

## INTRODUCTION

Christianity, like any religion, can be looked at either from the inside or the outside. When viewed from the *inside*, one gets a believer's perspective; when viewed from the *outside*, one gets a nonbeliever's perspective. I have attempted to incorporate both perspectives, though obviously within limits. Augustine held the conviction that, "one cannot fully understand a religion unless one believes it."<sup>1</sup> The truth of the matter is, it's impossible to describe Christianity without having experienced it, because to be a genuine Christian is to experience the living Christ inside of you. This spiritual reality is difficult for believers to explain to those who have not had the experience. In a sense it would be like trying to describe the experience of weightlessness in space without having been in space, or the experience of gravity on the moon without having been there. Yet, even these physical realities are relatively easy to communicate when compared to significantly deeper spiritual realities.

Over the years, many people have died for what they have believed. Many Christians have been martyred for their faith. When one attempts to teach about a system of beliefs that is a life or death matter to people, one will fail miserably unless he himself embraces that reality. For instance, a teacher might be able to explain the United States Constitution on a fairly sophisticated level, but he or she will not be able to match the spirit of those who labored over its formation, because they were willing to die for the freedom they were trying to protect. The more distant one is from the reality he is teaching about, the more sterile will his words be. Conversely, if someone teaches a subject about which he cares deeply, he will communicate far more effectively. As a practicing Christian, I trust I have presented the material in this book in a way that will help readers come to an understanding of a reality that transcends the physical.

### **The Need for Intellectual Honesty**

Intellectual honesty is critical to the process of learning, especially when one is engaged in a quest for truth and is seriously seeking to maximize his or her potential in life. But being intellectually honest is not easy. It can be extremely difficult when new ideas and belief systems come into conflict with present ideas and beliefs. Most people are fairly passionate about what they already believe, and any challenge to those beliefs generally serves to make

them defensive and uncomfortable. Over the years a lot of information has been written down on the chalkboards of our minds; though much of it may be accurate and helpful, some of it undoubtedly is erroneous and hurtful. It would be wonderful if each of us had a mind eraser to remove all of the pain and misinformation that we have accumulated on the chalkboards of our minds—but life is not that easy.

The famous American statesman Daniel Webster was a man of great wisdom and insight into the makeup of human beings. He believed getting a *new idea* into someone's mind was one of the most difficult things in the world, but he felt it was even more difficult to get an *old idea* out of someone's mind. Generally speaking, once people adopt a set of values and beliefs, two things happen: First, they continue to add to their paradigm, accepting any evidence that supports their position; and second, they begin to reject any evidence that runs contrary to their position. So, when we wed ourselves to a particular concept, it becomes difficult to divorce ourselves from it. Therefore, we should examine a concept very carefully before we adopt it as our position, because the end result is that this prejudiced position will now control our reasoning. It is sobering to think that there is enough information in the world to support one's *ignorance* on any subject. Let me explain. Probably three of the most sensitive issues in any society are politics, religion, and race. I believe there is enough information circulating in society to support one's hating any *political party* in our country—whether it be the Democrats, the Republicans, or the Green Party—if all you do is “selectively process” certain pieces of information. That's why we find so many people vigorously opposing each political party. It certainly does not help matters when self-serving politicians lace their campaigns with venomous attacks and half-truths about their opponents. Is it any wonder our citizenry is so partisan in its politics, so juvenile in its behavior, and so adolescent in its ability to work through differences and misunderstandings?

Let's look at another issue. There is enough on the information highway to support one's hating a particular *race*—whether it be Whites, Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans, or whatever—if you selectively choose to believe only certain pieces of information. Likewise, one could apply this concept to hating a particular *religious group*. There is an abundance of information (selectively chosen) to hate Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. It is simply a matter of choosing to believe the information that leads to hatred, and rejecting the information that leads to acceptance. Some people even attempt to justify their hatred by pointing out how many people agree with them! Just because you can get a million people to agree

with you does not make a particular position right; it only shows how extensive the problem of ignorance really is—it's universal!

Every year millions of people are murdered worldwide because people can find no other way to satisfy their hate, and America's statistics are some of the worst. Think about it—*millions* are murdered every year! Professor Thomas Schirrmacher was quoted by the German news agency *IDEA* that 43,000,000 Christians have been killed for their faith since the time of Christ.<sup>2</sup> That's an extraordinary number. There have been millions upon millions of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and members of other religious groups who have been killed for their faith as well. And it's all due to the incredible power of hate! What kind of intellectual dementia moves people to such barbarism? Do we really live in a *value-free* universe? Is hate value-free?

In the following chapters, the information presented may or may not coincide with your belief system. I do not ask you to abandon your present beliefs, whatever they may be. I merely ask that you be willing to use your mind to the fullest. Education takes place where open dialogue and investigation occur through the uncovering and exploring of new ideas and concepts.<sup>3</sup> I invite you to join me on this journey as we look at the transcendent spiritual realities of the cosmos.