

This I Believe - by Lyle W. Lieder

I grew up in an excellent rural Minnesota home. My mother and dad were loving, caring and devoted parents. While depression times were tough for families, they made certain we children were never in want. My folks were devout Christians. Since we lived twelve miles from our Methodist church, it was not always possible to make Sunday services. On those occasions we had church at home, with Bible reading, hymn singing and prayer. Theologically, my parents were conservative. They believed in the literal interpretation of the Bible as God's holy word. This was the way I was taught to think as well.

When I felt called to enter the ministry I wanted to attend the best seminary possible. I applied and was accepted at Drew Seminary and Boston University School of Theology, both fine Methodist Seminaries. I chose BUST. A very wise older minister, a Dr. Vader, who knew of my plans to attend BUST, was at the time serving the Faribault Methodist Church as their pastor, invited me to visit him. He was fully aware of my conservative background. He was also aware that a young aspiring minister would naturally be exposed to fresh new ideas in seminary. He was concerned that these new ideas might have a devastating effect on my faith. He proposed the soundest approach to this matter I have ever known. His suggestion stood me in good stead all through my years in seminary and has been a remarkable benefit to me throughout my forty-some years in the ministry.

Dr. Vader said I needed to look upon my growing-up faith as a solid spiritual foundation for which I should be very grateful, both to my parents and my church. However, he warned me never to look upon that foundation of faith as made of reinforced concrete, but rather I should think of it as composed of bricks, made stable with mortar. He then pointed out, that in my studies at seminary, I was certain to be exposed to many new theological ideas. Some would seem to be valid, others might not. In the process I would probably discover beliefs which were even more satisfying and fulfilling for me than those I now held, to say nothing of being more logical. Naturally, when that happened, I would want to replace an old belief with the new and more adequate one.

He said further, if I were to look upon my spiritual foundation as constructed of reinforced concrete, when I went to replace the old with the new, the only way to break into that faith-foundation would be to crack it wide open. When that happens the entire structure is weakened and in danger of collapse. If, on the other hand, I look upon that spiritual foundation as made up of individual "bricks of belief" stabilized with mortar, if and when I discover a belief superior to the one I have held, I can replace that one belief as one would a brick. I would need to take out the old and throw it away, replace it with the new; cement it in place with new mortar, and throughout the process the original foundation has never been weakened. When completed with new bricks and new mortar, one's spiritual foundation is even stronger than before. A person can continue that process brick by brick as long as one discovers new and more satisfying beliefs. As a result, one never runs the risk of losing ones faith! What an awesome, as well as a sensible, solution!

What excellent counsel for a young person who was about to encounter a myriad of great life-changing ideas! I have never ceased being grateful for the insight of that wonderfully wise old minister.

To develop a mature religious foundation, a person must constantly search for more comprehensive answers. I believe, when a person begins to put together one's own system of faith and belief, all the relevant factors possible must be considered. Only after considering every aspect of a given belief, can a legitimate value judgment be made. That judgment for me must make logical sense. Likewise, that judgment must be based upon the premise that the newly chosen belief leaves the fewest questions unanswered. It goes without saying that, logically, if a person's new belief creates more questions than it answers, there must be a better choice. As a result, my personal beliefs leave the fewest questions unanswered, for me. When I discover another aspect of belief which answers more questions than my presently held belief, I willingly replace the old with the new, just as Dr. Vader suggested. When I have cemented that new "brick" in place, I believe my spiritual foundation is even stronger than it was before!

I believe the universe was created by an all-wise mind. For the sake of this document, I will call this mind, "God". I believe God to be both omniscient and omnipresent. I believe that God is neither male nor female but pure spirit-wisdom. I also believe the nature of "God" to have been the most tragically misunderstood, misrepresented and underestimated concept throughout all human history; and shockingly, most especially during this present, so called, "enlightened" age.

How God created the universe, I do not know, nor do I pretend to know and find it unlikely that I could ever know. Scientists call creation the "Big Bang". Perhaps God used the "Big Bang" to bring about creation. I don't know, and it really is of no consequence to me how it was accomplished. That it was accomplished at all, is, in my mind, a miracle. In fact, I believe creation is too awesome a miracle to have just "happened". There is far too much logic and consistency and order in the universe for it to have taken place by accident. Accidents are just that, accidental. The very word, "accident" is the antitheses of consistency or systematic order and design. Only a perfectly rational mind could create a perfectly rational universe such as ours.

The universe in which we live is designed to function according to basic fundamental laws. Throughout history, humans have been trying desperately to understand these universal laws. During this present technological era, especially, we have made more rapid progress in that direction than in the past. Since we are now beginning to understand a few of these laws of nature, we are in a better position to master some of them. But, for a comprehensive knowledge of how our universe is put together and how it functions, we still have a long way to go.

In addition to the material world and it's creatures, I also believe that God was, and is our creator; that God created us! I do not care whether God did it miraculously; all at once, as

the Genesis story suggests, or whether it was done throughout the eons of evolution, of which scientists speak. That we are here, attests to the fact that, somehow, miraculously, God accomplished it. God created us!

When a person studies and assembles all the facts, it does seem to me more logical that God used the long evolutionary process to bring us into being. All evidence points in that direction. If this were not true, I would be forced to conceive of my Creator as a "God of cheap tricks", intentionally trying to confuse us. I would have to assume that God placed fossils in the rocks to fool us into thinking that the universe is as old as it appears; that God stratified the walls of the Grand Canyon, simply to fool us into thinking our earth was billions of years in the making; that God actively tried to fool us into thinking there were once dinosaurs roaming the earth for millions and millions of years, who lived and died in such astounding numbers that their decaying bodies created all the oil deposits on the planet; and so on! No, the God I worship is no magician or "slight of hand" artist, using tricks to hide the truth. The God I worship is meticulously forthright and honest, not devious and misleading.

I believe in, and have the highest regard for, the Bible. I do not believe the Bible to be God's final word. The Bible, I believe, is still being written daily, through the lives of dedicated, present-day servants, like those referred to throughout the Bible. In fact, the Bible is not "God's hand-written word" at all, even though God's word can certainly be discovered within the pages of this remarkable book. The Bible is actually the record of humankind's worthy and sincere attempt to record the ways we have tried to understand God throughout the ages. It is my opinion also, that we need always to be reminded of the fact that the books of the Bible as we know them, were not designed or constructed by God at all, but instead, the books of the Bible were assembled by a group of self-proclaimed "protectors of the faith" in an early century, A.D..

Contrary to what many would have us believe, the Bible was not penned by the hand of God, but rather, the Bible was written by the frail and imperfect minds and fingers of dedicated worshippers through the centuries. If God had done the writing, the Bible would be perfect. It would be entirely free of mistakes or inconsistencies. Likewise, there would be no seeming shift in the very nature of God from the Old Testament God, a God of wrath and war and partisanship, to the New Testament God; a God of love and forgiveness and inclusiveness. No, the Bible was not written by God. The Bible is the remarkable attempt by serious believers to make God real. It is the faithful record of humankind's growing recognition of the belief in the one and only true God, who is not only the God of the entire universe, but a God so approachable and personal as to be an influence and a power in the lives of persons like you and me.

Furthermore, I believe the Bible was never intended to be taken literally as so many mistakenly take it today. For serious minded Christians, this misguided analysis of what is interpreted to be "God's literal word", is a most dastardly condemnation of their

arrogance and even blasphemy. For example, if it had been intended that a person take literally the story of Adam and Eve, as the very first man and the very first woman, surely the author of Genesis would have been wise enough to delete the statement about Cain, their one remaining son, taking a wife from a "distant country". The only conclusion a thinking person can draw, is that the author intended the story to be only symbolic, explaining how we humans came into being. No, the story is simply stating, in allegorical form, that God was the creator, both of the universe, and all that is in it, including humankind! That is the essence of the creation story, not that God literally took a rib from Adam and made a woman, allowing interpreters for all time to suggest that God looks upon men as superior to women!

A literal interpretation of the Bible can only lead to disastrous consequences over and over again. If we allow ourselves to get bogged down in non-essential details and ancient imaginings, we are almost certainly destined to miss the essence of what was intended. In a century when there was a pantheon of gods, I have no doubt the purpose of the creation story was to help the people of the time understand God as the one and only true God. The writer of the Genesis story was simply trying to convince them that there is only one real God, the God of all creation. Only this Creator-God is Divine and worthy of humankind's trust and devotion.

I believe in Jesus Christ as the unmatched model for Christian living. Certainly there are other historic figures who have understood the Divine Mind so comprehensively that they deserve a special place in what we Christians refer to as "The Kingdom of God" - such as Mohammed, and Buddha, and Confucius. And, quite certainly too, there are a few of every major faith, who have stood out as really god-like, such as Ghandi, and St. Francis of Assisi, and Martin Luther King, Junior. They deserve special recognition for their faithfulness, their devotion, their vision and their self-sacrifice.

There are also instances of the Bible being downright wrong. One such statement referring to Jesus that "there is no other name...whereby we might be saved" must be entirely false. That one statement has, perhaps more than any other, tragically made Christians egocentric and intolerant of other religions.

But, for Christians, Jesus Christ is absolutely central. To emulate Christ is to live the most exciting and fulfilling god-like life imaginable! In Christ one sees God in theory, in practice and in action. Jesus' "Sermon On The Mount" is the very heart and core of the Christian faith. Even Ghandi, while a Hindu, said he got his inspiration and appreciation of Christianity from the Sermon On The Mount.

More than any other, Jesus Christ captured the real essence of God in both his teachings and his example. With his entreaty, "It has been written, but I say to you.....etc.", Christ corrected humankind's misunderstanding of the Old Testament belief of God as a despotic, wrathful, prejudicial, warlike deity. Here, Jesus sought desperately to help us see God in a new, refreshing, and mature light, as the good, loving, understanding,

forgiving, all-inclusive Deity that he clearly recognized God to be. By his own living and example, Jesus the Christ embodied those qualities throughout his brief life. Moreover, it was specifically because of these radical ideas, that Christ was crucified, as he broke with traditional Jewish beliefs.

This was the supreme sacrifice Christ made to get these fresh, revolutionary concepts of God before us. This, likewise, is the ultimate sacrifice Christ made for all of us who call ourselves, "Christians", "followers of Christ". In my judgment, those misguided souls, who today tragically see God primarily as the vindictive, judgmental, prejudicial sovereign, are completely missing sight of the true nature of the God for whom Jesus Christ lived and died.

So perfectly was the real nature of God reflected through the living and teaching of this Jesus, called the "Christ", that Christ and God became as one and the same. Moreover, I believe, as we Christians grow to become more god-like, and our lives reflect a more perfect image of the God of Christ, we too, find ourselves more like the Divine. Basically, I believe, since we were created in the "image" of God, each of us carries within us a spark of the Divine. I am thoroughly convinced that our world would be a safer, more friendly, more enjoyable, more god-like place in which to live, if instead of our obsession with hatreds and wars and prejudices of every kind, we found ourselves taking seriously Christ's admonition to "love" our enemies, to "do good" to those who would persecute us, and to "forgive" those who want to do us wrong. This is fundamental to a mature religious faith, such as Jesus preached and lived.

In parable after parable, Christ tried fervently to teach us what to do when others are revengeful, or hungry, or naked, or neglected, or otherwise in need. As a result we Christians know what to do, for Christ taught us that we are to be a new "light to the world". We are to be the "leaven" that "leavens the loaf". We are to be the "salt" to season the whole! Unbelievably, we are further told that, to be a Christian, we must "go the second mile". We are further instructed that we must share everything we have been given with others, and, most shocking of all, to "turn the other cheek" when attacked! No wonder the rich and powerful of Jesus day felt he was a radical who must be silenced!

These were revolutionary ideas in Jesus' day. They are still revolutionary ideas today. If Christ were to walk the earth today and preach this message anew, I have no doubt that we would destroy him as they did in the first century; or it is more likely perhaps that we would simply lock him away permanently as an insane dreamer. There is no place for radical ideas in the social order of the rich and powerful. Radical ideas shake us up. Can you even imagine two armies on a battle field "turning the other cheek", as the solution to an international crisis? What a crazy notion by an insane Dreamer! Just think of this: we Christians could revolutionize our world, if we were ready to put into practice what Christ preached! Instead, we act as though our judgmental, war-like ways are superior to the ways proposed by the one who really knew God.

Many of the great faiths of the world speak of the miraculous births, and even the "virgin births" of their founders. I believe the concept of the "virgin birth" of Christ is not essential either to his personhood, his saviourhood, or the validity of his teachings and example. To those for whom it is relevant, so be it! However, it is interesting to note that when Matthew wants to prove that Jesus is of the "lineage of David", he traces Jesus' ancestry through Joseph, his father, not through Mary, his mother. That should tell us something of the mindset of the first century Gospel writers. It was only in retrospect, centuries later, that the concept of Christ's "virgin birth" seemed a valid essential to the early church fathers. According to biblical scholars, the miraculous birth stories were added to the Gospels later.

Contrary to the opinion of many, I believe in the basic underlying "goodness" of humans, not our basic underlying "evilness"! After all, we believe we are God's supreme creation. I believe God created us to be "good". There is no question in my mind as to our propensity for evil. Most certainly we can be, and often are, evil. But I sincerely believe our natural inclination is to be good. It is only when we are less than our natural human selves, that we choose the evil.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that God created us as free thinking, free acting, entirely free agents. We are not automatons, moved about as chess pieces on a chess board. We are intelligent beings with God-granted powers of choice, imbued with the freedom to choose good as well as the freedom to make bad choices. I am convinced that the more intimate we are with the God who created us, the more likely it is that we will make good choices. By the same token, the farther away we are from that Divine Mind, the more likely it is that we will make bad choices. Furthermore, I believe God will not interfere with our choices, good or bad, unless invited to be a part of them. We are completely free in every way. There are no strings attached. This is the amazing, unbelievably awesome freedom which God has entrusted to us, frightening as it is.

Therefore, I believe, if we insist on mutilating and wastefully using up the resources of our remarkable and miraculous planet, I am convinced God will not interfere, even if we are determined to destroy the earth completely. This is precisely why I believe wholeheartedly that Christians need to be very concerned for the responsible stewardship of our entire world and everything in it. Native Americans had it right. All of God's creation is sacred. Every creature and every plant has its place. The entire planet, and now even space, is at our mercy. We are no less than God's stewards.

The stewardship and management of every resource is critical; given to us by a God who created us and trusts us to make all the right choices. I also believe, that if the world is to be destroyed, we will do the destroying, not God. Our freedom is an indication that God will not interfere. Therefore, unless we are humble enough to recognize our own frailties and shortcomings and request direction from the Divine, I feel that scenario is a very real possibility. What an awesome responsibility rests on the shoulders of each of us! God's remarkable world is entrusted to our frail, imperfect human hands. If we goof it up or use

it up, future generations, if there are to be any, will have a very limited future indeed! What a truly awesome trust!

Actually, this is possibly as good a place as any, to deal with the whole matter of prayer and how it comes into play. No one knows for certain exactly how prayer functions. Certainly God knows what we need before we ask. Likewise, God surely cannot be so immature and self-centered as to need praise. Then why pray?

A "give me" prayer is both selfish and unnecessary. A prayer to win a ball game, for example, must be a terrible embarrassment to God. What about the prayers of the opposing team? I can see validity in a prayer to do one's very best, or a prayer for guidance and wisdom while making a critical decision. But, prayer cannot be a substitute for hard work and careful preparation. That would simply be making God a crutch to lean on when the going gets tough. I believe, naturally, there is always a place for a prayer of thanks or gratitude. That is the very least one would expect of a devout person.

For me, intercessory prayer is most valid and makes the most sense. Intercessory prayer is unselfish, and reflects a concern for another that is Christ-inspired. How it works, I do not know, but it certainly seems to. Since each of us carries within us a spark of the Divine. Perhaps our little spiritual spark of concern, added to the great overwhelming strength of God, gives an extra boost to the process. Therefore, if many intercessory prayers are added to the whole, the impact is great indeed. At any rate, intercessory prayer does appear to have a unique power whether we understand it or not.

As I indicated earlier, if we are to become more God-like in every way, we need to get on God's wave length. I believe we can only do this when we include God in all our major decisions. This is one of the most productive uses of prayer. When I was a college student, it was my great good fortune to hear Dr. George Washington Carver address the student body at Carleton College. He said that when he wanted to discover something new, he would simply go out into his garden and talk to "Mr. Creator". He said the conversation would go something like this: "Mr. Creator, what can I make out of the peanut?" "Little man, what would you like to make out of the peanut?" "Mr. Creator, I'd like to make milk out of the peanut." "Little man, I have given you a brain. Now, go back into your laboratory, and I'll help you make milk from a peanut." This may sound like a simplistic solution to a complex problem, but I believe that is exactly the way it must be done! As "little people" we must work closely with God to find real solutions to our many real problems. God knows the answers. We need to appeal to God for those answers and make certain that we apply them.

I also believe that God had to deal with impossible problems when creating the universe. I do not believe God's universe to be perfect, that is, without flaw, even though it was created by an all-good God for all-good purposes. I think even God faced insurmountable choices. From time to time, God had to make a choice in creation that left other consequences less than ideal. One such choice, for example, was weather. For God to

make weather perfect for one situation, of necessity it made that same weather pattern less than perfect for another situation. The same weather pattern that grows mid-western corn, can also spawn violent, destructive tornados. Actually, we are discovering through "el nino" and "el nina" that the same thing can be said for weather patterns around the globe. It is beginning to dawn on us, that we as a people, have, through our ignorance, contributed substantially to the warming process, which seems to be disrupting the delicate weather balance God created so carefully.

Nevertheless, I believe all aspects of God's creation are subject to universal, underlying unchanging laws. These fundamental laws make it possible for humankind to understand nature and therefore, to deal with it. In time, with full understanding, it may be that we can actually improve some destructive situations. Certainly, we have improved on God's native seeds and growing methods. There may be many more ways we will be called upon to improve what God has provided.

As a matter of fact, I believe this is the basic reason we are here, to assist God. We are to work with God, to help God to complete and refine the creation and make our world, and God's world, in every way, a better place in which to live - an 'earthly heaven', so to speak. This, I believe, is our task. This task is great enough that we ought not to be wasting our effort worrying about "going to hell" and trying to frighten everyone into thinking the world is "coming to an end". If the world comes to an end, we will be the ones who end it, not the God who created it.

I do not believe in the traditional "second coming" of Christ, or what some scare-mongers speak of as the "rapture". I take Jesus seriously when he said he would come back. Christ does come back. Christ comes back for every person who accepts him and his teachings. I believe that is the true meaning of the "second coming". Not that long dead bodies will resurrect, and on a given day, greet Christ descending from the sky, and finally all ascend with him to heaven. Have we not learned anything from the folly of all those soothsayers who have analyzed the "prophesies" and the "signs" and waited for Christ to descend out of the clouds, to take home only a very limited number of the faithful? I take Jesus seriously when he said he would come back. Christ does come back. Christ comes back for every person who accepts him and his teachings. This, I believe, is the true meaning of the "second coming".

Unfortunately, many so-called Christians are more obsessed with dying than with living. I have great difficulty understanding those who think only about going to the next world. I believe the way one lives in this world automatically prepares one for residing in the next world. I am aware that millions on this earth live lives of such misery and horror that their obsession with a better place can hardly help but occupy their entire existence. However, I can find little evidence that Christ was overly concerned about our preparing for the coming world. On the other hand, I can find abundant evidence that Christ was greatly concerned about the conduct of our lives and our concern for those less fortunate, in this present world.

The Bible speaks often of "satan" and "hell". For the life of me I cannot imagine a good God creating an eternal hell, where a person burns forever. I believe we can all agree that God, certainly, at the very least, is as good as the best we can envision as human beings. God is at least that charitable, and at least that forgiving, and more, much more. As a human being, I cannot possibly imagine a crime so absolutely horrendous that I would want anyone to suffer eternally for it. And, certainly, a forgiving God is far better than I could ever be.

That, loving, omniscient, forgiving, creative Mind would never allow a person to burn forever! Why the writers of the Bible make so much of 'hell' and "satan", I do not know, and cannot possibly understand. I only know that the God I worship, the God of Jesus Christ, is not vindictive or hateful; is not a God to be feared; but a God of love, a God of understanding, a God of compassion and a God of forgiveness. The God I worship has no room for hatred and prejudice, or wrath and revenge, or even the sentencing of the worst sinner, to burning in an "eternal fire, forever"!

I do, without a doubt, believe in life after death. We Christians refer to this "paradise" as "heaven". I cannot picture a "heaven" in the traditional sense, with streets paved in gold; a place where only the righteous reside in eternal serenity and rest. Quite certainly "heaven" will not include our bodies, at least I surely hope not! I believe sincerely that whatever else "heaven" might be, it will not be a static state. It is my belief that what we do not achieve in the way of spiritual development and growth in this life, we will be destined to learn in the next life. I believe "heaven" will be a spiritual state of continual growth. What we learn here, we will not be required to repeat, but what we do not learn here, we will be expected to learn later. In a sense, therefore, we create our own "heaven" or our own "hell", by what we have learned of God through Christ; by how close we have grown toward God, and by how far we have developed spiritually right here in this present world.

Many Christians feel moved to limit God to the God of Christians only, much as Old Testament Jews saw God as their God - the God of only the Jews. Unfortunately, many Christians have developed that same mind set. Some even go so far as to maintain that only a specific denomination of Christians, who believe in a circumscribed way and a circumscribed interpretation of the Scriptures can possibly be "saved" or "chosen" by the Divine. What evidence is there that we as Christians are better than the devout of other faiths? Do we really have a corner on all Divine truth, while the other great religions of the world, who worship the same God, have none? What makes us so certain that we really are God's "chosen"?

We place a lot of credence on the Biblical word "only". How presumptuous of us to place limits on the Creator of the entire universe. How can we possibly be so arrogant as to claim for God only one way, the "Christian" way? What about devout Jews, or Moslems, or Buddhists, or Hindus, or Confucianists, or Shintoists? Many adherents of these great

world faiths worship the same God we do, though they may refer to the Divine by a different name and follow different practices of devotion. Does the God of the universe ignore their sincere concerns, their faithfulness and their agonies?

Of course, I feel the way of Christ to be, for me, a more perfect approach to God, but perhaps that is because I am most familiar with the Christian way. For me it is the only believable way. But, who is to say that an all-seeing, all-wise, all-knowing God does not recognize other "ways" as acceptable? In fact, I cannot believe that God is so confined and restricted and limited to "one way" that there could never be others. God is certainly loving enough to allow different ways to approach this Divine Life Force.

So, what do I really believe about the Christian church, the institution to which I have devoted my life and to which four of my five children have devoted their lives? I believe the traditional church, imperfect as it is, continues to be a positive influence for good in the world. At times it seems to be the only sane, ameliorating institution around. At other times, the church appears to be silent, indifferent and even a negative force in the face of suffering, prejudice, poverty and despair. Whether this is due to the fear of losing power and prestige or whether it's adherents simply lack the courage and forthrightness and the willingness to reach out to the desperate need of all around us, I do not know. I only know that I would like to see the church take more Christ-like positions on major issues, as unpopular as some might be. Instead of leaving critical issues to politicians, I would like to see the church take the lead for all human rights and justice. However, I stand unequivocally for the complete and total separation of the church from the state.

In my judgment, as an institutional church, we ought to be espousing, much more boldly and fearlessly, the Christ-like principles Jesus taught us. The church cannot be concerned with self-preservation. The church must become the strong voice as God's stewards of our planet. We need to be far more vocal in our protecting and preserving of the environment. We need to be offering better solutions to wars and hatreds and prejudice, so rampant in our world. In short, to be the church of Jesus Christ, we must deal honestly and forthrightly with the inconsistencies of the Bible, for thinking people to consider. We must take unpopular, Christ-like positions and hold them up before the world with courage and determination, whatever the consequences. The church must no longer hide behind ancient theological cliches and traditions which so often have been deterrents to our effectiveness and appeal.

Having said all that, I believe faithful Christians within the church of Christ are some of the most helpful hands God has on earth to complete and refine this remarkable creation. Without the influence and dedication of these faithful servants, our world would be in even greater peril. I am, however, feeling the need for fewer angry words, directed by some against those with whom they disagree theologically, as well as more aggressive action, on the part of those of us who call ourselves the "Christian church".

These are a few of the reasons why I believe we cannot afford to be wasting our energies

on prejudices of every kind, from people's race, their sexual orientation, their music, their clothing or lack of it, and even their choices of life style, or, whether or not we are properly prepared for "heaven". We will always be faced with predictors of doom, who accuse the Christian churches and their ministers of apostasy; who maintain we are selling out to their imagined version of evil, the "devil" or in their thinking, a literal "satan". All I can think of when I hear them speak, or read their words is, "What would Jesus the Christ say to them?" They make the great God I worship look like a weak, vengeful, angry, despot sitting on a high throne gleefully ordering one dreadful sentence after another. For those who would espouse such a theology, I feel only sympathy (and I must admit, I struggle with the term "disgust", - a result of my human-ness). Through their unbelievable arrogance they do the ultimate disservice, both to God as well as to the entire Christian body of faith. The great God of the entire universe is much greater than their narrow view - much greater. The God of Christ is much more magnanimous and much more wonderful in every way! What a pity to see God in such terms and to reduce the very essence of our being to the lowest human common denominator!

In the words of William Barclay, the famous British Biblical scholar, in speaking of strict, 'fundamentalism', "One thing stands out with astonishing clarity, there is no mention of the love of God as being the main foundation of all belief. This must be wrong!" And, so it is! First of all, the source of love is God. So, God is love! That is the cardinal essence of the teaching of Jesus the Christ. Since God is love, according to our faith, "We must love the Lord our God with all our heart, our soul our mind and our strength, and then, we must love all our neighbors as ourselves!"

There are many "little" beliefs which I have, throughout the years, "re-bricked" into my "foundation of faith", which are not included here, but those listed above represent some of the keystones in my belief system. As I said, these beliefs, "for me", are very satisfying and fulfilling. They answer, "for me", some of the many questions I have had as I matured as a "child of God". These beliefs may or may not register satisfactorily with anyone who reads this document. If anything written here is helpful, I am grateful. They are not intended to be instructional. They are merely the distillation of one who has sought honestly for answers to life's perplexing mysteries, and found these principles to be helpful and worthy of acceptance.

One of my favorite poets, Edwin Markham, in coping with life's fundamental principles, has penned these famous words:

He drew a circle that shut me out.
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win.
We drew a circle that took him in.

Lyle W. Lieder