

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Anne Sommers, letter to the editor, *New England Journal of Medicine* (1978), p. 746.

<sup>2</sup>The quotations from George Washington and other figures from history are taken from Harold D. Eberlein, "When Society First Took a Bath," *Sickness and Health in America*, eds. J. W. Leavitt and R. L. Numbers (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 331-41.

**Recommended Reading**

Allen, David E., Lewis P. Bird and Robert Herrmann, eds. *Whole-Person Medicine*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980.

"Holistic Health Issue," *Spiritual Counterfeits Project Journal*, August 1978 (P. O. Box 2418, Berkeley, CA 94702).

Leavitt, J. W. and R. L. Numbers, eds. *Sickness and Health in America*.

Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978.

Tournier, Paul. *Guilt and Grace*. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

## Chapter 7 And Then . . .

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*Peter Wilkes*

**I**n the preceding pages five scholars have argued the intellectual case for Christianity. In a university setting that is all one might expect. Universities are, after all, cerebral places. Such a purely intellectual approach, however, does scant justice to the wholeness of Christianity.

It has been the speakers' contention that the secular outlook offers an inadequate approach to human nature. Yet its inadequacy is most clearly demonstrated not in the lecture room but in life itself.

At the end of the day, scientists, economists, physicians and archaeologists go home to assume roles as parents and husbands or wives. It is in such practical areas of relationships where the alienation that is the logical consequence of secular humanism most often reveals itself. The breakdown may seem particularly poignant when a person is undeniably competent in some professional or intellectual realm.

The most important reason to consider becoming a Christian is *a conscious need for a fresh beginning, an awareness of inadequacy in oneself*. In intellectual argument the problem is presented as if it were outside me. In fact, *I am* the problem in microcosm.

Jesus, in calling men and women to follow him, intended a transformation of the whole person. The preaching of the apostles also was based on a radical change experienced in becoming a Christian. When Peter announced to a crowd in the temple, "Repent therefore, and turn again" (Acts 3:19), he was presenting the real issue for those who wished to become Christians.

All of us who have lectured in this series want to make it clear that to be intellectually convinced or attracted to the case we have presented is *not* the same thing as becoming a Christian. It is only a first step. This final chapter is concerned with the remaining steps.

At some point in our lives most of us feel inadequate. Those feelings are pointers to a much deeper insight, one that is difficult for most people to face: the inadequacy in us lies in our relationship with God. In that relationship the key issue is a moral one. We are simply not good enough, none of us.

From the very beginning the Judeo-Christian experience of God has been that he is morally pure to a degree beyond our imagining. He is not merely good; he is goodness itself. Facing such purity, human beings always become conscious of personal impurity. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk. 5:8).

It is of course entirely right for us to feel that way, because we have been made by God. Our existence is dependent on his choice. And he wants us to be good, not by our warped standards but by his. That is not merely an arbitrary demand placed on our lives. Our world is locked in an ultimate moral struggle between good and evil. The battle, which clearly rages outside in the world, also rages in-

ternally in all of us. Making a moral choice means taking sides. Either we are committed to God and to goodness, love and life, or we are opposed to those values and to their source.

In that ultimate conflict there are no private, independent forces. We cannot strike out on our own. To try to do so is to exhibit exactly the spirit of pride that wars against goodness.

The horrifying feature in this conflict is that *we are already on the wrong side*. That is why the purity and goodness of God are so intimidating to us and invoke such guilt.

Jesus is the ultimate revelation of the conflict. He stands alone at the end, relentlessly forcing human beings to choose. And choose they do. Roman justice is prostituted to political survival by Pilate. Jewish religious law is suborned by a high priest and his colleagues. A crowd is bribed to cry for his blood. His disciples flee and Peter denies ever knowing him. The world is there in microcosm, and where the world's heart lies is clear for all to see.

To become a Christian, of course, one must acknowledge where one stands in the conflict and give up any attempt to avoid responsibility. Wisdom begins when I, like the prodigal son in the Bible, go home and say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Lk. 15:18). To admit our rebellious nature is hard for us but absolutely essential for reconciliation with our heavenly Father.

God's response to a genuine turning away from our rebellion is dramatic. Relief from our burden of moral guilt is immediate. The problem has been placed in the Father's hands, and his action is decisive. Sin and guilt are simply annihilated and our forgiveness is proclaimed. The emphatic language of Scripture underscores the point: "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12).

Such forgiveness is incredibly costly, not to us but to God. The cross of Jesus is more than a display of human sinful-

ness; it is also a triumph of God's grace. There, as our representative, God himself bears all the consequences of our human rebellion against his goodness. Our rejection of him has been a rejection of life as well as of goodness; in the end they are the same. The consequence of our rejection is therefore death. It is *our* death Jesus bears for us.

Yet the last word is with life, for, like goodness, in God's universe life is invincible. The second triumph of Jesus was his return from death. Just as commitment of ourselves (and our rebellion) into his hands leads to forgiveness by his death, so his victory over death leads to an experience of life in us. We are not only forgiven, we are reborn.

Hence the second step in entering the Christian life is commitment to being changed under his hand into a new and better person. The conflict has changed from a rebellion to a struggle against evil in my own life. This is not a kind of self-reformation, which would be a return to the old pattern of self-justification, of trying to impress God with my accomplishments. It is different now: *he* is actively changing me. The decisive power in molding my character over the years of my life is his. To be a Christian is to commit myself to being transformed, on a continuing basis, toward a quality of goodness that is all his. The Bible speaks of this as being conformed to the likeness of Jesus (Rom. 8:29).

It is at times a painful process. We do not lightly let go of our pride or our prejudice or our cherished self-images. But it is a sure process. God does not begin tasks and leave them unfinished. We have the guarantee that "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

There will be a day when, as his completed workmanship, we will stand before him. On that day we shall no longer be ashamed, nor shall we be guilty. We shall be fully transformed into his goodness and his life.

We shall be our Father's children, grown up at last.

If you have come with us this far from the heavily intellectual start of this book, you may be ready for one further thought. The ultimate attraction to Christian faith is not in our needs or our guilt; it lies in Jesus himself.

In the end, Christianity comes down to loving him. We urge you to pick up the Gospel of John and read the story of Jesus again. You may find him so gloriously attractive that to follow him, to be his, will be your response, too—as it has been ours.