

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

QUESTIONS THAT PERSIST

Text: "Ye Shall Know the Truth, and the Truth Shall Make You Free." John 8:32.

The beasts of the field and the birds of the air share their exclamation points with man, but man does not share his question marks with them. Sometimes they may show a bit of curiosity and an instinctive "where?" and "what?" but "who?" and "why?" belong to man. And most fortunately, though not always happily for the elders, the "whos" seem most insistent in early childhood.

We are not discussing the question marks which have brought us our tremendous advance in scientific knowledge. We put aside the questions of the cynic, and even those of the doubter, however important they may be. We turn, instead, to the persistent questions of humanity, those which belong to the human race itself.

When the universe is so marvelously unfolding and man has begun to ride in the ionosphere while making his plans to visit the moon of the earth and the other planets, it is interesting to note that the first question of the Bible was spoken by the Lord to Adam (Hebrew, "the man"), "Where art thou?" It had immediate reference then, but the question persists. We remember how in childhood we wrote our address: name, town, state, U.S.A., Western Hemisphere, World. It was our childhood searching for an answer to the question "where?" The question remains and who of us can give the right answer?

THE QUESTIONS that persist through the centuries and ages lie deeper in us than does mere curiosity. They are questions in depth. They have to do with life's meaning and destiny. They are such questions as these:

Who and what is man? Job. 7:17;

If a man die shall he live again? Job. 14:14.

Why is there so much suffering in the world?

Is God a person?

Why do we need a revelation from God? Why cannot we discover the truth for ourselves and live by it?

What is the origin of evil?

What is the meaning of life?

THESE ARE NOT exclusively Christian questions. They belong to other religions as well. They are great persistent human questions. They and other questions like them are followed by man's biggest question marks.

Before we consider the answers to such questions, let us mention two of the probing questions of Christ Jesus. The Saviour was given to asking questions and they reach into the minds and souls of men of every generation.

Who can sidestep His question: "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

Surely it is significant that one of the questions of Jesus that penetrates most deeply into our inner self and demands our soul's decision, is that which He addressed to His disciples at Caesarea Philippi: "Whom say ye that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). Why should this question repeat itself through the centuries? Why is it that a question asked of a group of men almost two thousand years ago comes with penetrating insistence to us in this century? Why is it that neither the disciples then nor ourselves today can answer the question with the simple statement, "You are Jesus of Nazareth," even as one might give answer to another, "You are Alexander the Great?"

IT MAY DISAPPOINT some to discover that the answers to these questions cannot be found in the laboratory or by methods of measurement. In this twentieth century, and to men who



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can lift a satellite into orbit, it is difficult to admit that there are questions of human value which cannot be answered by means of the scientific method.

The deep questions of which we speak will not be answered by logical propositions and mathematical equations. When Peter responded to Jesus' question, "Who say ye that I am?" with the words, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," his answer was one of faith and commitment. The truth of the answer would be apparent in the experience of Peter.

Paul wrote to Timothy, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him." This is an example of knowledge by faith and commitment. As someone has said, "Knowledge of the truth is not simply a matter of quiet, cool inquiry. It is a matter of personal commitment."

IT BELONGS to our Christian faith that we believe commitment to Christ as the Son of the living God holds the answers to these deeper questions. The answers come in Christian experience, with revelation of the meaning of life and with motivation to live life to the glory of God.

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We have considered some of the probing questions of Christ. Are there not questions which we ask ourselves? We think of the questions which Nicodemus and the rich young ruler brought to Jesus. These were questions which they must have first asked themselves. The questions I ask of myself may be very different from the questions which you ask of yourself. Perhaps they have a general similarity, but may not be quite the same.

As we discover the truth which is in Christ, this truth shall indeed make us free; free to ask deeper questions and find our fulfillment in larger exclamation points. Or as someone wrote, "It would seem that the mature man is a man in movement, intellectually and spiritually, from the question mark to the exclamation point."