

## Who Is God?

The first book of Kings records how the Syrians were once defeated by the Israelites on high ground. Obviously, the Syrians concluded, the gods of Israel were gods of the hills; so they would try their fortune again, this time on the plains. Another failure resulted. Israel's God was God both of hills and valleys.<sup>1</sup>

In general a Christian Scientist's first meaningful encounter with God has taken place in some valley. He is likely to recall a moment of moral anguish, of physical extremity, of bitter grief or overwhelming disappointment. In this situation he has come face to face with God; he has glimpsed God and his own relationship to God in a new light.

Then he has felt God's power lay hold of his experience. A moral imperative has become clear; a long-standing disease has vanished; new hope, new purposefulness have lifted him from the pit. His life-journey still stretches before him, but it has new direction, new motivation.

God, as we understand Him, is God of both valleys and hills. He cares for us intimately in the traffic of everyday living and He is also "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity,

whose name is Holy."<sup>2</sup> He is both transcendent and immanent. We worship Him with reverence and humility, as the God "whose name is Holy," but we also encounter Him in the home or street, the office or the factory, confidently face to face, as His beloved sons and daughters.

Faced with the wonder and majesty of God, human thought must acknowledge in all humility its own inadequacy to grasp the fullness of divinity. But it has before it the experiences of the patriarchs and prophets as recorded in Hebrew Scripture, most particularly the life of Christ Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, and finally the workings of the Holy Spirit in all periods. We recognize that in these God has been continuously revealing Himself to mankind and that He has accompanied this self-revelation with acts of saving, redeeming, and healing power which have still further defined His nature. It would be immodest for any of us to claim that we personally know all the answers concerning God; but equally we should feel it the reverse of humility to reject or underestimate any part of God's revelation of Himself, given to humanity down the long millennia of history.

Christian Scientists acknowledge the paramountcy of the Bible in leading humanity to that knowledge of God and of His creation which is eternal Life. Paul Tillich describes the Bible as a record both of the divine self-manifestation and of the way in which human beings have received it. We,

too, find in the Bible God's revelation of Himself, as received and responded to by men. We therefore look first to the Bible — and especially to the Gospel record of the words and works of Jesus — to define for us the identity and nature of God.

The opening verse of Genesis puts God at the very beginning of all things (*in principio*); it acknowledges Him as creator. To Abraham He revealed Himself through Melchizedek as "the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth."<sup>3</sup> Moses recognized Him in Exodus as I AM. Leviticus speaks of "the mind of the Lord."<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy says of God, "He is thy life."<sup>5</sup> The Psalms see Him as shepherd and as the great Physician, "who healeth all thy diseases."<sup>6</sup> First Isaiah recognizes in God all three branches of government: "The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law-giver, the Lord is our king."<sup>7</sup> Second Isaiah calls Him "the God of truth."<sup>8</sup>

In the New Testament, Christ Jesus says that God is Spirit and good. But the name for God most frequently on his lips is Father; and this Father praises Jesus as "my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."<sup>9</sup> John writes simply: "God is love."<sup>10</sup>

Two definitions of God familiar to Christian Scientists are these, given in *Science and Health*:

God is incorporeal, divine, supreme, infinite Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love.<sup>11</sup>

GOD. The great I AM; the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-acting, all-wise, all-lov-

ing, and eternal; Principle; Mind; Soul; Spirit; Life; Truth; Love; all substance; intelligence.<sup>12</sup>

Mrs. Eddy also writes: "Love, the divine Principle, is the Father and Mother of the universe, including man."<sup>13</sup>

These answers to the question "Who is God?" satisfy our reason and our spiritual insights. We feel, too, that they meet the pragmatic test, to which Jesus appealed when the Baptist's disciples came to inquire whether he was the expected one. We feel that in some degree, however imperfectly, however incompletely, we are enabled through this understanding of God's nature to do some of those works which Jesus said his followers would do — to find our prayers answered in terms of spiritual and moral enlightenment, physical healing, and increased effectiveness as individuals and as citizens.

Four of our terms for God may perhaps usefully be commented on: Mind, Mother, Soul, and Principle.

The use of Mind by theologians as a term for God is not unusual. The Bible has countless references to God's wisdom and knowledge. It is hard to imagine the creator of all purposeful being as without intelligence, as not being all that the name *Mind* implies. In traditional theological discourse the characterization of God as Mind is often allied with the "argument from design." Christian Science, recognizing the entropy, fortuity, and disaster inherent in the material universe, turns

rather to the universe of enduring spiritual values for the evidence of Mind's design.

Motherhood, as an aspect of the divine nature, is discussed by Dr. F. W. Dillstone, a theological writer with pastoral and teaching experience in the Episcopal Church. In his book *The Christian Faith* he notes that Christian doctrine has virtually excluded "the mother-figure from its total imagery of family relationships as applied to God." Then he remarks:

Adoption of the masculine appellation led in some aspects of the Hebrew religion . . . to an extreme concentration on masculine qualities. But this was not the case in the Old Testament taken as a whole and certainly not in the New Testament. Fatherhood includes qualities of mercy and forgiveness, tenderness and gentleness, care and sustenance, concern for safety and comfort and renewal of life.<sup>14</sup>

This writer concludes that fatherhood provides an adequate image for the relationship of God to His creation, but he fully recognizes what we may call the feminine qualities in the divine nature.

We feel that specific recognition of God as Mother as well as Father is important. The divine name Mother emphasizes how completely man has his true origin in God. In his eternal nature man is wholly the offspring of heaven, calling no man on earth his father and no woman on earth his mother.

Soul in ordinary thought is closely connected with human identity and

individuality. To employ it as a name for God may suggest a pantheistic containment of God within His creation or, alternatively, a swallowing up of all identity and individuality in some single Oversoul. The recognition of God as Soul has for us the opposite connotation. It points to Him as the continuing source and sustainer of identity and individuality; it makes these more definite and distinct; it ensures them a survival and continuity beyond the finite limits of the space-time continuum.

Christians agree that God is Love. But if Christianity is to be recognized as a practical, systematic, demonstrable way of life, then surely the God who is Love can be identified also as Principle. The name Principle does not subtract from the divine nature as Father, Love, Life, the I AM: it includes all these. And it indicates God as the origin of all things — "In the beginning God . . .", "*In principio deus . . .*". It also points to His government of the universe not as a benevolent despot, but by universal law maintaining universal order. This law is infinitely warm, adaptable, intelligent. It is the law of divine Life and Love, perfectly adjusting itself with tenderness and wisdom alike to the wheeling of galaxies and to the sparrow's fall.

To conceive of God as Principle does not mean the total denial to Him of personal being. God is certainly not a finite human person on a superhuman scale; no Christian would think of the

infinite as person in that sense. C. S. Lewis writes of God:

He must not be thought of as a featureless generality. . . . He is the most concrete thing there is, the most individual. . . . Body and personality as we know them are the real negatives — they are what is left of positive being when it is sufficiently diluted to appear in temporal or finite forms.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Robert F. Evans in his book *Making Sense of the Creeds* makes this point:

Metaphorical language is the indispensable verbal medium by which we approach the finally ineffable yet commanding mystery of God and his love.<sup>16</sup>

This is true at one level, but in a more profound sense the names we give to human thoughts and objects are but types and shadows of the spiritual. Mr. Lewis, further discussing God's nature, writes:

He is unspeakable not by being indefinite, but by being too definite for the unavoidable vagueness of language. . . . Our physical and psychic energies are mere metaphors of the real Life which is God. Divine Sonship is, so to speak, the solid of which biological sonship is merely a diagrammatic representation on the flat.<sup>17</sup>

We feel that "personal" is too limited an epithet for God, unless we call Him infinite Person. As infinite Person and divine Principle, God lives and loves with the fullest intensity, caring inti-

mately for His whole creation, with every identity precious in His sight.

For its most complete example of the divine nature humanity turns to the life of Christ Jesus. Here God has revealed Himself as completely as it is possible for the infinite and eternal to reveal itself in a single human life-span. In Jesus the Word, or Christ, was made flesh; its saving presence and power appeared in the world as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."<sup>18</sup> Jesus was tempted as other men are, yet he was without sin. At every point in his earthly career, from his conception by the power of the Holy Spirit to his ascension with the promise that the power of the Holy Spirit would come upon his followers, customary material modes were set aside. He faced up to the evil in the world, but he cast it out; to the suffering in the world, but he healed it; to death, but he overcame it. The kingdom of heaven, which he proclaimed, had come not to perpetuate the world's evil either as a direct or indirect instrument of the divine purposes, but to expose and destroy it.

Untouched by sin, complete master over material conditions, Jesus defined God, as fully as possible in terms of a human life, and said: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."<sup>19</sup> In his living he exercised without limit the power of Spirit and the power of good; he thus defined God as Spirit and as good. And he commanded his followers to do likewise. He set them

the goal, as we see it, of presenting to the world the same definition of an immaculate God that he had himself presented. "Be ye therefore perfect," he said, "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."<sup>20</sup> We feel that in this unqualified perfection of God lies humanity's firm assurance of salvation.

A message written by Mrs. Eddy in 1901 offers this counsel:

As Christian Scientists you seek to define God to your own consciousness by feeling and applying the nature and practical possibilities of divine Love.<sup>21</sup>

Christian Scientists study daily to gain a closer acquaintanceship with God, as He has revealed Himself in the Bible. And they aim to let this maturing acquaintanceship with divine Love direct in ever growing degree their daily living and their response to the saving and healing power of God.

Men will continue their search to know and define God. But their search can be successful only as they recognize that in a deeper sense God through His Christ is searching for them. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that the Father seeketh true worshippers to worship him.<sup>22</sup> To his disciples he said: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you."<sup>23</sup> And the Christians at Philippi were counseled: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."<sup>24</sup> In John's

words, "We love him, because he first loved us."<sup>25</sup>

As Christians, we can open our hearts and minds to the divine grace by our thoughts and actions, by our prayers and our searching of the Scriptures. But ultimately it is God who discloses to each individual the full definition of Himself. It is the Father, who in individual encounter with each one of His sons and daughters, whether on hilltop or in valley, gives us in saving and in healing the final answer to this question "Who is God?" Then it is for us by our living to show how much or how little we have understood Him.

<sup>1</sup> I Kings 20; <sup>2</sup> Isa. 57:15; <sup>3</sup> Gen. 14:19; <sup>4</sup> Lev. 24:12; <sup>5</sup> Deut. 30:20; <sup>6</sup> Ps. 103:3; <sup>7</sup> Isa. 33:22; <sup>8</sup> Isa. 65:16; <sup>9</sup> Matt. 3:17; <sup>10</sup> I John 4:16; <sup>11</sup> *Science and Health*, p. 465; <sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 587; <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 256; <sup>14</sup> *The Christian Faith*, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1964, pp. 44, 45; <sup>15</sup> *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, Macmillan Co., 1947, pp. 93, 94; <sup>16</sup> *Making Sense of the Creeds*, Association Press, 1964, p. 19; <sup>17</sup> *Miracles*, p. 93; <sup>18</sup> John 1:29; <sup>19</sup> John 14:9; <sup>20</sup> Matt. 5:48; <sup>21</sup> *Message to The Mother Church for 1901*, p. 1; <sup>22</sup> John 4:23; <sup>23</sup> John 15:16; <sup>24</sup> Phil. 2:12, 13; <sup>25</sup> I John 4:19.