically live on top of each other. Does this sound like what Solomon means when he said that "a righteous man cares for the needs of his animal"?

As one other example, pigs too are treated as machines to produce food. The United States Department of Agriculture tells farmers: "If the sow is considered a pig manufacturing unit, then improved management…will result in more pigs weaned per sow per year." This is surely not man acting as a good steward of created beings that belong to God. The decline of any belief in God has been accompanied by a decline in any attempt to treat animals on farms as anything other than "manufacturing units" to be treated in whatever way will cause them to produce the most.

If we truly believe what the Psalmist says, that "The earth is the LORD's and all it contains" (Ps. 24:1), then we must not accept how those who do not believe this have acted. While we are directly given permission in Scripture to eat meat, it might well make a great difference in how animals are treated if Christians choose not to buy from those meat producers who do not tend to their animals as if they really did belong to God.

In the same way that if we believe in the sanctity of human life we must stand against abortion, so too, if we believe that "the earth is the LORD's" then we must consider whether we can support those who do not treat animals as animals but only as "manufacturing units."

I want to conclude this discussion with some suggestions about how we can both uphold the uniqueness of humans and stand against the mistreatment of God's creation.

Recovering the Creation as Compassionate Stewards

I have pointed out the disturbing consequences of abandoning the biblical view that humans are created in the image of God. As theologian and social critic Richard John Neuhaus perceptively puts it: "The campaign against `speciesism' is a campaign against the singularity of human dignity and, therefore, of human responsibility…. The hope for a more humane world, including the more humane treatment of animals, is premised upon what [animal rights activists] deny."(8)

If we are merely animals, we have no reason to be less species- ist than other animals. Dogs show no concern for the welfare of cats. If we are moral in a way that other animals cannot be, then we are both different from other animals and responsible to God for that difference. Because we have a spiritual aspect that no other animal shares, what the Bible calls the "image of God," we also have a responsibility to care for what God has entrusted to us. How should we live out that responsibility?

First, we must live in obedience to Jesus Christ. It was Jesus who reminded us that God clothes even the grass as an example of His care for all His creation. We need to demonstrate in our actions and in how we teach our children that we, too, consider all of God's creation as something that shows His glory.

Secondly, we must consider what our own role is as God's stewards. Just as not all are called to give their lives in vocational missionary service, so, too, not all are called to be full-time activists for better treatment of God's creation. But we are all called to be missionaries, and we are all

called to be stewards and not spoilers of the natural world.

Medical research and experiments on animals provide an excellent place for Christians to be proactive. Animals must be humanely treated, but at the same time we have much to learn about the treatment of cancer, diseases of the nervous system, and the management of serious injuries from animal experiments. If a cure for AIDS or any one of a number of genetic diseases is to be found, it should first be tested on animals. However, just as on farms, we have a duty as stewards to see that animals are treated with the respect due them as part of God's creation. Like Jesus, who regarded helping the sheep out of the well as more important than keeping the Sabbath, so too we must speak out strongly for the humane treatment of animals whenever they are used by humans.

We have been given the right and the responsibility to rule over the earth by its Owner, God. Once Christians led in this area, starting the whole movement for the humane treatment of animals. Now we have little to say to our culture about real stewardship. We must read our Bibles carefully and prayerfully consider how God would have us help recover His creation. Animals may not have rights, but we as Christians clearly have responsibilities to them.

As Christians we must stand for man as created in the image of God and His creation as a reflection of His glory. Let us say with the Psalmist: "How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Ps. 104:24).

Notes

1. Ingrid Newkirk cited in Charles Oliver, "Liberation Zoology," *Reason* (June 1990), p. 22.
2. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Avon Books, 1975), p. 215.
3. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, new revised ed. (New York:

Avon Books, 1990) p. 6.
4. “Liberation Zoology,” p. 26.
5. *Animal Liberation*, new rev. ed., p. 187.
6. Peter Singer, “Sanctity of Life or Quality of Life,” *Pediatrics* (July 1983), pp. 128-29. (Cited in Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*.)
7. Ibid.
8. Richard John Neuhaus, “Animal Lib,” *Christianity Today*, 18 June 1990, p. 20.

See Also *Probe Answers Our E-Mail:*
- What’s Up with Animal Rights?

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Jesus’ Claims to be God – Yes, Jesus Said He is God

Sue Bohlin answers the question about Jesus claims to be God by reviewing the major scripture passages where Jesus did so. This study clearly shows that Jesus was God and openly claimed to be so. Bottom line: Jesus clearly communicated that He and the Father are one and are God.

[Note: The following essay was written in response to a friend’s request: “Can you tell me where in the Bible Jesus claimed to be God?”]

This article is not an exhaustive list of Christ’s claims to be God, but it does cover the major ones. I suggest you read

this with a Bible open, as I have not posted all the scriptures listed.

1. Mark 2:1-12—Jesus heals a paralytic. He had authority to forgive sins, which is something only God Himself can do. Then, to authenticate His claim, He demonstrated His power by healing the paralytic.

2. The miracles Jesus performed are a very strong indication of His divinity (because no mere human can work actual miracles by his own power). Jesus referred to the miracles in John 10:24-39 as proof that he was telling the truth. This passage is Christ's own response to the unbelieving Jews' charge of blasphemy (dishonoring God by claiming to be God). Incidentally, this section also includes a beautiful promise that once you are saved/born again/become a Christian, you can never lose your salvation. Verses 28-29 say we will "never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (Here is another strong statement that He is God.) We can have the assurance of eternal security because we didn't earn salvation in the first place; it is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8,9).

3. During Christ's trial, the chief priests asked Him point blank, "Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." And He said,

- "I am." (Mark 14:60-62)
- "Yes, it is as you say." (Matthew 26: 63-65)
- "You are right in saying I am." (Luke 22:67-70)

These are all ways of saying the same thing, written by different authors.

In John's gospel, he recounts Jesus' interview with Pontius Pilate (John 18:33-37). Pilate wanted to know if He were the King of the Jews. Jesus then talked about how His kingdom was not of this world. Pilate said, "You *are* a king, then!" Jesus

answered, “You are right in saying I am a king…” The truth is, he is King of the whole universe.

4. Jesus says in John 10:11-18 that he is the Good Shepherd. When you read this passage along with Ezekiel 34:1-16, you can see that Jesus was identifying Himself with God, who pronounced Himself Shepherd over Israel. The Jewish people, being an agrarian and shepherding society, knew and dearly loved this section of the Old Testament because God was using a metaphor they *lived* every day. So when Jesus said, “**I** am the Good Shepherd,” and that whole John passage so clearly parallels the Ezekiel passage, there was no doubt that He was claiming to be God.

5. John 4:25-26. This is where the Samaritan woman, whom Jesus went to meet at the well, gets into a discussion of “living water” with Jesus. He pinpoints her sinful lifestyle (knowledge He would not have had as a mere human passerby), then He admits that He is the long-awaited Messiah: “I who speak to you am He.”

6. John 5:1-18. Jesus heals a lame man on the Sabbath, which the unbelieving Jews gave Him a hard time about. His answer was, “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working.” It was a well-known Jewish line of thought that, although God rested on the seventh day after Creation week, He continued to “work” in being loving, compassionate, and just, as well as keeping the earth producing, keeping the sun moving, etc. In other words, although the creating had stopped, the maintenance went on—even on the Sabbath, and that was the only “work” allowed on that day. So Jesus is putting Himself on the same level as his Father in working on the Sabbath. And by calling God “My Father” (instead of “Our Father”), He was claiming an intimate relationship with God that far exceeded anyone else’s. So in these two ways, He was making Himself equal with God.

7. John 16:28. “I came from the Father and entered the world;

now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." What Christ is saying here is that He existed along with the Father before being born. He "entered the world" by wrapping Himself in human flesh and being born as a baby. He grew up, fulfilled His mission/ministry, was crucified and raised from the dead (all part of the "mission") and then left the world to go back to the Father in heaven, where He is now seated at the right hand of God (the place of honor). He is the only person who **ever** existed before conception. That Christ was in a "pre-incarnate state" means that He is God.

8. (This is many people's favorite argument for the deity of Christ, including mine.)

First, turn to Exodus 3, where Moses encounters God in the burning bush. God tells Moses that he is the one He has chosen to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses says to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me 'What is His name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God replies to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God has said that His own name, His personal name, is "I AM."

Now…

a) Turn to John 8:56-58. Jesus is talking to the unbelieving Jews. "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing My day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet 50 years old," they said to Him, "and *you* have seen Abraham?" "I tell you the truth," Jesus announced, "before Abraham was, I AM!" Jesus was the great I AM from before the beginning of time; He existed before Abraham ever was. He is claiming here to be the I AM of the Old Testament. Verse 59 says the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, but the Lord Jesus slipped away. The reason they wanted to stone Him was because stoning was the death penalty for blasphemy. He was claiming to be Yahweh—Jehovah—Almighty God—I AM. (Of course, it wasn't

blasphemy when Christ claimed to be who He truly was!)

b) John 8:24. “I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I AM, you will indeed die in your sins.” In your Bible, it may read “if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be….” The extra words are supplied by the editors; they’re not in the original text. If you’re familiar with Exodus 3 you don’t need the extra words for it to make grammatical sense. The Lord Jesus is again claiming to be God.

c) John 18:4. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas and some priests and soldiers are about to take Jesus prisoner. “Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to Him, went out and asked them, ‘Who is it that you want?’ ‘Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘I AM,’ Jesus said. When He said, ‘I AM,’ they drew back and fell to the ground.” (Again, in your Bible the editors may have supplied “I am [he]” to make it grammatically correct. The Greek just says, “I AM.”)

The force of Jesus’ claim to be Yahweh (I AM) was so powerful that it literally knocked the arresting officers and the Jewish priests off their feet!

The above points are by no means exhaustive, and are given to contribute to the reader’s understanding that Jesus Christ is Lord because He is God. In this vein, I would like to close with one of the most powerful quotes ever written on the subject, by noted author C.S. Lewis in his classic, *Mere Christianity*:

> I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a

> lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come away with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

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The Sinfulness of Humanity

Over the last couple of years we have witnessed some incredible events in our world. In Europe, communism has become a thing of the past. In South Africa, apartheid finally appears to be on the way out. The former Soviet Union is in the throes of reorganization as it moves toward democracy and free enterprise.

Such events, coupled with recent successes on the battlefield, have caused many Americans to feel tremendously optimistic about the future. It has become fashionable to appeal to a new world order in which nations will cooperate with one another in a spirit of peace, and some have even suggested that we are on the edge of the millennial kingdom.

Don’t get your hopes up.

It’s easy to be optimistic when looking at the trend of world events, but it’s a little more difficult when one takes human nature into consideration. The sinfulness of humanity may be an uncomfortable subject, but it is absolutely necessary to

understand sin in order to understand both ourselves and the world in which we live.

Many people like to focus on our tremendous potential as a society, maintaining that the only thing preventing us from fulfilling that potential is inadequate education. For example, consider the following statement from the second Humanist Manifesto:

> *Using technology wisely, we can control our environment, conquer poverty, markedly reduce disease, extend our life-span, significantly modify our behavior, alter the course of human evolution and cultural development, unlock vast new powers, and provide humankind with unparalleled opportunity for achieving an abundant and meaningful life.*

Humanists recognize the fact that such utopian dreams are not guaranteed, but they believe our potential for progress is essentially unlimited. If we as a society decide that we really want to achieve something, we are capable of achieving it.

The Bible presents a very different view of humankind and our future. From a biblical perspective, we have all violated God’s laws, and our continuing tendency is not to seek the well-being of others but to seek our own satisfaction. Consider the following words from Romans chapter 3:

> *There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, there is not even one.*

These words may sound pretty pessimistic, especially when compared with modern humanism, but they are true. We all know our own failings. God says that we are to be holy just as He is holy (1 Peter 1:15, 16), and we cannot honestly say that we

meet that standard. You and I recognize that we have selfish desires, that we rebel against God, that we often find it easier to cheat people than to love them. The Bible tells us that everyone else has the same problem. As Paul put it, All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

Forgiveness for Sin

Thinking about the sinfulness of humanity is unpleasant at best, but we must first understand that all humankind has sinned if we are to realize that, even so, all is not lost. The most important thing to realize about human sinfulness is that forgiveness is available!

The Bible says that we have all broken God's laws, and we all deserve punishment as a result. Jesus Christ, however, came to take that punishment on our behalf. Let me explain it this way. We have been sentenced to death because of our sin. God's justice demands that the sentence be carried out. If He were to simply lay the sentence aside, then He wouldn't be a very fair judge, and He is always fair.

At the same time, God's love demanded that He provide a way of forgiveness. He provided that forgiveness through Jesus Christ. By dying on the cross for our sins, Jesus paid the penalty that we should have had to pay. He took the punishment for our sins.

Since God's justice has been satisfied in the person of Jesus Christ, we are able to have peace with God through Jesus (Rom. 5:1). All we have to do to experience that peace is to place our trust in Jesus, believing that He died to take the punishment that we deserved (John 3:16). When we trust in Christ, our sins are forgiven. We no longer need to be afraid of death or of God's future judgment. We have been declared righteous in Christ, and we are at peace with God.

The idea that someone would or could take our punishment seems

very strange to many in today's culture. The film *Flatliners* provides an excellent illustration of the way our world thinks about sin and life after death. In the film, several medical students take turns killing and then reviving one another, hoping to learn something about life after death. In their near-death experiences, they are confronted with past sins, in which they have offended not God but other human beings. They themselves must atone for their sins by making peace with the people they have wronged. There is no mediator to take their place. In addition, the sins for which they suffer are much less grievous than one might expect. What could a person do to obtain forgiveness for actions much worse than teasing another child or even causing another person's accidental death? Apparently nothing. Reflecting the perspective of many in our culture, *Flatliners* seems to say that there is no God to offend, no Christ to bear our punishment, and no hope for those who have committed grievous sin. What a sad perspective!

The Continuing Presence of Sin

When we accept God's forgiveness by placing our trust in Christ, we are completely freed from the penalty of sin. At the same time, however, we continue to experience the presence of sin. We still have the capacity, even the tendency, to rebel against God and to act independently of Him (Gal. 5:16-17). God's goal for us as Christians is that we would consistently obey Him, and the indwelling Holy Spirit works to change us from the inside out, but the process won't be completed until we are in the presence of God in heaven (Rom. 8:12-25; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:7-18). In the meantime, we continue to struggle with the fact that we are sinful people.

As fallen creatures, we will always want to say no when God says yes and yes when He says no. All too often, we seek to please ourselves rather than to please God.

This thought doesn't sound very encouraging, and some have maintained that talking about the sinfulness (or depravity) of

humanity causes Christians to have a pessimistic attitude about life. I disagree. Understanding that everyone is sinful gives us a realistic appraisal of life, one that explains the headlines we see in each morning's paper. If our natural tendency as sinful people is to seek power and control for ourselves or to lie, cheat, and steal, then we should expect people to act that way. Expecting these actions doesn't make them right, but it makes them understandable. Recognizing the sinfulness of humanity doesn't excuse crime, but it does protect us from the disillusionment that so many experience when their optimistic ideals eventually fall apart.

The belief that all persons are sinful can actually be a very liberating concept. We no longer place expectations on ourselves or others that no one could fulfill. We no longer demand perfection, for we expect a degree of failure. With regard to current events, we do not join those who continually hope for some kind of global transformation apart from divine intervention. We recognize that sinful people will continue to govern every nation, even our own, and that they will always seek their own interests.

The founders of this country believed in the sinfulness of humanity; indeed, this view of human sinfulness is central to the United States Constitution. We do not believe in giving any single individual limitless power, because we do not trust anyone enough to put him or her in that position. We regard a system of checks and balances, through which each person's decisions must ultimately be approved by others, as safer than a government in which unlimited power is entrusted to one individual.

I am not saying that humanity should simply accept its lot; we must certainly work to improve our society. A proper understanding of human nature, however, prevents us from seeking to fulfill impossible goals through unrealistic means and keeps us from placing too much faith in humanity. We need to be involved in the political and social arenas, but we

should not place too much hope in our involvement. Human sinfulness will keep us from doing all that we would like, but we must continue to do all that we can.

The Politics of Sin

Many people believe that humanity is basically good and that all we need to do to improve our society is provide a healthy psychological and physical environment. This belief is appealing because it makes us feel like we are in control of our own destiny, but unfortunately it isn't true. Humans are not good creatures in a bad environment. If anything, we are sinful creatures in a relatively good environment.

In this country we elect representatives who promise to uphold our interests in the public realm. Yet year after year we are disappointed when they break their promises. They may institute some helpful programs and make a few choices that we agree with, but often the entire exercise seems futile. One reason behind this sense of futility is that politics is built upon compromise, but another reason is that political programs are unable to deal with humanity's real problem—sin. Barry Goldwater, who served many years in the United States Senate, said it this way:

> *We have conjured up all manner of devils responsible for our present discontent. It is the unchecked bureaucracy in government, it is the selfishness of multinational corporate giants, it is the failure of the schools to teach and the students to learn, it is overpopulation, it is wasteful extravagance, it is squandering our national resources, it is racism, it is capitalism, it is our material affluence, or if we want a convenient foreign devil, we can say it is communism. But when we scrape away the varnish of wealth, education, class, ethnic origin, parochial loyalties, we discover that however much we've changed the shape of man's physical environment, man himself is still sinful, vain, greedy, ambitious, lustful, self-centered, unrepentant, and*

requiring of restraint.

That is a pretty profound statement, and it is one with which the Bible would agree. Political programs have no effect on society's real problem, the fact that we are all sinful and self-centered.

When we look at the seeming hopelessness of the situation, it is easy to see why some Christians have grown apathetic. They say, We try as hard as we can and it doesn't do any good. Why bother to keep trying? Theirs is a good question. Many Christian activists felt the same way at the end of the 1980s. Christians had been more involved in this country's politics than ever before, and there were several events in which they seemed to pull out all the stops. Many Christians lobbied intensively for the confirmation of Robert Bork to the U.S. Supreme Court, seeing him as a vital tool in their aim to bring an end to the abortion industry in this country. Their efforts failed. The troops were marshalled several more times during legislative battles on Capitol Hill, but they fell short more times than they succeeded. Many grew weary in the fight. I know I did.

Looking back on that decade, we have to ask, What did we expect? Did we expect our politicians to abandon the appeal of special- interest groups in favor of altruistic ideals and biblical ethics? We should not have been so naive. The sinfulness of humanity means that people will always tend to enhance their own power and seek their own interests. When they do otherwise, we take their actions as grace, but we do not expect them to act in accordance with anything but their own interests.

That's why we as believers must continue to be active in political and social causes. True, we do struggle with our own sinfulness, but we are being transformed by the person of Jesus Christ, transformed to the extent that we should no

longer fit comfortably into our culture (Rom. 12:1-2). Jesus said that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and what He meant by that is that we are to be distinctive representatives of God in a world that is trying to forget Him (Matt. 5:13-16; cf. Phil. 2:15). If we abandon our culture, we abandon that duty. We realize that we won't necessarily win the day, but we might. In any case, we'll have done the right thing.

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How to Be Successful and Satisfied

How belief in Jesus Christ can help you realize your potential and help you find real satisfaction.

This article is also available in Spanish.

Success is:_____. How would you fill in the blank?

"That's easy," you might say. "Success is … for an athlete, winning the Super Bowl, the World Series, or a gold medal: for an entertainer, winning an Oscar, a Grammy, or an Emmy; for a businessperson, being a top executive with one of the Fortune 500 companies: for a university student, being elected to Phi Beta Kappa or student government." But is it always so easy to define?

Several years ago Ranier, a German friend, spent three months with me in the U. S. Once, while he was watching his first baseball game on TV, the batter hit the ball out of the park for a home run. The fans went wild! Ranier turned to me with a

puzzled look and asked, “Why are they cheering? They’ve lost the ball?” To the hometown fans the batter was a great success. To someone from another culture, the home run was a mystery.

The meaning of success also varies with individuals. One dictionary defines success as “the satisfactory accomplishment of a goal sought for.” To be successful, you must achieve the goal and be satisfied with the outcome. With this definition one wonders if “success” that does not include personal satisfaction—a sense of well-being—is really true success at all.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Several factors contribute to success. Consider a few:

1. **Positive Self-Concept.** Imagine that you wake up one morning and your roommate is waiting to tell you something. He or she says, “I’ve been wanting to tell you what an outstanding roommate you are. You’re so kind, so thoughtful; you always keep the room so neat. Just being around you motivates me to be the most positive person I can be.”

After you recover from your cardiac arrest, you head off toward your first class of the day. Whom should you run into but your date of the previous evening, who says, “Am I ever glad I ran into you! I’d been hoping I’d get a chance to tell you again what a terrific time I had yesterday. My friends are so jealous of me. They think that I’m the luckiest person in the world to go out with someone like you, and I agree! You’re so friendly, so intelligent. You have a great sense of humor and good looks to boot! Why, when I’m with you, I feel like I’m in a dream!”

Then you float into your first class. Your professor is about to return the midterm exams you took last week, but before he distributes them he says, “I have an announcement I’d like to

make. I want everyone to know what an outstanding job this student has done on this test." He points to you in the front row and says, "You are a breath of fresh air to me as a professor. You always do your assignments on time. You often do even more than is expected of you. Why, if every student were like you, teaching would be a joy. I was even considering leaving teaching before you came along!"

Wouldn't that help you have a great attitude about yourself? And wouldn't it motivate you to be a better roommate, a better date, a better student? You'd say to yourself, "Why, I'm one sharp person. After all, my roommate, my date and my prof all think so … and they're no dummies!" You wouldn't argue with them for a minute! {1}

Of course, some people think so highly of themselves that their egos become problems. Nevertheless, many psychologists agree with Dr. Joyce Brothers when she says, " . . . a strong, positive self- image is the best possible preparation for success in life."{2}

2. **Clearly Defined Goals.** Aim at nothing and you'll surely hit it. Aim at a specific goal and, even if you don't hit it, chances are you'll be a lot farther along than if you'd never aimed at all.

The U. S. Space Program has produced many successes and, sadly, a few tragic failures. The successes of NASA help illustrate the importance of goal setting. Perhaps you've heard of the three electricians who were working on the Apollo spacecraft. A reporter asked each what he was doing. The first said, "I'm inserting transistors into circuits." The second answered, "I'm soldering these wires together." The third explained, "I'm helping to put a man on the moon."

Which one was more motivated and satisfied? Probably the one who saw how his activities fit into the overall goal.

Without a clear life's goal, daily duties can become drudgery.

Knowing your life's goal can increase your motivation and satisfaction as you see how daily activities help accomplish that goal.

In the early 1960's, President John F. Kennedy set a goal of putting an American on the moon by the end of the decade. In 1969, Neil Armstrong took his "one small step." A specific goal helped NASA achieve a major milestone in history. Someone who desires success will set specific goals.

3. **Hard Work.** Any successful athlete knows that there would be no glory on the athletic field without hard work on the practice field. A true test of character is not just how well you perform in front of a crowd, but how hard you work when no one notices—in the office, in the library, in practice. President Calvin Coolidge believed "nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not … Genius will not … Education will not … Persistence, determination, and hard work make the difference." {3}

"A true test of character is not just
how well you perform in front of a crowd,
but how hard you work when no one notices."

"What is success?" asks British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. "I think it is a mixture of having a flair for the thing that you are doing … hard work and a certain sense of purpose…. I think I had a flair for … (my work), but natural feelings are never enough. You have got to marry those natural feelings with really hard work." {4}

The heavyweight-boxing champion of another era, James J. Corbett, often said, "You become the champion by fighting one more round. When things are tough, you fight one more round." {5}

Success requires hard work. Of course you can overdo it and become a workaholic. One workaholic businessman had a sign in his office that read, “Thank God It’s Monday!” We all need to balance work and recreation, but hard work is essential to success.

4. **A Willingness to Take Risks.** Theodore Roosevelt expressed the value of this asset in one of his most famous statements: “Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in the great twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat, ” {6}

Ingemar Stenmark, the great Olympic skier, says, “In order to win, you have to risk losing.” Consider this question: “What would you do if you knew you could not fail?” That question can expand your vision and enlarge your dreams. Maybe your desire is to be a great political leader, an entertainer, a top businessperson or academician, a star athlete. What would you do if you knew you couldn’t fail?

Now ask, “Am I willing to risk a few possible failures in order to achieve that goal?” Success often involves risks.

AN OBSTACLE TO SUCCESS AND SATISFACTION

A positive self-concept, clear goals, hard work, and a willingness to take risks … all contribute to success. But there is a major obstacle to experiencing success and satisfaction in life.

In 1923 a very important meeting was held at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. Attending this meeting were seven of the world’s most successful financiers-people who had found the secret of making money.

Consider what had happened to these men 25 years later. The president of the largest independent steel company, Charles

Schwab, died in bankruptcy and lived on borrowed money for five years before his death. The president of the greatest utility company, Samuel Insull, died a fugitive from justice and broke in a foreign land. The president of the New York Stock Exchange, Richard Whitney, spent time in Sing Sing Penitentiary. A member of the President's cabinet, Albert Fall, was pardoned so he could die at home. The greatest "bear" on Wall Street, Jesse Livermore, died a suicide. The head of the greatest monopoly, Ivan Krueger, died a suicide. The president of the Bank of International Settlements, Leon Fraser, died a suicide. All these had learned well, the art of success in making a living, but apparently they all struggled with learning how to live successfully. {7}

Pollster and social commentator Daniel Yankelovich quotes a $100,000/ year full partner in a public relations firm: "I have achieved success by the definition of others but am not fulfilled. I appear successful … I have published, lectured, exceeded my income goals, achieved ownership and a lot of people depend on me. So, I've adequately achieved the external goals but they are empty."{8}

Dustin Hoffman is an extremely successful movie actor. His film career seems almost dazzling and includes an Oscar for his performance in "Kramer vs. Kramer." Yet consider what he says about happiness and satisfaction: "I don't know what happiness is …. life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? I'd strike out happiness …. Walk down the street and look at the faces. When you demand happiness, aren't you asking for something unrealistic?"{9}

Success in one area does not guarantee satisfaction in life. You can reach all your goals and still not be at peace with yourself. How can you both achieve your goals and be satisfied? And even if you feel a degree of satisfaction, could there be something more?

“You can reach all your goals,
and still not be at peace with yourself.”

SUCCESSFUL AND SATISFIED

More and more psychologists and psychiatrists are seeing the need to develop the total person physically, psychologically, and spiritually—to produce real satisfaction. Often in our struggle for success, we focus on physical and psychological development at the expense of the spiritual.

Not long ago a group of counselors spent quite a bit of time in New York City interviewing some of the nation’s most successful executives. They interacted with editors of newspapers and magazines, executives with advertising agencies, banks, the TV networks, seeking to understand these leaders’ ideas about success.

One question these counselors asked involved the spiritual area: “What place do faith and spiritual values have in your fife?” In response, 75% conveyed that spiritual values were “important” or “very important” to both personal and professional development. Remarked one, “If they could be strengthened, a lot of these other things would fall into place.” Yet, surprisingly few of these leaders had clearly defined convictions in the spiritual area. As one radio broadcaster noted with a smile, “I am inspirable, but I can’t find anyone to inspire me!” {10}

Then these executives were told about someone who could inspire them, one of history’s most influential personalities, a person who stressed the importance of spiritual development as well as the physical and psychological. The life and teachings of this influential and very successful leader have made quite a positive impact on my own life, as well. Perhaps

a bit of background will put my discovery in perspective.

In high school I looked for success through athletics, academics and student government. And I found it. I lettered in basketball and track … our track team was undefeated. I ranked in the top of my class academically, was involved in student government, and was attending one of the nation's leading prep schools. John F. Kennedy and Adlai Stevenson were graduates as were playwright Edward Albee and actor Michael Douglas.

I mention these details not to boast but to draw a contrast. Success in these areas had not brought the personal satisfaction I'd wanted. I was still an introvert, sometimes afraid to introduce myself to a stranger or ask a young woman for a date. My attitudes were often inconsistent with my behavior. Outwardly I could appear very positive and loving, while inwardly I might be negative and resentful of someone I didn't like. Guilt, anxiety and a poor self-image often hindered me from taking risks or from being vulnerable in relationships.

Later, in college, I was still wrestling with these areas. Then I ran into a group of students who had something special about them, a love, joy, and enthusiasm I found very attractive. I especially appreciated the fact that they accepted me just the way I was. I didn't have to try to impress them with a list of accomplishments, though they were sharp, attractive, and successful. Even in dating I didn't feel the normal pressure to display a macho image. They seemed to like themselves and they accepted me, too.

These were Christian students and I knew that I wanted what they had. They told me they had found a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I couldn't accept all that right away, yet I kept going back to their meetings because I was curious and because it was a good place to get a date. Especially because it was a good place to get a date!

AN OPEN DOOR

The more I spent time around them, the more I saw how their faith affected their lives and relationships. They told me that God loved me unconditionally, but that I was separated from Him by a condition of alienation called sin. They said that He had sent His unique Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins and rise from the grave to offer new life. When I placed my faith in Him, they explained, He would enter my life, forgive me of my sin, and begin to produce the fulfillment I'd been looking for.

Finally, through a simple, silent attitude of my heart, I said, "Jesus Christ, I need you. Thanks for dying and rising again for me. I want to accept your free gift of forgiveness. I open the door of my heart and invite you in. Give me the fulfilling life you promised." There was no thunder and lightning. Angels didn't rise in the background singing the "Hallelujah Chorus" and I didn't become perfect. But gradually, I began to see change. I had a new inner peace that didn't fluctuate with circumstances. I found a freedom from guilt and a new purpose for living. I saw my self-image improve and felt freer to take risks, to love others less conditionally.

There are many examples of Christians who are both successful and satisfied: Roger Staubach, former quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys; Julius Erving, star professional basketball player; J. C. Penney, founder of the department store chain; Dr. Charles Malik, past president of the UN General Assembly: Mark Hatfield, U. S. Senator from Oregon; Janet Lynn, a figure skater; Jerome Hines, Amy Grant, Pat Boone and Debby Boone as entertainers: and many more. Being a Christian doesn't guarantee supreme success. Christians have their failures, too. But a relationship with God can enhance your self-concept, help clarify your goals, strengthen your determination and help you improve whatever you do. The

personal satisfaction Christ provides can make a positive difference, too.

**“What a tragedy to … climb the ladder
of success, only to reach the top
and find the ladder leaning against the wrong wall.”**

Here’s how: Remember the earlier illustration about your roommate, date and professor showering praise on you? Unfortunately, that doesn’t happen every day. But God thinks you are very special, so special that He sent His only Son to die in your place. When you come to know Christ personally and realize the magnitude of His love for you, you can find strength to accept yourself and greater freedom to take prudent risks. You can face rejection with the security that even if everyone else turns on you, God still loves you. Knowing He wants the best for you can increase your determination to work hard for worthwhile goals.

What about you? Does your definition of success include personal satisfaction? Have you found success? Will your success be enough to sustain you through any rough times that may lie ahead? Have you found personal satisfaction?

What a tragedy it would be to spend an entire lifetime climbing the ladder of success only to reach the top and find the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall. Are you willing to consider how Jesus Christ can make a difference in your life?

Notes

1. Illustration adapted from Zig Ziglar, *See You at the Top* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Co., 1979), p. 46.

2. Ibid., p. 49.

3. Ibid, p. 319.

4. Prince Michael of Greece, “I Am Fantastically Lucky,” *Parade* Magazine, July 13, 1986, p. 4.

5. Ziglar, op. cit.

6. Hugh Sidey, To Dare Mighty Things,” *Time,* June 9, 1980, p. 15.

7. Adapted from Bill Bright, *“The Uniqueness of Jesus”* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1968) pp. 14-15.

8. Daniel Yankelovich, *New, Rules,*p-69.

9. Gerald Clarke. “A Father Finds His Son,” *“Time,”* December 3, 1979, p. 79.

10. Patty Burgin, “A View From the Top,” *Collegiate Challenge,* 1980, p. ii.

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A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the End

Hundreds of cases have been recorded of people who returned from the brink of death to report on “the other side.” But are out-of-body experiences really encounters with the afterlife … or something more deceptive?

A man is dying.

As he lies on the operating table of a large hospital, he hears his doctor pronounce him dead. A loud, harsh buzzing

reverberates in his head. At the same time, he senses himself moving quickly through a long, dark tunnel. Then, suddenly, he finds he is outside of his own physical body. Like a spectator, he watches the doctor's desperate attempts to revive his corpse. Soon, he sees the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died. He encounters a "being of light." This being shows him an instant replay of his life and has him evaluate his past deeds. Finally, the man learns that his time to die has not yet come and that he must return to his body. He resists, for he has found his afterlife experience to be quite pleasant. Yet, somehow, he is reunited with his physical body and lives. {1}

You may be one of the many who have read this account of a near- death experience in the best-selling book, *Life After Life,* by Dr. Raymond A. Moody, Jr. Dr. Moody is a psychiatrist who pieced together this picture from the reports of numerous patients he had studied. He notes that not all dying patients have these "out-of-body experiences" (OBE's) and stresses that this is a *composite account* from some who have. Not every element appears in every experience, but the picture is fairly representative, he says.

The last few years have seen a flurry of books and articles on these OBE's as an increasing number of doctors report similar findings. My own curiosity led me to several fascinating interviews with surviving patients.

One interview was with a woman in Kansas, who developed complications after major surgery. She told me that she sensed herself rising out of her body, soaring through space and hearing heavenly voices before she returned to her body.

A man in Arizona was in a coma for five months following a severe motorcycle accident. He said that during that time he saw his deceased father, who spoke to him.

Interpreting the OBE's

How should we interpret these out-of-body experiences? Are they genuine previews of the afterlife? Hallucinations caused by traumatic events? Or something else?

Let's evaluate.

First, the people who have death-related OBE's fall into different categories. Some have been pronounced clinically dead and later are resuscitated. Others have had close calls with death, but were never really thought dead (such as survivors of automobile accidents). Still others did die—permanently—but described what they saw before they expired.

Second, the determination of the point of death is a hotly debated issue. In the past, doctors relied merely on the ceasing of the heartbeat and respiration. More recently they have used the EEG or brainwave test. Some argue that death must be *an irreversible* loss of all vital signs and functions. These would say that patients who were resuscitated did not really die because they were resuscitated. But whatever one considers the point of death, most would agree that these folks have come much closer to it than the majority of people living today.

A number of possible explanations for the OBE's have been offered. Different ones may apply in different situations. Here are a few of the main theories:

The physiological explanations suggest that a "physical" condition may have caused some of the out-of-body experiences. For instance, cerebral anoxia (a shortage of oxygen in the brain) occurs when the heart stops. The brain can survive for a short while (usually only a few minutes) without receiving oxygen from the blood. Anoxia can produce abnormal mental states.{2} Thus, patients who recover from heart failure and

report OBE's may be merely reporting details of an "altered state of consciousness," some say.{3}

The pharmacological explanations say that drugs or anesthetics may induce some of the near-death experiences. Some primitive societies use drugs to induce OBE's in their religious ceremonies.{4}

LSD and marijuana sometimes generate similar sensations. {5} Even many medically accepted drugs have produced mental states akin to those reported by the dying. Ether, a gaseous anesthetic, can cause the patient to experience "sensations like that of being drawn down a dark tunnel."{6}

The drug ketamine is an anesthetic that is injected into the veins.{7} It is used widely and produces hallucinatory reactions 10% to 15% of the time." UCLA pharmacologists Siegel and Jarvik report the reactions of two subjects who took this drug:

"I'm moving through some kind of train tunnel. There are all sorts of lights and colors, mostly in the center, far, far away; way, far away, and little people and stuff running around the walks of the tube, like little cartoon nebbishes; they're pretty close."

"Everything's changing really fast, like pictures in a film, or television, just right in front of me. I am watching it happen right there."{9} The tunnel, lights, people and film scenes in these accounts bear some resemblance to the OBE images.

The psychological explanations suggest that the individual's mind may generate the unusual mental experience. Sigmund Freud, writing about the difficulty of coping with the thought of death, said it would be more comfortable in our minds to picture ourselves as detached observers.{10} Some modern psychiatrists, following this theme, theorize that the OBE is merely a defense mechanism against the anxiety of death. That

is, since the thought of one's own death is so frightening, the patient's mind invents the OBE to make it seem as if only the body is dying while the soul or spirit lives on.

Dr. Russell Noyes, University of Iowa psychiatrist, has done extensive research into the experiences of people in life threatening situations. He says that the OBE is "an emergency mechanism . . . a reflex action, if you like." {11}

Noyes and his associate, Roy Kletti, write, "In the face of mortal danger we find individuals becoming observers of that which is taking place, effectively removing themselves from danger."{12}

Other psychologists wonder if the patient may be confusing his or her *interpretation* of the experience with what actually happened.{13} The conscious mind seems to need an explanation for an unusual vision; therefore, it interprets the event in familiar terms. Thus, say these psychologists, the resuscitated patient reports conversations with deceased relatives or religious figures common to his culture.

It is possible that an OBE could be completely spiritual and yet not be from God.

Spiritual Theories

The spiritual explanations grant the existence of the spiritual realm. They view many of the OBE's as real manifestations of this realm. Dr. Moody, while admitting his inability to prove his belief, feels that the OBE's represent genuine previews of the afterlife.{14} The famous Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, well-known writer on death and dying, says she became convinced of the afterlife through her study

of OBE's and related phenomena.{15}

Many have noted that the experiences in Dr. Moody's first book, *Life After Life,* seem to contradict some of the traditional Christian beliefs about the afterlife. All of the patients—Christian and non-Christian—report feelings of bliss and ecstasy with no mention of unpleasantness, hell or judgment.

However, Dr. Moody's first book was based on limited observation. Further research yielded new information that he presents in a second book, *Reflections on Life After Life,* which came out in 1977 (two years later).

He has now talked with numerous patients who refer to a "city of light" and describe scenes that are reminiscent of biblical material.{16} Some of his other patients report seeing "beings who seemed to be 'trapped' in an apparently most unfortunate state of existence."{17}

One woman who was supposedly "dead" for 15 minutes said she saw spirits who appeared confused. "They seemed to shuffle," she reports, "as someone would on a chain gang . . . not knowing where they were going. They all had the most woebegone expressions. It was quite depressing."{18}

Dr. Moody now states, "Nothing I have encountered precludes the possibility of a hell."{19} Some have felt that the OBE's are inconsistent with the biblical concept of a final judgment at the world's end. No one reports standing before God and being judged for eternity. Dr. Moody responds in his second book by pointing out that "the end of the world has not yet taken place, "so there is no inconsistency." There may well be a final judgment," he says. "Near-death experiences in no way imply the contrary."{20}

Life After Death?

How should one view the OBE's and their relationship to the issue of life after death? Scientific or experimental methods are currently unable to solve the riddle (as a number of scientists will admit).{21} Not only is it difficult to provide controlled situations during medical emergencies; the scientist has no instruments to determine the *content* of events in the spiritual or mental realms.

Personal testimony alone is insufficient as a test of truth in these cases. Subjective mental experiences can be deceptive and are susceptible to influence by injury, drugs, psychological trauma, etc., as stated previously. Also, what would we conclude when the experiences differ?

Another approach involves the spiritual realm. Presumably, a qualified spiritual authority could accurately inform us about the afterlife. But with so many differing authorities on today's spiritual scene, whom should we believe?

An increasing number of educated men and women are concluding that Jesus of Nazareth is a trustworthy spiritual leader. A major reason for this conclusion is that He successfully *predicted* His own out-of-body experience—that is, His own death and resurrection. Consider the evidence:{22}

Jesus was executed on the cross and declared dead. His body was wrapped like a mummy and then placed in a tomb. An extremely large stone was rolled against the entrance. A unit of superior Roman soldiers was placed out front to guard against grave robbers. On the third day, the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty, but the grave clothes were still in place. The Roman guards came out with the feeble story that the disciples had stolen the body while they were sleeping. But how could they know who had done it if they were asleep?

Meanwhile, hundreds of people were saying they saw Jesus alive and were believing in Him because His prediction had come true. Both the Romans *and* the Jews would have loved to have produced the body to squelch the movement. No one did. The tomb remained empty and Christianity spread like wildfire. Jesus' disciples were so convinced that He had risen that they endured torture and even martyrdom for their faith.

Jesus Christ successfully predicted His own resurrection. This was not a mere resuscitation after His heart had stopped beating for a few minutes. It was a dramatic physical resurrection after several days in the grave.

Why is this incident so important? The resurrection shows that Jesus has power over death. It establishes Him as a spiritual authority. Because He remains consistent on statements we can test (such as His resurrection prediction), we seemingly have solid grounds for trusting Him on statements we *cannot* test (such as those He made about life after death).

One statement Jesus made was that all who believe in Him will have everlasting life, an eternity of joy. As one early Christian wrote: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him."

Jesus also explained that God loves us and desires our happiness both now and after we die.{24} However, we all initially exist in a condition of separation or alienation from God. This condition is called sin, and it prevents us from achieving maximum fulfillment in this life and from spending eternity with God.{25}

Jesus claimed to be the solution to our sin problem. By His death on the cross He paid the penalty for our sins so that we might be forgiven and live forever with God.{26} The Bible explains, "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son (Jesus). He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."{27} If we

refuse this free gift in Jesus, we are choosing to exclude ourselves from God, opting instead for an eternity of suffering. {28}

OBE Interpretation

In light of the above, how should one interpret the OBE'S? Here are some guidelines I use.

Because I have concluded that historical evidence supports both the authority of Jesus and the accuracy of the biblical documents, accept them as a standard.

If a given OBE contradicts biblical statements or principles, I do not accept it as being completely from God. If the experience does not contradict biblical statements or principles, then it *could* be from God. (I say "could" because there is always a possibility of influence from one of the other factors—body, drug or mind.)

It is also possible that a given OBE could be completely spiritual and yet not be from God.

Jesus clearly taught the existence of an evil spiritual being, Satan.

We are told that Satan "disguises himself as an angel of light,"{30} but Jesus said that he is "a liar, and the father of lies."{31}

One of Satan's favorite deceptions is convincing people that they can achieve eternal life by doing good. That way, they don't see their need for receiving Christ's pardon.

Could this be the reason that sometimes the "being of light" in the OBE's tells the patient to go back and live a good

life, but makes no mention of a commitment to Christ? (I'm not accusing everyone connected with OBE's of deliberately being in league with the devil. Rather, I'm offering a word of caution, a suggestion to consider satanic influence as one of several possible alternatives in individual cases.)

Obviously death is a common denominator of the human race. Some seek to avoid the issue or to insulate themselves from it through possessions and pursuits, popularity or power. Many feel that whatever belief makes you comfortable is okay. Do any of these descriptions fit you?

In the spring of 1977, a nightclub near Cincinnati was packed to the brim. Suddenly, a busboy stepped onto the stage, interrupted the program and announced that the building was on fire. Perhaps because they saw no smoke, many of the guests remained seated. Maybe they thought it was a joke, a part of the program, and felt comfortable with that explanation. When they finally saw the smoke, it was too late. More than 150 people died as the nightclub burned.{32}

As you consider death, are you believing what you want to believe, or what the evidence shows is true? Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live, even if he dies."{33}

I encourage you to place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior. Then you, too, will live, even if you die.

Notes

1. Paraphrased from Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M. D., *Life After Life,* Bantam, New York, 1976 (first published by Mockingbird Books in 1975), pp. 21, 22.
2. Stanislav Grof, M. D., and Joan Halifax-Grof, Psychedelics and the Experience of Death," in Toynbee, Koestier, and others, *Life After Death,* McGraw-Hill, New York, 1976, p. 196.
3. Daniel Goleman, "Back from the Brink," *Psychology Today,* April, 1977, p. 59.

4. Michael Grosso, “Some Varieties of Out-of-Body Experience,” *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research,* April, 1976, pp. 185, 186.
5. Grof and Halifax Grof, pp. 193-195; Stanislav Grof, “Varieties of Transpersonal Experiences: Observations from LSD Psychotherapy,” *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology,* 4: 1, 1972, p.67; Russell Noyes, Jr., M.D., and Roy Kletti, “Depersonalization in the Face of Life-Threatening Danger: An Interpretation,” *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying,* 7: 2, 1976, p. 108.
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14. Moody, *Reflections on Life After Life*, p. 111.
15. James Pearre *Chicago Tribune*, “Ghost Story: How a long dead patient talked doctor into continuing work with the dying,” *San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle,* November 14, 1976, section B, p. 7.
16. Moody,*Reflections on Life After Life,* pp. 15-18.
17. Ibid, pp. 18-22.

18. Ibid., pp. 19-21.
19. Ibid., p. 36.
20. Ibid., pp. 36, 37.
21. Ibid., pp. 132-135; A. Susan Mennear,"Life After Death?" *Good Housekeeping,* September, 1976, pp. 187,188; J. B. Rhine, Ph. D., "Parapsychology and Psvchology: The Shifting Relationship Today," *The Journal of Parapsychology,* June, 1976, pp. 131-133.
22. For a more thorough documentation of resurrection evidences, see Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict,* Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1972, pp. 185-273; see also pp. 15-79 for evidences for the reliability of the biblical documents.
23. 1 Corinthians 2: 9, NIV.
24. John 3: 16; John 10:10.
25. Romans 1:23; 6:23.
26. Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 2:24; John 3:16.
27. 1 John 5: 11,12.
28. John 3:36; Revelation 20:15.
29. McDowell, loc. cit.
30. 11 Corinthians 11:14.
31. John 8:44.
32. "They Didn't Believe It," *The New York Times,* May 30, 1977, p. 16; Hal Bruno, "The Fire Next Time," *Newsweek,* June 13, 1977, pp. 24, 27.
33. John 11:25.

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Jesus: The Divine Xerox –

Reasons to Believe

Probe's founder Jimmy Williams provides a compelling set of reasons to believe that Jesus is in fact the Son of God. By asking questions one would expect of God on this earth, we see that Jesus is the only one who fulfills them all. Jesus' characteristics are His own apologetic.

You know, today when you walk across the campus and begin to talk about the New Testament, the claims of Christ, and how He is relevant to high school or college life, often you get this expression of amazement, as if you have committed intellectual suicide, because you actually believe His claims. Some tell us that becoming a Christian involves a blind leap with little or no evidence to support it. In fact, the blinder the leap and the more lacking the evidence, the more noble the faith. It is certainly true that any philosophy or belief cannot be proved; I would not try and insult anyone's intellect by saying I could *prove* to him that Jesus Christ is God. However, I think when we look into the history of this unique person, we see some things that have to grasp the mind of any thinking man and impress upon him the strong consideration that Jesus may be who He claimed to be…namely, God incarnate in human flesh.

Now whatever we may say about Jesus Christ, most everyone would agree that in the person of Christ we view one of the most unique personalities of all the centuries—whether He is God or not. The unbeliever, atheist, Moslem, Hindu and Buddhist alike all generally agree on this one central fact, that Jesus Christ is indeed a unique personality.

> "Here was a man born of a peasant woman in an obscure village. He grew up in another obscure military camp town where He worked as a carpenter's son. He never wrote a book; He possessed neither wealth nor influence. He never ran for political office; He never went more than 200 miles from His home town; He never even entered a big city. In infancy He

startled a king; in childhood He puzzled doctors; in manhood He ruled the course of nature and hushed the sea to sleep. During the last three years of His life He became an itinerant preacher, roaming the land of His birth, healing the sick and comforting the poor. At the end of this three years of ministry the tide of public opinion began to turn against Him. He was betrayed by one of His closest friends and arrested for disturbing the status quo. All of His followers deserted Him; one denied Him three times. He went through six trials, each of which was a mockery of jurisprudence. Prior to one of the trials He was beaten to the point of death with leather strips imbedded with studs of iron. A crown of thorns was then rammed down upon His head, tearing the flesh so that blood poured down the side of His face. The Roman procurator officiating at His trial was nervous. The uniqueness of this man made Pilate want to wash his hands of the whole affair. But the crowds cried for His death.

“As the Roman procurator brought this insignificant, now mutilated and beaten carpenter’s son before the crowds, he hurled a challenge to them which has resounded across twenty centuries: he said, “Behold the man.” Pilate was impressed. He had never before seen such quiet dignity, intrepid courage, noble majesty. Never had any other who had stood before his bar carried himself as this One. The Roman was deeply impressed, and avowed his captor’s uniqueness. But the mob shouted, ‘Crucify Him.’ So He was taken outside the gates of the city and nailed to a cross to die the death of a common criminal.

“Yet the story doesn’t end here. For something happened after that strange, dark day that has changed the entire course of human history. He came forth from the tomb in resurrection power. His greatness has never been paralleled. He never wrote a book, yet all the libraries of the country could not hold the books that have been written about Him.

> He never wrote a song, and yet He has furnished the theme for more songs that all the songwriters combined. He never founded a college, but all the schools put together cannot boast of having as many students. Every seventh day the wheels of commerce cease their turning and multitudes wind their way to worshiping assemblies to pay homage and respect to Him. The names of the past proud statesmen of Greece and Rome have come and gone. The names of the past scientists, philosophers, and theologians have come and gone, but the name of this man abounds more and more. Though over 1900 years lie between the people of this generation and the time of His crucifixion, He still lives. Herod could not destroy Him, and the grave could not hold Him. He stands forth upon the highest pinnacle of heavenly glory.
>
> "Never had any other who had stood before his bar carried himself as this One. The Roman was deeply impressed, and avowed his captor's uniqueness. But the mob shouted, 'Crucify Him.' So He was taken outside the gates of the city and nailed to a cross to die the death of a common criminal. Still today He is the cornerstone of history, the center of human progress. I would be well within the mark when I say that all the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that have ever sat, and all of the kings that have ever reigned, put together, have not influenced the course of man's life on this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life, Jesus of Nazareth. History has been called His story. He split time: B.C., before Christ; A.D., *Anno Domini*, in the year of our Lord.{1}

When, some 20 centuries ago, Pontius Pilate said, "Behold the man," I doubt that he had any idea of who it was that stood before him. He certainly wouldn't have dreamed that this humble peasant would launch a movement (indeed, already had) that would change the course of Western civilization. In view of the claims that He made and the impact He had upon history,

it behooves us to “Behold the man.” Who was He? Those who knew Him best were convinced that He was God. What do you say? I am convinced that the only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from a fair examination of the evidence is that He was and is, indeed, God, the Saviour of the world. Let’s consider some of these evidences together.

I would like to consider several lines of historical evidence that suggest that Jesus Christ is God. The first line of evidence is:

Because the Hypothesis Fits the Facts.

Now what I would like to do in terms of presenting the first line of evidence for His claim that He is God is to ask the question, “What would God be like, if God became a man?” If the facts about Jesus Christ fit the answers to the above question—pre-eminently so, uniquely so, we will have offered evidence, that He may be who He claimed to be. So I would like to suggest four things that I think we would all agree would characterize God if God became a man.

If God were a man, we would expect His words to be the greatest words ever spoken.

What is great literature or great oratory? The masterpieces of one generation often appear stilted and artificial to another. The words which endure are the words which have something to say about that which is universal in human experience, that which doesn’t change with time.

Statistically speaking, the Gospels are the greatest literature ever written. They are read by more people, quoted by more authors, translated into more tongues, represented in more art, set to more music, than any other book or books written by any man in any century in any land. But the words of Christ are not great on the grounds that they have such a statistical edge over anybody else’s words. They are read

more, quoted more, loved more, believed more, and translated more because they are the greatest words ever spoken. And where is their greatness? Their greatness lies in the pure, lucid spirituality in dealing clearly, definitively, and authoritatively with the greatest problems that throb in the human breast; namely, Who is God? Does history have meaning? Does He love me? Does He care for me? What should I do to please Him? How does He look at my sin? How can I be forgiven? Where will I go when I die? How must I treat others?

This amazing purity of the words of Christ became more real to me in a forceful way while I was studying the Greek language in graduate school. The New Testament is written in Greek. I was taking a course called Rapid Greek Reading in which we did nothing but read the Greek New Testament and recite in class. We read about eight pages of Greek a week or about the equivalent timewise of 600 pages of English. We struggled night and day while reading the Gospels in order to be able to read them out loud in class directly from the Greek text to our professor. It was sometimes humorous to hear one another struggle with the text of Matthew or Luke. The interesting thing was that when reading one of the Gospels aloud, we would stumble and toil with the sections where Matthew was simply recounting narrative, but as soon as Matthew began to quote the words of Christ the struggle ceased. His words were the easiest to translate. They were so simple and yet profound. To labor with the narrative portions and then come to the words of Christ was like moving from the intensity of the hurricane to the calm serenity of the eye of the storm. It was the difference between sailing on rough tempestuous seas and on a glassy lake at eventide.

Certainly, no mere man could impregnate such simple words with such sublime thoughts. Consider the volumes of truth stored up in the phrase, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”{2}, and “Whosoever would find his life, must lose it”{3}. Libraries could be filled with works which simply develop

those concepts.

No other man's words have the appeal of Jesus' words. They are the kind of words we would expect God to utter if God were a man.

The second line of evidence is:

If God were a man, we would expect Him to exert a profound power over human personality.

One of the greatest impacts among human beings is the impact of personality upon personality. Most human beings are rather ordinary in their impact upon other human beings. I can't think of anyone in my life whose personality has made an impact upon me; strong influence, yes, but impact, no. Periodically in history a Churchill, Hitler, or a Caesar comes along and impact is made. Certainly, if God were a man, His personality would be so dynamic it would have unprecedented impact on His contemporaries. Is this the case with Jesus of Nazareth? We find most emphatically that it is. Whether Jesus be man or God, whether the Gospels be mainly fiction or fancy, certainly a historic person named Jesus made such an impact on a small band of men as to be unequaled by far in the entire annals of the human race. Consider for a moment the historic nucleus from which Christianity sprang: Peter, a weak-willed fisherman; John, a gentle dreamer; Thomas, who had a question mark for a brain; Matthew, a tax collector; a few peasants and a small cluster of emotional women. Now I don't want to minimize the character of these men, but seriously, does this rather heterogeneous group of simple folk look like the driving force that could turn the Roman Empire upside down, so that by 312 A.D., Christianity was the official religion of the Empire? Frankly they do not. The impact of the personality of Christ upon these people turned them into flaming revolutionaries who launched a movement that has changed the history of Western Civilization.

The amazing thing is that these men were the very ones who ate with Him, slept with Him, and lived with Him for over three years and still concluded that He was God. How could a person live with someone for that period of time and come to that conclusion unless it were a valid conclusion? You could spend less than an hour with the greatest saint mankind has ever produced and be thoroughly convinced that he was not God. How could you spend three years with a mere man and become absolutely convinced that He was God, in fact, be so convinced that you would be willing to die a martyr's death to punctuate your belief? Listen for a moment to the traditional deaths of the apostles: Matthew, martyred by the sword in Ethiopia; Mark, dragged through the streets of Alexandria until dead; Luke, hanged on an olive tree in Greece; John, put in a caldron of boiling oil but escaped death and died in exile on the island of Patmos; Peter, crucified upside down (he said he wasn't worthy to be crucified in the same manner as His Lord); James, beheaded in Jerusalem; Philip, hanged against a pillar in Phrygia; James the Less, thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and beaten to death down below; Bartholomew, flayed alive; Andrew, bound to a cross where he preached to his persecutors till he died; Thomas, run through by a spear in India; Jude, shot to death with arrows; Barnabas, stoned to death by Jews in Salonica; and Paul, beheaded at Rome by Nero. Even more incredible is the fact that James and Jude, our Lord's own brothers, believed that He was God. You may for a time, be able to pull the wool over the eyes of those outside your own family, but certainly your own brothers would not swallow such an unbelievable claim unless there were unimpeachable reasons to do so.

Christ's personality had a tremendous impact upon these men. And after nearly two thousand years the impact is not at all spent. Daily there are people who have tremendous revolutionary experiences which they attribute to personal encounters with Jesus Christ.

The personality of Jesus, then, is without parallel. It is unique and incomparable. Wherever He is, He is the Master. When surrounded by hungry multitudes or by hating Pharisees, when questioned by clever theologians or besought by stricken sinners, whether examined by stupid disciples or by a Roman governor, He is the Master.

If God were robed in human flesh, then He would possess a personality that would have revolutionary impact, indeed, unique impact, upon His contemporaries. Like no other man in history, Jesus made that kind of unique and revolutionary impact.

If God were a man, we would expect supernatural acts.

If God were a man, not only would we expect His words to be the greatest ever spoken, and the impact of His personality to be unique, but we would also expect that His life would be characterized by wonderful deeds. We would expect Him to do the things that only God could do. Now obviously the very act of God becoming a man involves something supernatural. But if God became a man, it makes sense that He was going to convince men that He was indeed who He claimed to be, that men deserved to see Him do things that only God could do—namely miracles, suspensions of natural law. Everything about the life of Jesus Christ confronts us with the miraculous. At the outset of His ministry He appeared at a wedding feast and turned water into wine. He demonstrated His power over disease by healing the nobleman's son and the lame man at the pool of Bethsaida and many more. He fed 5000 people and said, "I am the bread of life." He walked on the water. He claimed to be the light of the world; then He healed a man who had been blind since birth. Once of His most startling claims was made to the despondent sister of Lazarus (Lazarus had been dead for four days) when He said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Then He said, "Lazarus, come forth," and the dead man came out of the tomb. Someone has noted it was a good thing Jesus called Lazarus by name or all the dead since the dawn of time would

have come forth. When Christ made these astounding claims, more than ordinary means were necessary to impress men with their truthfulness.

Now there's a funny kind of thinking going on today concerning miracles. It all started with a fellow by the name of Hume. Paradoxically, this may surprise you, Hume was an orthodox Christian. But, Hume said some things about miracles that have been used as an attack on miracles. Hume argued that miracles are the most improbable of all events. Ever since Hume's essay, it has been believed that historical statements about miracles are the most intrinsically improbable of all historical statements. Now, what then is the basis of probability? What makes a miracle a more probable or a less probable event? Hume says, and so do other secular critics today, that *probability rests upon what may be called the majority vote of our past experiences.* The more often a thing is known to happen, the more probable it is that it should happen again; and the less often, the less probable. He goes on to say, the majority vote of our past experience is firmly against miracles. There is in fact, "uniform experience" against miracles. A miracle is, therefore, the most improbable of all events. It is always more probable that the witnesses were lying or mistaken than that a miracle occurred.

Now here is the foolishness in Hume's whole argument. We must agree with Hume that if there is absolutely "uniform experience" against miracles, if they have *never* occurred, then there is no such thing as a miracle. But, that is exactly the point in question. Is there absolute uniform experience against miracles? We only know that the majority vote of past experience is against miracles if we know that all reports of miracles are false. And, we can know all the reports to be false *only* if we know already that miracles have never occurred. This is a circular argument. Let me repeat it again. The critic of miracles today says with Hume, "We know that all historical reports of miracles are false because miracles

never happen, and we know that miracles never happen because all historical reports of them are false." Get that? We know that miracles have never happened, because all reported instances of them are false, and we know that all reported instances of them are false (such as the Bible) because we know that miracles never happen.

Very frequently today we hear or get the impression that brilliant scholars, after examining all the evidence, have scientifically proven that miracles never happen. This is totally untrue. The rejection of the miraculous is not their conclusion; it is their starting point, their presupposition. It's interesting to note that as you study the literature of the first and second century, even some of the literature of the critics of Christianity grant the miracles. In fact, it was not until the 19th century that the major attacks against the miracles began when the omniscient modern critics got on the scene and began to look back 2,000 years and say miracles never happened. But, the attackers of the first century generally grant them. In *Jesus and His Story* by Ethelbert Stauffer, a professor of New Testament at the University of Erlangen—and not an evangelical scholar—cites the following: "In 95 A.D. Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus of Lydda speaks of Jesus' magic arts."{4} "In 100 A.D.—Jewish ritual denunciation—'Jesus practiced magic and led Israel astray.'"{5}

In the second century (according to F. F. Bruce) Celsus, a philosophic critic of Christianity, acknowledged his miracles but attributed them to sorcery.{6}

Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, also acknowledges the fact that Jesus performed miracles in his *Antiquities of the Jews.* A basic principle of evaluation of evidence states that when enemies agree on a common point, it may be regarded as certain that the point is commonly accepted. Stauffer states this with clarity in *Jesus and His Story*:

> The sharper the clash, the wider the gulf, the more vital does this alteration of testimony and counter-testimony become to the historical investigator. For if a confrontation of witnesses yields statements that agree on some points, then these points must represent facts accepted by both sides.{7}

In addition to the testimony of the secular historians, we have in the four gospel documents themselves, the personal testimony of hundreds of eyewitnesses that the miracles of Christ are true events. All of the evidence we have indicates that He is indeed God manifest in the flesh.

If God were a man, we would expect Him to be sinless and incomparably holy and divine.

Here lies, perhaps, one of the most convincing evidences for the deity of Christ. No man has ever lived such a noble, pure, and sinless life. Those who knew Him for three years, said "He was without sin."{8} The Roman centurion commented as Christ hung on the cross, "Surely, this was the Son of God."{9} Paul, the brilliant intellect of the first century, perceived, "He knew no sin."{10} Pilate called Him, "that just man," and said, "I find no fault in Him."{11} He Himself claimed to be sinless and challenged the religious leaders of His day to find fault in Him.{12}

There is no comparison between the person of Christ and the most saintly of the saints of the human race. To them confession of sin and painfully laborious efforts toward saintliness were daily fare. In fact, the closer they came to God, the more vivid became their consciousness of their sinfulness.

But Jesus never appears to us as One who struggled to obtain saintliness. He never felt the need to confess a sin, and yet He pointed out the sin in others and urged them to confess. Christ never admitted a need of repentance. We can't even

imagine Him dying the death of saintly Augustine of daily confession and repentance. Jesus possessed perfect sinlessness and purity, not by struggle, privation, asceticism, or pilgrimage. It was by His birth and nature.

The greatest saints of other religions are not even in the same category as Christ. Mohammed, for instance, was apparently a neurotic. Gandhi, whom many have acclaimed as the most saintly man of the century, does not even compare with Jesus Christ. Gandhi himself claimed that he didn't even know God and that the reason for it was his own sinfulness. He said, "It is a constant source of sorrow to me that I am so far separated from the one whom I know to be my very life and being; and it is my own wretchedness and sin that separates me from him."{13} How different this is from the words of Jesus, "I and the Father are one,"{14} or "He who has seen me has seen the Father,"{15} or even more direct, "All men should honour me, even as they honour the Father. He that does not honour me does not honour the Father which sent me."{16} Can you even imagine Calvin, Luther, Paul, or any other great saint making a claim such as this? Frankly, I cannot.

Jesus Christ is not a great man among great men. He is uniquely the greatest man of all history. His divine quality of life can be verified from the mouth of the atheist, infidel, and unbeliever, not to mention the enormous testimony from the Christian Church. Thinking men the world over who have examined the evidence will all agree that Jesus of Nazareth is the greatest personality of the centuries. He is the greatest teacher, leader, and influence for good in the history of the human race.

Rousseau, the French Deist said of him,

> If the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus were those of a God. Shall we say the Gospel history is mere invention. My friend, it is not such that men invent. And the facts concerning Socrates, of

> which no one entertains any doubt, are less attested than those concerning Jesus Christ.{17}

He goes on to say a little later that “the facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth are so striking, so amazing, so utterly inimitable, that the invention of them would be more astonishing than the hero.”{18}

Byron, the profligate poet, whose philosophy of life was eat, drink, and be merry said, “If ever a man were God, or God were man, Jesus was both.”{19}

Renan, the skeptic, Who wrote a classic life of Christ in which he tried to prove the myth of the Gospels, nevertheless concluded with this last line: “Whatever surprises the future may bring, one thing is certain, Jesus will never be surpassed.”{20}

When exiled on the lonely isle of St. Helena, the emperor Napoleon was once discussing Christ with General Bertrand, a faithful officer who had followed him into banishment and who did not believe in the deity of Jesus. Napoleon said,

> I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christianity and whatever other religions, the distance of infinity. Everything in Christ astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and His will confounds me. Between Him and whoever else in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. He is truly a being by Himself.{21}

If God were a man, we would expect Him to be sinless and incomparably Holy and Divine. We see that the hypothesis fits the facts of the life of Jesus Christ. Should we now conclude something other than Jesus is God? The Apostle John said, “No man has ever seen God, but the only begotten Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made Him known.”{22} Jesus is the

Divine Xerox of the invisible God. The Original is invisible, but His earthly Reproduction is visible for all to behold in the unprecedented life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Notes

1. Author unknown, although a portion of this essay is attributed to Dr. James Allan Francis.
2. Matt. 7:12.
3. Luke 9:24.
4. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 1959), p. 9.
5. Ibid., p. 10.
6. F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents; Are They Reliable?* (5th ed. rev.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), p. 68.
7. Stauffer, p.x.
8. 1 Pet. 2:22.
9. Matt. 27:54.
10. 2 Cor. 5:21.
11. Luke 23:14.
12. John 8:45-47; 10:37-39.
13. Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?* (Glendale, California: G.L. Publications, 1967).
14. John 10:30.
15. John 14:9.
16. John 5:23.
17. John Ballard, *The Miracles of Unbelief* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1908), p. 251.
18. Ibid.
19. Lord Byron.
20. Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (New York: Carolton Publishers, 1863).
21. Frank Mead, *Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations* (Westwood: Fleming H. Revelle, 1965), p. 56.
22. John 1:18.

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