

HOW TO BE YOUR OWN SELFISH PIG



By Susan Schaeffer Macaulay
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And how can I finish without a thank-you to my mother and father? Mother and dad, lots of these stories are yours. Thank you for you.

HOW TO BE YOUR OWN SELFISH PIG

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Dedication

This book is dedicated
To some very good friends,
You'll know who you are
Because together we brought in the damp laundry
And put it in the "warming cupboard."
You helped chop all the vegetables
And stirred the porridge every morning.
I'll never forget you—
Your love, your help . . .
The fun and the laughter,
The music, and the talk.
Space separates us. Things happen.
But together we stand on firm ground.
There is life. We grow in truth.

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“What kind of a place is this?”

Since I'm more used to talking with people than writing, I'd like you to imagine that this book isn't a book at all, but actually a visit to the rambling old house in England where I live along with my family and co-workers.

As you crunch up the driveway with your backpack slung over your shoulder, you will be welcomed by our dog, Timmy. His loud barks will announce your arrival.

If it is sunny and warm, you will soon find yourself sitting on the lawn, surrounded by thirty or so people. Some lounge back, soaking up the sun. Others are playing a game with five or six little boys. A few are gathered in a heated discussion. It is afternoon tea break, which is enjoyed for as long as possible in England.

But the people around you are not just from England or any one corner of the globe. Two young German students are talking with a couple of Americans. An Australian kicks the ball to the children, while four English students talk about their university courses with an older-looking couple. These people are dressed differently from each other, since they come from different backgrounds and countries.

Why is such a diverse group of people together? And where are you?

You're at a L'Abri Fellowship Center in a small English country village south of London. L'Abri (La-BREE) is a French name, meaning “the shelter.” The L'Abri house I live and work in, like the other L'Abri houses around the world, is a shelter where people can come to get away from their everyday routines and think about their questions, and look at answers.

Some people come because of terrible personal problems: drugs, divorce, unwanted pregnancy, depression, suicidal feelings, alcoholism. Other people come just because they want to figure some things out. (The locations of the five L'Abri Fellowship Centers—in Switzerland, Holland, England,





Massachusetts, and Minnesota—do add some appeal to visits there, especially for people who like to travel!)

When I was fourteen years old, my parents, Francis and Edith Schaeffer, started the first L'Abri Center in Switzerland. It all began in 1955 when my sister Priscilla, the oldest of the four children in our family, went to the nearby university town of Lausanne, and started bringing a few friends home for weekends. These students were asking lots of important questions, which often led to one big topic: "What is life all about?" They couldn't believe that this family would sit and talk about their questions until midnight or 1:00 A.M. They loved the homey care my mother gave, the sled rides, and the family hot dog roasts. But what brought more and more young people to visit for longer and longer periods of time was the possibility of asking, thinking, and finding answers. My parents believed that you could talk about truth. They also believed that the roof over our heads and the food my mother prepared for those who came week by week would be provided by a God who was a part of our daily lives.

I couldn't even guess how many people have come and gone at L'Abri in the years since then. The original family grew up and had children of their own. Other people have come and worked in Switzerland and in the several other new L'Abri centers. The L'Abri you are visiting in England started eleven years ago.

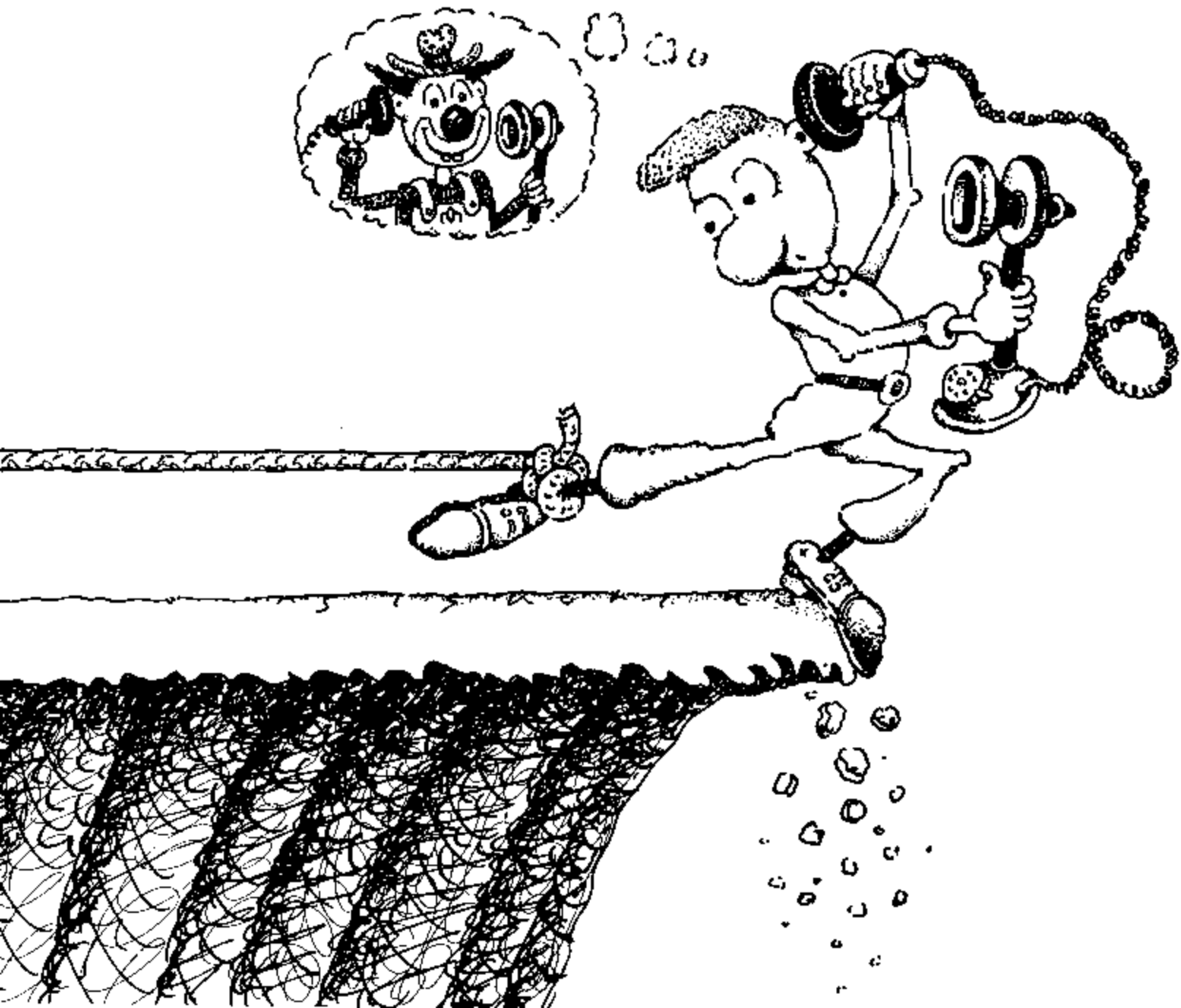
In this book you'll share with me some stories of people's lives and their ideas. The questions and problems are real ones; the people who had them are real, too. (I changed some details to protect their privacy.)

Don't pack lots of fancy clothes when you come. Bring your very oldest jeans, and lots of warm sweaters. I'm afraid the huge, old manor house (built in 1789) gets chilly, and there's lots of work to do. Everyone is asked to help with the laundry, gardening, cooking, etc! You will study for four hours and help for four hours every day.

The people living and working here at L'Abri are my husband, Ronald, and myself, three of our four children (our oldest daughter is at college), plus three other families and three single workers. At mealtime, you may have a meal somewhere in the main house, in the old stable block, in an apartment, or in the old schoolhouse, all turned into homes of those working here. Upstairs there are bunk beds to flop down on at night. You will get very tired!

This visit will be easy to arrange. All you have to do is turn the page. Sometimes there are more people who want to come to L'Abri than we can house. But in this case, you can visit and eavesdrop without even writing a letter. I hope the ideas we discuss will jump the gap of the space that separates us. Come and join our conversations. They sometimes last for hours!





Sally sank into an armchair by the crackling fire and closed her hand around a cup of coffee. Traces of tears smudged her cheeks, and her hands shook. Her wrist, freshly bandaged where she had slashed it, made her wince whenever she moved.

As I sat down across from her, my heart sank. What should I say? I decided just to listen.

“My life is such a mess. . . .” Sally murmured, staring into the fire. “The whole world is a mess. And I don’t think it’s going to get better. What’s the use in going on living?”

On another day Matthew stood by the kitchen sink, washing stacks of cups with short, jerky motions. It looked as if he were trying to kill the cups!

“Take a look at me!” he said. “People say I’m a success. Ha! If only they knew.” He laughed bitterly. “I thought I had it made, too. I finished school, got an ‘important’ job, could afford a comfortable life-style, had a beautiful girl friend. I really cared about this girl, too, and the future looked promising. . . .” His voice trailed off.

“But then our feelings for each other died,” he continued, getting angry again, “and we broke the thing up! I was miserable. And, you know, as I looked around at everything else that I had, it all tasted like—like sawdust without her.”

He turned from the sink to glare at me. “What’s this crummy life all about, anyway?”

Next time you’re out with a friend for a hamburger and fries or a sundae, try to look your friend in the eye and ask Sally’s or Matthew’s questions: “What is life all about?” “What’s the use in going on living?”

Your friend will very likely joke or laugh, not believing you’re serious. Or he might stare at you nervously, or even call a psychiatrist. After all, people don’t usually ask those

**“And yet they drink, they
laugh;
Close the wound, hide the
scar . . .”**

**Carly Simon, “That’s the Way I’ve Always
Heard It Should Be”**



kinds of questions. Our culture tends to squelch deep thinking, or else to label it as something that only superbrains or strange people do.

Yet Sally and Matthew aren't weird. They are real people I've known, two out of many who have brought their questions to L'Abri Fellowship in Greatham, England, where I live and work.

Why were they asking questions, when most people don't bother to? Because difficult events in their lives had shaken them cruelly. The way they'd tried living wasn't working. They'd come to the end of their rope.

Rather than weird, Sally and Matthew are quite typical. Have you ever noticed that people usually only pay attention to the "heavy questions" of life when things go wrong?

We don't do much serious examining of ourselves after getting a date with Mister or Miss Wonderful—but we do after that same person has informed us that he/she is shampooing his/her hair that night! We're less inclined to think deep thoughts after winning a championship game than after losing in a shutout.

When things in life are going along well, we assume that we must be doing something right. It's when they go wrong that we begin to wonder. And even then we often try to shut out the questions that bother us. We go to a party, or turn the music up louder, or work harder. We buy a new sweater or a pair of skis to cheer ourselves up, or drown our problems with a chocolate shake or a few beers or a few pills.

"Don't think about it," society tells us. "Don't ask questions."

You might say that the culture around us brainwashes us. There are more images and words thrown at us every day than ever before in man's history. Magazines, tv, newspapers: these form the media. They are out to sell opinions to us. On top of this, we are surrounded by friends and neighbors who tend to repeat what they have heard. Some

people say that young people are especially susceptible to being influenced by their peers. That may be true. But everyone tends to think that the ideas most people have accepted must therefore be “right” ideas. We forget to think for ourselves.

But no one can run away from these questions and decisions forever. You already believe in something. Whether you’ve thought about it or not, you have your own philosophy of life. It’s made up of what you believe about right and wrong, life and death, truth and God and man. And your life view affects you. It affects the way you take a test tomorrow as well as what you’ll do in a job or in your love life ten years from now.

I started the process of thinking through my beliefs almost accidentally, when I was eleven years old, growing up in Switzerland. What touched it off was a squabble with my two sisters, Debby and Priscilla. We had nearly finished weeding the family vegetable garden, and we were hot, tired, and crabby. As I grew more and more obnoxious in my side of our argument, one of my sisters piped up and said that I wasn’t being a very good Christian example to any villagers passing by.

Without thinking, I said the most shocking thing that came into my head—pretty shocking, at least, when your father is a minister. “Well, I’m not a Christian anyway!” I yelled. “I don’t believe any of it!”

I was received with the dramatic reaction I’d wanted: shocked silence.

As we picked up our hoes and walked down the mountain path toward our home, I suddenly felt a tingle of fear creep up my spine. Inside, I had the dizzy sensation of standing on the edge of a dangerous cliff. I had said that I wasn’t a Christian because I’d wanted to shock Debby and Priscilla. But now I wondered: Did I really believe in God? Was the Bible true? Did I have reasons to think so, or had I just blindly accepted what my parents had told me?

The more I thought about it, the worse I felt. I had loved this God of the Bible since I had been tiny. Now all that I’d

“Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is the probable reason why so few engage in it.”

Henry Ford, 1929



heard about his teachings and his love seemed to be turning to ashes in my hand.

At the supper table, Priscilla announced, "Susan says she isn't a Christian."

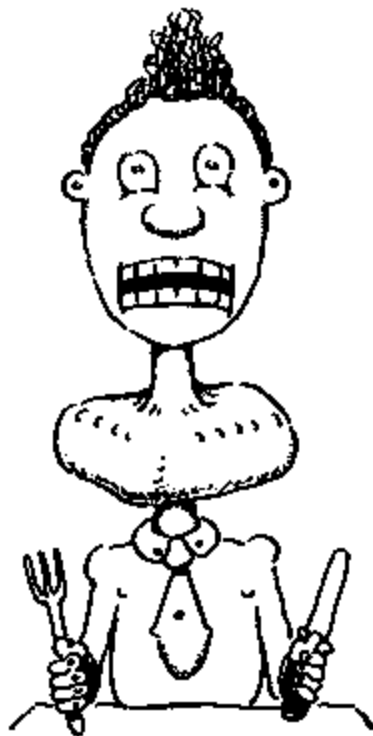
By then I didn't feel like denying her words, even though I could see that my mother looked sad. I was sad, too, for I felt as if I had lost God and his love. I wasn't sure that there even *was* a God.

But I was also determined. I couldn't believe in fairy tales! I had to grow up.

That easily could have been my last day of knowing

How to Be Shallow: Key Words and Phrases

1. "Sorry, but I never discuss religion or politics while I'm eating."
2. "What did you do, swallow a dictionary or something?"
3. "I don't want to talk about it."
4. "What do you think this is, church or something?"
5. "Thinking gives me a headache."
6. "Do you like anchovies on your pizza?"



God was there, and that I was safe in the order he had provided. It could have been the death of my faith.

Or it could have been the end of my progress into thinking as an adult. All it would have taken was a comment like, "Of course you're a Christian, Susan," or, "You're only eleven; you don't know what you're saying," or, "Don't be foolish—it's obvious that the Bible is true."

But something else happened instead. That night when I was ready for bed, alone and quiet in my room, my father came in.

"Let's talk, Susan," he said seriously. "Tell me why you said you are no longer a Christian."

I confessed that I'd first said the words because I was mad. "But as soon as I said it, I was scared," I explained. "I can't call myself a Christian! All this time, I've only believed it because you and mother told me about it. Now I'll have to wait and see if it's true or not. Maybe the other religions are true. Or maybe there isn't even a God at all!"

There was a moment of silence. I still remember the quiet, friendly companionship in the atmosphere when my dad finally answered me. "Susan," he said, "those are good questions. I'm glad you've asked them."

What a relief! That dizzy, lonely feeling left me. It was OK to ask questions! It was important for me to find out for myself if what I'd believed was true.

As we talked that night, I discovered that my dad had asked these same questions about God in his own search for answers. Dad opened the door for me into a new adventure. He said that I didn't have to go through life with a blindfold on my mind to believe in God, merely clinging to hopes and feelings. Neither did I have to throw my beliefs out the window.

If something is true, he explained, you can look at it hard, and think about it, and compare it with other beliefs, and it will stand. It will be reliable.

I decided to do just that.

"No man can live without a world view; therefore, there is no man who is not a philosopher."

Francis Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*



One way I've looked at all this since then is to realize that people are like plants. They need roots. A plant can appear to be growing and thriving. But if it doesn't have firm roots, it can easily dry out, be uprooted, or blow over.

Take a look at yourself. What are your roots? What is it that you hold onto to keep yourself going, day after day? Do you believe in things your parents told you? Television? Your school? Your friends?

Do you know what's really true?

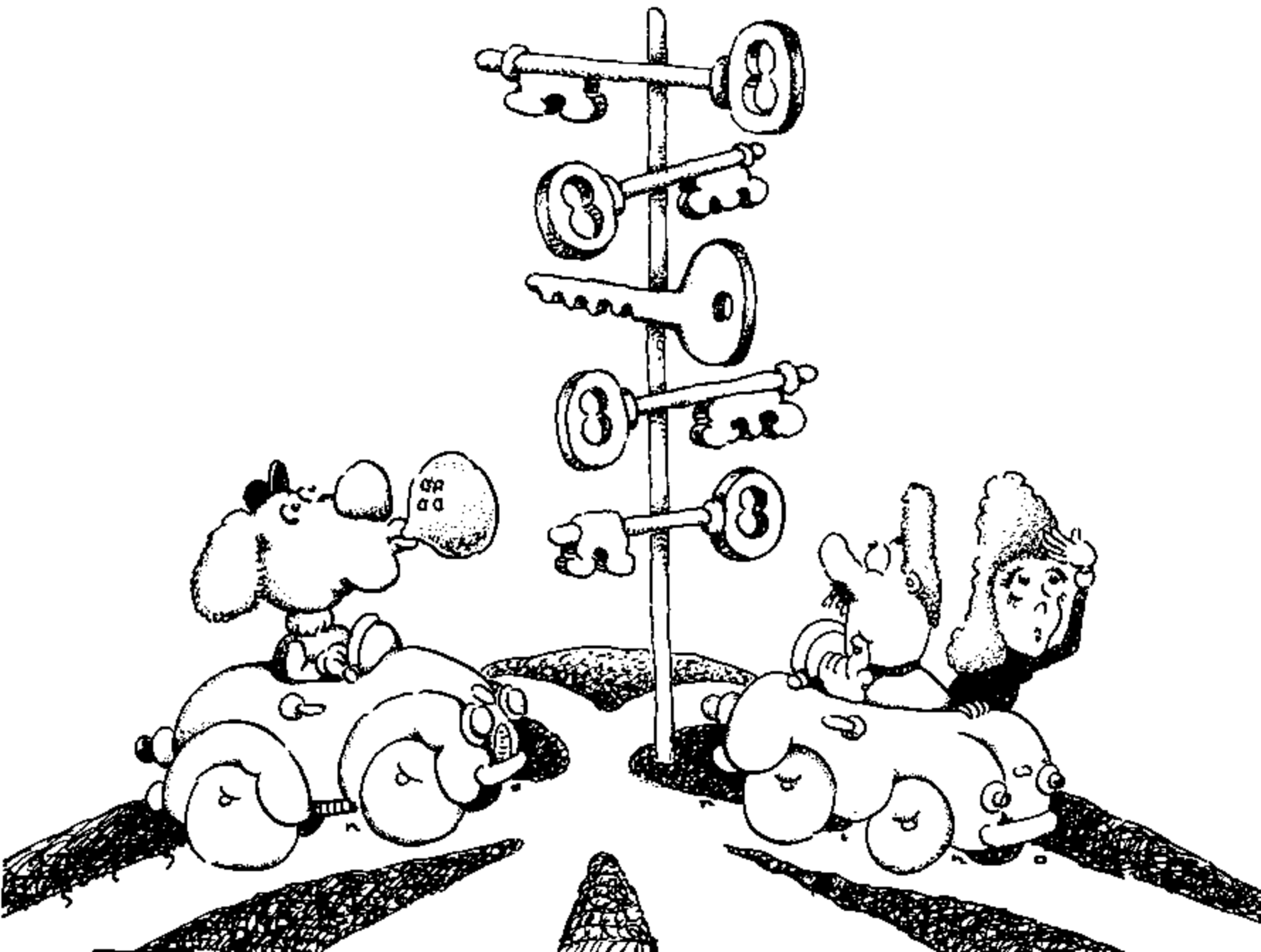
And what will it take to get you to look for answers? You could wait, like Sally and Matthew, until you reach the end of your rope. But if you'd like to discuss it further, this book is for you.

“In ordinary times we get along surprisingly well, on the whole, without ever discovering what our faith really is. If, now and again, this remote and academic problem is so unmannerly as to thrust its way into our minds, there are plenty of things we can do to drive the intruder away. . . .

“But . . . to us in wartime, cut off from mental distractions by restrictions and blackouts, and cowering in a cellar with a gas mask under threat of imminent death, comes in the stronger fear and sits down beside us.

“ ‘What,’ he demands rather disagreeably, ‘do you make of all this? . . . What do you believe? Is your faith a comfort to you under the present circumstances?’ ”

Dorothy Sayers, Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World



A middle-aged couple stood chattering with me in a theater lobby. We all held steaming cups of coffee.

“How *perfectly* lovely that you work with young people, Mrs. Macaulay,” the plump Mrs. Briggs gushed. Her husband beamed. Then, still smiling, she launched into a major statement. “But surely you don’t think that any one belief is right? Why, everybody knows that all roads lead to God in the end!”

“Yes, lots of people do feel that way. But are they right?” I asked. “If something is right, then some other things have to be wrong, don’t they? If something is true, aren’t other things false?”

The couple looked surprised. (You may have noticed that it isn’t considered proper etiquette to express a definite point of view that opposes others.)

“Just think,” I went on. “You have to drive home later on tonight. If I told you that it didn’t matter which road you chose to drive on, it would put you in a mess. Why, if you were to get on the freeway here, you couldn’t get off for another twenty miles!”

“Of course! That’s obvious,” Mr. Briggs sputtered. “We mean that you can’t know what’s true about something like religion.”

The Briggses were mouthing a popular view, that there are some unseen things you just can’t know the truth about. They think that the facts of religion are different from the facts of living in the real, everyday world of penicillin, grocery stores, satellites, pet dogs, and road maps. The truth in those areas seems quite clear. Obviously, if you didn’t know the difference between *up* and *down*, you’d have a hard time getting to your class on the fourth floor!

If you sincerely thought that you were a cow, and

insisted that you should stay outside and eat the lawn, men in white coats would come and take you somewhere else!

But, religion, many people say, is different. In that area, any belief you hold is OK as long as you are sincere about it and it "helps" you. In fact, you can't say that someone else's view is either right or wrong, true or false.

You've probably already noticed this "anything goes" idea. Society puts up with a lot of strange beliefs and superstitions because of it: pyramid power, palm reading, good-luck charms, reincarnation. I can remember jumping over the seams in the sidewalk when I was about five years old, because I'd heard the saying, "Step on a crack, break your mother's back!"

Harmless? Silly? The little child Susan was playing a game. But there comes a moment when it isn't a game anymore. If you lived in tribal Africa and sincerely thought that you needed to eat a healthy baby's liver if the demons were to be appeased and you were to regain your health, would it matter? Could you be wrong?

Think of what happened in November 1978 when nine hundred people believed in their religious leader, Jim Jones. They were so committed to him and his teachings that, at his command, they drank poison. They gave it to their babies. These people were not simple savages. The poison was mixed by persons who had studied at some of the most advanced U.S. medical schools!

Every idea has consequences that grow out of it, as a plant grows from a seed. And the logical result of thinking that anything goes in religion is to think that any sincere religious action is OK. Even suicide or murder.

Though the examples I gave may seem extreme, they point out two things. First, what you believe about truth and right and wrong and God aren't ho-hum matters. Second, although many people might say that "anything goes" in religion, in actual situations they find themselves drawing a line and calling some religious beliefs wrong, hurtful, or stupid.



"It is important that a person choose the right answers in life," I told Mr. and Mrs. Briggs in the theater lobby that evening. "It is a personal disaster if he or she chooses the wrong ones. That is why I work in L'Abri Fellowship: we believe that there is *one* right road."

They shook their heads.

What you believe affects everything about your living every day. What you think and feel and do springs out of your beliefs. For instance, if you believe you are a cow, and then act like one, you might find yourself in a mental hospital one morning. Your beliefs might leave you in complete despair, like Sally in the last chapter, or with deep anger, like Matthew.

Later, when I was thinking over the conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Briggs, I thought that the following incident could have clarified what I wanted to say to them.

When our family first went to the old manor house in Greatham that is now L'Abri, we were given a huge pile of keys. We couldn't imagine that there could be so many doors to unlock—until we got to the property.

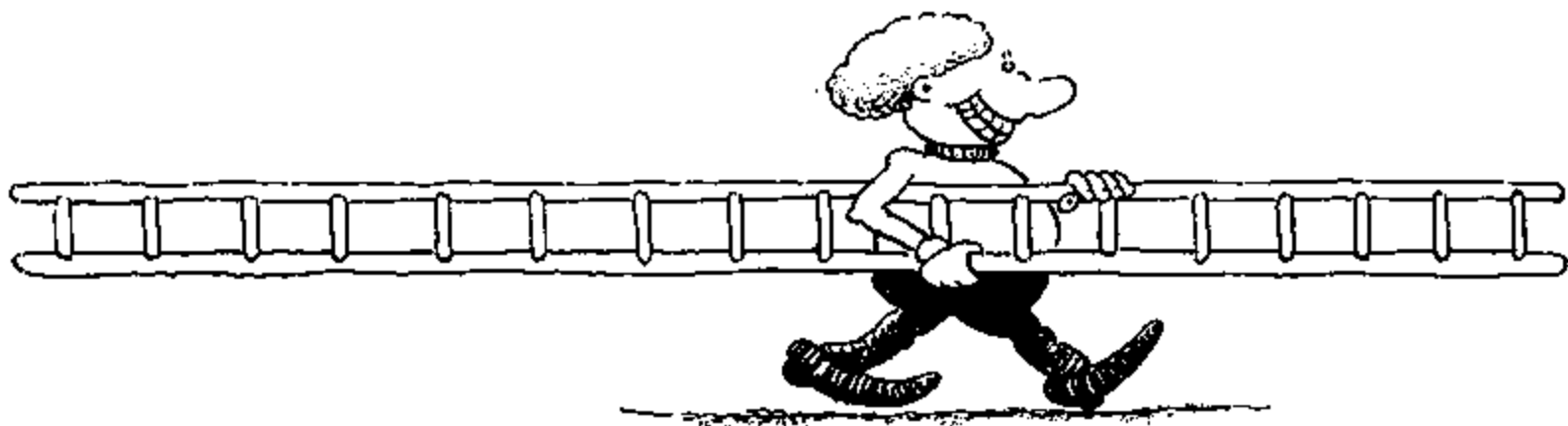
Our first task was to find the key for the main oak door at the front of the house. My five-year-old, Kirsty, tried helping me. "Is this the one?" she asked.

"Opinion is the queen of the world."

Blaise Pascal

"As one can ascend to the top of a house by means of a ladder or a bamboo or a staircase or a rope, so diverse are the ways and means to approach God, and every religion in the world shows one of those ways."

Ramakrishna Paramahansa



Before I could reply, her older sister Margaret, aged eight, retorted, "No, that's too thin. How about this one, mommy?"

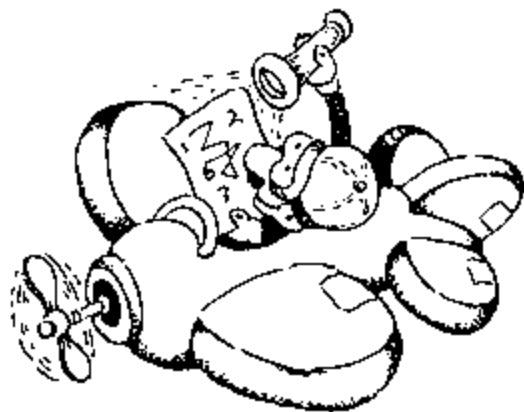
I looked at the key Margaret held up. "Well, yes, that looks like the right thickness. But it's the wrong shape," I said. I pounced on a more likely candidate. "This looks about right!" But when I tried it, it didn't go into the keyhole. It didn't fit.

I think that our search for the right key (which we finally found—one hour later) is much like the search for truth. The keyhole had a certain shape. Only one key would fit.

I believe that the world around us has a definite shape, too. All kinds of facts make up that shape. And I believe that only one explanation of truth and life—and only one religion or philosophy—will fit all the facts. The other options won't work. Finding the right one is like sorting through a pile of keys for the one that fits.

The basis of this book is the idea that you can find

Flying in the Dark



When I was a child in Switzerland, I used to lie awake and listen to the night. Where we lived in the Alps, there were no cars roaring by our door, and no voices or clatter from the neighborhood. We were quite isolated, so the silence was an interesting thing to me. I tried to catch the sounds of night creatures outside or the drip of icicles off the chalet roof.

Once in a while, the roar of a passing aircraft would drown the small sounds. I would feel my body tense up as I lay there, listening. How could a pilot find his way over the mountains in the dark? I imagined the drone of the plane's engine turning into an explosion as the aircraft plowed into a towering peak of the nearby Dents du Midi mountain range.

On foggy or stormy nights, my tension was even greater. Would the pilot make it?

the key to truth. But before you read on, you must decide if there's really something to look for. Do you think that there might be a key to reality? That some things are true and others false, some right and others wrong? I'm not rushing you into an answer; some people would answer yes to the above question, and others no.

What do you think?

I now understand how a pilot flies when he cannot see. He uses his instruments, of course, and he also uses a map. He has to have just the right map. If he climbed into the cockpit for the Alpine flight I heard at night and was handed a map of the ocean, he'd say, "That map doesn't accurately show the place I'm going to! It won't be of any help!"

Maps of the wrong mountain range wouldn't help him either. He had to have a map that described the area I lived in, near Lausanne in the Rhone River Valley.

We need maps, too, to find our way through our lives without crashing. We need a guide that shows us what life really is about. World religions and philosophies offer us many "maps." But which one fits where we're going? Which one will help us as we fly into the dark?

That is for you to find out.

**"Some people say I'm a
Jesus freak,
And I do believe it's true.
Whose freak are you?"**

Servant, "Holy Roller Blues"



I was cooking supper in the big, warm L'Abri kitchen. Outside, the cold winter night had descended, and through the window I saw nothing but blackness.

Suddenly I nearly jumped out of my skin. A strange and very white face was pressed up against the window! Even though I was frightened at first, I went to the door to let the person in.

When I brought the ghostly figure into the kitchen, I saw that I had nothing to be afraid of. My visitor was a thin, almost emaciated young man whose head was shaved completely bald. He was shivering with the cold and damp, and gratefully accepted a hot drink.

As we talked, I learned that his name was Joe, and that he was a young British student who had been searching for meaning in his life. He had met some members of an Eastern religious sect, and had been attracted to their otherworldly way of living. He thought these people had grasped the mysteries of the universe.

But by the time Joe came to us, he was so absorbed in this other world and so divorced from the real world around him that he was mentally and physically ill!

According to his new beliefs, Joe's own separate self didn't exist. He was one with all the other spirits in the universe, and a part of the one spirit: God. Spirit was all that existed. The physical world was only an illusion, he said.

However, as Joe lived at L'Abri, it became obvious that he couldn't function in the reality he claimed was the true one. He said he didn't believe in the physical world. But of course he had to eat—and he did.

He said he didn't believe in his own existence as an individual. Yet he would find himself saying, "I think . . ." Then he would realize what he was doing, and a puzzled look would



**“I am plagued by doubts.
What if everything is an
illusion and nothing
exists? In that case, I
definitely overpaid for my
carpet.”**

Woody Allen, Without Feathers

cross his face. Could he really say “I”?

In his search for truth, Joe had absorbed the idea that religious truth was beyond common sense, a completely different kind of reality. So he chose to believe what his Eastern friends told him, rather than trust his own life experiences.

A number of people and religious groups in the world would agree with Joe. They would say that you can't use your mind to find out what life is really all about. They may suggest drugs for finding this other reality, or meditation. This way, you can escape from your mind, and float into a kind of dream experience.

They make an interesting point that most of us don't think about: that we live by trusting our senses, whether we ought to or not. For example, if I were to ask you, “Does this book exist?” you'd say, “Of course! I'm holding it in my hand.”

The Hindu and the Teakettle

One afternoon, my parents visited Cambridge University, and met with some students in the living room of a college apartment. My husband-to-be, Randal, his good friend Tom, and other students gathered around the fireplace. A teakettle was whistling cheerfully on a gas burner nearby, promising hot cups of tea.

As the group discussed ideas, one young man from India, who was Hindu by religion, started to speak out against Christian ideas of truth. My father decided to probe this fellow's own conclusions, to show that he could not actually live and act upon what he said he believed.

“Are we agreed,” my father asked, “that you believe there is only one reality, which includes all things, all ideas?”

The young man nodded.

“Then,” my father pursued, “this means that, ultimately, everything is the same. Any difference we see is

But when you say that, you're making an assumption. You're trusting that what your common sense tells you is true. But how do you know you're not imagining what you see? How do you know that you're not imagining yourself?

The Chinese philosopher Lao-tse, who lived in the sixth century B.C., asked, "If, when I was asleep, I was a man dreaming I was a butterfly, how do I know when I am awake that I am not a butterfly dreaming I am a man?"

When I was a teenager in Switzerland, this kind of discussion about what existed and what didn't often took place in our living room. And it would always leave me hopping mad! I thought that it was some kind of stupid game.

I can remember shouting at a philosophy student once: "But *of course* the rose is on the table, and of course the legs hold the table up! This is crazy! Why, when my little brother was

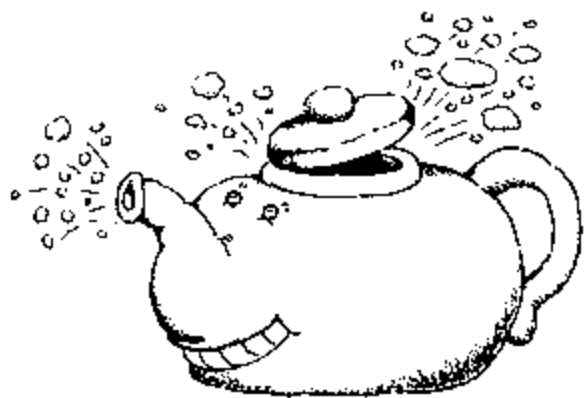
temporary, an illusion. There is no such thing as a separate personality, correct? No final difference between good and evil, or between cruelty and noncruelty?"

The young man agreed again, but the others in the room were surprised at what the full extent of their friend's Hindu beliefs could be.

Tom was struck with the fact that such beliefs didn't fit into the real world. But instead of arguing, he reached for the steaming teakettle, lifted it off the gas burner, and held it over the startled Indian's head. Everyone looked surprised, and the Indian student looked scared to death.

"If what you believe is really true," Tom said firmly, "there is no ultimate difference between cruelty and noncruelty. So whether I choose to pour this boiling water over your head or not doesn't matter."

There was a moment of silence, and then the Indian rose and left the room without comment. He could not match what he believed with real life.





**“The truth of Christianity
is that it is true to what is
there.”**

**Francis Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not
Silent***

eight months old he knew that he couldn't crawl *through* a table leg! A baby is closer to the truth than you are!”

“Well, what is the point of all this?” you're probably asking, just as I was then. The point is a very practical one, believe it or not: you have a choice when you ask questions about religions and life views. You can assume that what you see around you and what you feel inside you are real, and investigate on that basis. Or you can assume that you need some special, mystical knowledge, and that thinking won't help you much at all.

People who hold the first point of view can look for truth by observing. People who hold the second point of view have to resort to more mystical techniques: blanking out all thoughts by repeating a single meaningless syllable called a “mantra,” for instance. Taking drugs. Meditating on the thought of the sound of one hand clapping, as in Zen Buddhism. Or, just believing unbelievable things!

When I was a teenager, I was fortunate enough to be able to talk with people who held points of view different from those I'd grown up with. The Hindus voiced something like Joe's beliefs: everything around me, including the rocks on the mountainside, and good as well as evil, were a part of the eternal consciousness that was God. There wasn't a separate, distinct, solid *me*.

My natural instinct led me to disagree with these people. I felt sure that I had a personality. I didn't see how I could possibly live with thinking that I wasn't really me.

Joe lived in two worlds. His religion told him one thing. His senses told him something else. To stay alive, he had to do things his religion told him were nonessential or meaningless (like eat and stay warm).

But I believe real truth is practical and sensible. It fits in with—and explains—the world you see around you and feel inside. I propose that a good test for a view of life is to ask yourself: Can I live this way? Does it make sense with what I

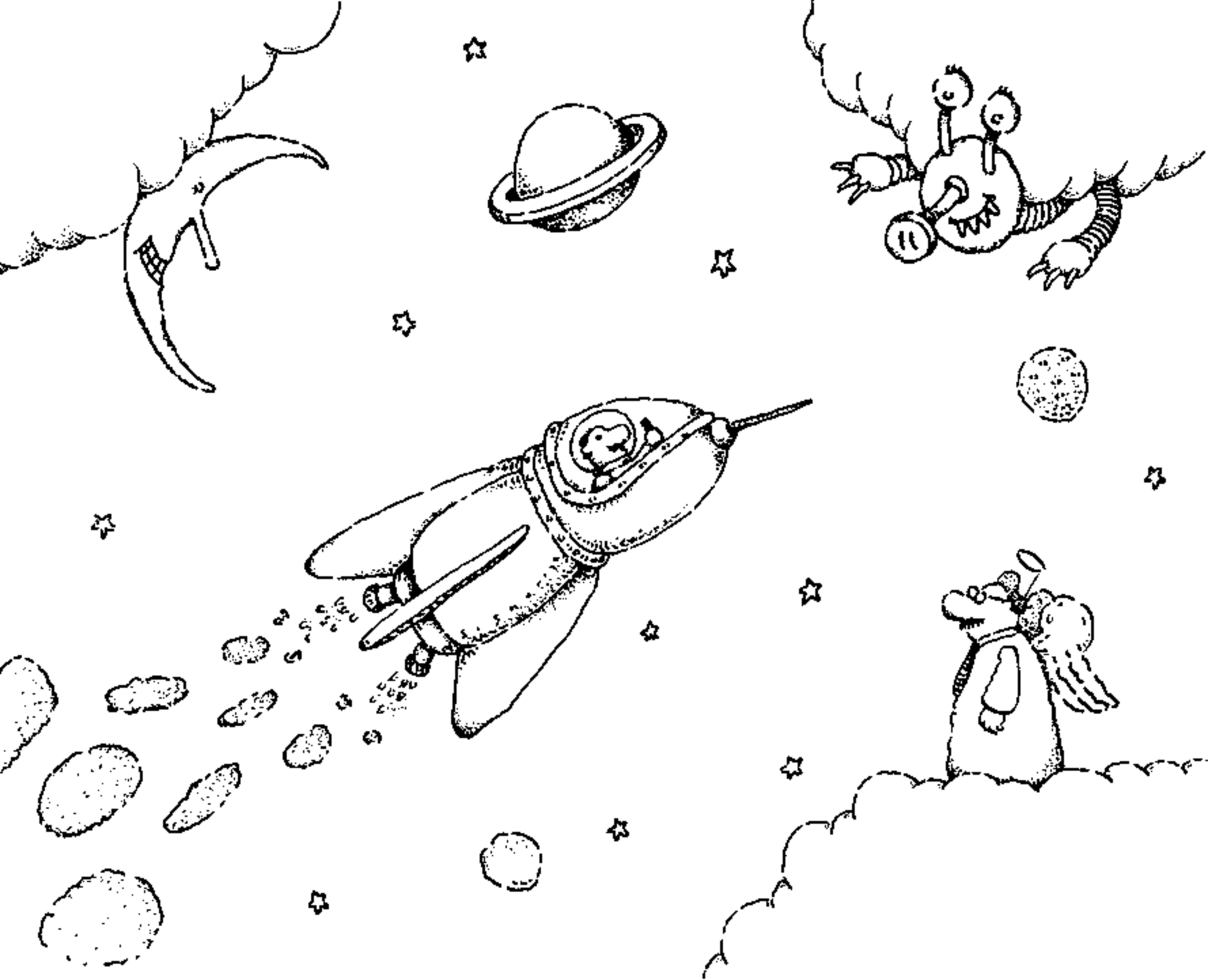
observe? (That question is one Joe should have asked.) A life view that is true would fit with the workings of the physical world and the facts of human personality.

If you don't feel that you need a practical sort of truth, then you can close your eyes, or meditate on your navel, and anything can be true in your head.

If you would rather use your common sense and your mind in your search for truth, you can continue reading, asking and looking with both eyes wide open.

“It seems to me quite disastrous that the idea should have got about that Christianity is an otherworldly, unreal, idealistic kind of religion. . . . On the contrary, it is fiercely and even harshly realistic.”

Dorothy Sayers, Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World



"I bet you believe in the tooth fairy, too."

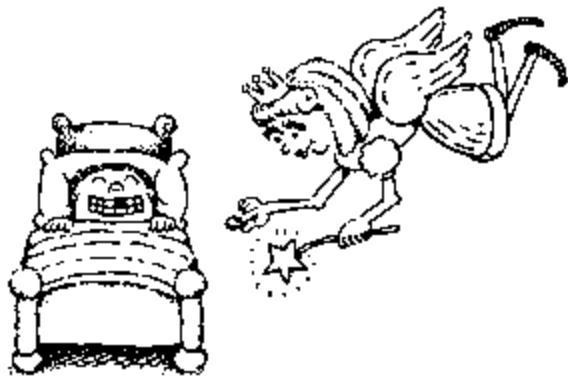
Richard, a middle-aged man who somehow looked older than he really was, sat at the dining room table with his head in his hands.

"I've lost everything that meant anything to me in life," he sighed. "After my parents' marriage broke up when I was a teenager, I started drinking—too much. Still I managed to finish college, get a job, and marry someone who really cared for me. For a while I stayed off the bottle. Then troubles at work got me drinking more and more until finally, my own wife and children were frightened of me! My marriage broke up. I lost my job. And do you know what? Nobody cares!"

He looked up at me with a sudden spark of anger: "What a mess I'm in! If there is a good God, why does he let people like me have so much trouble? Come to think of it, why is there so much suffering in the world? It doesn't make sense to think there could be a God."

Richard's anguished conclusion was one I had heard before. Like many people, he wished that there was a God. But because of all the pain and suffering in the world, he didn't think a good God could possibly exist. He liked the idea of there being a God who planned things, who stood for right, and who would perform favors and miracles—something like Superman. But it seemed as foolish to hope for that as it would to believe in the tooth fairy. The evidence did not seem to point in the direction of there being a good power in control of things.

"Richard," I said, "I know you feel horribly trapped, let down, and miserable. But you must separate the two questions you're asking. First, is there a God? Second, if there is, then why is there suffering? If the God of the Bible is there, he is perfectly good and hates suffering even more than we do. The Bible says that although God is all-powerful, he also made the human race separate from himself. We aren't puppets! The choices we have made in history and are making right now have



resulted in an abnormal world. Much of what we see around us is the work of man, not of God.”

Another L’Abri student, Allan, put down his fork and interrupted the discussion Richard and I were having. “Here you are, saying that the Bible explains how a good God could let evil come into the world by letting people have choices. But I want to know why you are so sure that there’s a God at all. Isn’t the belief in God the same as a gullible child’s faith in Santa Claus, or the tooth fairy? Isn’t it wishful thinking, because you want somebody to pull you out of trouble, and to tuck you into bed at night? Richard is right: the thought of an empty, uncaring universe is uncomfortable. But isn’t honesty better than deception?”

Allan turned to Kit, a biologist from New Zealand, who had said he believed that the Christian answer made perfect sense. “I don’t see how you have the nerve, as a biologist, to say you believe in God. You should know better as a scientist. What those religious guys experience is a blind leap of faith. Nothing more. Nothing less. There’s no proof for God’s existence! If I take off in a rocket for Mars, am I going to bump into angels on

Lost in the Forest

Imagine that you are hiking through a great forest, and lose your way. A storm sets in. You’re relieved to see a hut in a clearing. A light shines from the window, and smoke curls from the chimney. You practically run to the door, hoping to find shelter there.

You knock. No answer.

You call. No voice replies.

You go to the window to look in. What a relief!

The hut is occupied. There is a fire burning, and a kettle bubbling merrily over it. The table is set for supper, and a freshly baked pie sits in the center.

What do you know about this setting, using

the way? Or see a demon or two? Maybe I'll land in heaven itself!"

Allan had a valid point. In his observation of the world around him, he hadn't seen God. On top of this, he didn't feel he'd seen any proof of God's existence, either. He wanted scientific evidence.

Kit had something to say about proof. "Listen, Allan. As a biologist I operate on something that is the most obvious and reliable fact of all: the order in the nature of everything in the universe. Science operates on the fact that everything is orderly. Even though it is all amazingly complicated, certain causes always have the same effect. I can run an experiment again and again with a certain, sure result. Even the smallest child can quickly see that. You cannot even go home and make a cup of coffee without operating on the assumption that natural laws are orderly, not chaotic. You know that the stove's heat will always make the kettle boil; it won't freeze on the flame one day! So where did all this order come from?"

"It evolved," Allan said.

scientific observation? You know that someone lives in this hut, even though no one is home at the moment.

Someone had to have built the fire, put water in the kettle, set the table, and baked the pie. From the state of things, you gather that the person will come back soon to eat the supper he's prepared. You are not alone in the forest.

You cannot see the owner of the hut any more than you can see God or angels. Yet the evidence of that owner's existence seems overwhelming.

Try looking at the world as you did that imaginary hut in the forest. Do you see evidence of the hand of a Creator? Is the evidence as convincing as you would like it to be? Is there somebody at home in the universe?

"I saw no God nor angels while in orbit."

Gherman Titov, Soviet cosmonaut and second man in space, 1962

"God is dead."

Friedrich Nietzsche





**“Not only is there no God,
but try getting a plumber
on weekends.”**

Woody Allen, *Getting Even*

My husband, Ranald, joined in. “The order we see in our world is the basic rule of all life. And yet, in mathematics, the odds of all of this order merely happening out of nothing, out of chaos, are virtually nil. To complicate the picture, we not only face the complexity of the mechanical universe, but there is also the nature of the human being. Here there is more than order. What about the facts of personality, love, kindness, cruelty, the existence of beauty?”

I had something to say here, too. “Allan, when I try to explain to children this idea that all things and people were made by chance, I tell them that my watch made itself. ‘It took millions and millions of years,’ I tell them, ‘but the bits of gold somehow were thrown off of the planet in just the right shapes. Seventeen tiny jewels came together. I’m not sure just how, but finally this watch came out.’ ”

The students around the table laughed.

“Does it make better sense to believe that all the atoms, molecules, DNA codes, stars, and planets just happened?” I continued. “Children are often more down-to-earth than adults, for they accept that it makes sense that somebody powerful and intelligent created us. They can also see that this God could not be just a big machine or force. He had to think, to act, to feel. A machine could not produce the little boy who jumps into my arms, or the girl who composes sensitive music. An infinite computer could not produce the choice of love, could it?”

“I sympathize with you, Allan,” Ranald said in the young man’s defense. “In a sense we can’t bump into God in the universe. But in another sense, I believe the fact of his existence bumps into us every day.”

Allan had a lot to think about, but he decided not to commit himself just then. “Pass the cabbage, please . . .”

What would you have said if you had been eating lunch with us that day? Do you think there is a God?

You could decide that it makes sense to assume that