

WHY AM I STILL A CHRISTIAN?

P. F. JENSEN

"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

Years ago I read an essay by the great philosopher Bertrand Russell called 'Why I am not a Christian'. I was very grateful to Russell at the time, because I was going through one of those periods of doubt that many Christians have from time to time. I remember picking the book up as though it were forbidden fruit, half convinced already that I was going to be argued out of my faith. When I put it down, however, I felt that the load of doubt had gone. If this was the best that even Lord Russell could do, then I had nothing to fear! As I said, I was very grateful.

Mind you, the years have passed since then, and new and better challenges have emerged. Occasionally I examine my faith, asking myself 'Why am I still a Christian?'

Various answers could be given to this. For example, it is often suggested that the Christian faith offers personal wholeness. We live in an age when it is easy to suffer mental strain, to feel as though you are a fractured personality. Sometimes people tell us that Christ renews and heals the mind and makes a person better adjusted. Yet, this is not why I remain a Christian. I have seen enough to know that personal wholeness in this life is not the inevitable result of being a Christian. Sometimes strain and breakdown can follow becoming a Christian. Furthermore, I have never thought that my personality was sufficiently unstable to need a crutch such as religion. Why am I still a Christian?

There are people who maintain that the Christian faith is good for physical health. God still heals today, we are told, and if you are a Christian you can expect a good measure of well being. But, once again I don't see it like this. God does indeed heal today; but there is no guarantee that he will, and some fine Christians

are permanently incapacitated. Beside I am well; I have never had a hospital visit; I rarely go to the doctor. Why am I still a Christian?

In the end, I think there are two chief reasons. In the first place, I am convinced that the Christian message is true. There was really a man named Jesus Christ; He died for our sins and rose again from the dead. We do have the historical records, and they can be examined and tested.

There is a second reason, however. The gospel message does meet a deeply felt inner problem which I have. This is not the problem of mental or physical difficulty; it is the problem of moral collapse. Although I am outwardly law-abiding and respectable, and I know from self-examination that I do not succeed in fulfilling the requirements of God's law. I recognise that his law is just and good; I recognise that my failure is blameworthy; but I continually fail to delight in his law, and to think things which are pure and holy and good. In short, I sin. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - I know that is true, and I know that I am a sinner. There is for me no other course, then; I am and remain, with gratitude to God, a Christian.

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