

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF MY HEART

by David L. Hatton

The creatures will not alter their voice— that is, their beauty of form—if one man simply sees what another both sees and questions, so that the world appears one way to this man and another to that. It appears the same way to both; but it is mute to this one and it speaks to that one. Indeed, it actually speaks to all, but only they understand it who compare the voice received from without with the truth within.

--Augustine's *Confessions* (X,vi,10)

Part of adolescent growth is learning to think independently. For me, that growth led to doubts about my Christian beliefs and the validity of the Bible. My decision at age nine to ask Christ to enter my life was rooted more in the fear of hell than in a love for God. At thirteen I even had a mystical experience called "being filled with the Holy Spirit." But at the same time, my introduction at high school to the theory of evolution overshadowed these experiences with doubt.

During those years I began to study philosophy, which I learned meant "love of wisdom." I knew that seeking to discover the truth was the wisest path that I could choose for my life. The Greek philosopher Socrates became my hero, and I wanted to follow his maxim, "Know thyself." Oddly enough, philosophical thinking led me to question evolutionary theory.

Evolutionism as a belief system required too much faith! If the theory had included an Orderly Force producing higher forms of life out of a chaotic world, it would have made sense. But studying the actual theory in depth, I found that it was based on chance and accident. There was no Intelligent Power behind evolution at all. With enough time and haphazard, good mutations, life in all its dynamic diversity had evolved from a single cell! But could random reproductive mutations, a chance gamma ray passing through a frog's gonad, a rat's testicle, a monkey's sperm, here and there in time, produce the wonder of humankind on earth?

In biology class one day I became convinced that evolutionary theory took more faith than a religion. We were studying breast-feeding in mammals, and a riddle came to me that my biology teacher could not answer. Mutation was the key to change, and chance was the source of mutation. Then how could these anatomically unrelated but mutually essential features, the rooting and sucking reflexes in infant mammals and the letting down reflex in the female, possibly be simultaneous accidents? All mammals required both at the same time for survival! It was too fantastic for belief, the reflexes too intertwined to be accidental.

Back then, statistical analysis had not yet been used to refute the basis of evolutionary theory. Computers fast enough to simulate the odds of successful evolutionary development were not yet in existence. Statistical numbers describing the chances of such complexity coming from such randomness were too astronomical. But I could see even then, with something as simple as breast-feeding, how these one-in-a-million chance occurrences were far too frequent in nature for evolution to be a valid theory of life on earth.

My original faith in a Creator was returning. The Author of nature could not be

Mindless Chance: there had to be an Intelligent Designer behind all this. A Supreme Being with a brilliant mind had to exist!

Again, philosophy helped me here, as did science. Both in casual contemplation and in mathematics, there is a place for the concept of infinity. We can imagine limitless space or a line going in opposite directions forever, without actually knowing what infinite distance really is. In other words, we have an ability to accept infinity even though we do not understand it. Before Einsteinian physics, the universe itself was thought to be that "infinity." The discovery that our universe is "on a curve" showed that the universe was not infinite. But that fact cannot remove from our hearts the question, "What is just beyond the rim of the universe?" Within us is a puzzling question which no theory or discovery in the material world can eradicate. We have a place inside us that asks about an Infinite Something, even though science cannot show us its existence in terms of the limited material universe.

In knowing myself, then, as Socrates encouraged, I found the possibility for belief in an Infinite Being beyond this finite world. Room for belief in a "God" was a built-in human trait. The human heart has an innate openness to faith that a "Creator" exists. But which God? The God of one of the religions?

Obviously, the fact that I was raised in a Christian family did not make my former religious beliefs any more valid than those of other religions. And who was to say that any of the world's religions were right about the nature of God anyway? How could I discover the truth about the true God?

In developing a philosophical world view, we all start with a few presuppositions. My heart was leading me to accept the major premise that a Creator God exists, but I also assumed what seemed to be a logical corollary: that all in the universe, including my own person, is God's creation. What then could I learn from the world of nature and from my own human nature that could tell me about the Author of both?

First, in the material and biological world, I saw order, law, and design. This betrayed something about the nature of the Creator: God is a Mathematician, a Legislator, and an Artist.

Turning my gaze inward, I knew that I was more than a physical being under laws of compulsion and instinct. I had internal laws or aspirations that transcended definitions in material terms. Human intangibilities, such as freewill, honesty, pride, guilt, honor, happiness, sorrow, love, etc., were more real and meaningful parts of human life and existence than even our physical makeup. Humanness, as expressed by these inner characteristics, could tell me the most important thing I needed to know about God. Since I was a person who could feel, think, choose, and even create, then I could logically conclude that my Creator was also a Person. I rejected the idea of God as an impersonal force, for it would give these inner experiences of personality no Source, no Prototype, and would make the personal creature more advanced than such an impersonal creator.

But if a Person, then what kind of Person was God? In my own estimation, which met consensus with the majority of thinkers in history, the highest of virtues in this intangible realm of the soul were those which stem from "unselfish love." And if we humans esteemed

"love" so highly, then God must surely be loving. How could I know this? Well, this God of order put a strong law within my heart that made me feel good about loving actions, but uncomfortable with my unloving or selfish deeds. In fact, I had to battle this sense of guilt with rationalizing efforts to bring my mind to accept any of my unloving acts as being "okay." And just by studying life, I observed that when love is the rule, humanity is in order. When selfishness rules, destruction and disharmony follow. So, just from these two observations, the outer world and my inner world, I could learn that God was a very wise, powerful, loving Person.

There was actually a time when I thought of making my own religion based on such mental reasoning. Many people do just that, and have been doing so for ages. In a sense, that is what the intellectual construction of a philosophy can become. But my reasoning took a different path.

As a finite being, I had some wisdom; but God's wisdom would be, by nature, infinite. I had a measure of love; but God's love would be, by nature, perfect. God's perfect love, then, would far surpass even the love I had for myself, and God's absolute wisdom encompassed the very wisest choices I could ever make. If I could learn God's will, rooted in such infinite wisdom and love, then I would be a *fool* not to yield my own will to God's.

I had already learned some general things about His will through nature and my own heart. Was God the kind of Person who would make His will known? Would He spell out His specific desires for humanity, especially His will for individual human beings, like myself?

Something true about the nature of human love is that love communicates. Without communication, a relationship of love breaks down, whether it is the patriotic love between citizens, the friendly love between neighbors, the familial love in clans and homes, or the romantic love between lovers and spouses. So, the God of love would have to be a Communicator. It would be His nature to communicate with us, and the perfect God would do so reliably and unambiguously. His love would mandate a Divine communication, a Personal revelation that went beyond His hints about Himself in the design of the physical world and the nature of the human soul. Such a Self-disclosure by God would be the only sure foundation of a true religion, or more properly, a true relationship between God and humanity.

If you have followed my reasoning up to this point and see its logic, I think that on your own, staying honest with yourself and what you see in nature, you will arrive at the same conclusion I have reached.

I looked among the world's religions for a revelation of the God of infinite love which my heart taught me about. If such a God existed, that God would love to the greatest degree imaginable.

That last step of reasoning led me beyond my old doubts and fully back into my original faith in Jesus Christ. I cannot reproduce here the details of my religious research or of my study of Christianity in particular. I believe you must seek the truth for yourself for it to be really meaningful to your life. But I do challenge you: search through earth's history for a religion whose center is a God who loved humanity so much that He "became flesh and

dwelt among us" (John 1:14). God's word in nature is nice, His word in the mouths of divinely illumined prophets is better, but becoming one of us is the platform for communication *par excellence!*

God's loving act of Incarnation has to be the ultimate in divine Self-revelation. And yet, becoming human just to say "I love you" would not be the kind of love our world really needed from God. What about the disorder, the hurt, the loss caused by mankind's greatest problem, the selfishness of sin?

The answer of Christian Scriptures is this: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us," (Romans 5:8). The ultimate proof of divine, self-giving love was the Cross of Jesus Christ. In a marvelous way, His death for our sins and His victory over the grave have released into this world the fountainhead of peace and healing that all humanity longs for. Most of all, Christ's dying in our place paid for the reconciliation between a loving Creator and us, who have often rebelled against His laws of love. Selfishness brought us only ruin and death. But God's love, reaching out to lost humanity and experiencing death in our place, brought us the offer of life and wholeness.

I could not invent or imagine a religion that deals with the human condition in terms of greater love than the love of God we discover in the New Testament. So, I gave up the idea of establishing my own world view and turned my life over to the God who revealed Himself in the Bible. My life philosophy is now based on a relationship to Christ as my Master, Savior and greatest Friend. My religion is to do my best to return the love He has shown me. Not all my questions are answered yet, but I would be a fool to let unanswered questions rob me of enjoying answered ones. And I now have something better than intellectual satisfaction with a set of religious beliefs or philosophical conclusions. I've come to know the Personal-Infinite Being behind creation. With this wonderful God I have an ongoing love-relationship, based not on my hopeful wishing, but on God's proof of His love in Christ's Incarnation and Self-sacrifice.

The more I learn about this earthly life and the human condition, the more I see how the Christian faith makes so much sense. I was searching with my best and most honest reasoning to find the truth, and I found that the Truth was a Person. I was seeking the God that my heart hoped was there, and the God of love who revealed Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ, was all the time hunting for me.

God is hunting for you, as well. Are you searching with all your heart for Him? If you'd like to read more about the Christian faith or how to become a Christian, contact me through my website. I'll try to answer your questions, suggest resources, or send links for further reading. God bless you!

Sincerely serving the Lord Jesus,

David L. Hatton

(www.pastordavidrn.com)

* * * * *

THE ANSWERING

by David L. Hatton

Is there any meaning, a purpose why we're here,
A reason for our living and dying day by day?
Could there be a message that comes from the beginning,
Outside our world of striving? Is someone there to say?

If it is all illusion, if we are just machines,
How can we measure value? Are we worth more or less?
If we are merely atoms that clumped by time and chance,
Why deem ourselves so precious upon vague hope and guess!

If only Someone's out there to speak His love by word,
To tell us who we are; if only Someone came,
Then we'd have an answer: (religion gave too many--
Science forgot our souls), but He'd have to leave His name.

Science said, "Keep searching," religion said, "Try harder."
Some said, "Do your own thing," and others said, "Be brave!"
But tell me how to listen: the voice of pain is loud!
The wounded scream around us: we face an open grave....

But One came speaking purpose and wept at pain and death
And healed the brokenhearted: "A lunatic," said some.
But He said Someone sent Him named Father God and Love.
He claimed to seek the lost ones; that One who came said,
"Come."

© 1991, in *Poems Between Heaven and Hell*