

THERE IS such a thing as truth. If there were not we would have all killed each other long ago. If we live our lives failing to see truth or attempting to add falsehoods to it, we will be chronically discontent within the lie we have created for ourselves. No matter where a person may stand, to avoid such a state he or she must be willing to take a step of faith which will likely be entirely against his or her present nature. The person who sees life as nothing but countless differential shades of gray must accept there is an absolute. The person who assuredly lives his life according to countless convictions of infallible right and wrong and justice and condemnation must accept that the majority of his convictions are most likely mistaken. If I can never take the particular step applicable to my own position, I will never know God. I cannot find God in a place where I am so fascinated with human intellect that I cannot recognize the truth when it stares me in the face, and I cannot find him in a place which is so confidently stuffed with my own naïve and relentless doctrines that I have no room for him.



THE SPIRIT of God is his Breath, a gentle wind, and the wind blows where it pleases in whatever way it desires. A seed carried by the wind does not argue with the air about where it lofts it nor where it lay it to rest. The seed only knows that wherever it lands its purpose is to become a tree stretching its limbs heavenward in a revelation of God's glory.

If I see life only in black and white terms defined by my countless convictions I may accomplish a great number of things but they will not be creative, alive, and spontaneous with the Spirit of God. I may accomplish a number of things that are morally acceptable and even grand in scale, but they will be lifeless and stale because they originated in the sterility of my own pride and prejudice.

On the other hand if I see life only in disorienting differential shades of gray then I may excel at debate and playing the Devil's Advocate and I may impress all my friends, but between all my ranting of possibilities and theoreticals I will never utter a simple yes or no. I may even rightly believe I am extraordinarily intelligent and open-minded and a wonderful example of what a post-modern thinking person should be, but I will never accomplish anything worthwhile because I have no conviction to stir my resolve and plant my feet. The truth is that I am most likely a coward and I have no backbone and I am taking up oxygen better saved for somebody who will make a difference in the world.

I must have enough freedom of movement that the Spirit may carry me aloft to wherever it pleases, and I must have enough conviction in my heart that I may stand and deliver what I was intended to be. It does me absolutely no good to make a rock of myself and spend my years buried immobile in the inertia of my prideful stubbornness, but neither does it do me any good to make of myself a piece of chaff that spends its days in aimless wandering until it decomposes.



TO KNOW answers to my questions about the nature of life I need to understand they will be my answers to my questions for my life, and I need to know this is all that is possible for me to find and it is quite enough for me to find. To know these things I must know myself, to know myself I must know God, to know God I must seek God, to seek God I must start with faith, and to start with faith I must make a leap.

In short this leap is to embrace a paradox that tells us life is simple and complex, and since it calls us to paradox the leap of faith to seek God is a leap for all men. This is as it should and must be, for without faith it is impossible to please God and God calls all men by nature to please him and he would not call us to some thing we cannot do. It requires us to accept that life is awesomely deep and disorientingly gray, literally swimming in a myriad of questions to which we must shrug and say we do not and cannot know. It also requires us to accept that life is so simple that if we see it rightly we will intuit the clear and meaningful answer to every question man has ever asked. It is a limitless well, of a depth which cannot be plumbed by the most brilliantly lived human life, and yet so simple it can be completely revealed in a single uttered sentence, a single gesture, or a single expression of a human face. It is at once the unfathomable depth beyond all men's minds, and the tiny, laughing answer that any toddler knows. It is a limitless depth, simply constrained.

The leap we must make is to believe that the ultimate questions of life are answerable, that they rest only in God, and that we may genuinely know him. But only time and circumstance will tell if and when each of us will make the necessary ascent to realize such an idea is personally relevant. The person who says he can make the ascent occur in other people before they are ready for it does not know what he's talking about.



JESUS OF Nazareth must have been an absolutely extraordinary human being. John, looking back over several decades of thoughtful maturation, an analysis of Jesus' life, and the impact it was having upon the known world, began his gospel by noting, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh..."

The English "Word" here is translated from John's Greek *logos* (*logos*), and this translation is unfortunate because it tends to obscure the enormity of what the author may have been conveying in his choice of vocabulary. In John's day *logos* generally could have and likely would have implied a message uttered to convey a concept or a reasoning. But more importantly, *logos* was a term coined by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus some five hundred years before John. Although he never formally defined the term, to Heraclitus the *logos* was essentially what we might today call a formula, or set of rules, which governs all of life.

Although of course we cannot be sure of what John was thinking as he penned *logos*, the rest of his introductory material seems to support both the general usage and that of Heraclitus. If so, then John's view of Jesus goes something like this: In the beginning, there was a formula, and that formula was with God, and God was the formula, and the

formula became flesh in a man known as Jesus. As we also include the more general usage of logos, we find Jesus as a message; an utterance of the formula, spoken in the language of a human life.

In the view of John, if we want to know the mystery behind the formula to which all of creation is subject, if we want to understand how life truly works, we can look to the life of this man Jesus as being a message which expressed the formula. Ascending to this view of Jesus is absolutely necessary to an understanding of the fullness, depth, strength, and beauty of genuine Christianity.

Therefore, if we as Christians instead view Jesus only in the dismally shallow methods of our religious doctrines, we understand only a minority of the importance of Jesus' life. We prefer only to focus upon whatever pieces of his teaching (or their interpretations) make our lives happier, and upon his death and the reward it gives us. We completely, wholly ignore the deeper Christian claim that Jesus was the very utterance of the underlying nature of reality. We continue to believe that following Jesus is about living moral or accommodating lives, rather than about becoming authentic people who live authentic lives.

The importance of this to the non-Christian is simply that Christianity is far more conceptually deep and respectable than nominal Christianity makes it out to be. The message seen in the life of Jesus is valid and applicable with respect to every human life, and in this sense has profound relevance to all of us irrespective of religious belief.

And so, to try to grasp what kind of human being Jesus must have been, we need to sit and muse for a while upon a handful of Greek words John spoke about Jesus. We must try to imagine one man spending some forty years contemplating another, and then concluding not that he was a man who merely understood the way life works, but rather that he was a man whose human life, as he lived and breathed and died, was a sublimely uttered message demonstrating life's fundamental reality. And this is the message that can set us free.



AT ITS heart, Christianity is not a religion, but a path. It lies in the message and meaning of a single, solitary life. It has been said and written over and over again for two thousand years that to live a Christian life one must do only a single thing, which is to continually focus upon Jesus. The problem with this idea is that it often results in Jesus becoming something akin to a Hollywood celebrity or political candidate. Television and radio and churches all over the country are filled with voices repeating, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus" in just the proper accent and with a culturally prescribed polish and inflection. Mention to an average man on the street that all he need do in life is to keep his eyes upon Jesus, and most likely he will begin to hear the echoes of television evangelists repeating the name of "JE-uh-zus" over and over again, usually followed by the promise that JE-uh-zus can save anybody – especially if he or she mails a check of gratitude on Monday morning. Jesus becomes so frequently seen in this light that, in

practicality, his depth is entirely lost. In the worst of cases, our views of him become the object of clumsy and childish late night television parody – and sometimes rightfully so.

Of course Christians are usually sincere in our beliefs, but when we share in these superficial Jesus images, on Sunday mornings watching a charismatic and well dressed minister stand before us and talk of JE-uh-zus and perhaps the gospel of prosperity, what should we honestly expect? When we adorn our luxury cars with bumper stickers that in their own parody ask, “Got Jesus?” as if the message were something to be likened even humorously to a product that comes from cows, is it not understandable that profundity is not in the air?

Our shortcoming is that in our minds the only way we can stay focused upon Jesus is to safely and idealistically objectify him like we do everything else in our lives; as far as we are concerned, to focus means to objectify. We consider Jesus with the same part of our humanity that we reserve for other paramount things such as boyfriends and girlfriends, favorite sports teams, Americana, and patriotism. Fatuous love, baseball, apple pie, democracy, and Jesus. This may make us good American women and men, but it is not sufficient to approach a message regarding the fundamental reality of Life Itself. Reducing Christianity to such a level should embarrass us, shame us, and bring us to weep.



YESTERDAY I sat upon one of the swings on your school playground, waiting to pick you up at the end of the day. When you came out to meet me, you wanted to take time to show me around the playground. It was a nice few minutes that we spent together as we walked from one play apparatus to another. You explained each one with great earnestness – which ones you avoided, and which were your favorites. I could tell how happy you were in those few minutes – how relaxed you felt with only the two of us there, and how proud you were to show me a little world that is known to you far better than it is to me. You are only six years old, just starting the first grade, and you already have a world that is more yours than mine.

And that is really the fulcrum of it, I think, although you understand not why. For now this morning, as I have dropped you off for another day, I am keenly aware of the magic of childhood. I see today that the meaning of life rests hidden, comically and teasingly, behind the translucent tears and laughter of little children. If we adults can take time to observe children on a school playground, and place other concerns of the morning aside for a few meditative minutes, we can begin to know this is true. And after the school bell rings and the children flow inside to their assigned seats behind closed doors, we can walk alone amidst the playground now empty and silent, where the joyful music of their voices lingers in the air to waft gently around us – like a field of butterflies returning from the summers of our youth.

On this playground today, the yellow hooded cup perched upon its steely stilts and accessible only by ladder will most likely be a recess playhouse for you – sitting shy and unaccompanied within it. I can imagine your tender presence there, as I can my own

from long ago. On a playground thousands of miles away and many years ago, this cup would have been my Apollo capsule, a hundred thousand miles from Earth and for some heroic reason piloted solo in my imagination; for I too was shy and often alone. And the sand around my feet which today finds its way unbidden and unwelcome atop my business shoes would have been the material of a hundred castles and caves sized just so for my little toys and larger dreams. The threats of litter I see within it today, waiting as if with sinister intent to slice or pierce my skin and infect me with microbes possibly lethal, would have been grand bonuses when I was a child; free little toys of metal and glass inexplicably left behind by adults who did not know their value. Thirty years ago this little playground of steel and sand would have been to me a place without boundary; a place of everywhere I could want to go, a place of being anybody I wanted to be. It would have been a virtual world, to become every dream a child could ever dream.

This playground is a place of life in all its simple perfection. It is a place of real life, vibrant and magical and safe; and in my heart today, in this moment, like the children I feel this life. I am moved near to tears because I can feel its essence lingering here from all the little hearts and minds departed only minutes ago. I feel as though I am walking in slow motion—floating almost—through a hope and innocence so tangible I can hold out my hands and feel them upon my skin. I was once made of them. But not so much anymore.

What has transpired through all the years to get me from a long ago then of childhood, to a present now of adulthood? Did the separation begin for me behind walls of brick like these in front of me today, in classrooms remembered only by scents of mint paste and janitor's wax? Is the same sort of division growing now within you as you sit properly in your seat, raising your hand on cue, and learning the sanctioned way to place serifs upon your ABC's?

My day is just beginning. I offer these questions to that which I know as God, and turn my thoughts to the office that awaits me.



WE WERE children once. We were children, and by nature we worshipped God with our gaiety, our hope and innocence, our openness and honesty, and our innate belief that all others were just as hopeful and innocent, just as open and honest, just as loving, and just as lovable as ourselves. We were beautiful then. We were perfect. We did not know anything about doctrines of God, but we knew everything of living in his kingdom, for it belonged to us.

What happened to us between then and now, among other things, is that we began to believe we were smart and clever. We became fascinated, and then obsessed, with ourselves. We discovered pride, and we found in it great pleasures. To use the truth underlying story, something told us we could know right and wrong as well and completely as God does, and we believed it, and we picked and ate of things deadly. From that metaphorical moment in our lives onward to the present day, we have been

hiding from God—not in the lush vegetation of an ancient and perfect garden—but in the dark labyrinth of our own minds.

We have grown up under the guidance and supervision of a worldview all too far removed from childhood. We have been pressed and formed and packaged into people whose perception of all things, and thinking about everything, are selfish, proud, arrogant, and complacent. We have forgotten that we were children once. We have refused to return to the kingdom. We have forgotten how frail we are.

This is true not just for us as individuals, but also for us collectively as human beings formed into societies and cultures. The importance of this cannot be overestimated and we must not let it be ignored, for now we find ourselves at the end of one human era and in the beginning of another. Few of us know how to articulate it yet, nor even that we need to do so, but the modern age has gone away. It became acutely ill in the twentieth century, and if it is not yet dead, the mourners have at least gathered in preparation for what is soon to come.

This is not to say that the best of all possible choices would be to welcome a post-modern age so ecstatically that we cannot wait to gather up all vestiges of modernity and throw them out with the trash. Many are trying to do just this, but it is not wise, it is not feasible, and efforts to do so will end in disaster. But also and certainly, the worst thing we could do would be to bury our heads in the sand pretending the modern age has not died after all, and cursing the liberal evils of a post-modern age all the while. The arrival of the post-modern age offers us something far too valuable to waste; an opportunity many generations before us found impossible to envisage. The modern age was, with great exceptions but never the less on the whole, one of human pride, arrogance and complacency in the face of God, and in it was born the nominal religion most of know and follow. But today, on the playground of life, spirituality and religion, we have the chance to begin anew.

We are at the foundation of a new way of the masses seeing God and human, and such a chance does not come along often. We have before us the chance to help shape spiritual and religious thought for generations to come—not for all of the generations to come, as the modernist might have assumed, but for at least a few of them. This is the great blessing of opportunity given to our generation, and it is a task that is ours for the taking—if we are able to do so courageously, resolutely, wisely, and most of all humbly.

To do so, we will first have to decide for ourselves what we will continue to cling to, and to what we will bid a farewell. If we meet our responsibility well, we will cling to eternal truths and discard decaying beliefs—beliefs decaying precisely because they were falsehoods constructed of our pride, prejudice, and ignorance. We will cling less meticulously to our religious factions, and turn more fully to God. For Christians like myself, we will present the message and eternal truths of a God story ancient and grand, and do so with relevance for today—and at least a few tomorrows. If, that is, we can find honest ways to believe the story ourselves and if, like children, we can forsake the darkness.



OF JESUS we know very little, but we know enough. We know the message of his life was one of utmost simplicity and tremendous depth. We know that what we are called to do is love; to love God, to love our neighbors, and to love our selves. There is nothing more basic than this; it is the simple constraint.

But to understand this fully, to love well, and to love well in all circumstances, our love cannot be something we do because we feel like doing it at the moment, or because we decide it is a good idea, or because philosophically it seems like a good way to live. And certainly, necessarily being a true and universal love, it cannot be simply what you or I define love to be. Therefore, more importantly, more essentially, and more finally, we are called to become the love that is God. We are called to become this love and, since by its nature it is boundless, we are called to a path of endless becoming which never ceases to deliver us further and further into the limitless depth of the reality of life.

The love we are called to manifest and become, become and manifest, is a love so numbingly profound and so far beyond all other things in beauty, that on behalf of people the world ignores, we may well die as innocent persons, in poverty and ridicule and pain, at the hands of hate-filled, prideful, ignorant men. This is what the formula knows can happen, and this is what the message proved does happen.



ALL ROADS to God merge in the end, joining the singular path of true compassion. Any road which does not lead to this compassion does not lead to God. Until we come close enough to God that we feel compassion within us the way Jesus felt compassion within himself, we will never really understand the Jesus story. We will never really understand why Jesus lived the way he lived, and we will never really understand why he died the way he died.



TRUE COMPASSION requires and nurtures a depth within us, a profound unearthly depth which comes from God and God alone, but it also requires a simplicity that allows compassion alone to be enough for us, and that stops our intellect from questioning the decency of everyone and everything around us. Compassion is the determinant of all that is truly moral and selfless, but a prideful human morality and the selfishness of man strive every moment of every day to hold compassion in contempt—to belittle and control and limit it. Therefore, if we want to be compassionate people, if we want to have the heart of God, at some point in our lives we have to draw a line in the sand, surrender many things, make a stand, and say with all our resolve, this is where I will live and die. We have to make up our minds that our own lives do not matter at all, that we will be satisfied with a strange and foreign depth of being which most people will never comprehend, and that we will never care nor notice if everyone around us thinks we are foolish, stupid, idealistic or demented. We have to deeply believe, and will eventually come to know, that what the world and our friends call living is nothing of

the sort, and that we live a different kind of life that is hidden from the world behind the shadows of everyday living.

In other words, if we want to live in God, we have to die to ourselves and to the rest of the world. We have to cast away our false life in order to gain true life.

Religion always tells us this, but it rarely understands what it is saying.