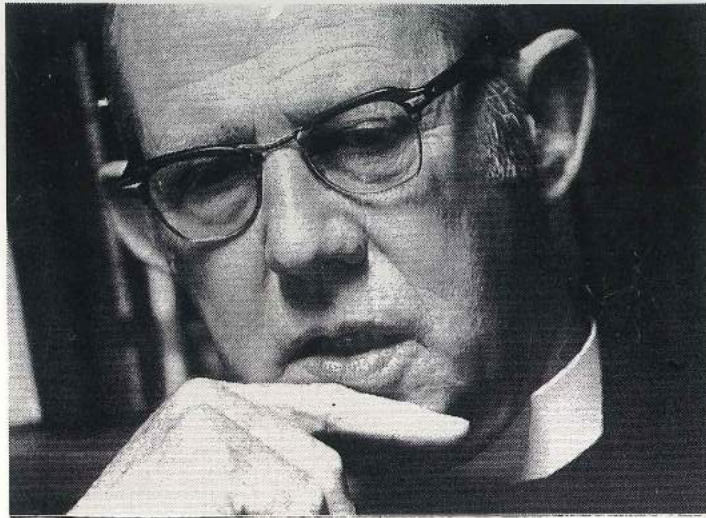


## About the Author



The Free Lance-Star - Barry Fitzgerald Photo

When Thomas Green Faulkner, Jr., retired in 1976 as rector of St. George's Episcopal Church in Fredericksburg, Virginia, he avowed in a newspaper feature story interview that his next task would be to write a book.\* "It would be mainly written to leave as a heritage to my children," he said at the time. The subject would be the profound changes that were evolving in religious theology in his 50 years as a social worker, teacher, minister, historian and philosopher. At that time, the Rev. Mr. Faulkner said the realization had thrust itself upon him that man had created God in his own image and characterized the deity in terms of might and power. Through his studies and search for truth, he concluded that a true Christian is a social worker laboring in the spirit of Christ.

This manuscript, taking almost 20 years of research, writing and rewriting, is the result of the Rev. Mr. Faulkner's evolving theology that correlates scientific truths with Christian beliefs, and his determination to explain the belief that every church should be a missionary station reaching out to the community.

\*The Free Lance-Star, January 31, 1976.

# Gospel for the 21st Century

*... into all the truth* - JOHN 16:13

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**An innovative historical and scientific religious treatise, offering a provocative new direction that will prove helpful in this God-given, God-directed world of the future.**

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**THOMAS G. FAULKNER, JR.**

*If a man does not  
keep pace with his  
companions, perhaps it  
is because he hears  
a different drummer.  
Let him step to the  
music he hears,  
however measured  
or far away.*

— Henry David Thoreau  
*American writer and philosopher*  
(1817-1862)

# **Gospel** for the 21st Century

THOMAS G. FAULKNER, JR.

*For St. George's Library  
From Mary Faulkner*

*Summer 2004*

A PRIVATE PRINTING

*First Edition*

THOMAS G. FAULKNER, JR.  
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Second Printing, December 1996

## *Dedication*

*To my children ...*

THOMAS G. FAULKNER, III

JOHN H. FAULKNER

ANN FAULKNER RIDGEWAY

*and to my wife ...*

MARY HAMPTON BARTENSTEIN FAULKNER  
who has encouraged me  
to publish this treatise.

## ... Contents ...

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*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you ... — John 13:34.*

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Foreword ... 7

Preface ... 11

### *Part One*

Spiritual Autobiography ... 13

### *Part Two*

The Treatise ... 31

*Twelve Chapters or Areas  
for Consideration.*

Epilogue ... 85

*The Future of the Church*

Endnotes .....93

Bibliography .....95

## *Foreword*

**T**he word "Gospel" has traditionally come to mean "glad tidings" or "good news." Persons who respond to the life of Christ with a revelation of joy and new understanding of God have an interpretation of the Gospel to reveal. I realize this treatise may sometimes contradict orthodox Christian teachings. However, as I viewed it in retrospect over five decades of tenure as an orthodox ordained Episcopal priest, I felt compelled to put my thoughts on paper. I find comfort in realizing that God has always allowed humans the opportunity to question the meaning of his existence and their relationship to him. The simple fact that there exists today, and throughout history, a multitude of diverse religions and ideologies will attest to this. Furthermore, it would seem that since God allows societies of dissimilar cultures to conceptualize beliefs which they find fulfilling, he would certainly expect them to continue to search for the true meaning of their relationship to him. This meaning, being hidden by God's supreme insight and intelligence, may never be fully revealed.

Still, I sense that he favors the search for it to continue under the guidance of the Holy Spirit which John 16 tells us was given to guide us into all the truth (John 16:13). The word "truth" as used here speaks to the reality that only God is ultimately the Truth. The Bible and the ongoing history of God's people to the present day is a story of the continuing revelation of God to his chosen people. What I have written here is Truth for me. I know some aspects of the revelation are radical, even heretical, in the orthodox sense. My writings here express a real sense of finally letting God be God to me and others and escaping the human tendency to interpret God in our own image. However, I am fully and humbly confident that God for my children, their generation, and future generations will continue to unfold for them the mysteries of himself and



his universe. I am just as confident that God's nature, as all of us from time immemorial have begun to understand it, will never change. I know this because I have experienced God's love and forgiveness in my heart, body and soul in my own life.

My study of history and philosophy at the University of Virginia prompted me to question the liberal theology of the early 1930s. This was followed by written depictions of my own life of Christ under Dr. W. E. Rollins at the Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria. My introduction to Neo-Orthodoxy came under Dr. Albert T. Mollegen, under whom I wrote my Senior thesis, *Sin and the Spirit in the Pauline Epistles*.

Through all these experiences Jesus's words of warning about trying "to pour new wine into old wineskins" (Mark 2:22) kept haunting me. During the integration struggle of the 1950s and '60s, while trying to hold to the basic tenets of orthodoxy, I found myself being gradually compelled unconsciously to pour the new wine of Jesus into the *new wineskins of the Spirit of Truth* as promised by Jesus in John 16:13. Having thus been led into this modern scientific age, I found a need to write this treatise. It is written, first of all, for my own children, and then for any who may find it helpful, in this God-given, God-directed present day and age.

Since my family began to edit this book a number of years ago, a subtle realization occurred to me. This book could provide us the opportunity to illustrate how God continues to reach out to each of us from generation to generation. Therefore, I decided to open up "my" book to my family and use my writings as a vehicle to encourage us all to seek God more in our everyday lives. The result has been a broadening and enriching of my original work with original material contributed from the lives of other members of my family. One example of this transition was my decision to ask my son Tom to write a chapter on his vision of the Church of the future as he is experiencing that future in his own life. Other examples are the stories told to illustrate the points of some of the chapters of this book. These stories were written by my wife

and my children and provide witness to the rich movement of the Spirit that is taking place in our world, even during these very trying and frightening times. I hope that this collaborative writing model will encourage other families and extended families and communities to delve similarly into their own experiences with God. By so doing, we shall all better hear God's still small voice calling us into closer relationship with him.

I feel called to apologize to the reader for my sole use of the masculine gender when referencing God. After my first draft, I recognized my error, but when I attempted to revise the book specifically to neutralize this gender reference, my writings became too stilted. I can only assert that my concept of a compassionate, forgiving God inevitably involves a God who is both masculine and feminine, simultaneously and separately.

As a final word, I express my appreciation to the late Dr. Moultrie Guerry and to the late Rev. William Parkinson for their understanding help and encouragement; to my sons, Thomas G. Faulkner, III and John H. Faulkner, and to my daughter Ann F. Ridgeway, for editing and adding some additional thoughts; and to my cousin Mrs. William Harrison Faulkner for typing the original material which had been dictated to tapes. Most importantly, I owe much of the development of my spiritual life to my lifetime love and faithful partner in Christ, my wife, Mary Hampton Bartenstein Faulkner. Her life of service and love to our family and to others has been a major window through which God's love and forgiveness have been revealed to me. It is clearly her determination and editorial assistance which have finally resulted in the publication of this treatise.

—Tom Faulkner  
Fredericksburg, Virginia  
May 1996

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## Preface

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*Seek the truth, come whence it may, cost what it will.*

— DR. WILLIAM SPARROW  
Professor of Theology, 1841-1874,  
Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Virginia

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**T**he institutional church and its theologians tried to keep Galileo and Copernicus from declaring their astronomical theories. For this reason, the purpose of this book is to take away the shackles that theology has placed upon the operation of the Holy Spirit and allow it to lead us into all truth by incorporating scientific truth into what has been held to be sacred or second century biblical knowledge.

*Part One* of this book depicts the spiritual autobiography of the author. The intent is to give the reader a better understanding of what led the author to re-examine the basic tenets of the Christian faith and gain new insights about each of them.

*Part Two* is a treatise covering the following areas:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Creation.   | 8. Life under God's Grace.                                  |
| 2. Evolution and the Doctrine of Man<br>Including the Fall.  | 9. The Church.  |
| 3. The Presence of Evil in the World.                        | 10. The Ascension.  |
| 4. God's Relationship to Mankind<br>Before and After Christ. | 11. Pentecost.  |
| 5. The Eternal Atonement.                                    | 12. The Christian Ministry.                                 |
| 6. The Cross<br>(God's Unconditional Love).                  | And also the <i>Epilogue</i> :<br>The Future of the Church. |
| 7. The Resurrection of Jesus.                                |   |

**Part One**

*Spiritual  
Autobiography*



## Chapter One

## EARLY YEARS

---

*... Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children,  
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

— MATTHEW 18:3.

---

WE ARE FIRST SPIRITUAL BEINGS. Each of our lives is nothing more or less than a spiritual journey toward communion with the heart of the selflessly loving, all-forgiving God. Each moment that the Christ in us touches the Christ in another, we move a step closer to our journey's end.

My journey started in Greensboro, North Carolina. I was born in 1908, the son of an Episcopal clergyman, the Rev. Thomas Green Faulkner, and Elizabeth Walker Terrell Faulkner. I grew up in a position of some privilege, although we were relatively poor financially. In that day, our position of privilege was established through our extended family. My grandfather was a lawyer in Boydton, Virginia. His name was Charles James Faulkner. He was married to Lucy Harrison, a descendant of William Henry Harrison. Grandfather Faulkner was a leading layman in the Episcopal church in Boydton. My grandmother was a gentle, caring person who spent a good deal of time working with inmates of a county alms house through a ministry sponsored by a nearby Episcopal chapel. My grandfather on my mother's side was named Dr. Charles James Terrell. He was a small, tough, proud man who was a medical doctor in Hanover and Louisa Counties in Virginia. He had been a respected senior officer in the Confederate Army. After the war, he was forced to give up his East View plantation which he had inherited, and live in one of his tenant houses. I remember his attempting to give me boxing lessons, when I

was in my teens. I refused. I was afraid of him. One memorable story about Grandfather Terrell was that at the age of 85 he knocked down a tramp whom he heard insulting my mother. My grandmother on my mother's side was Betty Trevillian Anderson. I did not get to know her because she was in poor health by the time I was born.

Five years after I was born, my family moved to Richmond, Virginia, where my father became Assistant Rector of Holy Trinity Church. After four years, he was called to be the rector of St. Paul's Church in Salem, Virginia, where we lived for six years. My brother, Donald, was born while we were in Salem. Since we were twelve years apart, he and I did not spend much time together in our growing up years. This situation changed significantly after we both came into adulthood. We then moved to Chatham, Virginia, where my father became Rector of Emmanuel Episcopal Church and teacher of Bible at the Chatham Episcopal Institute. We stayed in Chatham through my first two years at the University of Virginia.

My memories of my early years are happy memories, times of fishing with my father and taking long walks with him in the afternoon. My relationship with my mother, Elizabeth Walker Terrell, a nurse by profession, was not as close. She tended to be the disciplinarian of the family with my father being the more forgiving, affectionate parent. My happiest memories were the times I spent with the Faulkners in Boydton. I spent one month each summer there. Our family would come to Boydton for Christmas each year. My early memories of those Christmases are unquestionably my most vivid.

Each Christmas morning began with family prayers in the library. Only after prayers could we approach the Christmas tree to open presents. We then had a sumptuous breakfast. After breakfast, the entire family went to church. On returning home, we had a light lunch. In the afternoon, the family took long walks together. Christmas dinner was served as the evening meal. I remember the seven o'clock meal as the

culinary highlight of the year. After dinner, the family gathered again for prayers. Family prayers were held in the morning and evening every day of the year. One story told of my grandfather was that when he once learned that his law office was burning down, he first had his personal prayers before he went to the scene of the fire! Christmas Day concluded with the family shooting off Roman candles from the front porch. My grandfather always retained the privilege of firing the first one.

Even as I depict this idyllic version of the reality of my youth, I now recognize that simultaneously there existed another reality far from idyllic. Grandfather Terrell's earlier economic success on his plantation was made on the backs of numerous slaves whom he owned before the Civil War. I remember African-Americans stepping off the boardwalk out of "respect for me" when they saw me, the grandson of Charles James Faulkner, in Boydton. My last memory of each Christmas day in Boydton was looking out the window at Pink, the cook, and Mr. Holloway, her husband, leaving for home in their wagon at 10 or 11 at night. We called the African-American man "Mr. Holloway" in jest. No African-American was then addressed as "Mr." The Holloways' lantern hung by the wagon seat. I can still see the light from the lantern slowly fading into the night. Although at the time I never gave it a thought, the Holloways had sacrificed all of their Christmas day to make ours special and fun. Now they were headed home with no time for their own families to celebrate Christmas. My family had an African-American maid in Chatham who came each day before breakfast, helped Mother with the housework and meals and then went home after supper that evening. She got off only on Thursday and Sunday afternoons. She was paid three dollars a week. I remember that my parents did not permit me to play with the African-American children from my neighborhood. It remains amazing to me that I unconsciously participated in this unjust social system for years. It was not until many years later that God touched my heart through his African-American people and in the process changed my life.

## Chapter Two

## GROWING UP

---

*And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still, small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.*

— 1 KINGS 19:11-13.

---

LOOKING BACK ON MY LIFE, I feel very fortunate to have spent much of my youth in one setting, that being Chatham, Virginia. I played on the high school basketball and baseball teams and had many close friends. It was always understood that I would go to college at the University of Virginia. My uncle taught German there.

Midway through my years as an undergraduate, an incident took place that deeply affected me later in life. My father was practicing a vital ministry in Chatham as Rector of Emmanuel Episcopal Church. He also received compensation for teaching Bible at the Chatham Episcopal Institute. His work as a teacher directly benefited his ministry in that the students walked to Emmanuel Church for the eleven o'clock service each Sunday.

Unbeknown to my father, Bishop Thompson began a strategy to replace him with the Rev. Edmund Lee, a person he was wooing to become the new Headmaster of the Institute, which was renamed Chatham Hall. Bishop Thompson first encouraged the Institute to hire a woman to replace my father as the school's Bible teacher. He assigned my father to some rural parishes in the area to make up for the lost income. He

then promised the Rev. Edmund Lee not only the Headmaster position but also the rectorship of Emmanuel Church. When the Rev. Mr. Lee accepted the offer, the Bishop told my father that he needed to transfer him to Blackstone and provide him some additional parishes there to supplement his income. My father had no choice but to accept the Bishop's offer.

On the last Sunday evening that my father preached at Emmanuel Church, all of the churches in Chatham closed to honor his ministry and to attend his final service. My father carefully shielded his family from the pain he experienced during this period. It was years later before I finally understood the injustice that had been committed.

I graduated from the University of Virginia with a BA degree in History in 1930. This was a foreboding time with the Great Depression just around the corner. Through the influence of my uncle, who was professor of Germanic languages at the University, I was offered a position to teach German, French and Mathematics at Woodberry Forest Preparatory School, in Madison County, Virginia. I was also placed in charge of the tennis program and coached football and basketball in the lower grades. In 1933 Woodberry Forest was forced to reduce its staff and I was laid off as one of the last to have been hired. Up to that time in my life, I had fought a sense of a call to enter the ministry. The realization of my father's unhappy experience with the institutional church had made me fight the call even harder. However, the circumstances surrounding my situation at the time forced me to deal with the issue. I went to see Bishop St. George Tucker of the Diocese of Virginia and he encouraged me to go to Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia, and see how the ministry might fit for me. I accepted his advice and enrolled in the seminary.

In my first year of study there, I was required to write my own "Life of Christ" under the tutelage of Dr. Wallace E. Rollins. This was an experience which had a profound influence on my life. For an entire term, I lived and breathed every word and act ever attributed to Jesus. My faith, up to that

moment based on intellectual understanding, became a visceral, dominant, inherent part of me.

During my first summer, I decided to attend the Episcopal School of Social Work in Cincinnati, Ohio. The experience convinced me that the course of study at the Seminary was more and more irrelevant to the suffering world which I came to know in Cincinnati. As a result, after completing the Fall term, I dropped out of seminary and returned home. Soon after my return, a family friend who was supervisor with the National Emergency Relief Administration offered me a job as a caseworker in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. Within a year of my employment, I was confronted with my second disillusioning experience with institutions. Our office received instructions from Washington to transfer all able-bodied federal relief recipients to U. S. Soil Conservation Service jobs, which I did. A few days later, my supervisor called me in for a conference. He told me that he had received written instructions countermanding the instructions to transfer people to Soil Conservation jobs. Three times I asked him to show me the directive. He refused. I recognized that he was trying to use his authority to force me to reverse the transfers. He realized that if all of his caseworkers followed my example, he, as well as other social workers, would possibly be out of a job. I told him that since he was not able to produce the countermanding instructions, I had no choice but to resign. I walked out of his office never to return. My idealistic view of social work had been quickly undermined by a supervisor who placed his and his employees' job security over the need of getting persons off of relief.

I was left in confusion about my future. In desperation, I went to talk to my high school principal who encouraged me to return to the Seminary. I discussed the situation with Bishop Tucker and returned to the Seminary with his full support. To encourage me even more, Bishop Tucker offered me the opportunity to conduct services on alternate Sundays at Emmanuel Church in Rapidan and All Saints Chapel at Mitchell in Culpeper County, Virginia. I threw myself into an

augmented course of study and was able to pass my canonical examinations a year later and be ordained Deacon in 1937. I was made deacon-in-charge of the Rapidan and Mitchell churches. The churches allowed me to be in residence at the Seminary during the following winter so I could finish my course work and complete my senior thesis on *Sin and Spirit in the Pauline Epistles* under the direction of Dr. Albert T. Mollegen. I received my Master of Divinity Degree from the Seminary in 1938 and in June was ordained to the Priesthood at Emmanuel Church, Rapidan. I then became rector not only of the churches in Rapidan and Mitchell but also of Christ Church in Brandy and St. Paul's Church in Raccoon Ford. After a rewarding and busy initial pastorate, I was called to be the rector of Trinity Church in Manassas, Virginia, in 1942. While there, I met a bright, attractive elementary school teacher named Mary Hampton Bartenstein who has been my wife for over fifty years. From the day we married, Mary and I began a team ministry.

From a spiritual standpoint, two particular incidents occurred in 1942 that would determine the direction of my ministry in the years to come. On the day before Thanksgiving, I stepped in front of an African-American lady as I entered the local post office. Suddenly, for the first time in my life, I realized what I was doing and stepped back and let her pass through the door first. She turned and thanked me. At that moment all of my unconscious conventional behavior of the past loomed up before me and I swore to myself that all persons entering the church of which I was rector should be treated exactly the same. Later that year, a blood drive was held in Manassas for those fighting the Axis powers in World War II. An African-American gentleman, who was the principal of the local all African-American Industrial Institute, quietly walked over to me and confided that it broke his heart that he was not permitted to give blood because of his race at the Red Cross blood donor center in my church's parish hall. He said he didn't have time to travel to Washington, D.C. where his blood would have been accepted. I never forgot that conversation.

### Chapter Three

## TIMES OF DECISION

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*And he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"  
And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."*

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— LUKE 9:20.

---

IN 1946, I ACCEPTED A CALL to be rector of St. George's Church in Fredericksburg, Virginia. This included the oversight of the Episcopal students at Mary Washington College until 1955, when this responsibility was transferred to Trinity Church. During my first eight years at St. George's we accomplished a great deal. We made extensive repairs and improvements to the church building. The church membership increased. My wife, Mary, began a youth program called "Young Peoples" that drew teenagers from all over the community. Nevertheless, the transforming moment of my life was yet to come.

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation of the races in public schools was unconstitutional in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case. Jackie Robinson became the first African-American to be made a member of a national all-white baseball team. The Fredericksburg Ministerial Association voted that the Church should follow suit by integrating the Association-sponsored Holy Week services which were held each year at St. George's. Since, for a number of years, the community had held integrated services on the World Day of Prayer at St. George's, I anticipated no trouble with the Association's decision. However, when I presented this decision to my Vestry on April 22 of that year, they became quite agitated and angry at my support of such a proposal.

Action was postponed until the May 7 Vestry meeting. I entered one of the loneliest, most fearful junctures in my ministry. I knew that only God could bring peace to the situation. I prayed and struggled to find the words to witness effectively to the lessons God had taught me with the help of a proud African-American woman at a post office over ten years earlier. At the May 7 meeting, I made a statement to the Vestry attempting to justify my actions. Among other things, I said:

"First of all, I want to say that I, too, as a Southerner am instilled with prejudices against the negro. I have been shocked when I have realized this on different occasions. However, as a Christian I know I am wrong and that I must rise above my prejudices and not let them control me, otherwise I would be declaring that Christ or God was wrong and I was right. I can not take such a position as that. As a Southerner, I know that I must forever fight not to let my attitude toward negroes control me, otherwise, I cannot call myself a Christian. This applies in general, but it especially applies to the fellowship of Christians as a congregation in God's House, where I believe Christ, my Lord and Saviour, opposes segregation in any form."

The Vestry's response to my appeal was to decide by unanimous vote to direct me to turn away any negro who would attempt to join the church, to make clear to possible negro visitors that they were not welcome, and to insure that no integrated services were ever held in St. George's Church. I was specifically directed not to report to the congregation any explanation of my part in the decision to desegregate the Holy Week services.

During this very lonely hour, I went to obtain counsel from my Bishop, Bishop Goodwin. He stated that he "went out on a limb" during Prohibition and that he strongly advised me to stay out of the fray. With shock and dismay, I realized that my professional future was clearly in jeopardy if I continued to be faithful to my beliefs.

Thanks to a group of women in the congregation, Vestry

elections held in January of 1955 resulted in the creation of a more open-minded Vestry, more sensitive to the issues I had attempted to present. As a result, I decided that it was now safe for me to defy the previous Vestry's directives. I wrote an open letter to the congregation in July of that year. I explained the basis for the action taken by the Ministerial Association concerning the Holy Week services. I also made it clear that the Canons of the Episcopal Church required me to accept negroes into the church and to minister to their needs.

On September 6, I wrote the Vestry a letter stating that the Canons of the Episcopal Church required me to minister to the needs of all who might join the church and that I had the authority under Canon Law to act on these principles independent of vestry directives attempting to counter such requirements. On September 8 by majority vote, the Vestry agreed to go along with my position. In the Spring of 1956, the Vestry extended an invitation to the Fredericksburg Ministerial Association to continue holding their Holy Week Services in St. George's Church.

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Chapter Four**LAST YEARS  
OF MINISTRY**

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*He said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."*

— JOHN 21:17.

---

MY WIFE AND I spent the next twenty years at St. George's, closing out our mutual ministry in 1976. The lessons God taught us through our African-American brothers and sisters continued to define the points of emphasis in our ministry together. Concern for the needs of others became a primary focus for the church. We helped the community initiate the Big Brothers and Big Sisters programs.

We supported the establishment of the Anne Hamrick Community House to provide assistance for low income African-American children in our community. We started a one-to-one ministry with the elderly at local nursing and adult homes. (This ecumenical ministry is now a licensed affiliate of the Dolphins of Delaware Valley in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, and is sponsored by the Fredericksburg Interfaith Community Council.) Teen dances called "Dragnets" were started every Friday night in the Family Room of the Church. Later these dances were rotated from church to church. When attendance grew too large, the churches and the community sponsored them in the Community Center and later in the Armory. A



Cardless Christmas program was developed, in which participants donated the amount of money they would have spent on cards and postage for local friends, to raise funds for a sister parish in the Philippines. When this program was terminated, we organized an interdenominational Cardless Christmas program to assist the United Givers Fund agencies which were in the greatest need after the annual campaign. Mary and I made our home a foster home for troubled teenagers to assist them in getting a better start in life.

In 1973 when St. George's Church employed an assistant rector, the Vestry at Christ Church, Spotsylvania, which had been without a full time rector for years, and had not had regular Sunday morning services, asked me to be their rector, also. With the consent of St. George's Vestry and the help of the assistant rector, I complied with their request. As a result, when I retired in 1976, the Diocese of Virginia appointed a Deacon to be Christ Church's first full time resident minister in many a year. This ministry added a positive note to my retirement period.

I retired in 1976. As I began to look back on my ministry encompassing over forty-five years, my first curiosity was naturally with the ongoing life of St. George's Church where I had spent thirty of those rewarding years. It is fascinating to me to watch now from afar as that community blossoms into an ever increasing array of ministries led primarily by the laity of that church. Recently a book\* highlighting some of the Episcopal churches which are considered national models for the ministry featured St. George's Church. The church's present rector, the Rev. Charles R. Sydnor, Jr., and the lay leaders of the church have now established a commission system led by the laity. One of the positive results of the system is that many of the functions formerly performed by the rector are now practiced successfully by the laity. In addition, through the system, lay ministry in the church has greatly expanded.

\**To Seek & To Serve*, Pages 36-52. (Forward Movement Publications, 1991.)

I also recognized the valuable role that my brother Don played in my family's life together. Don grew up and became an internist and lived much of his life in Norfolk, Virginia. Through him, my children were given window opportunities far beyond what my meager income could have afforded: special gifts at Christmas; retreats to Don's home and his cabana at Virginia Beach; and his faithful availability to my children during their college years and beyond. In his own life, he also exemplified a person constantly focused on the needs of others, particularly the elderly. More recently, Mary and I have had the opportunity to help carry him through some very rough times at the end of his professional life. Without question, my brother has played a significant part in my spiritual development.

Even as I contemplated these bright spots in my spiritual experiences, my own ongoing spiritual journey carried me down a different road. I began to question seriously some of the orthodox assumptions on which my Christian faith was founded. Why had it been so difficult for my parishioners to accept African-Americans as their brothers and sisters in Christ? Did the church's emphasis on salvation for tomorrow, and not for today, make us forget Christ's constant call: "...Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40) Why do we look to the institutional church and our other institutions for final moral authority when the true Christ rests in each of our hearts?

I had seen what corrupt institutions had done to my father and to others victimized by the Great Depression. I had experienced the fears and prejudices of people, including my own, and the dehumanization and destruction that could result from such feelings. As I struggled with these issues, I began to recognize that our Christian faith remained primarily a faith frozen in the decisions of early church councils, a faith made comfortable through its institutionalization under Emperor Constantine. Science and religion were considered to be at odds with each other. God's selfless, all-forgiving love was

overshadowed by a God of judgment and the law who set specific conditions on his love, who was thought to require that his Son be sacrificed before he would be appeased. My spiritual journey did not entirely fit with these beliefs.

Therefore, for the last twenty years, my spiritual journey has continued to track deeper into the heart of God. In the process, I have seen in the crucified Christ a window into the character and depth of God's love that I had never seen before. The following chapters are an attempt to outline the implications of some of these revelations for me.

## Part Two

# *The Treatise*

## Chapter One

## Creation

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*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ...  
and God saw that it was good.*

— GENESIS 1:1 & 12.

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**T**he good news is: In the beginning was unconditional love, and this love was with God, and this love was God. All things were made through this love, and without it was not anything made that was made (paraphrase of John 1:1-3). God loves his creation and all that he made is inherently worthwhile and good to him. It was God's love that created humankind in the image of God in order that God might have someone to care for his creation and be in relationship with him. As Matthew Fox says, we were created with the rest of the universe as God's original blessings.<sup>1</sup> Science tells us that we are probably not the only creatures with such capacities. We have learned that there are many solar systems, a number of which may have inhabitants made in God's image also. Even in this world, science has taught us that the dolphin's brain capacity possibly exceeds even our own. Who knows what we might learn of the ocean frontier in future generations?

In his recent work, *Religion Confronting Science*, showing the parallels between the biblical creation story and scientific theory, Dr. Donivan Bessinger states, "...we find in the scientific account of creation the majesty and mystery of the universe that underlies religious experience, and we come to be in touch with the 'cosmic religious feeling' expressed by Einstein."<sup>2</sup>

Science tells us how God created the world and the universe. It also tells us about the laws and systems which God

ordained for the operating and functioning of his creation. Indeed, it is still telling us more and more about this as it probes deeper into these matters. These findings, when authenticated and accepted as truth by science, are as much truth as anything theology has held to be the truth. Because of this fact, the truth of science about God's world may be said to be the result of the operation of God's spirit in the world just as much as so-called "sacred truth." For this reason, it seems only logical that we incorporate scientific truth into theology rather than setting it apart. Indeed, by incorporating it, we not only enhance the story of creation, but we also make creation even more wonderful and majestic, as the intricate process of how God created the world unfolds. By itself, the Genesis story lacks the majestic wonder of science's story. Furthermore, by incorporating the scientific story into theology, as the established way by which God created the world, once and for all time we stop this controversy between the scientific truth and the "sacred" or "revealed" truth. Both are truths because both are of God. It is ridiculous to separate them any longer as if science is of humanity and not also of God. If so, it would be as if the Holy Spirit leads us into the truth in a limited manner with no connection to the physical or material world.

To illustrate the point, I end this chapter with a recent rewrite of the creation story by my son Tom which for me enriches and validates the deep meaning of the original story:

*Before the beginning was God. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>3</sup> God said, "Let there be light." A tiny fireball exploded, growing and expanding into the infinite. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. This first day of creation spanned one hundred million years.*

*God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters." Billions of galaxies formed out of the fireball's explosion. God called the firmament Heaven. God saw that it was good. The second day covered an*

*incomprehensible expanse of nine billion years.*

*Each galaxy continued its development as a unique creation, each founded on the creative power and love of God. In one such galaxy called the Milky Way, God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." God called the planet Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. God saw that it was good. God looked with compassion on the planet Earth, and God said, "Let there be life." Single celled creatures multiplied on the Earth. Some cells began to produce oxygen. Large continents formed on the Earth as the waters receded. Eventually, other cells began to produce which depended on the oxygen emitted from the earlier cells. The third day reached across two billion years, less than a quarter of the time of the second day.*

*God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years." Amoebas were created, cells with nuclei. The miracle of sexual reproduction between cells came into being. Multicellular organisms were created. God said, "Let the Earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind." The first plants were formed. The miracle of photosynthesis was created, and the life forms of Earth learned to feed off of the energy of the sun. God saw that it was good. The fourth day was made up of another two billion years.*

*God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the Earth across the firmament of the heavens." At that time, an explosive creation of life forms began to occur. Jellyfish, sponges, and worms were the first creatures to be created. Amphibious life forms then came into being. Eventually, early dinosaurs began to roam the Earth. Finally, the*

first flowering plants were created. God saw that it was good. The fifth day shortened to a period of only six hundred million years.

God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the Earth, over every creeping thing that creeps upon the Earth." *Homo sapiens* were born, man and woman, evolving over thousands of years from apel/humans living on the Earth over four million years before. Humankind accepted God's covenant to be stewards of the Earth. God saw everything that had been made, and behold, it was very good. The sixth day concluded after only two hundred fifty-eight thousand years.

On the seventh day God finished the initial plans for creation and rested. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.<sup>4</sup>

## Chapter Two

# Evolution and the Doctrine of Man, Including the Fall

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*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me  
from this body of death?*

— ROMANS 7:24.

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**E**volution is the unfolding of the way in which God created human beings. A human being's physical body, we now know, evolved through various stages before it became the body as we now know it. In this development, it is interesting to note that the fetus evolves through all the stages of evolutionary development before it takes the form of a human body. In other words, the human body evolved out of the lower orders of physical life. Having evolved out of these orders, it is only natural that the human body should involve some of the stronger instincts and motivations of the lower orders of life. These instincts and motivations were once essential for the survival of the species. One of the strongest of these instincts was to avoid death; in other words, to look out for one's self, to be self-centered. Closely related to this primary instinct was the survival of the strongest at the expense of the weak. Thus it can be shown that one of man's strongest motivating forces is the tendency to be self-centered.

Although Saint Paul knew nothing of modern science, it is interesting to note that he believed the flesh of the human being

was the locus of the tendency to be self-centered. Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 7, verses 19-25, could be paraphrased as follows:

I want to live for others, but due to the innate physical tendency to live for myself, what I do not want is what I do. Now, if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who does it, but the innate self-centered tendency which dwells within me which does it. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, i.e., to live for others as God does for us, self-centeredness lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God (to live for others) in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of self-centeredness which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through his unconditional love for me in Jesus Christ our Lord. So that I live for others with my mind, but in my flesh or physical being I serve the law of self-centeredness (or for Paul, Sin).

It is interesting to note that flesh and sin or self-centeredness are equated in Romans 7:14-18; Romans 8:7-8; Romans 8:12-13; and Romans 9:8.

Knowing nothing of evolution, Paul attributed self-centeredness to an evil power, or "Sin" as he called it, which took up its abode in human flesh. As God placed his spirit in the human body, i.e., a spirit which had the predominant characteristic to live for others, a dichotomy or conflict was created. Humans then had a fleshly tendency to be self-centered as well as a higher nature to live for others rather than for themselves.

It is impossible to tell just when this dichotomy came into being. It is also impossible to say that at any given time the dichotomy did not exist and that human beings lived through a period in which the human body was not inhabited by both a higher and lower nature. According to the way in which we now know God created humans, there could never have been a time of "perfect innocence" from which mankind fell. Instead the conflict between mankind's serving themselves instead of

their Creator has always been in existence. God has attempted to show this dichotomy ever since he created men and women. The Holy Spirit has striven to demonstrate the manner in which humans can master their lower nature and become the persons that God intended them to be, members of human society living in God's own image; living for others rather than for themselves. In this connection, it is interesting to note that due to human intellect, a person is capable of developing even a lower nature than an animal if he refuses to accept the gift of his God-given higher nature.

Herein, both corporately and individually, is the root cause of most of what we call evil in the world. Though some evil in the world is unexplainable, much of what we call evil can be shown to be directly related to self-centeredness. Strife, war, social crimes, meanness, and in some instances emotional problems, mental illness, and even physical illness, can be attributed to humankind's tendency to be self-centered.

My son John is a Physician Assistant working in a rural clinic in North Carolina. He related to me the following story which illustrates so beautifully the reality of humankind's tendency to be self-centered, and more importantly, our capacity to rise above such tendencies by faith. The tragic story also depicts a missed opportunity to permit divine grace to wash over past wrongs and provide a peaceful, loving end to a courageous fellow earthly traveler:

*Few expressions of self-centeredness have been more troubling to me than an incident I once observed in a nursing home. A noble lady's life was ending. A series of strokes, serious infections, and other complications had left her in a wretched state with no hope of recovery. She was unable to swallow. Consequently, a feeding tube was placed in her stomach to stave off starvation and dehydration. Her inability to get out of bed caused bed sores. She had lost all control of her bladder and bowels. When medicines fought off one lung infection, another would appear.*

*Her lungs became so damaged that simply taking a breath took great effort. This patient's condition was officially labeled as "vegetative," but she did respond to painful stimuli. The doctors sadly acknowledged her ability to feel the pain and discomfort of her condition.*

*In answer to everyone's prayers, this brave lady finally did slip into a coma. Her face showed the peacefulness that appears as such patients approach an inevitable death. The family was called so they could be with their mother during her final hours. Each of several sons and daughters gathered to talk, pray, and rejoice about her admirable existence. A lasting sense of peace and contentment came over the entire group.*

*Abruptly, a late arriving youngest daughter burst into the room demanding a conference with the physician in charge. She began wailing loudly, screaming that her mother was not ready to die. She demanded that her mother be sent immediately to an emergency room twenty miles away. Unfortunately, her abrasive insistence won over the other family members. The patient was put through additional procedures and discomfort only to finally die 48 hours later.*

*The nursing home staff discovered later that the demanding daughter had led a life of drug abuse and prostitution. This had brought great suffering to her mother. Family members blamed the daughter for her mother's declining health. The daughter had even caused her mother to fall into poverty by stealing from her to support her drug habit. It now seems clear why this one daughter was so insistent on sending her mother out to an emergency room. Her self-centeredness led her to do whatever she could to delay her mother's death, thereby delaying her own personal feelings of guilt and failure. So long as her mother was still alive, she did not have to be left alone with the realization that she had directly contributed to her mother's death.*

### Chapter Three

## Presence of Evil in the World

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*For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.*

— MARK 7.21.

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**W**hy is evil present in the world? Although there will always be a certain amount of mystery attached to any answer to this question, for the most part I do not believe that much so-called "evil" can rightly be called evil. There is so-called evil resulting from natural phenomena. Much of this could be avoided if people did not choose to use their freedom to take the chances that they are free to take. No persons have to live, for example, next to a river that is likely to flood, but they are free to do so. Is it then evil when they place themselves in a spot where a flood is more likely to occur? Is it evil that since they place themselves there, a flood wipes them out? They were free to choose a place that would not flood, yet they chose to live near the river. We do not have to drive cars on the highways. Are car accidents evil? How can God be held responsible for the "evil" flood or car accident if we, using our God-given freedom, put ourselves in harm's way?



What of the evil of the physical world, such as sickness, birth defects, and physical disabilities? Why does one person live to be 40 and die of a heart attack, while another lives to be 100 in good health? God created the world in this way. He seems to have done it deliberately that we might be co-partners in perfecting God's creation. Certainly, as the discovery of penicillin illustrates, the means for perfecting it are built into creation as we discover them and use them properly. Why God made the world as it is will probably always remain a mystery. In view of God's suffering love, we can believe that these seeming defects are certainly not the result of mankind's so-called "Fall" in Genesis. That is too simple an explanation. We instead must continue to learn how God has organized his universe by living sensitively and learning how to live totally dependent on God's love.

I have not mentioned the shortening of life through abuse, such as drug addiction. If we choose to misuse our bodies, this is not God's fault. This leads to a short discussion of the most widespread form of evil, moral evil. By moral evil I am referring to the breaking of those moral laws such as "Thou shalt do no murder." The basic cause of moral evil is the self-centered tendency with which we are all born. This tendency is part of the physical nature which in the animal kingdom was good and essential for survival. Mankind is a race of spiritual as well as physical beings. In a very real sense mankind is still in the process of being perfected. We never fell from any perfect state. Being both physical and spiritual has always been the locus of the conflict between our higher selfless nature and the self-centeredness of our fleshly nature. This conflict has continued since human beings first set foot on this earth and continues today. The difficulty in perfecting our nature lies in the fact that we have been blaming our misbehavior on outside evil forces, rather than acknowledging that a human being resides in an animal body. Had we been more quick to see this, we might be nearer to being the persons that God created us to be.

It is interesting to note that although we have accepted the

facts of evolution, we have continued to make "original sin" the reason for our wrongdoing, rather than accept the fact that we are spiritual beings working to perfect ourselves in bodies with remnants of animalistic urges and instincts still present in our makeup. We thus continue to depend on mythology and metaphysics instead of science to explain our failure to be the persons God created us to be.

As stated in Chapter Two, Saint Paul made our flesh the locus of Sin in us. In his epistles flesh and Sin are synonymous. Paul presented Sin as an evil power residing in us causing us to yield to our carnal nature. Thus Jesus, the fully inspirited person, was for Paul the perfect person because he had overcome the power of Sin in his flesh, rather than succumbing to it. In reality, however, if a person attains some degree of being Christ-like, he or she has not been victorious over some evil power, but instead has with God's help subdued the self-centered tendency in his or her physical nature. Therefore, instead of telling persons to stop being sinners, we should tell them to stop succumbing to the self-centered tendency of their physical being and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit to live for others as the persons God created them to be.

## Chapter Four

## God's Relationship to Man Before and After Christ

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*O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. I made known to them in thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*

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— JOHN 17:25-26.

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**B**efore Jesus Christ came upon the scene of history, God's relationship to humans, for the most part, was based on humanity's own idea of relationships. This is due to the simple fact that until Jesus, all of God's attempts to reveal his true nature were interpreted on the basis of humanity's own understanding of association. Simply expressed, this association was as follows: A says to B, "I'll have no harmonious relationship with you unless you conform to my standards and norms. If you do not conform to them, our relationship cannot be harmonious."

Following this same line of thought, the writers of Exodus and Deuteronomy have Yahweh (Hebrew God) making the Ten Commandments given to Moses the basis of Yahweh's relationship to humans. "Keep my commandments and I'll bless you; break my commandments, and I'll punish you," saith Yahweh (Exodus 20:4-7 and Deuteronomy 11:26-29).

On the other hand, in other books of the Old Testament, it appears that Yahweh through human writers is trying to correct

the Exodus understanding of his relationship to humans. Thus it is in Hosea we find Yahweh's relationship to humans equated with the prophet's forgiving of his unfaithful wife and taking her back into a full marital relationship. Likewise, in the Psalm 23, we find the Good Shepherd's risking his life for all his sheep synonymous to Yahweh's relationship to humans. Other psalms depict Yahweh in the same light. Then there is Yahweh, as the suffering Servant in Isaiah 52, suffering rather than requiring conformity to his will. In these writings and in other places in the Old Testament, Yahweh appears to be trying to show humans that his relationship to them is not based on their idea of relationship or on his Law, but on his unconditional love for them.

Before continuing our analysis of Yahweh's relationship to humans as found in the Bible, if we are to assume that this understanding of God's relationship to humans is correct, does this make the moral laws which have grown out of the Ten Commandment's tradition obsolete? It does not, by any means. The moral laws which teach humans how to live in peace and harmony with each other and God are as much a part of the moral structure of the universe for humans as the physical laws of nature are part of the universe's physical structure. Neither can be broken by humans without their suffering. At all times humans are free to keep them or break them. In either case, in his unconditional love for them, God not only is with them in their suffering, but he is also empathetically suffering with them as he strives to enable them not to break the moral and physical laws of the universe. Humans are free to keep or break the God-ordained laws of the universe in full knowledge of the consequences.

Having completed this diversion, let us now continue our main theme. When all of Yahweh's efforts to reveal his true relationship to humans failed, he brought forth Jesus to be the very enfleshment of his unconditional love in order that henceforth and forevermore human beings, once and for all time, might know that his true relationship with them was not based on his Law, but on his unconditional love for them.

In view of this fact, when Jesus came upon the scene of history and began living out Yahweh's unconditional love for all humans, regardless of who they were, or of what they had done, even John the Baptist, who had proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah, could not understand Jesus' words or actions. Being steeped in the idea that Yahweh's relationship to humans was based on Yahweh's laws, John was so perplexed by Jesus' establishing friendship with the worst sinners, even dining with them, that he sent his disciples to ask Jesus whether he was the Messiah or should they look for another. (Luke 7:19.)

The revelation in Jesus that God loves us just as we are, without any demands, was too much for John the Baptist to comprehend. That we need not conform to his will in order to receive his love was too difficult for John the Baptist to accept. It has continued to be beyond human comprehension even today.

The fact that the all-perfect, all-powerful God loves us in spite of our lack of love for him and for others, even to the point of his suffering in Jesus the pangs of physical death on the cross, rather than not love and forgive us, is too far detached from our own concept of a loving relationship. We are unable to understand fully this primary theological premise. Instead, we revert to our own idea of relationships by setting up norms with which we and others must conform in order to receive God's love and blessing.

When God in Jesus says to the prostitute, "Neither do I condemn thee; Go and sin no more" (John 8: 11), this concept of God is beyond humanity's comprehension. Even though we make much of Jesus' parables of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7), and the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), we still have not thought through these truths to the ultimate verity. The repentance alluded to in each is simply what repentance for Jesus always was: a recognition by a person that he or she as a child of God always has been under God's love.

I would like to illustrate this point with an exegesis or study of the parable of the prodigal son. First, we see a

complete contradiction in the character of God's relationship with humankind as expressed in this parable as compared to the myth of Adam and Eve's supposed fall from grace. At no time is there any change by the father in his relationship with his wayward prodigal son. When the prodigal son forsakes his father, takes his inheritance and departs to another country to waste it all in a state of debauchery, the father's relationship with the son never changes. The son is always his son. It matters not how far the son digresses, the father loves his son just the same.

As soon as the son comes to himself, he realizes that his father's love for him has never changed. He is always his son and his father loves him exactly the same. Because of this, there is nothing that the son need do or say on his return to his father. You cannot lose what you never lost to begin with. The trouble with human beings is that they forget that God's love for them always exists. It does not have to be earned or proven.

God's love is free and forever flowing with no strings attached. It only requires that each of us believe this and come to accept our place in God's family, a place that has already been assigned to us. As in the prodigal son parable, the Father's love for us never changes. We are always his children, in spite of all the suffering and heartache we cause him. The Father loves us just the same, and is continually awaiting the time when we will come to ourselves, recognize our true identity and return home. That the Almighty God would have such a love seems too incomprehensible for humanity to accept. Mankind, it seems, would rather live under the burden of rules, regulations, and laws to which no one can truly conform, rather than enjoy the freedom which comes from living under, in, and through the unconditional love of God as revealed in Jesus.

As great and wonderful a person as Saint Paul was, he was so steeped in the idea of God's relationship to humans based on humans' own idea of relationships, that he could not enjoy the complete freedom of life under God's love. Paul could not separate himself from the entanglements of human

relationships in order to become more attuned to God's offered relationship. Paul continually tried to pour the new wine of Jesus into the old wineskin of the past. He reverted to the old idea of a relationship with Yahweh in which Yahweh, as in most religions until Jesus, seemed to demand a perfect sacrifice on humanity's part to be in complete harmony with him. The cross was intended to reveal the depth of God's love for mankind. God in all of his omnipotence and unconditional love suffered in Jesus the pangs of physical death rather than destroy Jesus' crucifiers. Instead, Paul clouded the meaning. The crucifixion was declared to be the consummate offering required under the older image of God's relationship. With his continuation of this old concept, Paul encouraged an ongoing misinterpretation of the true meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Consequently, for two thousand years, the true revelation that Jesus intended to instill in the world has remained obscure.

The teaching that Jesus' crucifixion was a once and for all time sacrificial act on his part is wrong. God's suffering through Jesus on the cross is as real and current today as it was almost two thousand years ago. We are prone to accept God's free grace without remembering that our unloving acts not only cause suffering to others, but also give pain to God. The doctrine of salvation by faith, rather than by works, also makes us forget the eternal suffering our unloving acts bring upon God, who in his righteousness and love endures the suffering in order that we might be saved by faith. The end result of this is that since works cannot save us, we feel no deep compulsion to be more loving. The once accepted teaching that God, who is Love, could not suffer, is an outgrowth of the above thinking. Many people still prefer to think that this is true.

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross did not bridge any gap between God and humankind. The gap never existed. The cross was simply a means for humans to find a way into the very heart of God. In the cross the innermost nature of God was revealed once and for all time to humans. Most doctrines of the atonement are attempts to explain a situation that never

existed. Hell is only the state of every person who in his or her ignorance rejects God's love. Heaven is that state of the prodigal son when he comes to himself and returns home.

## Chapter Five

# The Eternal Atonement

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*And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them;  
for they know not what they do."*

— LUKE 23:34.

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Christ's cross was a "window" into the very heart of the eternal God. Through the cross God revealed that he has always suffered rather than not forgive. In view of this fact, there never could have been a time when God, from his side, was ever separated from humans. God never intended for any demands to be placed upon humanity in order that humanity might receive his love, with all of its blessings, manifested through God's enfleshment in Christ. Since humans' understanding of relationship had been based on one person's relationship to another, rather than on God's perfect relationship to all people, humans had always been unable to understand the true nature of God's love. Jesus revealed through his life, death and resurrection that the chief characteristic of God was freely given unconditional love. This love is given without requirement or threat. On the cross, we see the Almighty God, himself in Jesus, suffering the excruciating agony of crucifixion and physical death, rather than using his power to destroy his crucifiers. Ironically, it was a misinterpretation of God's love that caused the crucifixion, and even today, it is an ongoing misinterpretation that continues to mislead us.

Since we can never love God or others as God loves us, the cross shows us that the only way we can be certain of our

continual fellowship with God is to live as sinners constantly being forgiven. We should forever see ourselves as perpetual crucifiers of a love that persistently forgives. We pray "Lord have mercy on me, a sinner." And from the cross comes God's reply, "I forgive you."

This is the Christian way of life. Living it, we are saved from any exalted opinion of ourselves. Yet, at the same time, knowing we are in fellowship with God, we partake of that inner peace that nothing on this earth can take from us. Tasting of this, we know that whatever position or prestige we gain in life will always be less than that which we already have in the assurance of our fellowship with God. Our reason for being is based on showing forth our thankfulness to God for his love for us in Christ.

As we Christians lead a life of continual thankfulness to God for his resolute forgiveness of our sins and his love for each of us, we become aware of several significant facts. By living a life of thanksgiving we are freed from any form of inconsistency in that we have assurances of attaining the highest station of any person, namely fellowship with God. We can now find relief from all the restraints and struggles which usually afflict us. Being thus appeased, we are now able to do whatever work we have to do in comfort and serenity, having no concern for our worldly reward.

Hopefully, many of us can remember specific experiences of realizing the power of a life lived out in constant thankfulness to God. My son Tom's spiritual rebirth occurred at a service of Holy Communion at St. Stephen's of the Incarnation in Washington, D.C., in 1967. It was his experience of the reality of a spiritual life focused on constant renewal through a life of thanksgiving that led him into his life work in community development:

*In the Spring of 1967, I joined a group of University of Virginia students on a long weekend trip to Washington, D.C., to visit St. Stephen's of the Incarnation Episcopal Church. The rector, Father Bill Wendt, had caused a stir in the early sixties when he*

*declared that St. Stephen's needed to open its doors to the residents of the surrounding neighborhood. Since most of the neighbors were African-Americans and the church members were primarily white Virginia suburbanites, the proposal split the church. About two thirds of the members went back to the suburbs never to return. The remnant congregation initiated an aggressive set of outreach programs to encourage the residents of the neighborhood to become involved with the church. As a result, the church became one of the most vital Episcopal congregations in the United States.*

*The character of St. Stephen's ministries went to the heart of the opportunities and problems that the neighborhood posed to the church. They set up Power House, a home for homeless people whom no other organization was willing to take. After every Sunday service the church members, their neighbors, and the homeless sat down to the table together to share a common meal. Eventually, the church gave up the land around their church building so that affordable elderly housing could be built for the neighborhood's older residents.*

*However, it was not the ministries of the church that made the deepest impression on me that weekend. Rather, it was the Holy Communion service held on Sunday morning. Father Wendt stood before the congregation behind a beautiful free standing altar with a huge eight foot high cross hanging over the altar from the ceiling. Colorful homemade banners hung from the rafters around the congregation. Mama Scott, an elderly African-American woman, played soulfully on her guitar to the left of the altar. People of different colors and nationalities, some financially secure, others living on the street, stood praying together. During the intercessory prayer, individuals called out all around the congregation thanksgivings, regrets, hopes, failures, sins, and petitions.*

*The moment came for the bread and wine to be*

*blessed. The bread had been made by one of the members of the congregation. As Father Wendt held the bread and wine aloft in commencing the blessing, there was an electric realization that all of our petitions, sins, hopes, and lives were being simultaneously, mystically blessed, cleansed and made new again. As I partook of the bread and the wine that day, I experienced a sense of cleansing and rebirth that I knew was being shared corporately by the people around me. Looking back, I recognize that Sunday experience as a major turning point in my life. I had momentarily experienced a window into the actual presence of God's kingdom on this earth.*

## Chapter Six

# The Cross

(God's Unconditional Love)

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*But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat upon his breast, saying*

*"God, be merciful to me a sinner."*

— LUKE 18:13.

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**T**he cross exemplifies the true substance of God's eternal love for humankind. To understand this fully we should view the cross from two perspectives. The first perspective is the suffering love that God is willing to endure to the point of a painful physical death in Jesus, resulting from mankind's sinful and unloving ways. Christ's crucifixion is the epitome of the suffering that our lack of love inflicts on both God and other men and women. As we view the cross from this perspective, not only do we see the awfulness of our lack of love, but we also behold the separation both from God and other persons that such a lack of love brings to us. This separation is a definition of Hell.

As we realize how ominous our sinfulness truly is, we become deeply burdened. Our cry goes out, "Lord have mercy upon me, a sinner!" It is then that we hear the words of Christ, in his love, constantly repeated, "I forgive you."

At this point, the second perspective of viewing the cross is revealed. We now realize that no amount of suffering or pain, not even the very pangs of physical death itself, can stop



continual fellowship with God is to live as sinners constantly being forgiven. We should forever see ourselves as perpetual crucifiers of a love that persistently forgives. We pray "Lord have mercy on me, a sinner." And from the cross comes God's reply, "I forgive you."

This is the Christian way of life. Living it, we are saved from any exalted opinion of ourselves. Yet, at the same time, knowing we are in fellowship with God, we partake of that inner peace that nothing on this earth can take from us. Tasting of this, we know that whatever position or prestige we gain in life will always be less than that which we already have in the assurance of our fellowship with God. Our reason for being is based on showing forth our thankfulness to God for his love for us in Christ.

As we Christians lead a life of continual thankfulness to God for his resolute forgiveness of our sins and his love for each of us, we become aware of several significant facts. By living a life of thanksgiving we are freed from any form of inconsistency in that we have assurances of attaining the highest station of any person, namely fellowship with God. We can now find relief from all the restraints and struggles which usually afflict us. Being thus appeased, we are now able to do whatever work we have to do in comfort and serenity, having no concern for our worldly reward.

Hopefully, many of us can remember specific experiences of realizing the power of a life lived out in constant thankfulness to God. My son Tom's spiritual rebirth occurred at a service of Holy Communion at St. Stephen's of the Incarnation in Washington, D.C., in 1967. It was his experience of the reality of a spiritual life focused on constant renewal through a life of thanksgiving that led him into his life work in community development:

*In the Spring of 1967, I joined a group of University of Virginia students on a long weekend trip to Washington, D.C., to visit St. Stephen's of the Incarnation Episcopal Church. The rector, Father Bill Wendt, had caused a stir in the early sixties when he*

*declared that St. Stephen's needed to open its doors to the residents of the surrounding neighborhood. Since most of the neighbors were African-Americans and the church members were primarily white Virginia suburbanites, the proposal split the church. About two thirds of the members went back to the suburbs never to return. The remnant congregation initiated an aggressive set of outreach programs to encourage the residents of the neighborhood to become involved with the church. As a result, the church became one of the most vital Episcopal congregations in the United States.*

*The character of St. Stephen's ministries went to the heart of the opportunities and problems that the neighborhood posed to the church. They set up Power House, a home for homeless people whom no other organization was willing to take. After every Sunday service the church members, their neighbors, and the homeless sat down to the table together to share a common meal. Eventually, the church gave up the land around their church building so that affordable elderly housing could be built for the neighborhood's older residents.*

*However, it was not the ministries of the church that made the deepest impression on me that weekend. Rather, it was the Holy Communion service held on Sunday morning. Father Wendt stood before the congregation behind a beautiful free standing altar with a huge eight foot high cross hanging over the altar from the ceiling. Colorful homemade banners hung from the rafters around the congregation. Mama Scott, an elderly African-American woman, played soulfully on her guitar to the left of the altar. People of different colors and nationalities, some financially secure, others living on the street, stood praying together. During the intercessory prayer, individuals called out all around the congregation thanksgivings, regrets, hopes, failures, sins, and petitions.*

*The moment came for the bread and wine to be*

*blessed. The bread had been made by one of the members of the congregation. As Father Wendt held the bread and wine aloft in commencing the blessing, there was an electric realization that all of our petitions, sins, hopes, and lives were being simultaneously, mystically blessed, cleansed and made new again. As I partook of the bread and the wine that day, I experienced a sense of cleansing and rebirth that I knew was being shared corporately by the people around me. Looking back, I recognize that Sunday experience as a major turning point in my life. I had momentarily experienced a window into the actual presence of God's kingdom on this earth.*

## Chapter Six

# The Cross

(God's Unconditional Love)

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*But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat upon his breast, saying*  
*"God, be merciful to me a sinner."*

— LUKE 18:13.

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**T**he cross exemplifies the true substance of God's eternal love for humankind. To understand this fully we should view the cross from two perspectives. The first perspective is the suffering love that God is willing to endure to the point of a painful physical death in Jesus, resulting from mankind's sinful and unloving ways. Christ's crucifixion is the epitome of the suffering that our lack of love inflicts on both God and other men and women. As we view the cross from this perspective, not only do we see the awfulness of our lack of love, but we also behold the separation both from God and other persons that such a lack of love brings to us. This separation is a definition of Hell.

As we realize how ominous our sinfulness truly is, we become deeply burdened. Our cry goes out, "Lord have mercy upon me, a sinner!" It is then that we hear the words of Christ, in his love, constantly repeated, "I forgive you."

At this point, the second perspective of viewing the cross is revealed. We now realize that no amount of suffering or pain, not even the very pangs of physical death itself, can stop

God's love for us. God's love in Christ willingly suffers whatever mankind may inflict upon it, rather than not constantly be forgiving.

These two important perspectives give us a picture of how to conduct ourselves in order to be in constant fellowship with God. As we become aware of our separation from God, we at the same time realize that our separation lasts only as long as we permit it. We now know that we are provided this intimate alliance simply by sincerely desiring his fellowship. Once we truly desire this union with God, and once we truly deplore our separation from him, we are then no longer separated from him. Herein is the only manner in which the ultimate purpose of Christ's life on this planet is fulfilled. Here is the only way that Christians can live in peace with themselves and with God. A Christian should utilize these two perspectives of viewing the cross in order to live a life not as a sinner who has been forgiven, but as a sinner who is constantly seeking forgiveness and who is continually being forgiven.

To keep ourselves in the perpetual cycle of a sinner being continually forgiven is to live in harmony with both God and all men and women. In other words, to see ourselves standing at the foot of the cross as crucifiers of Christ who are in need of Christ's forgiveness, which is always flowing freely, is to live the Christian life and to partake of Heaven. We are given this opportunity to live in perfect fellowship with God, not tomorrow, but today.

The Rev. Robert Capon in his excellent book, *The Mystery of Christ*,<sup>1</sup> illustrates beautifully the difficulty we have accepting the character and breadth of God's all-forgiving love for us. His book is a series of theoretical counseling sessions that he has with people in various conditions of emotional need. He notes that the sessions are based on actual experiences that he has had with counselees. One of the counselees is named Mabel. She comes to Mr. Capon because she can not seem to get over the recent death of her husband. Her husband died suddenly of a heart attack while she was away at a conference. She blames herself for not being there and the doctors for

somehow being negligent in caring for her husband. After listening to her story, Mr. Capon responds to her in a manner totally consistent with his response to every other counselee in the book. He tries to help her focus on the fact that God loves her unconditionally and wants to forgive her unconditionally if she will only ask him. Mabel, as almost every other counselee in the book, has a terrible time comprehending such a love that is so contradictory to the conditional love that she typically has experienced as a human being. She leaves the session clearly touched, but still in a quandary about how to gain God's all-forgiving love for her which she needs so badly and to divorce herself from her human tendency toward guilt and condemnation of others.

There is one counselee in the book who is the exception. His name is George. He is in his mid-eighties. He had to place himself in a nursing home. He is often in pain and has lost much of his ability to move around. However, it is clear from his conversation with Mr. Capon that George is vitally alive. George attributes his enthusiasm for life to an incident thirty years earlier. At the time, he was unhappy with his job; his feet were beginning to show signs of crippling; and he had made two active suicide attempts. Nevertheless, one day he woke up... "and I was at peace...I just knew in that moment that I was acceptable to God and that I could accept myself — my whole life — even though I knew I really wasn't any different from what I had been."<sup>2</sup> George had initiated a step in faith in an all-forgiving, all-loving God who would hold him up for the rest of his earthly life and help him make the most of every moment.

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Chapter Seven

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The Resurrection of Jesus

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*... this Jesus ... you crucified ... But God raised him up ... and of that we are all witnesses.*

— ACTS 2:22-32.

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The awesome miracle of the resurrected Jesus was God's divine seal on Jesus' identity. Before his resurrection, Jesus' disciples had thought that he was the Messiah, God's anointed one, but with his death on the cross, uncertainty gripped their hearts. They wanted to believe, but doubt clouded their vision. In spite of all Jesus' forewarnings of his approaching crucifixion, they could not bring themselves to accept a suffering, dying Messiah.

Even though such a concept was in keeping with the love that Jesus had lived, that love which Jesus proclaimed and revealed in his life as the innermost nature of God's being and the basis of God's relationship to mankind, it was such a contradiction of the disciples' own conception of God's relationship to them that they found it difficult to accept. The disciples were immersed in the belief in a God whose chief characteristic was his power, which he would use to enforce his will on humans. Jesus' emphasis on God making himself powerless in his suffering love on the cross was inconceivable. A God whose love was not based on the keeping of his laws was inconceivable to them. It contradicted everything that the disciples had been taught about God before the coming of

Jesus. A God with a love that would allow himself in Jesus to suffer the pangs of death itself, rather than not love and forgive his crucifiers, was beyond comprehension. They failed to understand fully this love even as they watched the Crucifixion on Calvary's Hill.

In Christ, especially in his crucifixion, the disciples saw perfect love, but this made the darkness of their despair even darker. Perfect love, they thought, had been overcome by death and the powers of evil. The power of God, a God of righteousness and justice, in whom they had believed, had allowed the perfect love in Christ to be defeated by evil. Christ's crucifixion had indeed begun to destroy their faith in God. Evil, rather than God, ruled the universe, they felt. Such was the utter despair of Christ's disciples following his crucifixion. All was darkness, without the slightest ray of light; then dawned Easter morn!

Suddenly, that despair was transformed into the most complete joy that the world had ever witnessed. Humanity beheld the complete abandonment of every fear and doubt that had ever existed. The disciples shouted to those whom they had feared the most that Jesus was still alive. He truly was the Messiah. He was the Christ. He truly was God's anointed. The world now knew that God's relationship to humans was based on love. His love was not in keeping with the Old Testament God. God loved everyone, just the same, regardless of whether he or she kept his Law or not.

The realization of God's true nature which before the disciples were unable to comprehend and believe, they now believed fully and completely. By making the resurrection of Jesus a reality, God had restored the disciples' faith in him. Christ's every word and every deed were eternally true. God's suffering love, as seen on the cross, was stronger than death or any evil power. That love was inexpendable and everlasting. That love, just as Christ had taught, was the very innermost heart of God himself.

In view of this fact, let us, like the first disciples, cast aside all of those false conceptions of God's relationship to us, and

accept his love for us, in Christ, with all of its profound simplicity and wonder. Just as Jesus taught, there is now no fear that we need have.

God, in his love, makes all these benefits available to us, but since they flow from his love, to be conscious of them and to appropriate them, we must be conscious of our need for God's love and confirm our acceptance of it by seeking to show forth the same kind of love and concern to others and God's creation. Once we do this, all of the benefits of God's love are ours, including a life that is more abundant today and the assurance and certainty of being in communion with God at all times and in all places henceforth and forever more.

This is the Christian faith that turns despair into hope, sadness into joy, and death into life. Christ's resurrection is God's seal on the authenticity of this faith.

He is risen! Alleluia! The Lord is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

## Chapter Eight

# Life Under God's Grace

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*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you;  
not as the world gives do I give to you.*

*Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*

— JOHN 14:27.

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**L**ife under God's grace is a life in response to God's love as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. This life does not tell us to act in any specific way or to be any particular type of person. It simply holds up before us the suffering love of God revealed in Christ, and says to us, "Behold, the suffering the God of the firmament is willing to undergo and is continuing to undergo rather than not love and forgive us. Look at the cross, behold the depth of God's love for us. God, in his love, remains the same. He suffers at our hands rather than reject and destroy us. The God of the universe loves us that much."

As we comprehend this fact fully, we formulate and develop an unpretentious love for God. The deeper our perception of God's love for us, the more dominant, but yet at the same time subservient, will be our love in response. In a very real sense, we shall be clothed with God's righteousness according to the depth of our response to his love. A Christian's virtues are the by-products of his or her response to God's love. No one can say, "I am going to be humble," and be humble. True Christ-like humility is the by-product of a person's response to God's love for him or her in Christ. It is the God-given garment with which a person is clothed when he or she really reacts to God's love.

The same is true with all the other Christian virtues, including being as concerned for the poor as Christ was. A Christian's virtues and a person walking in God's holy ways are the end result of that person's reaction to God's love and are not the result of any effort on his or her own part. If we try to be Christians and walk in God's way, we shall fail. This was the way of the Old Testament. Before Christ it was impossible and it is just as impossible today. No one can ever become a Christian independently. Humans can only live the Christian life in their response to God's love.

As we behold the suffering our unloving deeds inflict on God, being a Christian becomes living in constant acceptance of the fact that we are sinners continually seeking God's mercy. The more we live in this manner, the more we react to God's suffering love for us in Christ. As Henri Nouwen states in his book, *Life of the Beloved*, Christian living is the product of our increasing realization that we are truly God's beloved.<sup>1</sup> As we develop in this relationship, Nouwen emphasizes that a number of radical changes will take place in our behavior. We shall spend more time praying to our Beloved and less time trying to be "relevant." We shall spend less time trying to be popular and more time responding to God's call in our hearts. Finally, we shall spend less time trying to dominate others and more time being servants to our Beloved, his creation and our fellow men and women, especially the poor in our midst.<sup>2</sup>

Those people who live out such a relationship with God tend to make a lasting impression on us. My son Tom related the following story of one such person who has become a spiritual mentor to him:

*Some people never die. Mr. J. Wilbur Walker is one of those people for me.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Walker's mother died when he was five years old. He showed up on the steps of a boarding school in Tuscaloosa, Alabama with thirty-five cents in his pocket. The school staff took him in. For the next six years, each week he worked in the fields three days and went to school for three days.*

*When he was nine, he said that he promised God and himself that "...if there was a public service I could provide, I would do it." In 1939, he became a public school teacher, spending his next thirty-three years in public education. During that time, he served as principal of a number of elementary and high schools in Greenville County, South Carolina. More importantly, he passionately spoke out for the rights and needs of the African-American children whom he served.*

*From the beginning of his teaching career, he became a key leader in helping to bridge the chasm of hatred and distrust that had built up between the white and African-American people of the community. He bravely spoke out against the unfairness of African-American children receiving only the used school books of white children. I'll never forget when he told me of one incident during those trying years. The Ku Klux Klan came after him and tried to hang him. He was left for dead in a ditch in the West Greenville community. Miraculously, he lived through that harrowing experience. Without hesitation, he continued his call for justice and equality for his students.*

*Partially due to Mr. Walker's efforts, the public schools of Greenville County were peacefully integrated in 1970. There was a cruel irony that grew out of this success. The newly integrated school administration "rewarded" Mr. Walker with a demotion in the public school system that eventually led to his resignation after a brief court battle.*

*Nevertheless, the Spirit within Mr. Walker would not be defeated. He picked himself up one more time and focused his energies on helping his neighbors make a better life for themselves. I met Mr. Walker at about this time. He was serving on the Neighborhood Advisory Committee when I accepted a job as Greenville's*



*Renewal and Development Administrator. From the very first time I met Mr. Walker, I instinctively held him in deep respect. His integrity and compassion were inherent in every word he spoke. He worked constantly to help his neighbors envision what their neighborhood could become and then he helped them put in place the projects and programs needed to realize that vision.*

*One memorable experience took place in 1981 when I was serving as Deputy Director of the Greenville Housing Authority. Mr. Walker walked into my office one day and told me that he wanted to start a beautification program in Fieldcrest Village, a 348-unit public housing development built in the forties. I told him that I was sorry, but that there were no funds available to carry out his plan. To my surprise, he said that he did not need any money; he would run the program himself at no cost to the Housing Authority. We were so impressed with his personal commitment that we agreed to permit him to move forward with his plans. During the next few weeks, he spent all of his time recruiting young people to work on the program and planning beautification projects with the Fieldcrest residents. Mr. Walker's incredible dedication led the Housing Authority to provide funds from our maintenance budget for landscaping materials. We also contributed funding designated for a vacant maintenance position to provide minimum wages to the kids he selected to do the landscaping work.*

*Mr. Walker called his program Operation New Broom. He spent as much time as he could encouraging his kids, teaching them about landscaping and keeping their community clean, and helping them to focus on doing better on their schoolwork. After a year of effort, Fieldcrest Village began to brighten with beds of colorful flowers, new shrubbery, and other plantings. His kids not only showed a great deal of pride in their*

*landscaping work, but also began to bring home report cards that indicated monumental academic improvement. By the end of the program, most of his kids qualified for the Honor Roll. In April of 1982, a ceremony was held to celebrate the achievements of Mr. Walker and his kids. The day before the ceremony, Mr. Walker had to be placed in the intensive care unit at the hospital due to the return of a heart condition that he struggled with all of his life. He begged his doctors to permit him to attend the celebration. I shall never forget the moment. Mr. Walker, barely able to move, sat humbly on the stage as his kids were celebrated and as they each came over to give him a hug or shake his hand. It was announced at the ceremony that through Mr. Walker's efforts, a scholarship fund was being created to assist students from Fieldcrest Village in going to college. I had forgotten about the scholarship fund until a few years ago, when I went to a conference and the first college graduate assisted with Mr. Walker's scholarship fund was introduced. It was another unforgettable moment.*

*During the next four years, Mr. Walker's health continued to deteriorate, but his spirit never wavered. You see, Mr. Walker still carried the dream of the Kingdom, a Godly vision of what life could be like in his community. He clearly saw what God wanted for his world. Mr. Walker lived in what was considered one of the more dangerous and poverty-stricken neighborhoods in Greenville. In the heart of the neighborhood was a ten-acre site of vacant land that had been cleared by the City years before. No one seemed to be able to come up with an adequate plan to build anything back on the land. Mr. Walker began to talk to his neighbors about the possibility of building a new subdivision of affordable single family homes on the property. His dream was to encourage the sons and daughters of the neighborhood*

residents to move back into the neighborhood as first-time homebuyers on the site. The City staff began to pick up with his dream and to develop a way to subsidize the housing construction and site improvements needed so that the dream could be realized.

On September 1, 1988, Walker Place was dedicated consisting of fourteen new homes housing sons and daughters of the West Greenville community. I remember Mr. Walker's calling me early that morning in distress because he had just learned that the subdivision was going to be named for him. He told me that he did not want the recognition and he did not know what to do. I understood what he was saying. Mr. Walker was simply living out a promise that he made to God when he was nine years old. In a life of dedication interspersed with defeats, Mr. Walker had become nothing less than an instrument of God's peace. Last year, Mr. Walker passed on, but his soul remains in my heart and in the hearts of many who were touched by his humble and sincere compassion.

## Chapter Nine

# The Church

*And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as had any need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people...*

— ACTS 2:43-47

The often quoted statement "History repeats itself," is not always an accurate statement. When it pertains to general trends in mankind's behavior, there is considerable truth in this old saying. If you penetrate our modern day veneer, you may find that our reactions as men and women have not changed to any great extent throughout history.

The earliest church in history was the church of Israel. That group of people thought they were to be the ones through whom God chose to reveal himself. To reveal his truth and his love to the world was their reason for being God's "chosen people." They had no other basis for considering themselves his chosen people. In and through them the world was to see and understand God and his love for mankind. As God so loved the world, they were to love the world and to give themselves in God's service to the world. This was the primary reason for Israel's existence. Israel truly was the first Church of God.

Throughout Israel's history her prophetic leaders were constantly reminding Israel of her reason for being, and trying to keep her from existing for herself, rather than for the world she was to save and serve. The Israelites, however, refused to heed the prophets and, instead, gloried in being God's chosen people. They refused to fulfill the primary purpose for which God had chosen them. Instead of living for the world, they lived for themselves. Instead of giving themselves for the sake of the world, they threw up barriers around themselves and cut themselves off from the world. They selfishly became so concerned with preserving themselves as God's chosen people that they forgot their true calling. Verna Dozier in her book, *The Dream of God*, sees the critical turning point for the people of Israel to be when Samuel hearkened to the call of the people to appoint a king over them, effectively rejecting God as their King. She calls this moment "the second great fall in human history." She states, "...God offered the chosen people a way of life that would testify to a new possibility for human life, absolute trust in God, but the chosen people said, no, we want to be like all the nations."<sup>1</sup>

Christ attempted to call Israel back to her true reason for existence. He modeled for them a life of total trust in God and total commitment to saving the world and serving others, a life that depicted God's dream for them. However, they were unfortunately still looking for a god on their terms who would wipe away their opponents and establish a kingdom in their land which could not be conquered. Jesus' total revelation of a "weak" God willing to love all persons unconditionally and forgive them was such a threat to their concept of their destiny that they rejected Jesus and sought his crucifixion.

The new Christian Church and its members made the revelation of God's unconditional, all-forgiving love in Christ its primary objective. But beginning with the baptism of Constantine, the church gradually, like Israel, began to forget its primary reason for being. The church began to concentrate more and more upon itself and the preservation of itself. It began to exist for itself, rather than for the world. Verna Dozier

calls this institutionalization and corruption of the church "...the third fall, the third time the people of God chose the kingdoms of this world instead of the kingdom of God." She notes that the movement that Jesus began with his disciples "...swept on in power until it could no longer live in the uncertainties of trusting God. It became an institution, one among many, even if one over many."<sup>2</sup>

The Reformation tried to stop this trend, much the same way as Israel's prophets had. Human nature being what it is, with the development of denominations and their interests in preserving and maintaining themselves, the Reformation really aided and abetted the trend it was seeking to change. As a result, today, if we are really truthful with ourselves, we discover that the average branch of the church in its conventional form exists much more for itself than for the world it's supposed to serve and save.

A quick look at the average congregation reveals this to be painfully true. What is the primary reason for our coming together on Sunday morning? Are we really primarily conscious of the fact that we are God's chosen people? Are we really aware that we are the body through which God desires to serve the world by revealing himself and his truth and his unconditional love to all men and women? Is the primary purpose of every organization and every activity and officer of the congregation to serve the world as part of God's chosen people? If it is not, then to survive as a branch of Christ's church in the world today, we must radically reorganize ourselves into the channel of God's love and forgiveness that God calls us to be.

Being members of the church in order to be better men and women is commendable, but if a congregation's primary objective is not to be better witnesses for God in the world, for the sake of the world, then that congregation has never really been a part of Christ's Church. Much the same as God called upon Israel, Christ is calling every branch of his church today to serve the world, rather than itself. "He that seeketh to save his life shall lose it, and he that loses his life for my sake and

the gospel, (i.e. for the good news of God's unconditional love for the world) shall find it" (Mark 8:35), applies to every congregation as well as to every individual Christian. A congregation that lives for itself and not for the world will die to itself.

Our Sunday worship should be a gathering together to give thanks and praise for the gifts that we have received in the past week, to confess our failures and to gain help and strength to go forth to be better channels of God's love in the coming week.

The "churches" today which tend to be focused primarily on serving others are seldom found within the institutional church. Rather, small loosely knit groups of caring Christians seem to be taking more of the lead to be Christ to the world. My son Tom shared with me one example of such a church taking shape in his community:

*A group of Christians have been coming together over the period of a year to learn to listen to God's call on their lives and to understand better what it means to be the church. They call themselves the Servant Leadership School. The group is made up of twelve persons and is intentionally inclusive with regard to sex, income, race, and institutional church affiliation. One woman in the group has felt a call from God to provide housing for recovering drug addicts. She personally has experienced the pain of drug addiction. She lost one son to a drug overdose and has another son in prison due to his drug addiction. As a neighborhood leader, she led her neighborhood to rid themselves of the largest cocaine ring in the community. In following her call, she learned of the Oxford House program. Oxford House is a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC, which rents single family homes to recovering drug addicts. The persons chosen to live in each home are organized as a democratic unit and must follow certain basic rules including: getting employed, paying their portion of the rent, staying off drugs and*

*alcohol, sharing in house responsibilities, and similar rules made by each house group.*

*At a Servant Leadership meeting, she shared her calling. Four persons felt they shared her call and decided to join her in forming a mission group to support her effort. Three weeks after her sense of call, she was surprised to learn that an Oxford House had been established in her community. The group is now expanding to include interested members of the local Oxford House as well as members of the institutional churches represented in the Servant Leadership School group. For example, one Bible study group of one of the churches became interested in the project after they heard of it while wrestling with their own sense of call from God after a two-year period of intense Bible study.*

*The Oxford House mission group is now meeting every couple of weeks for prayer and Bible study around the call they are experiencing. They are presently helping to start two more Oxford Houses in their community.*

*This "church" has no institutional and no hierarchical structure. God's call and the response to that call are the primary foundations of the "church." The institutional churches of the community have become secondary channels for needed resources and support. A marriage is being consummated between the recovering addicts and the community of faith. The heart of God is leading people to be born yet again.*

Chapter Ten

# The Ascension

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*And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.*

— JOHN 1:14.

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**T**ry as we may, we can never really understand and feel what another is experiencing until we have had a similar experience ourselves. Unless we have a similar experience, our concern and sympathy for the person involved cannot be the same as that of a person who has had a like experience. We, of course, can suffer vicariously with another person, but really to suffer with him and to feel what he feels, we must have had an experience similar to his. All the words in the world cannot supplant the understanding presence of a person whom we know has had an experience similar to the one we are undergoing. Herein lies the often overlooked significance of our ascended incarnate Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In the exaltation of Christ as Lord of Lords and King of Kings, we forget that he is still just as human as he is divine. We forget that in Jesus Christ, God the Almighty became a human, became one of us, a part of our humanity, in order to understand through actual experience the deepest feelings and thoughts of our human hearts, minds, and fleshly bodies.

Before God's incarnation, or enfleshment in the body of a human being, try as he might, even he could not know fully and completely what it was to be human. But now, because he dwelt among us as a human, we know that he knows the deepest feelings of our hearts and minds and bodies. In this sense, God is truly different from what he was before his incarnation or enfleshment in Jesus Christ. A new experience has been absorbed and has become a part of his being. He is no longer only God the Creator and ruler of the world; he is now God the Creator who has experienced to the fullest the very life of his creation. Our commemoration of Christ's ascension is a constant reminder of this fact. When, according to the mystical, figurative language of the Bible, Christ ascended to sit on the right hand of God, he took with him all of his human experience to be a constant part of God's being. Now, not only is God upon the throne, but God with the human understanding and experience of Jesus is also on the throne. The significance of this is tremendous.

No matter what happens to us in this life, whether the greatest agony or despair, no matter how severe the anguish or pain, we now know that God understands fully through his own bitter experience in Jesus Christ. Unlike the sympathy and concern of a friend who has never experienced what we are experiencing, God's sympathy and concern, we know, stems from his own heart-breaking experience as a human in Jesus Christ. In him we have an everlasting, inescapable, unexpendable friend who knows and understands whatever befalls us. The incarnate God in the ascended Christ assures us of this fact once and for all time. May we never forget it, but find in it a consolation that surpasses anything else that can console us on the earth.

Let us pray:

*Oh God our Father, who in Jesus Christ has become one of us in order to experience what it is to be human, enable us to remember that this experience is still an integral part of thy being whenever we pray to thee or seek thy presence and help in our lives. We ask for thy love's sake. Amen.*

## Chapter Eleven

# Pentecost

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*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the spirit gave utterance.*

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— ACTS 2:1-4

Jesus told his followers: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria unto the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8.) One fact that Jesus teaches us in this statement is that there is a very definite relationship between our receiving power and our witnessing for Christ in our everyday living. "You shall receive power and you shall witness unto the uttermost parts of the earth" is a parallelism. The receiving of power through the Holy Spirit and witnessing unto Christ are concomitant actions. As we witness, we receive power to witness. As we are willing to receive power to witness, we witness. As we strive to love others unconditionally, we love them unconditionally. All the apostles had to do was begin to witness. They had the desire to receive power to

witness and God did the rest. The lives of the apostles, as recorded in the book of Acts, and the lives of Christians throughout history stand as living testimonials to this.

Our acceptance of the Lordship of Christ means that we promise to give him and his interests and concerns top priority in our lives. In bringing this down to everyday living, this means putting persons before material things and treating persons as persons, not as objects. It means recognizing the sacredness of all of God's creation and treating it as such. It means giving top priority to those activities which are concerned about the welfare of others and God's creation. Finally, it means putting Christ and his demands upon our money, time and energy first. Only as we have tried to conduct our lives in this manner have we kept our promise to follow Christ as Lord. When we fail to do so, we not only break our promise but we separate ourselves from him who is the way, the truth, and the life.

The great problem with all of us ever since we made our commitment to follow Christ is that we are unable to meet his standard. In this we are not alone. This was the problem of the apostles also until they recalled Christ's words: *You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.* They then became instantly confident to venture forth and witness unto him knowing in their hearts that the influence of Jesus' dominion would cause them to receive direction to witness in ways that would exceed their highest expectations. The same capacity to witness once received almost two thousand years ago is still available to all of us today. As did the apostles, once we stop asking how, and start to accept the fact that we can with the help of the Holy Spirit, we experience an ever growing concern for God and his creation. This caring takes top priority in our lives.

When we make concern for others and the rest of God's creation our top priority, we shall discover a whole new set of values as we go about our daily living. We shall see Jesus in the eyes of the prostitute, the beggar, and the oppressed. We shall hold the natural environment in awe, treating plants and

animals as the sacred creations of a loving, compassionate Lord. We shall become servants first, increasingly seeking to be constantly available channels through which God can express his all-forgiving, unconditional love to his world.

One story that depicts this model of servant leadership is the creation of the Anne Hamrick Community House:

*In the fifties, the Rev. Anne Hamrick, a forceful, strong, white Methodist clergyperson and Ms. Julia Tyler, a petite and gracious African-American woman with a gentle heart, became friends. They came to know each other through their abiding concern for the many underprivileged children in Ms. Tyler's neighborhood. The two women started a Bible school on Saturday afternoons in an old, unrented house on Charles Street in the community. With a small amount of financial help and several volunteers, they soon had a class roll of eighty children.*

*Due to this overwhelming response, they decided to organize as a nonprofit group and apply for Community Fund membership. When the Rev. Ms. Hamrick was transferred to another parish, the Board named their old house the Anne Hamrick Community House. The House's programs expanded to include singing, crafts, art, evening tutoring, sewing, hygiene, and even piano lessons. Eventually, the House became more focused and today operates a pre-school in the basement of the Fredericksburg Presbyterian Church for the underprivileged children of the community. This highly regarded pre-school has now operated for the last twenty-five years under the direction of Ms. Cleo Lewis, a dedicated African-American teacher. "Miss Julia" is now 107 years old and is known by the community as the "patron saint of underprivileged children."*

Concern for others often needs to start at home. My daughter Ann shared the following experience with me:



*I had just had a horrible morning, the kind where nothing even routine falls into place. Once again the morning ended with anger, frustration and tears. As I drove home from letting the children off at school, I started to assess the situation. We were having more and more difficult mornings; for that matter, we were having difficult evenings too! What was happening?*

*My husband is a public school teacher. We both believed it was important that I be a "stay at home mom." Our children were 9, 6 and 3. We have had to make many personal sacrifices, yet our parents supported our decision and have helped us financially, enabling us to live more comfortably. I had started a small independent dealership selling natural herb products. Because we live on a small farm, we had also started boarding horses and offering riding lessons to try to help with the finances. Being raised in a family of "doers" has made it hard for me to say "no," when needs exist elsewhere. Examples include the PTO, youth sports, and church, to name only a few. After a quick assessment of what was going on, the problem was clear: I had overextended myself again. My physical and mental energy was being used up coordinating and doing too many things. My main priority, my family, was getting lost in the shuffle of the never ending stream of busyness with which life confronts us. I had to reassess my activities and begin pulling out. I had to accept the fact that I would feel guilty and perhaps some people would not understand. Yet, I would only have one life with my husband and our young children and this was it. I had to start the process of regaining my calling, that of the ministry of a family.*

*The ministry of a family has never been recognized because in the past it was more a way of life. I have found that it is a ministry that takes much sacrifice on the parent's part. It has meant not accepting tempting*

*volunteer and career opportunities. It has meant not doing, putting on hold or, yes, even giving up some of the things that may be personally important. It means giving up many of the material things that we may have become accustomed to having. We have had to accept a change of life style so that we have time to spend raising our family. It is realizing our children's need to spend more time with us and actively making sure it happens. The personal success in my life is now based on nurturing our children and giving them a solid base from which to grow.*

*The ministry of a family is a hard calling, especially today. Life has become so fast paced. The computer age along with its advances has thrown our lives into the fast track, requiring us and our children to constantly filter new information and changes that reach us in split second timing by phone, fax, computer networks, video, television, cable networks, newspapers, magazines, etc. We are constantly bombarded with a continual array of "things" that are advertised with the "must have in order to keep up" message. Nothing is inescapable whether it be suffering, violence, or destruction, the media's preferred bill of fare. A close friend of mine, Anne Sanderson, who is a family counselor, has suggested that "perhaps we have reached the point in our existence where technology has moved beyond our evolutionary level." Now more than ever we must be a constant in our children's lives. We need to be able to protect them from the "rat race" that society has fallen into by first consciously removing ourselves from its demands.*

*No matter how you look at it, children are time consuming! They require our love and our undivided attention to be their windows to see life as a wonderful adventure. They need us to be mirrors to reflect the warmth, love and pure joy that we feel when we see*



*them growing and learning about themselves and their world. They need to see through our example that God's love is always within them to be comforting in the sad times and joyous in the glad times. We are truly the channels through which God can express his all-forgiving and unconditional love to our children's world.*

*The most precious gift we can give our children is our time. Nothing can replace this in their lives and once it is gone we can't get it back. My hope is that the new church will encourage the practice of the ministry of a family. This will allow us as ministers to rejoice in the knowledge that we are doing God's work in a capacity that no one can replace. The ministry of nurturing a family is the hope of the future for our children and all future generations to come.*

In our retirement years my wife has regained her sense of Godly wonder and mystery in nature that she experienced years ago growing up on a mountain near Warrenton, Virginia. She tells this story of a how a family of bluebirds have deeply touched her:

*Eight years ago, as I peered out my kitchen window, I noticed a pair of bluebirds building a nest in a birdhouse my husband had placed in the yard. Each day I watched with fascination as the two built a home and eventually created a new family. The more that I shared their daily life challenges through my window, the more connected my life became to theirs. I fiercely drove off the neighbor's cat who threatened the new family's existence. I did battle with a group of sparrows that tried to run off the bluebirds from their home. Soon my sudden appearance in the yard alone caused the sparrows to take flight and the bluebirds to remain perched on the roof of their rightful abode.*

*At the beginning of every Spring for each of the last eight years, members of my bluebird family have*

*returned. I watch excitedly as a new pair of bluebirds begin again to create a new nest in my little bluebird home. This year we have shared the pain of one unsuccessful family and the joy of a successful one. A third attempt is now in the making. In the extreme heat of the noonday sun, I go out into the yard and place a parasol over the birdhouse to insure that the home does not get too hot for the mother bird and her eggs. I watch warily to see if the neighborhood cat appears. I experience the simple mystery of love and relatedness that God has inherently established in all of his living creatures.*

## Chapter Twelve

# The Christian Ministry

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*Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.*

— ACTS 4:32-33.

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**I**n the early days of Christianity and the Church, there were no specially ordained ministers. Those who were first called by Jesus to be his disciples and apostles were, of course, held in greater respect than those who came after them, but even so, in the early days of Christianity every follower of Christ, every Christian, was a minister in his or her own right. Each was equally responsible for ministering to one another and to others and for sharing the good news about God's unconditional love for all men and women. If one individual was more highly regarded than another it did not mean that he or she had any more right to minister the word of God. Any person who called himself or herself a Christian was a minister of Christ. It was also dangerous to be a Christian, which fact no doubt explains the intensity of the early ministers of the Christian faith. This intensity reached such a high level that the most diabolic persecutions could not subdue it. Finally,

Christianity became so consequential as a movement that the mighty Roman Empire and its emperor, Constantine, were forced to accommodate it. As long as every Christian felt that he or she was as much a minister in God's sight as the next Christian, no power on earth could stop the spread of Christianity. As has often been said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." No period in Christian history has demonstrated this more than the period prior to the baptism of Constantine.

After Constantine's baptism, it became popular to be a Christian. It was no longer dangerous to be a Christian. As a result, Christianity began to lose its intensity. This, in itself, would not have been so destructive were it not for the fact that Christianity gradually grew into an organization with certain followers of the belief being more highly regarded as ministers than others. Before this some Christians may have been more esteemed as teachers, but it never occurred to the average Christian that these gifted teachers had more authority in the church. Any Christian was thought to have the right to lead a group in prayer, bless the wine, or break the bread during communion. In fact these duties were most likely those of the head of every Christian household. As Christianity gradually became more organized, these duties began to be assigned to certain persons who came to be regarded as "the ministers." Quite naturally, the average Christian began to think of himself or herself as less and less of a minister in his or her own right. The ministry of Christ for all began to become the ministry of a selected few, who were called "ordained ministers."

The church thus lost untold millions of ministers, and has never recovered from this loss. Think of what would have happened if every Christian businessman and every traveler in a foreign country had made the ministry of Christ his or her priority. The effect of this on the world would, today, be beyond imagination. God's kingdom would be a reality on earth today.

My son John has spent his entire professional life in the medical field. He has had many opportunities to witness firsthand individuals who did live out their Christian ministry

as lay people. John shared this story with me of one such exemplary minister of Christ:

*Dr. Harry Carpenter is an internist working in a rural setting in North Carolina. To meet Dr. Carpenter is to recognize that Christ has claimed his soul. He sees his professional work as a calling and he attempts to manifest Christian love in every aspect of his daily work. He shared with me that a major turning point in his spiritual journey occurred many years ago when he suddenly felt a clear calling to provide medical services to the poor in Haiti. He was the Chairman of the Board of Deacons in a large Baptist church in Coco Beach, Florida, at the time. He excitedly shared his calling with the Deacons and asked for their support in his call. He was shocked by their response. They expressed dismay at his misguided ideas and tried to discourage him from pursuing his vision.*

*Being a certified airplane pilot, Dr. Carpenter began to close his practice at intervals for a couple of weeks at a time and fly down to Haiti to set up clinics and help where he could. A number of his patients left his practice in dismay, feeling betrayed by these intermittent closings. Fortunately, there were other patients who specifically began to choose Dr. Carpenter as their physician because of his ministry to the Haitian people.*

*Dr. Carpenter's service to the Haitian people changed his life. Today, in the late stages of his professional career, he is following a new vision to create rural health clinics as satellites of nursing homes throughout twenty-two of the poorest rural counties in North Carolina. With God's help, he will succeed.*

## Epilogue

# The Future of The Church

by Thomas G. Faulkner, III

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*The church may be the channel of divine grace, the body of Christ through which the eternal Gospel is experienced anew, but it is also and always a political, sociological, and historic institution that responds time after time to the changing patterns of human thought. If the church continues to live, it will continue to change; for it cannot escape the historic process.*

— Into the Whirlwind, by John Spong.

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**T**he institutional church must radically change if we are to meet God's call to love others and his creation and become his co-creators. First, however, we must remember that we are on a journey, a journey that eventually carries the remnants of the universe into a perfect relationship with God. At this point in the story of God's chosen people, we still are stumbling, but all is not lost. As Verna Dozier states, "I believe that the church, in whatever form it appears institutionally, rejects the dream of God. The paradox is that within that institution the dream is kept; if it weren't, I would not be sharing my understanding and you would not be reading it."<sup>1</sup>

Gordon and Mary Cosby have been the mentor-facilitators of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C., since the late

forties. Today the Church has about 130 members and has been the catalyst for an incredible array of ministries including a hospital for the homeless, a medical clinic for the poor, apartments for the poor, housing for drug addicts attempting to overcome their addictions, a retreat center, a jobs program, and a servant leadership school. In a recent orientation session with a servant leadership group from Greenville, South Carolina, Mr. Cosby told the group that he believed that the institutional church had outlived its relevance and that new forms of the church would take its place. More recently, the Cosbys have declared that the Church of the Saviour as an institution should be abolished. As a result, that community is struggling with the issue to decide what God would have them do about the matter.

We live in a rapidly changing world. Communications technology makes the pain of the world our intimate companion. Through the evening news, we see an entire generation of young African-American males being destroyed through violence on the streets of our cities. Thousands of starving, dying people in Africa peer out at us on our television screens. Our family structure has been ripped apart, replaced through divorce or desertion with an increasing number of single parent households which often lack the extended families of past generations which could give them adequate support. God's world continues to cry for the hands, eyes, ears, and feet of the Body of Christ to act, to share God's unconditional love and to heal the world. To accommodate God's call to be the church of the future, we must first remember that *we are the church*, not our denominational buildings and institutions. As the church, we must reach out to our fellow members, whatever their income, whatever their race, whatever their denomination, and join with them to follow God's call on our lives. We must return to the models of community which the early Christians developed by utilizing small groups in which to share our lives and our dreams; to study the history of God's chosen people through biblical study and the sharing of our own stories; in remembrance of Christ's crucifixion, to break bread and drink

wine ritually together as symbols of God's suffering love for us in Christ and as outward and visible means whereby we receive God's love and help; to listen for the Lord's still, small voice calling us to do his will in the world; and ultimately, to respond to the world's pain by sharing God's love and forgiveness in ministry to others and God's creation.

Whatever value our present religious institutions have must be made subservient to the needs of our small groups. We must fight the temptation to delegate responsibilities to such institutions without first prayerfully considering how such responsibilities can be carried out in our small groups. Which of our Christian rituals require a specialist to administer them? Will our small groups require itinerant teachers and counselors to support us in ministry? Do we need to maintain some organizations to reach out as the Body of Christ to other parts of the world? No easy answers come with these questions. We can only continue to listen in prayer to the Lord and act in response to his will.

In the future, we must also face the fact that our God has communicated his love to people of faith who are not Christians. Matthew Fox writes of this reality in his book, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. He examines the tradition of the Cosmic Christ initiated by Saint Paul in his writings: "The whole creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal the divine sons and daughters... From the beginning till now the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth; and not only creation, but all of us who possess the first fruits of the Spirit." (Romans 8:19, 22-23.) The Cosmic Christ is seen as the universal, mystical revelation of a compassionate Spirit springing up in all cultures quietly reaching out to touch each of us individually and bringing in new life to a dying world.<sup>2</sup> He points out that the Cosmic Christ has not limited his actions to Christian people: "There is *one* great underground river, though there are numerous wells into it—Buddhist wells and Taoist wells, Native American wells and Christian wells, Islamic wells and Judaic wells."<sup>3</sup> As Christians, we are called to communicate in love with people of

other religions so that we can find common ground in a compassionate, loving God who waits on us all to save his creation.

The key to the future of the Church lies in the fact that no matter what action we take, God as the unconditionally loving, all-forgiving Force remains as the foundation of the universe. We are called to live moment by moment seeking his call in communion with fellow travelers. We shall strive to make our relationships a mutual affirmation of the good in each. As we learn through the power of the Holy Spirit to permit our egos to die to Christ, we shall increasingly have the opportunity to be his instruments to make whole the piece of the world that God has given us the opportunity to touch. The opportunities are numerous: Spending time in prayerful silence; nurturing our families with quality time and love; supporting a dying relative; befriending a homeless person; hugging a lonely person; living out our lives in poor neighborhoods; caring for a garden; or showing love for animals. As we live out God's call on our lives, we must constantly remember that we are members incorporate of the Body of Christ, the Cosmic Christ who continues to make the universe whole. In such a context, our "small" actions will radically transform the world we touch into the heaven on earth of which God dreams for his creation.

## — ENDNOTES —

### Chapter One ...

- <sup>1</sup> Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing*, (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1983), p. 47.
- <sup>2</sup> Donovan Bessinger, *Religion Confronting Science*, (Greenville: Orchard Park Press, 1991), p. 38.
- <sup>3</sup> John 1:1.
- <sup>4</sup> This creation story is derived from excerpts from the first and second chapters of Genesis, RSV, combined with scientific data on the history of creation from the following references: Bessinger, p. 45. Michael Dowd, *The Big Picture, or The Larger Context for All Human Activities*, (Woodsfield: Living Earth Institute, 1993), p. 1-14.

### Chapter Six ...

- <sup>1</sup> Robert Capon, *The Mystery of Christ*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), p. 107-129.
- <sup>2</sup> Capon, *The Mystery of Christ*, p. 166.

### Chapter Eight ...

- <sup>1</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), p. 26.
- <sup>2</sup> Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), p. 1-73.
- <sup>3</sup> Background information on Mr. Walker's life was obtained from an interview with Mrs. Ollie Walker, Mr. Walker's widow. Mrs. Walker was an elementary school teacher for 38 years in Greenville County, South Carolina.

### Chapter Nine ...

- <sup>1</sup> Verna Dozier, *The Dream of God*, (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1991), p. 71.
- <sup>2</sup> Dozier, *The Dream of God*, p. 84.

### Epilogue ...

- <sup>1</sup> Dozier, *The Dream of God*, p. 120.
- <sup>2</sup> Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 76-155.
- <sup>3</sup> Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, p. 230.

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## *St. Francis' Prayer*

*Lord make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying (to ourselves\*) that we are born to eternal life. Amen.*

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\*Author's addition.