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# WHY I BELIEVE

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## A SERIES OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CONFESSIONS

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### V. WHY I BELIEVE IN THE BIBLE

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The Bible is a collection of books, which record the religious experience, convictions, and hopes of the Hebrew people in the Old Testament and those of the early Christians in the New Testament. These records represent a religious history of over a thousand years. History is mankind's greatest teacher. Religious history is no exception to this general principle. The religious experience represented in the Bible is more profoundly ethical and more truly spiritual than that anywhere else recorded. The Bible is thus the richest treasure of religious instruction and inspiration as yet within the reach of man.

This biblical record shows successive generations of men working out their ideals and struggling ever forward toward higher visions. It clearly demonstrates that these generations, under the guidance and inspiration of God, made their religion as they went along. It was no static quantity inherited by them from a distant past, but a living and growing power ever seeking to find expression through the lives of men. The form that this growing religion took at any particular time was largely determined by the needs of that time. Each generation in turn sought to interpret the world in which it lived in terms of God;

or to use a familiar phrase, to "justify the ways of God to men." Their world, like our own, was continually changing; they themselves were likewise continually undergoing education through the experiences of life; consequently, the successive interpretations of world-movements and of individual responsibilities in the world-order were necessarily each more or less different from its predecessor. They never allowed any one stage of that experience to become final in its authority over succeeding stages. Each generation was looking forward to something yet to come which should transcend in value all former achievements and fulfil their highest hopes. When something of this dynamic and forward-looking attitude was lost in the later Jewish generations and attention began to be focused upon the past, the freshness and insight of the religious leaders of the classical period was lacking and the religious experience of the age was consequently dull and drab. It remained for the movement starting in Jesus to bring back the old insight and enthusiasm and to carry forward the old experience to a higher and more commanding eminence.

I treasure the record of this changing experience for three main reasons. First,

because it satisfies me that God moves in the affairs of nations, that this is God's world. The story of the experience of the Hebrew people coming to a climax in the religious experience of Jesus and of the early church is the greatest wonder in history. Nothing less than the goodness and greatness of God will account for it. As I see more and more that the forces of the biblical world were the same in their nature and processes as the forces of the present world, my faith in the God of today is immeasurably strengthened. I see that the will of God worked itself out in Hebrew history by slow degrees. More than a thousand years of preparation were required to pave the way for the coming of Christianity. God is never in a hurry. Infinitely patient, he waits for man to catch up with his purpose and to cooperate in the working out of his plans. The record of this long suffering encourages me when I am tempted to be downcast by the slowness of our own generation to respond to high and holy ideals. There is an irresistible urge implanted by God in the soul of man that slowly pushes him on to better and higher levels of thought and deed. The progress has been at times almost imperceptible; and it is only when we take long views of the history of man such as the biblical records make possible that we can discern the steady advance of the frontiers of religion and morals. "Our God is marching on."

My second main reason for giving the Bible first place in my mind and heart is the fact that the results of the hearty and intelligent acceptance of Bible standards and ideals justify the Bible. The tree is known by

its fruits. Whether in personal, social, or national life the introduction of the principles of the Bible as controlling influences has always and everywhere meant improvement. It is a significant fact that the nations of today who set the pace in this modern world and are responsible for whatever of light and progress has been incorporated into modern civilization are nations that have worked out their own civilization under the guidance and inspiration of the biblical message. The Bible today is a striking illustration of the principle known as "the survival of the fittest." It has been brought into contrast and competition with the other great religious literatures of the world on their own soil and it has had nothing to fear from the contact. It has commended itself to peoples of the most divergent characters and cultures and has always had a great contribution to make to their betterment both socially and spiritually. Wherever it has found lodgment it has taken root in the life of the people and has produced essentially the same fruits. It has put a new spirit into backward civilizations and brought them into line with world-progress.

No less convincing is the evidence forthcoming with reference to the effect of biblical teachings upon personal character. Sudden transformations of life-purposes, such as that of Paul on the way to Damascus, have led many a soul out of darkness into light. Careful nurture and constant instillation of biblical ideas and ideals in the minds and hearts of developing childhood and youth have saved many more from the necessity of such a cataclysmic experience. But by whatever mode of entry the Bible has

obtained control of the human heart and life it has produced characters that are the admiration of the world. It has succeeded not only in commanding the respect of men's intellects but also in firing their imaginations and capturing their wills so that they have given themselves unreservedly to the doing of the will of God as they have seen it inscribed upon the biblical pages. And that will of God has been consistently seen to involve primarily not a mere lip service in the temple but a pure and unselfish devotion to the service of human welfare.

My final reason for having confidence in the Bible lies in the fact that I find in

the teachings of the Scriptures inspiration and instruction for my own personal, daily life. The visions of the prophets and the longings of the Psalmists kindle my own soul to quicker life; and the wonderful story of Jesus gives me a clearer understanding of God and a new revelation of the possibilities of man. I look upon the Bible as a ringing challenge to creative living. I am spurred by its stories of noble, sacrificing service to a realization that I should serve my own day and generation with the same whole-souled devotion and the same, forward-facing faith.

## VI. WHY I BELIEVE IN IMMORTALITY

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I believe in immortality because I believe in man and because I believe in God. All else is auxiliary, supplementary.

1. What I mean when I say here that I believe in man is that man's value, actual and potential, is such that his existence ought to be continued indefinitely in spite of physical death, if such a thing is possible. Man ought to be immortal.

The value of every human individual is incalculably great; as compared with the value of material things it is infinite. This is the Christian estimate. It is an intuitive appreciation, arising in the experience of love. Only love could make such a discovery. It is not surprising then that the clearest perception of this truth was the achievement of that divine man who loved as never man loved before or since. It was this perception of love, more than anything else,

which gave rise to the Christian religion; it made morality social and made religion the religion of socialized morality.

This Christian estimate of the value of man is rationally defensible. The human spirit is endowed with moral freedom. Within however narrow limits at any particular moment, the individual's decisions creatively determine his conduct, his character, and his destiny. This belief is theoretically permissible and morally certain. If it is not true, the whole human consciousness of moral responsibility is an illusion. But if man is a responsible agent, his will, given constantly further opportunity to express itself, is a possible source of unlimited moral and other spiritual values. Moral personality has thus infinite potential value. Reflection confirms the intuitive judgment of love.