

A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY
OF
UNBELIEF IN THE GOSPEL BY JOHN

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A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SACRED THEOLOGY
in
The Biblical Seminary of New York

New York, N. Y.
April 4, 1948

This thesis is lovingly
dedicated to my mother
and father who by life
and words directed me to
Jesus Christ that I might
have life through Him.

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May 25, 1948

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INTRODUCTION

A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY
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INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of the Problem

A mysteriousness often enshrouds human activity so that man stands perplexed and puzzled as to the "why" of it. Included among such human experiences is "unbelief". For when men turn away from Jesus, who offered light for darkness, and exchange truth for falsehood, freedom for bondage, and life for death, the mind is baffled by such activity and cries, "Why".

The purpose of this thesis is to throw light on this problem by making a psychological study of unbelief in the Gospel by John. The problem of the study is to determine the nature, cause and consequence of unbelief in Jesus Christ as it is seen in selected incidents from John's Gospel.

B. Delimitation of the Problem

To make a thorough study of belief or unbelief it would be necessary to enlist the cooperation of two sciences: psychology and philosophy. For the subject of this study is imbedded in human behavior, which is

in the field of psychology, as well as being linked with reality and truth, which are the concern of the philosopher. Balfour suggests that unbelief

" . . . has the misfortune to lie in the borderland between logic (philosophy) and psychology, and to be capable of treatment by either, but incapable of subjection to either; so that only the cooperation of both can reduce it to order."¹

Having an awareness of the complexity of this inquiry, the following study, though it is primarily concerned with the psychological aspect, will therefore not overlook the importance of the philosophical. In the discussion proper, however, the search will necessarily be in quest of the nature, cause, and consequence of unbeliefs and not whether they are true or false; it will deal with how they came about, and not with the logical grounds of the propositions.

Nor is it the aim of this treatment to make an extensive investigation of what modern psychology has to say on the subject of unbelief. On the other hand, the purpose will be to obtain some very basic and representative principles that recognized psychologists have concluded in reference to unbelief, and then to use them as helps in the study of religious unbelief. The concrete examples or experiences of religious unbelief will be selected from that section of John's Gospel in which he

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1. F. C. S. Balfour: Problems of Belief, p. 9.

especially contends with unbelief, and not from the entire Gospel.

C. Justification of the Problem

The problem of the nature of unbelief is of paramount concern today, first, because of the general idea that unbelief has come as an inevitable result of the intellectual progress of man's mind, and that the modern mind cannot be persuaded to accept the Christian objects of belief because they are intellectually unattainable. If this be true, then Christianity is open for grave attack, and unbelief has a treasured beach-head. Therefore, it is imperative that unbelief be investigated to see if it does spring from rational and intellectual difficulties. The Gospel of John will offer concrete examples for this investigation.

Also, since the epidemic of unbelief has seemed to have swept the land, it is of equal significance that the truth regarding unbelief be more clearly understood by the servant of God in order that he may wisely pull up, plant, and water. If the Christian stands bewildered and inactive in the face of unbelief because he is not cognizant of its nature or its causes, then the scope of his ministry is extremely limited. Therefore, a treatment of this subject is significant because of its possibilities for the training of leaders for Christian service.

The importance of such a study is stated by Wilbur M. Smith who wrote:

" . . . I believe there are deep and mysterious causes for the depth, and vigor, and universality of the unbelief of our modern age, possibly beyond the full comprehension of finite minds. The subject is worthy of ten years of study, but I do not have the ten years to give to it."¹

A more appropriate book of the Bible could not be obtained for the basis of this study than the Gospel by John. For the fourth Gospel breathes the very problem that is faced in this thesis. Also, in this Gospel Jesus is seen confronting, analyzing, and meeting the problem of unbelief. If Jesus knew the truth about man's experience of unbelief and correctly dealt with it, then no better guide in this study could be desired than what is provided in John's Gospel, which sets forth Jesus' own analysis of unbelief.

D. Methods of Procedure

The method of procedure for this study of unbelief will be as follows:

1. A psychological interpretation of belief and unbelief as to its nature, causes, and consequences, as given by specified psychologists.

2. A psychological interpretation of unbelief as

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1. Wilbur M. Smith: Therefore Stand, p. 142.

revealed in the selected incidents of unbelief in the fourth Gospel in the light of findings of modern psychologists.

3. A topical summary of the nature, causes, and consequences of unbelief in John.

E. Sources of Study

In order to discover the psychologists' interpretations of unbelief, a study was made of the writings of some of the leaders in this field. The classical treatments of belief by William James in his two books, The Will to Believe, and The Varieties of Religious Experience, were utilized. The works of other outstanding psychologists, such as Lundholm, Hickman, Sumner, Pratt, and Wyckoff, were also found to be helpful.

For the second and third chapters of the study, the source material will be primarily the Gospel by John itself, with the interpretations of this Gospel by leading expositors supplementing first-hand study.

CHAPTER I
A PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION
OF BELIEF AND UNBELIEF

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OF BELIEF AND UNBELIEF

A. Introduction

The quest of this thesis, an understanding of unbelief as recorded by John, leads into a field of study other than the Scriptures. Since the psychologist specializes in the field of human behavior, any attempt to understand experiences in the lives of individuals directs one to the field of psychology. Therefore, in order to be able to understand adequately unbelief as it is presented in John, the fruits of the study of psychologists in the general field of belief and unbelief will be sought. It is the purpose of this preliminary study to provide tools for a more thorough study and a greater appreciation of the primary aim of this thesis.

The first task of this chapter will be to obtain the psychologist's answer to the following question: What is the nature of unbelief; or, just what is the essence of the experience of unbelief? Then the study will turn to the determinants or causes of "unbelief", those factors which bring it to birth. Finally, this preparatory inquiry will observe the consequences of unbelief in the individual.

At the outset it should be especially emphasized that in this introductory study belief and unbelief are treated as synonymous experiences. For to the psychologist belief and unbelief are of identical nature and cause, the only difference being that unbelief is a "negative" belief.¹ That is to say, "unbelief" is "belief", but in the contrary proposition. Therefore, an understanding of unbelief is obtained through what has been discovered about belief. It must, therefore, be continually kept in mind that in this chapter what is said regarding belief also applies to unbelief.

Obviously, when analyzing human experiences, no easy task is involved because of the complexity of the human personality. Thus many answers and explanations have been offered in the attempt to reveal the essence of the experience of belief; and, of course, each type of psychology would have its specific answer. Therefore, no attempt will be made to champion one answer against another, but only to present what seem to be general concepts.

B. The Nature of Belief or Unbelief

First, the three elements which are involved in the "believing experience" should be noted: they are

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1. Helge Lundholm: The Psychology of Belief, p. 5.

the mind, the proposition or outside object which is presented as reality, and the relationship in which the mind stands toward the proposition. When any proposition is presented as reality, the mind may react in one of three ways: it may accept what is presented as "bona fide" reality, which is belief; or it may accept the suggestion as false, which is unbelief; or it may hesitate in deciding whether the proposition is true or not, which is doubt.¹

It has just been implied that belief, or unbelief, is an "acceptance of" or an "assent to" the reality, or falsity, of something. This seems to be universally assumed; but there is a wide variance in opinion as to what type of acceptance or assent it is. It is at this point that much ambiguity and vagueness surrounds the experience. Some say it is intellectual assent only, others that it is an emotional acceptance, while still others affirm it is something more. Thus, the first objective will be to learn what type, or manner, of assent, belief and unbelief entail, or what basis this assent has in the human personality.

1. "Intellectual" Assent

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1. F. S. Hickman: Introduction to the Psychology of Religion, p. 441.

To the average man "belief" describes an "intellectual assent" to the reality of a proposition or object. The common statement, "I will not believe what I cannot understand", is an attempt to explain belief as an experience which is "a matter of intellectual grasp and formulation".¹ Belief, then, is recognized to have its foundation in the intellect.

2. "Emotional" Assent

Certain psychologists, however, are quick to point out the danger of considering belief as intellectual assent only, for they insist that belief involves also "emotional assent". In fact, Bagehot found the emotional aspect of the personality so great in the experience of believing that he was led to call belief the "emotion of conviction". For he observed that the feeling element was so strong in some beliefs that no intellectual reason could dislodge it.² To him, and others, belief would be the assent of the emotion, thus equating it with other emotions as fear, anger, and love.

3. "Volitional" Assent

Still others, in the field of psychology, stress that the assent of belief is composed of another element;

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1. Ibid., p. 440.

2. Ibid., p. 444.

that is, the will. In fact, some psychologists would call belief "wish-realization"; and, therefore, in relation to religious objects belief becomes "wishful-thinking". Thus, belief would be placed midst other primal desires of the human personality.

4. Assent of the Whole Personality

But any attempt to limit the nature of belief to either an intellectual, emotional, or volitional attitude results in serious objections by the majority of the psychologists. For example, Selbie defines it as follows:

" . . . an attitude of the whole personality and (which) may involve action as well as a certain mental state. When a man really believes he does so with his whole being and becomes involved in an attitude of trust, loyalty, and self-committal."¹

Hickman also maintains the inclusiveness of this experience by regarding the presence of what he terms "all mental processes: intellect, volition and will".² Schiller defines belief as "a spiritual welcome which we assume towards what we take to be a 'truth'. As such an attitude, it is plainly an affair of our whole nature, and not of mere 'intellect'!"³

William James realizes the whole-sidedness of

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1. W. B. Selbie: The Psychology of Religion, pp. 112-113.
2. Hickman, op. cit., p. 440.
3. F. C. S. Schiller: Problems of Belief, p. 14.

belief in the various definitions he uses to reveal its nature. First, he recognizes it as "a mental state or function of cognizing reality . . . it contains every degree of assurance, including the highest possible certainty and conviction."¹ Elsewhere he states: "In its inner nature, belief, or the sense of reality, is a sort of feeling more allied to the emotions than to anything else."² In his classical lecture on "The Will to Believe" he writes: "The maximum of liveness in an hypothesis means willingness to act irrevocably. Practically, that means belief."³ In closing his discussion on the analysis of belief, he refers to it as a psychic attitude that is "a state of consciousness sui generis".⁴ Thus, many psychologists have come to see that belief is a unique experience which engages the whole personality in assent to a specific reality.

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C. The Cause of Belief and Unbelief

It is impossible to thoroughly understand any experience without an examination of its origin and cause. The nature of belief and unbelief has been discussed; now the study turns to the elements and factors which bring

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1. William James: The Principles of Psychology, Vol. II, p. 283.
2. Loc. cit.
3. William James: The Will to Believe, p. 3.
4. James, The Principles of Psychology, p. 287.

to birth belief or unbelief.

Wyckoff, in his book Acute and Chronic Unbelief, has outlined the three general factors which demand consideration in such an inquiry; namely, the belief, the interpreter of the belief, and the believer. Previously the accountability for unbelief was laid to the "unreasonableness of beliefs, or teachers."¹ Therefore, the cure or only prevention of unbelief was to provide reasonable beliefs and to present them in an appealing and acceptable manner. But psychology has come to consider another factor in unbelief; that is, the unbeliever.

"Gross unreasonableness, logical inconsistency, scientific misstatements, philosophical defects, naturally make any religious belief untenable for the educated. Incorrect interpretation, wresting words out of their true meaning, insistence upon archaic adaptations, tend to make religious truth useless. But it is equally true that many times the attitude of the believer, his prejudices, his special interests, his training, have as much to do with his unbelief as either of these other factors."²

Though all three factors, the belief, the interpreter of belief, and the believer, have power to stimulate unbelief, the pre-eminent concern of this study will be with that part in which the personality of the individual and his social environment, which greatly determines his personality, are the active agents.

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1. Albert C. Wyckoff: Acute and Chronic Unbelief, p. 45.

2. Ibid., p. 45.

1. Forces Within the Personality

a. Rational Factors.

This division is meant to include that which is related to the knowing process. Many of our beliefs have direct relation to some aspect of our faculty of knowing - the sense-perception, a memory-image, or an idea. The saying, "seeing is believing", claims that the engenderment of belief springs from sense-perception, that sense-perceptions cause belief, and the lack of objective evidence leads to unbelief. The sight of the object greatly stimulates the individual to believe in its reality.

Also, the function of reason in the cause of belief and unbelief is a very important issue. For "our beliefs appear to be essentially intellectual, as if we had taken careful thought and wisely selected the most reasonable theology . . ."¹

Admittedly, sense-perception and reason have a role in the cause of belief or unbelief, but the big question is, how large a part do they play? Most of the psychologists are in one accord that it is a minor role. First of all, it is evident that man would have few beliefs in his possession, if he were to wait for them to be parented by the senses, or by what might be labeled

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1. H. W. Dresser: Outlines of the Psychology of Religion, p. 81.

"objective evidence". As James writes, "Objective evidence and certitude are doubtless very fine ideals to play with, but where on this moonlit and dream-visited planet are they found?"¹ D'Arcy agrees "there is very little we can know with the certainty of absolute proof: (yet) there are many things we can know on evidence which is silly to doubt. . . ."2

It is true that logical systems and reason engender belief or unbelief, but in order to obtain a true picture of the cause, it must be learned how much of our beliefs or unbeliefs are a result of these rational factors. Regardless of how some value the reason, psychology recognizes that in most instances, in non-religious as well as religious beliefs, reason is not the great determinant of belief. As Sumner observes:

"If there is one thing with which the student of the subject is impressed, it is with how small a fraction of our beliefs arise in the first instance through reason or having arisen, are maintained by it."³

Most psychologists agree, then, that the rational plays a minor role in unbelief as well as belief, though Professor Leuba in his book A Psychological Study of Religion seems to assume otherwise. He writes:

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1. James, *The Will to Believe*, p. 14.
2. M. G. D'Arcy: *The Nature of Belief*, p. 69.
3. F. B. Sumner: *A Statistical Study of Belief*, pp. 618-619.

"The leaders in philosophy, science, literature, and even in religion as well as increasing numbers of the rank and file, reject openly or secretly the traditional Christian belief in a Divine Father in direct communication with man."¹

This statement seems to be a concrete example of what Lund calls

" . . . a marked tendency to idealize the rational principle, and to conceive of it as the most valid and important of belief-determinants, notwithstanding the fact that non-rational factors appear to outweigh it so largely in conditioning our belief-attitudes."²

Leuba's attitude is also indicative of what Lund found to be true of individual ratings. When students rated themselves with others on a scale of rationality, they each considered that the reason played a greater role in conditioning belief in their own life than in the lives of their fellow students. They all tended to rate themselves nearer the ideal than the average person. Wyckoff suggests that this is due to the conceit of the typical unbeliever who, fighting his faith, attempts to console himself with the thought that it is "his unusually keen mind, or his superior knowledge. . . , or his intellectual honesty. . . which are responsible for his unbelief."³

Having seen that belief or unbelief is very seldom the result of strict rational processes, but that it is greatly caused by other factors, the following ques-

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1. J. H. Leuba: A Psychological Study of Religion, p. 315.
2. Lund, op. cit., p. 40.
3. Wyckoff, op. cit., pp. 41-42.

tion remains to be considered: what, then, is the real part of reason in coming to belief?

Though the rational factor cannot be maintained to have even a major say, its function is a vital one. Though we never believe entirely by reason, we also never believe without prospect of reasonableness. Johnson has attributed to the reason a double role in belief. First, the critical function is seen when contradictions appear and the mind becomes suspicious and demands closer scrutiny of beliefs. Reason thus acts as a guard against falsehood and deception. Second, reason also has a constructive function in the developing of criteria or standards for truth and in organizing beliefs into coherent form.

b. Emotional and Instinctive Factors.

No definite test of what really is true has ever been agreed upon, and such a discussion would take us into the field of philosophy. But if it were said that only reason and sense-perception could be trusted, then it would necessarily follow that most of mankind's beliefs and unbeliefs are false. Though it is one of the tests, it is not agreed that reason is the only criterion of truth, for intuition, pragmatism, revelation and other elements have their right to be heard. Pratt, in The Psychology of Religious Belief, defends the right of other factors than the reason, especially the intuition, to be

legitimate causes of belief:

"The whole man must be trusted as against any small portion of his nature, such as reason or perception. These latter should, of course, be trusted, but they have no monopoly of our confidence. The ideals which have animated and guided the race, the sentiments and passions which do us the most honor, the impulses which raise us above the brutes and which have been the motive forces of history, the intuitions which have marked out the saviors and the saints and the heroes of our earth, have not come from the brightly illuminated center of consciousness, have not been the result of reason and of logic, but have sprung from the deeper instinctive regions of our nature. . . . For the instinctive part of our nature, in part conscious, in part unconscious, is ultimately the dominating factor in our lives and the source of most of our real ideals."¹

As a matter of fact, at times it seems as if our emotions, passions and volitions lie at the root of all our convictions.

It is the emotional factor which is dominant in determining the beliefs of the primitive man and the child. "Real for this early stage", writes Stern, "is simply what is keenly felt, and it remains real as long as feeling is absorbed in the experience."² McDougall likens this tendency of the child, to believe in the reality of whatever evokes an instinctive impulse, to the similar tendency of the animal and primitive man. This may be termed "primitive credulity".³

That beliefs abound where emotion is alive is

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1. J. B. Pratt: The Psychology of Religious Belief, p. 27.
2. Lundholm, op. cit., p. 12.
3. Loc. cit.

made evident by the fact that during youth, when vitality and enthusiasm are high, belief flourishes; but in the adult, when love grows cold, it diminishes. This truth led Bain to suggest that the saying of Jeremy Taylor, "Believe and you shall love", should be reversed to "love and you shall believe".

The expression, "I am confident, although I cannot give a single good reason for my belief", voices the role of the emotions, or intuition. The emotional dispositions and moods of an individual definitely influence his beliefs. "Religious fervour, social enthusiasm, love, anger . . . predispose the subject to select and to accept those ideas which harmonize with and nourish the disposition or mood."¹ James, too, believes that it is this "unreasoned and immediate assurance" which is the root soil of belief, while reasoned argument is but the top soil that can be seen. "Instinct leads, intelligence does but follow."²

The attempt to forbid emotions any part in stimulating belief has its dangerous conclusions. For in any field of investigation or discovery, the individual must be kindled by the flame of emotion in order for any progress or initiative to be made. James maintained that

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1. A. Mair: "Belief", Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. II, p. 461.
2. James, The Will to Believe, p. 73.

"For purposes of discovery passionate desires are extremely necessary On the other hand, if you want an absolute duffer in an investigation you must after all, take the man who has no interest whatever in its results; he is the warranted incapable, the positive fool."¹

c. Volitional factors.

Upon first observation the volition may seem to have very little to do with belief; for every individual has experienced that belief does not come by a simple command of the will. Yet Bain, in his book entitled Emotions and Will, was so impressed with the role of the will that he called belief the growth or development of the will - a phase of our active nature. If this factor seems to overlap with the emotional forces, it is due to the fact that will and emotions are not easily separated, and are invariably found together.

In the personality of every human being, certain needs are discovered. These needs are not the offsprings of man's whims but are a part of his very nature. Mair calls them "the expressions of a nature striving to realize itself."² This effort, or will, to satisfy needs is a determinant of belief or unbelief. For "the believer arrives at his belief by seeking, by turning himself in a certain direction"³ The believer finds his be-

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1. Ibid., p. 21.
2. Mair, op. cit., p. 462.
3. Ibid., p. 462.

lief because he seeks, that is because he wills.

According to Tennant, "desire operates on belief in some cases by diverting attention from any counter-evidence there may be; and when this conative attitude is accompanied by strong emotions, such attention becomes totally inhibited".¹

2. Forces Without the Personality - Authority

Beliefs which are fostered and determined by the social environment may be classified under "authority". This includes all reasons for assent which do not come from the result of the believer's own observation, reason or insight, and often lie outside the range of his verification.²

In childhood many of our beliefs, or unbeliefs, are caused by two mighty forces: parental and religious authority. But age does not free one from authority; it merely transfers him from one type of authority to another. "Always and everywhere . . . authority plays an immense, inevitable, and on the whole beneficent, part in the production of belief."³

Besides the parental and religious there is the authority of the psychological atmosphere of public opinion. This atmosphere may be provided by college, social

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1. F. R. Tennant: The Nature of Belief, p. 30.

2. Ibid., p. 48.

3. Balfour, op. cit., p. 208.

organizations, or community groups. Many young men have had their beliefs shattered because of the taunts of others about believing on the basis of their parents' authority. Yet the scoffers seem to be blind to the fact that their unbeliefs, too, have been caused by authority; namely, that of professors. In any social environment it becomes easier to believe or to disbelieve, dependent upon the atmosphere created by the group. The might of this authority in determining belief or unbelief is partially found in the extreme difficulties of opposing this "psychological climate", as Balfour terms it.

"Power of authority is never more subtle and effective than when it produces a psychological 'atmosphere' or 'climate' favorable to the life of certain modes of belief, unfavorable, and even fatal, to the life of others."¹

Another element in authority is testimony. First-hand testimony is a very frequent cause of belief. Every day men are led to believe because first-hand testimony has been given as to its reality. Unless the witness has some reason or motive to deceive, or can be accused of self-deception, this ground for belief is almost indisputable. Second-hand testimony is not quite so accurate.

D. The Consequences of Belief and Unbelief

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1. Ibid., p. 214.

Having observed the nature of belief and unbelief and the factors which cause them, the consequences of belief or unbelief can be more clearly seen. The power of beliefs has ever been recognized through history. It truly might be said that beliefs make history. It is only beliefs, or unbeliefs, that turn the vitality of the whole personality into one channel. Lindsay was so impressed with this vitality that he called the psychology of belief the "psychology of power".¹

As beliefs or unbeliefs engage the whole personality, they lead to action; and it thus follows that the type of belief, or unbelief, determines the type of action. Or, in other words, that to which the whole personality is committed determines the character, or the life of the individual.

E. Summary

In this chapter the nature, causes, and consequences of belief and unbelief have been studied. The nature of the "belief-experience" was discovered to be much more than mere intellectual assent, which is often the meaning given to it. It is a unique act in which the whole personality, the mind, emotions and will, rise up in assent to and acceptance of the reality of a proposi-

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1. James Lindsay: The Psychology of Belief, p. 65.

tion or an object.

Belief and unbelief were seen to stem from three general sources: the beliefs themselves, the manner in which these beliefs were interpreted, and the believer himself. The personality of the individual became the chief concern in search for elements which stimulate belief or unbelief. It was learned that the intellect and rational processes do not cause belief as much as the emotional, intuitional and volitional factors. Specific loves, hates, impressions, needs and desires of the individual are paramount in shaping his beliefs. Also, the authority and social pressure of the home, church, school, community, organizations, and friends contribute toward the formation of belief or unbelief.

The primal consequence of belief is that it directs the energy of the entire personality into one channel. Thus, the type of belief, or unbelief, determines the actions, character, and life of the individual.

CHAPTER II

A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF UNBELIEF

IN JOHN

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A. Introduction

The previous chapter has provided psychological principles and insights for the understanding of any experience of belief or unbelief. It is now the purpose of this chapter to enter the field of religious life itself with its actual experiences of unbelief. No other book provides the abundance of material for such a study as the Gospel by John, and it is to this book we turn for selected experiences of unbelief. The preceding chapter by its very nature has been general and abstract, but this study aims to be specific and practical.

It has already been noted that in a study of unbelief the understanding of the unbeliever is of paramount importance. This is simply saying that to understand the actions of a person you must understand him. Thus in the beginning of this study it is imperative that thought be given to the character of the two groups that appear in the major role of unbelief. These two groups are "the multitudes" and "the Jews".

This chapter will deal with selected instances of unbelief and what they have to reveal in regard to the

nature, causes, and consequences of unbelief. These incidents will be taken from that section of the Gospel in which Jesus contends with unbelief, namely, from the fifth through the twelfth chapters. This is not to say that unbelief appears no where else in John, for it does, but in the last section of the Gospel, Jesus gives Himself primarily to the establishment of the faith of His disciples. Therefore, this study will be concerned with that section in John in which the author specifically deals with unbelief.

The approach of this section is, of necessity, a psychological one, for it is the study of behavior itself. In the actual experiences of unbelief lies the key for understanding the subject of this thesis, for in the incidents themselves are imbedded the nature, causes, and consequences of unbelief. Because this is true, no topical or systematic approach of this subject could rightly be made until a psychological study has been completed. Therefore, in the light of this fact, each incident will be studied as a psychological unit in order to discover its rightful contribution to an understanding of unbelief.

B. General Characteristics of the Unbelievers

The unbelievers in John's Gospel are divided into two groups, "the multitude" and "the Jews".

1. The Multitude

The multitude, ὁ ὄχλος, is a general term including the common and average person of Palestine. This group possesses the characteristics which have always been expressive of the general populace. They have confused and vague opinions, are easily led, and are variable as the wind. One minute they say that the Christ's origin is to be unknown; and then, almost in the next breath, they contend that He is to come not from Galilee but from Bethlehem, in accordance with the Scriptures.¹

2. The Jews

The leading role of the unbeliever is taken by "the Jews", who in many ways are quite distinct from "the multitude". They have strong and definite convictions regarding the coming Messiah and national sovereignty. They represent, in the main, the rulers and official representatives of the nation, and in this sense may be thought of as centering in Jerusalem and Judea, while the multitudes have their center in Galilee.

To break down this group into its component parts will bring into sharper focus the nature of the people with which this study is concerned. The ruling

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1. John 7:27, 42.

and official body of the Jews consisted in a number of groups who in a sense were contestants for power. They were the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, and Herodians. To understand the character of these different groups they should be seen in the light of their birth.

At the close of the Greek Period (332-167 B.C.) in Jewish history, the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes brought to a climax the corruption and oppression of centuries. The desecration of the temple and brutal imposition of infamous laws stimulated the famous Maccabean revolt. This revolt was essentially a religious rebellion, forming under a party of national opposition to foreign rule. But eventually this party turned to political self-seeking and burned with the desire for official power rather than religious reform. From this group came the New Testament Sadducees, who had their roots in the Jewish aristocracy. They were associates of the rich alone, and they zealously guarded their position. "The goal of their political action was, first of all, the strengthening of their aristocratic caste."¹

The old religious element separated into a party of its own, and because of its great zeal for religion was as much opposed to the national party as it was to foreign rule. From this group came the New Testament

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1. F. A. E. Sieffert: "Pharisees and Sadducees", The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. IX, p. 11.

Pharisees. To this group, religion was the determinant of all their actions; but religion to them was only the knowledge and fulfillment of the law. Thus arose the sect whose piety was strictly legalistic, whose prayer, fasting, and whole religious life became externalized. They revered the tombs of the prophets but were careful not to imbibe their spirit. Also, into the law of the Pharisees gradually crept the oral traditions of the scribes, and these traditions became as binding as the statutes given at Mt. Sinai.

But, since this old religious party failed to retain any zeal for the nation, there separated from it still another party, a group that was fired with revolutionary fanaticism. The Zealots, as they were called, embodied a reckless zeal that believed in the advancement of the sword to save the cause.

As the national party, the Sadducees, began to align itself with the foreign rule, there sprang up another political party with no religious attachments, which linked itself with the reigning house of Palestine. Its objective was to establish the Herodian Kingdom in the joint spirit of Judaism and Hellenism. This group was called the Herodians.

These were the "Jews" that Jesus faced: the Sadducees, with a thirst for political gain and self-enhancement; the Pharisees, with the passion for the legal

observance of the law; the Zealots, eager to conquer by "fire and by sword"; and the Herodians, with only political concern. It is no wonder that when Jesus met the "Jews" there was controversy and opposition. For Jesus confronted

" . . . the Jew's materialism, their political, self-seeking, nationalizing materialism, with the great claims of the spiritualism of a God who must be worshipped in spirit and truth, and who could be seen and known only in the spiritual Lordship of Jesus Himself over personal character and life."¹

C. Study of the Incidents of Unbelief

A consideration of the nature of the unbelievers has already been undertaken, and it might be expected that the next logical step would be a presentation of the nature of the object which is presented for belief. But this will not be the procedure, since in each incident of unbelief the nature of the object varies, though in every case Jesus is ultimately the object of unbelief. That is to say, though it is toward Jesus which the unbelief is directed, yet it is the different claims or actions of Jesus which are the immediate objects for belief in each incident studied. Therefore, during the study of each situation the specific nature of the object of unbelief will be determined and expressed.

In the events examined, the procedure, though

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1. M. W. Jacobus: "Jesus' Controversies with the Jews", Addresses on the Gospel of St. John, p. 164.

not rigidly held to, will be as follows: first, a brief account of the event; then a pointing out of the nature of the object of unbelief; and finally, the factors present which stimulated the rejection, with the consequences which followed therefrom.

1. Healing at Bethzatha on the Sabbath - John 5

The first incident of study centers around the healing of a lame man, on the Sabbath, near the pool of Bethzatha in Jerusalem. Jesus manifested His power over disease by healing him who had been ill for thirty-eight years through a simple command, "Rise, take up your pallet and walk". Then the Jews came upon the scene and exclaimed that it was against the law for the healed man to carry his pallet on the Sabbath. But the man who had received power to walk answered them, "The man who healed me said to me, 'Take up your pallet, and walk'".¹ It was as if to reply, "He who had authority to heal me, he it is who commanded me, gave me the authority, to take up my pallet". But the Jews saw not the sign, only a broken law; and when they learned that it was Jesus who had healed the man, they began to persecute Him because He did this on the Sabbath. When Jesus replied that He was only imitating the work of His Father, the Jews sought all the more to

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1. John 5:11.

kill Him. For He had called God His Father.

Now in this incident it is seen that the Jews' unbelief was focused on Jesus' actions and person. First, they did not believe that He had the authority over the Sabbath law. Second, they did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God, that God was His Father. If they could have believed the latter, they would have had no trouble accepting His authority over the Sabbath. The great point at issue, then, was the Person of Jesus. The problem over which the Jews stumbled was the Incarnation.

What caused the Jews to disbelieve that Jesus had authority over the law? The partial answer to this question is revealed in their actions: their rabid zeal for Sabbath observance. The fervor of this zeal is revealed in the immediate reprimand they gave the healed man for his action and the question they asked him. For they did not ask, "Who is it that healed you", but, "Who is it that told you to take up your pallet". All this reveals what the psychologists would term a "psychological atmosphere" which made it practically impossible for the Jews to believe. The sun of their system was obedience to the law and this prevented them from seeing the facts at hand which plainly manifested Jesus' power and ability.

Also the fact that they "persecuted" and "sought all the more to kill" Jesus, points to the deep-seated

passion which accompanied their reverence for the law. This strong "emotion" with the "psychological climate" blinded the Jews to all evidence to the authority of Jesus over the law. The evidence of His authority should have been plain to them; for, previously, at the time of the cleansing of the temple, the Jews had asked Jesus, "What sign have you to show us for doing this?"¹ This question revealed that some place in their thought was the realization that signs were proof of authority. Yet, when a sign, the healing of the infirmed man, confronted them, they were oblivious to its message. Therefore, their unbelief was not due to the lack of objective evidence.

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Nor is there any suggestion that the Jews even considered that Jesus might be the "Son of God", and thus have authority over the law. This was not because there was no testimony available for such a conclusion, but because they had been blind to it. For in Jesus' reply to them, after explaining the relation of the Father and the Son, He set before them the testimony that was available as to His Person and Authority. This testimony included the following facts and witnesses:

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(1) John the Baptist had borne witness to Jesus. He testified that Jesus was "the Lamb of God, who takes

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1. John 2:18.

away the sin of the world".¹ He saw and bore witness that Jesus was the "Son of God".² It was John who had said that he was not worthy to act in the capacity of a servant to Jesus.³ If they considered John a prophet, how much greater should be their conception of Jesus.

(2) The "works" that Jesus was then doing, that the Father had granted Him to do, were even greater than the testimony of John concerning Jesus' divine origin.

(3) The Father Himself has witnessed of Jesus, but the Jews had not heard His voice.

(4) The very Scriptures, to which they so zealously held, witnessed to Him. Moses, too, on whom they had set their hope, was listed among the witnesses to Jesus. Yet, in spite of all this evidence, they believed not.

The incident concludes with Jesus' own heart-searching analysis of what lay at the root of their unbelief. First, He pointed a finger at one of the chief prides of the Jews, the Scriptures. They were blind to its true message and consequently did not believe. That which should have been a steppingstone to belief, because it testified of Him, had become a stumbling block that produced unbelief. This had come about because they did

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1. John 1:29.
2. John 1:34.
3. John 1:27.

not have God's word abiding in them.¹ They guarded the letter of the Word with the fierceness of warriors, but the spirit and heart of God's message was not in their possession. They had taken what should have been a channel and made it a goal; the means which was to lead them to the life, had been mistaken for the life itself. As a result, they refused the true life.

The unbelief of the Jews was, therefore, not caused by any inferiority in the life of Jesus, but primarily lay in the "authority" of their established belief, namely, that their particular legalistic interpretation of the Scriptures was right, and that the letter of the law could not be violated. The tremendous force of these factors of authority is recognized by the psychologist. "Such believing attitudes", says Johnson, "become a frame of reference accepted as established, not to be questioned but defended as the stability and order by which we carry on."² Since Jesus' actions and words struck at the heart of the Jews' "established" attitudes, it is little wonder that they reacted as they did.

This leads to the deeper roots of unbelief:
"you refuse to come to me . . ."³ It was their own unwillingness that kept them from belief. They had no de-

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1. John 5:38.

2. P. E. Johnson: Psychology of Religion, p. 168.

3. John 5:40.

sire or will to come to Jesus for life. They stubbornly retained their preconceived ideas because these ideas were more comfortable and in harmony with their desires.

Then Jesus touched a vital nerve in the Jews' system of unbelief. He said, "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"¹ They were empty of the "love of God", but filled with the love of self. Their love (emotion) was wrong. Pride, with its unquenchable thirst for the praise of men, had left no room in the lives of the Jews for the love of God. Their "desires" were false and misdirected. If their driving motive was to receive the acclaims of men, how could they believe in Jesus? James wrote: "As a rule we disbelieve all facts and theories for which we have no use."² The Jews had no use for the belief in Jesus as the Son of God for that would shatter their love and desire. Therefore, they rejected Him.

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The unbelief of the Jews was, therefore, not caused by any inferiority in the life of Jesus, but in the authority of pre-established beliefs, the volition of their perverted desires, and the emotion of their self-love.

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1. John 5:44.

2. James, The Will to Believe, p. 10.

2. Feeding of the 5,000 - John 6

In the second incident in this study, the setting changes from Jerusalem and the violent and aggressive reactions of the Jews to the sea of Galilee and the comparatively passive reaction of "the multitude".

Near the time of the passover, multitudes were following Jesus because of the signs of healing He did. Through the need that arose Jesus took a lad's meal of five barley loaves and two fishes and changed it into a meal for a multitude. The response of the people to this sign was one of belief that Jesus was "the prophet who is to come into the world", and, "they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king".¹ But Jesus, sensing their intentions, withdrew to the hills.

The next day the multitudes went seeking Jesus because He had supplied them with bread. This provided the occasion for Jesus' discourse on the bread of life, in which He urged them to labor for that food that endured to life,² for the true bread that came from heaven and gave life to the world.³ Presenting Himself as the "bread of life", Jesus urged them to partake of Him. But they murmured at these hard sayings, and they "drew

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1. John 6:14, 15.
2. John 6:27.
3. John 6:33.

back and no longer went about with Him".¹

Again, Jesus' words and claims were the object of rejection. They accepted the miracle, but rejected His claim of a spiritual Messiahship and mission. It was not the work of Jesus but the words and claims of Jesus which caused their unbelief. They were not able yet to understand or receive the truth of the Incarnation. This was their unbelief.

The principle cause of the multitude's unbelief was their materialistic philosophy of life. This is made evident, first, in the attempt to make Jesus their king.

Great and sudden hopes had mounted within them when they saw the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. They would have made Him a political, material king - a bread king. Woelfkin suggests, "a Jewish Caesar to fight their battles and supply their temporal wants"² is all they ask. Therefore, Jesus could only withdraw from their midst, shattering their hopes and conceptions. For submittance to such demands would have put in grave danger His major mission, which was spiritual - to "save His people from their sins".³

Somewhere in the hardships and pain of foreign

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1. John 6:66.

2. Cornelius Woelfkin: "Jesus the Bread of Life", Addresses on the Gospel of St. John, p. 145.

3. Matthew 1:21.

domination they had lost all thought of the spiritual nature of the Messiah. As the desire for freedom from the oppressor's hand increased, so did the conception of the Messiah as a political deliverer, until His spiritual nature was forgotten altogether. This "psychological climate" present in the environment of political and physical oppression made it easy for the people to seek a political and material Messiah, but when Jesus shattered their illusions by refusing to cater to their desires and concepts, their seeking ceased and they turned away.

This conception of a political and material Messiah could only have come from blinded desires, for the prophets abound in the spiritual nature and mission of the Messiah. Isaiah writes:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even forever."¹

". . . and the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah; and his delight shall be in the fear of Jehovah; . . . and righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins."²

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1. Isaiah 9:6-9.
2. Isaiah 11:2-5.

Jeremiah's testimony is similar:

"... and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land . . . and this is his name whereby he shall be called: Jehovah our righteousness."¹

multitude

It should also be noted here that the multitude had already given witness to the uniqueness of Jesus. For they had called Him a prophet and had wanted to make Him their king, their Messiah. Yet in the end they deserted Him because He would not conform to their desires and conception of a Messiah, which were materialistic. Again it is seen that there was no lack of evidence to the worthiness of Jesus as an object of belief, but the materialistic desires of the people had stimulated their rejection. This is an example of what the psychologist has observed: that the desires formulate unbeliefs by diverting attention from counter-evidence.

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It was for their materialistic motive and thought that Jesus rebuked the multitude when they came seeking Him the next day. He said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."² They had not come because they interpreted the sign to mean that He was the spiritual deliverer of the people who had come to give life to the soul. They had not correctly interpreted

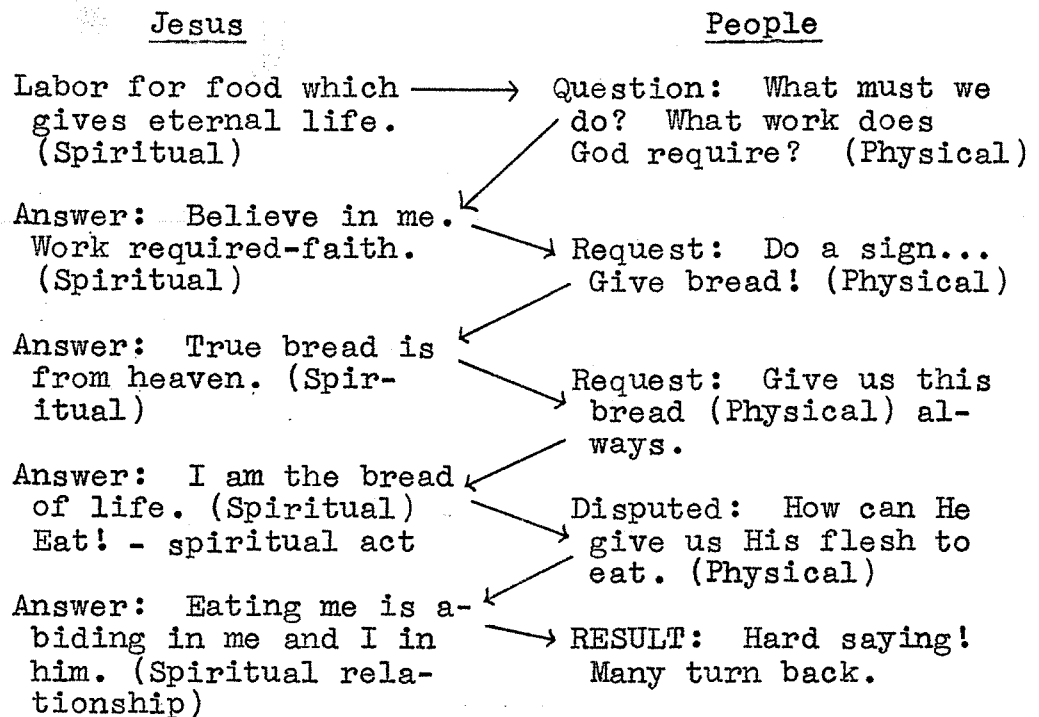
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1. Jeremiah 23:5-6.
2. John 6:26.

the facts; they came seeking because of material benefits received, and a desire for more. Their motive was purely material.

Yet Jesus tried to quicken within them spiritual sight. He declared, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you".¹ Thus begins a dialogue in which Jesus struggles to give sight to spiritually blinded eyes, "to lodge spiritual conception behind the earthiness of the people".² A diagram might best reveal the attempts of Jesus, and the repeated refusal of the people to be lifted to the level of spiritual thought.



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1. John 6:27.

2. R. E. Speer: John's Gospel, p. 67.

Thus though He continually attempted, through this figurative representation, to offer them spiritual life, all they wanted was bread; He would speak to them of spiritual things, of things regarding the life of the soul, but the only language they knew partook of the material. He would have opened heaven to them, but all they wanted was earth. Their materialistic nature and concomitant blindness of the things of the spirit was another major factor in their unbelief. Because their mental thermostats were set at the physical level, they were incapable of understanding and accepting the fact of the Incarnation and all related spiritual truths.

It was because of this reign of the physical in their lives that the Jews murmured, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come from heaven'?"¹ By His answer Jesus implied that the perceiving of this mystery is dependent upon the initiative of Divine grace, for the Father must draw them. To understand the unique Person of Jesus, it was required that they hear and learn from God, but the refusal to accept God's revelation would result in unbelief of Jesus.

Once more, when Jesus said that the bread which He had for the life of the world was His flesh, the Jews,

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1. John 6:42.

blind to spiritual meaning, say, "How can this man give us flesh to eat?"¹ Even though He explained to them that eating His flesh and drinking His blood meant for them to abide in Him and He in them, that it meant to make Him a vital part of their life, they only saw the physical meaning, stark cannibalism. To them it was a hard saying, and because they could not grasp the spiritual meaning in the words of Jesus they turned away in unbelief. B. ✓

In this incident the unbelief of the multitudes was primarily due to their own desires. Their desires for a political king, fostered by a strong psychological atmosphere, made it quite improbable that they would accept one who presented himself as a spiritual Messiah. Their materialistic desires and motives, in turn, tainted the intellect, which stumbled at the possibility of the Incarnation and refused to accept God's revelation. ✓ B.1

3. Teaching in the Temple - John 7

This incident has for its setting the feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Previously, Jesus has been in Galilee, for the murderous intentions of the Jews made it unsafe for Him in Judea. Unbelief was manifesting itself in radical action. In the face of this situation, the brothers of Jesus asked Him to go up to the feast with A.3

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1. John 6:52.

them; He refused, but later went secretly.

At the feast the Jews were wondering where Jesus was, and the people were muttering about Him. Suddenly, about the middle of the feast, Jesus appeared in the temple and began to teach. The Jews marveled, for Jesus had not had rabbinical training and yet He was learned. In the brief discourses that followed with different groups, Jesus gave words of explanation concerning the origin of His teaching, His personal origin, and His destination. Each discourse is followed by the varied reactions of the listeners.

The manner in which Jesus presents Himself to the minds of the multitudes and Jews for acceptance, centers around His claim to Messiahship, which involves the Divine authority of His teaching and the Divine origin of His Person. In this incident both the Jews and the people have representatives of belief as well as unbelief.

As before, Jesus gives a diagnosis of the main reasons for unbelief in Him. Two causes are referred to by Jesus: the evil nature of the Jews fought exposure,¹ and they do not will to do God's will.²

Jesus' life and words mirrored to the Jews their corruptness and exposed the evilness of their works,

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1. John 7:7

2. John 7:17, 19.

and they arose in a rage of hate, seeking to kill Him. By showing their deeds to be evil, Jesus had wounded their pride and had struck at their self-righteousness. Their self-love could not allow this to happen. Unbelief was fanned into flame by their corrupt moral nature, for they could not tolerate opposition to their great love and desire of self. The cause of their unbelief was not primarily in the nature of Jesus, but within themselves. It was a case of the emotions and desires causing the individual to disbelieve that which was out of harmony with them. It was as Tennant observed: when desires are joined by strong emotions, attention to any evidence that might point toward belief is "totally inhibited."¹

The unearthing of the second root of unbelief was occasioned by the effect of Jesus' teaching upon the Jews. The source or origin of His learning puzzled them. In the two preceding incidents, the works of Jesus had provided the opportunity for the development of unbelief, but this time it was His teaching. Jesus claimed that as the power to do the "works" came from God, so in like manner the source of His learning was from God.

But for anyone to know that Jesus' teaching came from God, one thing was required: a will to do His will. The Greek word is θέλησις, indicating aspiration

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1. Tennant, loc. cit.

and effort to do the will of God. Belief in Christ is thus represented as the result of sympathy with the truth rather than critical examination of evidence. It is a matter of the will. If the individual does not possess the volition to do God's will, he will not come to perceive the Divine origin of the teaching of Jesus.

This was just where the Jews were found wanting. Jesus reminded them: "Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?"¹ Though the Jews boasted of their possession of the law, none of them was in harmony with it, for they sought to kill Jesus. And lest the Jews rest in the thought that they were doing the will of God in seeking to destroy Him, Jesus exposed their superficial and false judgment of His actions.

He did this by referring to the law of circumcision. The law of circumcision required that the rite be performed on the eighth day, and frequently this occasion would come upon the Sabbath. Therefore, Jesus reasoned with the Jews in this fashion: Moses has given you the law regarding the Sabbath and also has prescribed circumcision. When the eighth day falls upon the Sabbath, you do not hesitate to sacrifice the Sabbatic law in favor of circumcision. In doing this you place the welfare of

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1. John 7:19.

the individual above the obligation to the law of the Sabbath. Now if you do this so that a man may be circumcized, which is a local purification, how much more should you allow me to make a man's whole body well.

Interplayed throughout this incident is the unbelief of some of the people. The first mention of the people is of their discussion concerning Jesus. "Yet for the fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him."¹ This statement reveals a "psychological climate" which would make it extremely hard for the people to believe. Fearing the Jews, the people would not easily decide for anything that would secure their wrath. For the multitudes valued comfort for self more highly than truth. The actions of the people must, therefore, be seen and evaluated in the light of this factor.

After Jesus' words regarding His authority and in defense of His works, the people entertained the thought that this might be the Christ, that the authorities really knew that Jesus was the Christ. But an intellectual conception prevented some of them from entering into belief. The general understanding that the origin of the Messiah was to be unknown seemed to be irreconcilable with what they knew about Jesus. Even though Jesus informed them that there was something mysterious about His origin,

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1. John 7:13.

of which they were ignorant, some let this lack of intellectual understanding overrule the impression of His life upon them, which was that He was the Messiah. Consequently, they turned in unbelief.

On the last day of the feast, the people were again debating Jesus' Person. Some seemed convinced that Jesus was the Christ, but this time the objection was raised that the Scriptures say the Christ will come from Bethlehem and not from Galilee. Previously, they had said His origin would be unknown, but now they say He must come from Bethlehem. These objections, when put together, appear to be alibis, and act as coverings for the real cause of their rejection, which was unwillingness to act, which in turn partially stemmed from the fear of the Jews.

Finally, the Pharisees and chief priests presented themselves in this picture of unbelief. Their first act manifested the unbelief which had already settled upon them. They sent officers to arrest Jesus. Nor was the stimulus for this act found in Jesus, but in the response of the crowd to Jesus. When the Pharisees heard that some of the crowd were beginning to believe in Jesus as Christ, at that moment they made an effort to arrest Him. Hidden motives for this action may be inferred. For the people to believe that Jesus was the Christ meant that they would follow Him and not the Pharisees and the

chief priests. To prevent the loss of their position the religious leaders had to act and act quickly. This they did. It was their selfish, jealous desires which led them to issue orders for His arrest. Their unbelief was being fed by a submerged stream of self-centered desires, which could not tolerate opposition.

At the end of the feast the action of the Pharisees is again cited. The officers returned from their mission empty-handed and gave as their reason, "No man ever spoke like this man!"¹ In so doing, the officers, unintentionally, testified to evidence of Christ's Messiahship. Smarting under such a frank admission, the Pharisees resorted to ridicule to dissuade the officers from believing in Jesus as had some of the crowd. They boldly suggest reasons for unbelief in Jesus by an appeal to their own authority.

Their first argument was "argumentum ad verecundian", which claims a belief should or should not be accepted because it is or is not held by revered people. The Pharisees reasoned that since none of the religious authorities had believed, it was therefore not true that Jesus was the Christ. A2

The second reason presented was as irrelevant to the central issue as the former, and contained logic

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1. John 7:46.

which was just as fallacious. It was an "argument ad hominen", which is an argument against the person advancing the belief instead of against the belief itself. By this method the Pharisees do not discredit belief in Jesus through His own character, but through the character of those who do believe in Him. Since the ignorant crowd had welcomed Jesus as the Christ, that was reason enough for unbelief. ✓ A2

Both of the preceding arguments are based on two fallacious presumptions and generalizations: that whatever the authorities believed was true and whatever the crowd believed was false. Thus, rational factors linked themselves, as a last resort, with the other links in the causation of unbelief. "Our reason," suggests James, "is quite satisfied in 999 cases out of every 1000 of us, if it can find a few arguments that will do to recite in case our credulity is criticised by someone else."¹ This seems to be the Pharisees' case. The officers' statement regarding the uniqueness of Jesus, indirectly called into question their unbelief. Therefore, they presented these logical fallacies in defense of their position. A2

Nicodemus, one of the Pharisees, interrupts the persuasive attempts of his fellows by focusing atten- *

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1. James, The Will to Believe, p. 9.

tion on the central issue - the character of Christ. The religious authorities had made decisions of judgment concerning Jesus without even giving Him a fair hearing. In doing this they were exemplifying an "unwillingness" to do God's will. For the will of God was that justice should be given. A²

The refusal of the Pharisees to do God's will and truthfully examine the life of Jesus was a primary factor in their unbelief. Anyone who was not desirous of doing God's will could not believe in Him who was the embodiment of the Divine will. The cause of unbelief is again driven back to the will, the self-centered, corrupted will and desires, in spite of the fact that the Jews tried to justify their unbelief by the reason. Even the people were observed suggesting a rational basis for their unbelief which was really produced by the "social pressure" of the religious leaders. r

4. Light of the World Discourse - John 8

Failing in their attempt to arrest Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees bring their opposition to another climax by presenting before Him for judgment a woman caught in adultery. The purpose of their act was not clothed with any inclination to learn about Jesus, nor with any spirit that would make belief possible, but with a sinister motive of securing charges against Him. Their

minds were closed to the Messiahship of Jesus; now all they desired was to do away with Him. The trap laid for Him was in the question: "Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?" It was a dilemma whose horns offered either conflict with the Roman government or disrepute in the eyes of the religious authorities and the people. Jesus' answer, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her",¹ turned the tables on the inquirers and left them slinking away in defeat and silent confession of their guilt and sinfulness.

Again, Jesus, while teaching in the temple, proclaimed Himself to be the "Light of the World"; but the Pharisees, having already passed judgment upon Him, accused Him of false testimony. Jesus replied that their judgment was according to the flesh; their judgment was not based on knowledge; for Jesus said, "You do not know whence I come and whither I am going".² Furthermore, their prejudices against Him put them in no state to obtain this knowledge.

The main study of unbelief in this chapter begins after a discourse in which Jesus reiterated His identity and stated that He was in perfect accord with the

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1. John 8:5.

2. John 8:12.

Father. Though the immediate response was the belief in Him by many, this belief was short-lived when it was put to the test. Godet says that "the term 'believed' designates here undoubtedly the disposition, openly expressed, to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah."¹ It might be termed a "half-belief" since it reached only to the intellect. For when the Jews were made aware that believing in Christ included acceptance of certain propositions and actions, thus involving more than the intellect, their belief waned.

The great barrier to full belief was their refusal to accept the proposition that they were in bondage to sin, that they were sinners. Their refusal lay in the fact that they confused physical and spiritual relationships. Thus they said they were not in bondage to sin, for they were descendants of Abraham. Jesus pointed out that their spiritual status may be determined by their spiritual conduct, and not by their physical status. Abraham was not their spiritual Father, for if he were, they would have believed the truth as Abraham did. But because they sought to kill Him who brought the truth, they revealed that they had a different father.

Quickly the Jews claimed God as their father,

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1. F. L. Godet: Commentary on the Gospel of John, Vol. II, p. 105.

but Jesus replied that this could not be. For if they were of God they would love Him, for He was sent by God. Then Jesus unfolds to them the reason why they cannot understand what He says and consequently the cause of their unbelief.

The real reason for their refusal to admit they were sinners and their inability to understand Jesus' distinction between spiritual life and physical life was the fact that the devil was their spiritual father, and their will was to do their father's desires. That the evil passions and desires of their father had been transmitted to them was evident. For as the devil was a murderer, even from the beginning, so they sought to kill. As the devil abhorred the truth and was the father of lies, so they did not believe the truth that Jesus told them. In proof that His word was the truth, Jesus asked, "Which of you convicts me of sin?"¹ For a sinless character would logically force them to admit that what He said was the truth, for sinlessness and truth are siamese twins and cannot be separated without the death of both.

Why then was it they did not believe and understand? It was because they were not of God, because they possessed the depraved nature that was like unto their father, the devil. These evil and corrupt "desires"

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1. John 8:46.

stimulated their unbelief. Once again this study is seen to agree with what the psychologists had to say in regard to the major role of desires in the birth and growth of unbelief.

5. Restoring of Sight - John 9

The events centering around the healing of the blind man by Jesus at the pool of Siloam on the Sabbath reveal the progress of belief as well as vividly exposing the causes of the rejection of Christ by the Jews.

When the neighbors of the healed man saw him, they could hardly believe what their eyes reported; for he who had been blind from birth could now see. Their reaction is profound evidence that a tremendous miracle had occurred. The neighbors ushered him into the presence of the Pharisees, possibly because they thought that here was a marvel that lay in the realm of the Pharisees to explain. And the Pharisees were quick to offer an explanation. Some, apparently unmoved by the greatness of the miracle, had their eyes open only to the fact that a law of the Sabbath had been broken, and therefore the healer was not of God. But others, awed by the power of what had been done, could not see how a sinner could do it. This division in judgment was caused by two different methods of approach to what had happened. In the first group, preconceived ideas were brought to the miracle and it

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was interpreted in the light of them; while the latter group came before the fact itself and in its light inferred the truth.

"Some, starting from the inviolability of the Sabbath ordinance, deny to Jesus, as a transgressor of this ordinance, any divine mission; from this results logically the denial of the miracle. Others, starting from the fact of the miracle, infer the holy character of Jesus, and thus implicitly deny the infraction of the Sabbath."¹

The Jews, who no doubt consisted of the opposing group of Pharisees, now shifted their action toward destroying the miracle itself. For to be true to their reasoning, if Jesus was not from God, then He could not have opened the eyes of the blind. To destroy the existence of the fact, they first attempted to establish that the man had never been blind. Failing in this, they tried to force the healed man to give God the praise and thus testify that "this man" did not do it. For they had already made the decision that Jesus was not the Christ, but, a sinner. In this incident it is seen what Mair meant when he said that "religious fervour . . . love, anger . . . predispose the subject to select and to accept those ideas which harmonize with and nourish the disposition or mood".² The fervour of the Jews' religious beliefs predisposed them to believe that Jesus was not of

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1. Godet, op. cit., p. 132.

2. Mair, loc. cit.

God, and therefore, they sought to destroy any evidence which ran counter to their belief.

But the healed man did not agree that his "knowledge" asserted the sinfulness of Jesus; on the other hand, his knowledge was that he was once blind, but now saw. When the Jews questioned him for the second time as to how it happened, he replied, "Do you too want to be His disciples?"¹ This question reveals that the cause of the unbelief of the Pharisees was even evident to this man. He had discerned that their unbelief was the result of their unwillingness to act upon the truth. They would never find the truth about Jesus if they were not willing to act upon the facts that were given to them. This reply was like a surgical knife to those who had been trying to destroy the facts, and they winced under it.

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Reviling him, the Pharisees paraded their relation to Moses, saying, ". . . we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know whence he comes from."² The healed man then burst forth in wonder at their unbelief, based on the fact that they did not know from whence Jesus came. "Why, this is a marvel!"³ A miracle as great as his healing confronted the man who had been blind, namely,

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1. John 9:27.
2. John 9:29.
3. John 9:30.

that even though Jesus had performed this unprecedented act, they still did not know His origin. The healed man marveled that, in face of this fact, the Pharisees still claimed ignorance and unbelief. For it was known by all that God did not listen to sinners. But God listened to Jesus, for He did something no one else had ever done, opened the eyes of the blind. Therefore, it was a plain, logical conclusion that Jesus was from God and not a sinner. The inability of those who professed high knowledge to follow simple, logical reasoning was the miracle; and it brought to light the irrationality of unbelief.

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In the lives of the Pharisees the factors of authority, desire, and will are, again, seen to be active in their rejection of Jesus. Their preconceived beliefs regarding the Sabbath law and concerning Jesus produced an atmosphere of authority which was not conducive to belief in Christ. Their strong desires and unwillingness to act upon the objective evidence at hand led them to attempt destruction of that which logically would have led them to belief.

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6. Jesus as the Good Shepherd - John 10

Following the discourse in which Jesus presented Himself as the good shepherd, there is a division among the Jews regarding the character of Jesus. Though both groups had identical facts before them, their conclusions

were extreme opposites. Many said, "This man has a demon and is mad, therefore, why should we listen to Him". Again they used the logical fallacy, "argumentum ad hominem", to escape the truth. But others, confronted by the import of His words, could find no resemblance between them and those of a demon-possessed person. They also recalled the fact that He had healed the man born blind and came to the conclusion such a deed could not come from a life controlled by demons.

During the feast of Dedication, the Jews encircled Jesus and asked, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly".¹ From this question it might be supposed that they were eagerly waiting for the truth so that they could act upon it. But this does not prove to be their spirit, as will be seen. For they had already been told, by the works and words of Jesus, that He was the Christ, but they had rejected them. They did not need to be told again the truth, but what they needed was to accept it and act upon it. Jesus told them that they did not believe because they were not of His sheep, for His sheep were those who heard His voice and then followed, which involves the will and action.

Now when Jesus did tell them plainly that He

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1. John 10:24.

was the Christ by saying, "I and the Father are one",¹ they gave no sign of belief, but picked up stones to stone Him. The reason for this action, they said, was because He had blasphemed, because, being a man, He had made Himself God.² This time they had reasoned rightly, for Jesus' words carried unmistakably the implication of Divinity, and Jesus did not deny their statement. But instead He attempted to get them to understand the mystery of the Incarnation. B/4

The difficulty for finite minds to understand the Incarnation, the God-man, has been evident in every generation since then. But because it is difficult to understand does not mean it is not true. Jesus, cognizant of the difficulty that faced the Jews, proceeded to provide evidence so that their minds could accept this "mystery" concerning His Person. B/4

First, He showed that it was in accordance with Scripture. As the prophets were called "gods", it was not blasphemy for Him, whom God had "consecrated and sent",³ to call Himself the "Son of God". Next, the nature of His works should give them foundation for understanding the Incarnation. If His works revealed that they were of God, then they should believe the works and not reject them. B/4

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1. John 10:30.
2. John 10:33.
3. John 10:36.

For acceptance would lead them to know and understand that the Father was in Jesus and that Jesus was in the Father.

But the Jews could not even be persuaded to accept the facts and thus be led into the truth of His Person. Instead they tried to arrest Him who was the Truth. Refusal to read objective evidence led to their unbelief. B. H.

Increasingly the unbelief of the Jews was being fed by the volition. They were unwilling to act upon the truth. Their miscomprehension of His divine-human nature was fostered by their continued refusal to accept His works, which would have eventually led them to the truth concerning His Person.

7. The Hardened Hearts - John 12

In the closing verses of the twelfth chapter of John, the unbelief of the Jews reached a climax. From thence the burden of the remaining chapters is with the development of faith in the disciples.

At the time of the passover Jesus made His "Messianic entry" into Jerusalem, the stronghold of opposition. The people thronged to meet Him and lined the pathways because they had heard of how Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. It looked to the Pharisees as if the whole world had gone after Him and accepted Him as Christ. But words from the lips of Jesus concerning His B.

ignominious death cast a blanket over the hopes of the crowd and forced a question as to His Messiahship. They inquired, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up?"¹ Imbedded like concrete was still the conception of a material and not a spiritual kingdom, and as a result, they again turned from Him. "Though He had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in Him."² With this rejection, Jesus withdrew and hid Himself.

To understand this rejection by the Jews is "indeed one of the most obscure problems of history".³ To reveal its cause the writer of the Gospel enlisted the prophecy of Isaiah: "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and turn for me to heal them."⁴

This passage seems to say that for some reason God entered into the situation and made it impossible for the Jews to believe. He did not desire that they should be healed; in fact, He had blinded their eyes, which signifies the deprivation of intellectual light or the sense

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1. John 12:34.
2. John 12:37.
3. Godet, op. cit., p. 234.
4. Isaiah 6:10.

of the true, and had hardened their hearts, depriving them of "moral sensibility, the sense of the good."¹ With the loss of these two faculties they could not believe.

But in what sense can it be said that God made it so the Jews could not believe? First, note the action of the Jewish people. Though Jesus had done all the signs that the author records and many more, thereby providing abundance of evidence, yet they οὐκ ἐπίστευον εἰς αὐτόν.² The Greek imperfect, ἐπίστευον, pictures a continual, persistent unbelief regardless of many appeals. They had continually refused to glorify God, thus it was God's desire and will that they be blinded and hardened. It might be considered a spiritual law of God, that those who persist in unbelief, regardless of evidence and appeal to belief, will eventually arrive at the place where it is impossible for them to believe.

"God has so constituted man, that, when he does not resist the first beginnings of sin, he loses the right of disposing of himself and forcibly obeys even to the end the power to which he has surrendered himself. God does not only permit this development of evil; He wills it and concurs in it."³

Thus the real engenderment of the unbelief of the Jews was their own moral condition. Continual rebellion against the truth wove a web about them from

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1. Godet, op. cit., p. 233.
2. John 13:37.
3. Godet, op. cit., p. 234.

which no escape was possible. Psychologically speaking, this involved the establishment of a "habit" which became so strong that the individual was left powerless to change it.

But there were also "many" among the rulers who believed to a certain extent in Jesus. This might be called a partial or half-belief, an intellectual assent only, for they gave no outward expression as to its reality. Complete assent, or belief, in Jesus was prevented by an emotional factor: the fear that the Pharisees would put them out of the synagogue.¹ And uniting with this factor was the love of self, pride, that fed itself upon the praises of men rather than the praise of God.² Therefore they were prevented from entering into complete belief.

In this last incident considered, a tragic factor entered into the causality of unbelief. At this point in their life some of the Jews did not believe because they "could not" believe. It was impossible for them to believe and this impossibility was contingent upon their previous continual unbelief. Again the emotional factor of fear and the self-love of man brought unbelief in the lives of those who were on the verge of

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1. John 12:42.

2. John 12:43.

belief, who had given intellectual assent.

D. Summary

In this chapter the discussion centered in the study of unbelief as it existed in the lives of the multitude and the Jews. A study of the general characteristics of these two groups exposed possible factors which would foster their unbelief. The crowd being easily led and influenced was naturally open for domination by factors of authority or social pressure. While the Jews, with strong and definite beliefs, made it unlikely or improbable that contrary beliefs would be well received.

The study of the actual experiences of unbelief in John revealed that the above characteristics of the two groups contributed to their rejection of Christ. Also, inner loves, passions, desires, and wills arose to take the major part in the response of unbelief. The whole personality and character of the unbelievers were seen to account for the rejection of Christ.

CHAPTER III

TOPICAL SUMMARY OF UNBELIEF IN JOHN

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A. Introduction

Now that a psychological study of unbelief in John's Gospel has been completed, the benefits reaped can best be brought together by a topical summary. The various incidents examined made a contribution to the understanding of the nature, cause, and consequence of unbelief. To obtain a more complete and ordered picture of unbelief as it is presented in the Fourth Gospel, these contributions will be summarized in terms of the nature, cases, and consequences of unbelief.

B. Nature of Unbelief

Throughout the Gospel of John, unbelief has been seen to be a total assent of the personality that Jesus was not the Christ, the Son of God. This assent of unbelief was manifested by a "rejection" of Jesus. In the prologue the author describes the nature of unbelief in a setting in which Jesus came to his own home and his own people did not give him a welcome.¹

This rejection or non-welcome of the Jews and of

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1. John 1:11.

the crowd was a response of their whole personality. Intellectually they rejected the fact that He was the Messiah, the Christ, nor could they accept the fact of the Incarnation, that He was the Son of God. Emotionally, their rejection appeared in their hate of Him, and volitionally it became evident in their refusal to follow and their violent action against Him. Therefore, unbelief in the lives of the Jews and the multitudes was an assent of the whole personality that the claims of Jesus were false. It was noted that "half-belief" existed for awhile for some. It could not be called belief because it was only the assent of the intellect. They intellectually believed that Jesus was the Christ, but the emotions and will would not give assent and prevented them from coming into full belief.

C. Causes of Unbelief

1. Forces Without the Personality - Authority

In the social and religious environment or atmosphere of the unbelievers was a number of factors which created a strong barrier to belief and made it extremely easy to fall into unbelief. The following factors of authority were present:

a. The religious environment of the Jews contained an atmosphere which agitated against belief in Christ.

For the heart of their religion was outward conformity to the letter of the law, while Jesus adhered to the spirit of the commandment. Also, the Jews strongly believed that the Scriptures themselves were the source of life. With this atmosphere pervading their thought, it was hard for them to accept Jesus as the giver of life.

b. The Jews' authority in religious matters stimulated the unbelief of the people. For what the religious leaders believed the people in general accepted. Therefore, when the leaders did not believe, the people were reluctant to do so. In fact, they feared even to speak openly of Jesus because they feared their leaders.

c. The authority of rabbinical training is seen as an element in the Jews' unbelief. Underlying their thought was the conception that to have the truth required graduation from "their seminary". Since Jesus had not received this formal education, the Jews were hindered in receiving Him. Again, when the man who was healed from blindness, claimed to know the truth, the religious leaders scoffed because he, a sinner, was trying to teach them who were "learned".

d. The social environment, or political conditions of the Jewish nation, had its role in creating a climate which fostered the rejection of Jesus as the Christ. For

the times emphasized the need of a political deliverer rather than a spiritual Messiah.

2. Forces Within the Personality

a. Rational Factors

The rational or intellectual factors which stimulated unbelief were seen to play a minor role. In fact, the rational cause often rose out of a more deeply seated cause, namely, of the emotions or desires. However, the following rational elements did contribute toward the rejection of Jesus:

(1) The failure to interpret signs correctly entered into their unbelief. The objective evidence, which was the necessary raw material for the mind, was in abundance, but they did not understand the evidence. In one incident, the healing of the blind man, they even tried to destroy the objective evidence.

(2) The mystery of the Incarnation and the consequent difficulty for the mind to understand it was a step toward unbelief.

(3) Reasoning from false premises gave the Jews a false intellectual basis for their unbelief. They assumed the inviolability of the external law and from that reasoned that Jesus was a sinner and, therefore, was not

from God because He broke the law of the Sabbath.

(4) Logical fallacies were rational factors that bolstered the Jews in their opposition to Jesus. An example of this was "argumentum ad hominen": you should not believe in Jesus because we, the leaders, do not believe in Him.

b. Emotional Factors

Specific emotions burned in the lives of the unbelievers and kindled the flame of unbelief. Jesus repeatedly pointed to these strong emotions as the determinant of their rejection. The psychologists recognize the difficulty of any sharp delineation between emotions and desires. Therefore, in the following factors, no attempt will be made to distinguish between them.

(1) The deep love of self impelled men to reject Jesus. Because Jesus did not feed their self-love, but tried to direct their love toward God, they rejected Him. This was evident in Chapter 5.

(2) Their hatred of the truth, which they had inherited from their father the devil, took its place in the line of causes. As they hated the truth, they hated Jesus for exposing the truth, namely, that their deeds were evil.

(3) Fear of what the Pharisees would do unto

them kept some of the people and some of the authorities from accepting belief in Christ. Intellectually they had come to believe in Him, but emotional and volitional factors brought about unbelief.

c. Volitional Factors

The primal desires and will of the Jews and the multitude were found to be a great element, probably the greatest, in producing the rejection of Jesus.

(1) Strong materialistic desires and cravings for satisfaction of physical needs made both groups blind to Jesus, who offered Himself as a spiritual Messiah. These desires led them to a materialistic philosophy of life and consequently produced spiritual blindness and led to the ignoring of the facts.

(2) The desire for the praise of men linked itself with the fear of the Jews of the loss of their religious position. This led them to reject Jesus, who threatened their prestige and position. It also led them to refuse to admit they were sinners.

(3) An unwillingness to do God's will resulted in unbelief. The Jews had no aspiration to do His will and, therefore, they were not stimulated to belief. On the other hand, their will was to do the will of their father, the devil. Their evil deeds and actions, contrib-

uted a part in the final rejection of Jesus.

(4) Their deeds or actions were evil and this led them to hate Jesus, for He brought their corruption to the light so that it could be seen.

D. Consequences of Unbelief

The ultimate consequence of unbelief has its unmasking at the Cross. For here unbelief is seen putting to death Him who was the embodiment of righteousness and truth. It is in the shadow of the Cross that the following results of unbelief are seen in their true significance.

1. Unbelief separated them from the source of life and cut them off from Him who could give nourishment and life to their spiritual nature. Rejecting Him, they must remain in darkness, continue in bondage, and die in their sins. For eternal life was only attainable by those who believed in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

2. Unbelief resulted in the complete corruption of their moral nature. They could not distinguish between truth and falsehood, nor were they any longer sensitive to the difference between good and evil.

3. Continuous unbelief had so hardened and blinded them that they came to a place where they could not believe. A habit had such a strong grip upon them that they were

powerless to break it.

4. The previous consequences point to another, namely, the destruction of the very foundation of their religion, of their relationship with God. Previously their contact with God was through obedience to the law, but now unbelief had made them so that they could not even obey the letter of the law. They were in bondage and darkness.

E. Summary

In this chapter a striking harmony is seen to exist between what the psychologists say in regard to unbelief and what is obtained by a study of unbelief in John. For in both instances unbelief is the assent of the whole personality as to the reality of an object; and the causes are primarily based on the emotions and desires, with the intellect mainly producing alibis for what emotion and desire has caused. It was not discovered that man was forced to unbelief in Jesus because of the intellectual impossibility of acceptance, but rather, because of the corrupted moral character of the individual. Likewise the consequences of unbelief were seen to be in the formation of character and the producement of energy and power within the personality.

CHAPTER IV
GENERAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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GENERAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As stated at the outset of this study, the purpose of this thesis has been to acquire an understanding of unbelief as recorded by John. The motivation for such a study has been twofold: the claim of contemporary thought that unbelief in Jesus Christ has its primary and just basis in the intellectual indefensibility of the Christian faith, and the need of the Christian minister for a thorough understanding of unbelief so that he may be a better servant of God.

The procedure was, first, to obtain the psychological tools and equipment for the study of unbelief. This was done by observing what noted psychologists had to say in regard to its nature, cause, and consequence. After this preliminary step, a first-hand study of selected experiences of unbelief in the Gospel by John was made (with the aid of the psychological insights already obtained). Then the truths gained from this second study were brought together in a systematic order so that a full and complete picture of unbelief might be received.

In the first part of this thesis essential truths or insights were gained from psychologists in regard to unbelief. It was first noted that to the psychologist,

though not to the philosopher, the experiences of "belief" and "unbelief" are synonymous, in that unbelief is a negative belief. Belief and unbelief, as an "acceptance of" or an "assent to" the reality or falsity of an object, could not be limited to mere intellectual assent, nor could they be confined to either the emotional or volitional factors. Rather, it was seen to be a unique experience of the whole personality: the intellect, emotions, and will rising up in assent and acceptance.

The cause of unbelief lay in three sources: the beliefs, the way in which these beliefs were interpreted, and the unbeliever. The latter became the chief concern of study. Within the personality of the individual it was observed that the emotional, volitional, and intuitional factors were the great determiners of belief, and not the intellect. Another great force in shaping beliefs was the authority and social pressure of the environment in which the individual lived. The psychological "climate" or "atmosphere" of his home, church, school, and community has a pronounced contribution in the formation of belief and unbelief.

The very fact that unbelief involves the participation of the whole personality is indicative of its great consequence. Beliefs and unbeliefs, it was discovered, direct the vitality and energy of the entire personality into one stream. They are the dynamics of power and life.

Therefore, the type of unbeliefs determines the actions, character, and life of the individual.

In the second chapter selected incidents from John's Gospel were studied. Each incident contained examples of unbelief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. The Jews were observed from the very beginning of their unbelief, when they rejected Jesus because His actions had opposed their belief that the law was supreme, until the climax of their unbelief, when they rejected Christ, this time, because they "could not" believe, their habitual unbelief having made it impossible for them to believe. All along this path of unbelief the love of self and the desire for praise and position were seen as the chief spark for their unbelief. The "intellectual" difficulties to believe were a recurring factor, but these rational causes were, in turn, seen to have their origin in the deeper causes of the desires and the emotions.

The multitudes, though at first readily giving intellectual assent to Jesus as the Messiah, finally turned to unbelief because their materialistic desires were not satisfied by Him. Likewise, the authority of the religious leaders and their attitude toward Jesus made the crowd fearful of believing. The intellectual conceptions that were presented as a basis for not believing were only conjured up to hide their unwillingness to act.

Unbelief in Jesus had its tragic consequences in the lives of the Jews and the crowd. It separated them from Him who could lift them above a mere "physical" life. Because of this separation all basis for moral character was destroyed, since selfish, physical-sighted desires and emotions have no eyes to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and falsehood. The crucifixion of Jesus, who was the embodiment of truth, goodness, and love, mirrored to the world that the rejection of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, ultimately ends in the desire of the individual to put to death truth and goodness.

In the concluding chapter it was very evident that unbelief as the psychologists see it was in complete harmony with unbelief as it was recorded in John and as the Saviour of men analyzed it to be. It is hoped that this thesis has done what the Gospel has done, namely, reflected the true nature of unbelief in all of its aspects in such a way that belief may be stimulated. For he that believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, shall have "life" in His name.

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