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Six Talks Based on
Beliefs That Matter by William Adams Brown

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[Chester, Pa.]

For the final assignment in Christian Theology for Today, Davis required six outlines based on William Adams Brown's book Beliefs That Matter.¹ The first talk, "What a Christian Should Believe About Himself," is the most notable. In discussing slave religion, King makes one of his few references in his student papers to the African-American experience: "as they gathered in these meetings they gained a renewed faith as the old unlettered minister would come to his triumphant climax saying: 'you—you are not niggers. You—you are not slaves. You are God's children.'" King refers to Leslie Weatherhead's metaphor of the global breakfast in this paper and returned to the metaphor throughout his life. King's second outline, "A Christian View of the World," argues for the achievement of social justice and thus the possibility for realizing the kingdom of God on earth. "How a Christian Overcomes Evil" presents a theme King would often articulate: evil is not driven out by force but crowded out by love. Davis judged the outlines "well done. A."

"What a Christian
Should Believe About Himself"

- I. Each Christian should believe that he is made in the image of God.
 - A. The meaning of the image of God.
 1. The ultimate meaning of the view that man is made in the image of God is that man is somewhat like God. He is more than flesh and blood.
 2. God creates every individual for a purpose, to have fellowship with him, to trust him. This is a second meaning of the image of God. It is not that man as he is in himself bears God's likeness, but rather that man is designated for and called to a particular relation with God. (Brunner) It is not that there is such a thing as a divine substance of which man is made. Rather, it is that man partakes of the divine image in a functional way.
 - B. The value of the concept.
 1. The concept of the image of God assures man that he is capable of having fellowship with the divine. Unlike his animal ancestry and the many inanimate objects of the universe, man is privileged with a dynamic relationship with God.

1. William Adams Brown (1865–1943) studied at Yale University, Union Theological Seminary, and the University of Berlin. He joined the Union faculty in 1892 and served as its Roosevelt Professor of Systematic Theology from 1898 to 1930. Brown's *The Essence of Christianity* (1902), *Christian Theology in Outline* (1906), *Beliefs That Matter* (1930), and *How to Think of Christ* (1945) were essential texts of liberal American Protestant thought in their era.

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2. Such a concept also keeps man aware of the fact that he is made for that which is lofty and noble. Man, with such a concept, is able to realize that when his actions, thoughts, and feelings are determined by anything less than God, he fails to partake of the divine image.
- II. Each Christian should believe that he is a member of a larger family of which God is Father. Jesus expresses the view throughout the Gospels that we are members of one family, meant to live as brothers and to express our brotherhood in helpfulness. A failure to realize this truth is a failure to realize one of the main tenets of the Christian religion. The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man is the starting point of the Christian ethic.
- A. The Fatherhood of God.
1. First we might say that our view of God as Father should be in definite agreement with Jesus' view of God as Father. Such a view assures us that God is not a mere stern judge that sits upon the divine bench forever ready to punish his children, but he is an all loving Father forever willing to meet the needs of his children. He is not the Aristotelian God who merely contemplates upon himself; not only is God a self knowing Father, but he is an ever {other} loving Father.
 2. Secondly, the Christian view of God as Father immediately gives the Christian a sense of belonging. When the Christian comes to believe that he is a child of an all loving Father he feels that he counts, that he belongs. He senses the confirmation of his roots, and even death becomes a little thing. Let me give an illustration. During the years of slavery in America it is said that after a hard days work the slaves would often hold secret religious meetings. All during the working day they were addressed with unnecessary vituperations and insulting epithets. But as they gathered in these meetings they gained a renewed faith as the old unlettered minister would come to his triumphant climax saying: "you—you are not niggers. You—you are not slaves. You are God's children."² This established for them a true ground of personal dignity. The awareness of being a child of God tends to stabilize the ego and bring new courage.
- B. The Brotherhood of Man.

2. This story was known to many southern black preachers. Howard Thurman's grandmother told him the story of a slave preacher who was allowed to visit the plantation and preach to the slaves. "When the slave preacher told the Calvary narrative to my grandmother and the other slaves, it had the same effect on them as it would later have on their descendants. But this preacher, when he had finished, would pause, his eyes scrutinizing every face in the congregation, and then he would tell them, 'You are not niggers! You are not slaves! You are God's children!'" (Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979], p. 21).

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1. Man's relationship to God is dependent upon man's relationship to man. It is impossible to simultaneously love God and hate your brother.
2. The brotherhood of man is an established fact by the findings of modern science. There are four types of blood, called O, A, B, and AB. These four types of blood are found in all races.
3. The destiny of each individual wherever he resides on the earth is tied up with the destiny of all men that inhabit the globe. We literally cannot live entirely to ourselves. Let us illustrate how we all share in the assets of the human family. When we rise and go to the bath, a cake of soap is handed us by a Frenchman, a sponge is handed us by a Pacific Islander, a towel by a Turk, our underclothes by an American or Englishman. We go down to breakfast, our tea is poured out by a Chinese. Our toast we accept at the hands of an English speaking farmer, not to mention the baker. We are indebted to half of the world before we finish breakfast. The secret of all our happiness is that we are one amid many brothers. This, every Christian should believe.³

"A Christian View of the World"

I. The world as a revelation of God.

Christians of all ages have testified that the good in nature is a revelation of the eternal God. This means that true Christians have no sympathy with those who think of matter as evil and the body as a thing to be depreciated. God is in the world and he is constantly using parts of it to reveal his nature to man. This has not led most Christians to say that nature is God; this would be pantheism. Rather they have said that nature is one of the avenues through which God reveals himself to man.

- A. The reality of the world.—Unlike Buddha, Christians have always insisted the physical universe has real existence. It is not a mere creation of our imagination, as some philosophers have tried to persuade us; A picture world which we have made for ourselves out of our dreams, an illusion from which we need to wake to reality. The Christian would not flee from the world as Gautama bids him, but he uses it, because God has made it for his sustenance, his discipline, and his happiness.

3. Leslie Weatherhead, *Why Do Men Suffer?* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1936), pp. 69–70: "When I rise and go to my bath, a cake of soap is handed me by a Frenchman, a sponge is handed me by a Pacific Islander, a towel by a Turk, my underclothes by one American or Englishman, my outer garments by another. I come down to breakfast. My tea is poured out by an Indian or a Chinese. My porridge is served by a Scottish farmer. My toast I accept at the hands of an English-speaking farmer, not to mention the baker. My marmalade is passed to me by a Spaniard, my banana by a West Indian. I am indebted to half the world before I have finished breakfast. The secret of half my happiness is that I belong to a family."

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B. God in nature.—Throughout the ages Christians have stood in the midst of the beauties of nature with an assurance that God is revealed therein. Man observes the splendor of the skies, the radiancy of the beaming sun, the fragrant {rose} ose, the melodies of the morning bird, and from such beauty he gains a feeling that causes him to rise above the hurly burly of everyday life and dwell in lofty atmosphere which blows the wind of God's eternal nature. Such beauty has always caught the mind of the affirmation mystic. Such beauty causes the poet to reach up and pull the abstract into the concrete. Such beauty serves as a source of reference for the musician. Whenever man is confronted with such experiences he is aware of the fact that he stands in the presence of the Eternal God who is forever revealed in the beauties of nature.

II. The world as a training school for the Kingdom of God.

Christians have joined in one accord in seeing the world as a place in which God is preparing his children for membership in a society in which all the relationship os life will be controlled by love.

A. The meaning of the Kingdom of God.

1. Political view.—Many have seen the Kingdom in political terms in which there would be established a theocratic kingdom on earth which would triumph over all satanically inspired regimes.
2. Cataclysmic view.—Others have seen the Kingdom as the day when Jesus shall return on the clouds bringing about a cataclysmic end of history and establishing God's eternal purpose.
3. Triumphant church view.—Here it is held that the Kingdom will come to realization by means of the increasing influence of the church ultimately destined to dominate the world.
4. Jesus' view.—Jesus took over the phrase "the Kingdom of God," but he changed its meaning. He refused entirely to be the kind of a Messiah that his contemporaries expected. Jesus made love the mark of sovereignty.⁴ Here we are left with no doubt as to Jesus' meaning. The Kingdom of God will be a society in which men and women live as children of God should live. It will be a kingdom controlled by the law of love.

B. The coming of the Kingdom in the world. Many have attempted to say that the ideal of a better world will be worked out in the next world. But Jesus taught men to say, "thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Although the world seems to be in {a} bad shape today we must never lose faith in the power of God to achieve his purpose. Let us illustrate this. Imagine a building in course of construction. The place is littered with all kinds of debris. Over there

4. William Adams Brown, *Beliefs That Matter: A Theology for Laymen* (New York: Scribner, 1928), p. 57: "Jesus took over the phrase 'the Kingdom of God,' but he changed its meaning. He refused entirely to be the kind of Messiah that his contemporaries expected. . . . Jesus made love the mark of sovereignty."

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is a heap of sand. Near by is a cement mixer, and stones of various sizes are piled up everywhere. Let us imagine that {that} we know nothing of the art of building, but that we know the architect. How impossible it would be to believe that before the building was finished the architect, who chose the site and chose his his workmen, decided that he was already defeated, that the builders were too stupid, and that therefore he had decided to build elsewhere with other builders. If we believe in the architect, we will believe that at last he will use everything in this muddled building site to work out his plan.

God, the great architect, chose this world as a site on which to build a wonderful structure; a global union of real brothers sharing in his good gifts, and offering all achievement as a form of worship to him. It would seem odd if the architect, who chose the site and intrusted the building to beings elled {called} men, suddenly threw up his hands, left the muddle and chose another site in another world and other workmen. The Great Architect may be saying, "Don't be impatient. Wait and see what I can do with this material which contains so many splendid qualities." It is very early to give up building. One geologist has said that if a movie film of the history of the earth were to be produced lasting twenty-four hours, then man would not appear until the last five seconds of the film. Let us have faith and cooperate with God and in the next few seconds we will be able to see the Kingdom in the world. Every Christian should believe this.

"How a Christian Overcomes Evil"⁵

- I. The first step in overcoming evil is to discover what is worst in us.
 - A. Discovering the evil. This is done by an examination of that sin to which we are most frequently tempted. It is very wrong to think that simply because we are tempted, that therefore we are wicked. The blessedness of temptation is that it only reveals the weak spot in our character, thereby providing the raw material for victory.
 - B. Admitting the evil. One of the peculiar things about the human mind is that it can convince itself that the wrong is right. But if we are to overcome an evil we must first admit that it is an evil. The hidden fault must be called by its right name, otherwise we miss seeing our pride under fear of an inferiority complex.
- II. The second step in overcoming evil is to combat the interior defect in cooperation with God's grace.

There are generally three ways in which this is done.

 - A. We must ask God's grace to overcome the evil.

5. Brown's prescription for overcoming evil differs from King's. Brown emphasizes the mystic aspects of the cross, whereas King focuses on individual efforts to overcome evil through self-examination, self-control, and love, which "crowds out" evil.

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- B. By daily examination of conscience. As a person counts the money in his pocket daily to determine whether the current expense of the day can be met, so we balance our consciences to see if they are going in debt morally and spiritually.
 - C. By turning the predominant fault into its opposite virtue. Goodness is not to be confused with passivity, but with activity in an opposite direction.
- III. The third step in overcoming evil is: Concentrate not on the eradication of evil, but on the cultivation of virtue.
- A. The difference in the two techniques of fighting evil and loving goodness is illustrated in an ancient Greek story. Ulysses returning from the siege of Troy, knew the danger of listening to the sirens tempting many a sailor to doom. So Ulysses put wax in the ears of his sailors, strapped himself to the mast of the ship, so that even though he wished to follow the appeal of the sirens, he would not be able to do so. Some years later, Orpheus, the divine musician passed by the same sea, but refused to plug up his sailor's ears or bind himself to a mast. Rather he played his harp so beautifully that the song of the sirens had no appeal. It is not a hatred of evil but a love of God which crowds out evil, for hate is useless unless we love something else more.
 - B. Evil is never to be attacked directly, but indirectly. Evil is not driven out, but crowded out. Sensuality is not mastered by saying: "I will not sin," but through the expulsive power of something good.

"What Shall We Think About the Church"

- I. The church as a religious institution for the perpetuation of a religious tradition.
 - A. Religion is not a private matter.—It is intensely personal, to be sure, but not therefore private. It is completely social as we human beings are. The church is the institution which has gathered together the various insights of spiritual giants through the ages and welded them into a body of belief and conviction which has passed from one generation to another with cumulative conviction. Without the institution working through the centuries, these insights would have perished long ago.
 - B. This does not mean that the church perfectly perpetuates the ideal for which it stands. It is an obvious fact that the church, while flowing through the stream of history has picked up the ends {evils} of little tributaries, and the evils of these tributaries, have been so powerful that they have been able to overwhelm the main stream. But amid all of its weaknesses, we must admit that the church enlarges our sympathy and reinforces our power by uniting us with those who have followed Jesus before us, or who will follow him after us.

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- II. The church as a nucleus of fellowship.
 - A. It is the place of the church to make people feel at home, not in a superficial sense but in the deep and abiding sense of finding peace in the fellowship which we have one with another. The church must stress fellowship as being more important than creed, and experience as being more important than doctrinal uniformity.
 - B. The memory of what Christian fellowship can mean can become a strong factor in a man's life. Let us illustrate. Dr. Leslie Weatherhead, in one of his books, speaks of a man who had been a victim of sex temptation and successfully resisted it over a long number of years. Only his best friends knew what a battle this particular problem was for him. One evening he found himself on business in Berlin with time on his hands. As he strolled down the Friedrichstrasse, his attention was caught by a large framed photograph of nude women. You can guess the kind of place that was this {then} advertised. He was greatly tempted to go in. No one would have known. His character would not have been damaged in the eyes of his friends. His respectability would have been unsoiled at home. Then suddenly, with great resolution, he walked away. A hundred yards from the place he had an immense sense of relief and spiritual power. When asked how he had found strength to make that great decision, he answered without hesitation, "My church at home." Even the memory of the fellowship, even the thought that he belonged to a company who loved him and who, with him, were seeking together the high and the lovely and the true and the beautiful things, strengthened him in the hour of temptation.
- III. The church as a religious communion.
 - A. To say that the church is a communion distinguishes it at once from any other kind of social institution. The church is the disciples listening to the sermon on the mount, or following Jesus along the roadways of Palestine. It is Peter and his comrades eyeing the leaders of Judaism and saying, "We must obey God rather than men!" It is Kagawa keeping the spirit of the Christian group in Japan alive during the desperate days of war.
 - B. The church must confront men with the fact of the living God. The church must make this fact real in terms not alone of vision but also of judgment and light shed on the road ahead. We are supposed to be, to borrow Alfred Noyes' famous phrase, "the light bearers of mankind."

"What Should the Christian Do About the Bible"

- I. Accept the Bible as a Spiritual Guide in finding God.
 - A. The Bible is a sacred book of the Christian church.—It is the record of God's progressive self-revelation, first to the people of Is-

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rael, afterward to the world in Jesus Christ.⁶ It tells us not only what men have thought of God and what they have done for God but what they have experienced of God. Thus by bringing us in touch with the men and women who have found God before us, it encourages us to believe that we can find God for ourselves and it shows us how to do so.

B. The Bible makes us acquainted with Jesus Christ, in whose person the divine revelation culminates.—The Christian religion has always insisted that through Jesus the character of God is revealed to man. God is like Christ. This is the basic affirmation of the Christian faith.

II. Christians should know the meaning of the Bible.

A. The Bible as a book of progressive revelation.—Every book in the Bible is not equally valuable. This has been made plain to us by the modern critical method. It has proved to us that the Bible is a book of progressive revelation. Notice the development of the great ideas in the Bible such as God, man, sin, and immortality. To understand how these great ideas progressed to their final culmination is to know the meaning of the Bible.

B. The Bible as literature.—The Bible is not stated in abstract, universal propositions, but in concrete applications to specific situations, it was written in literary, not scientific or philosophical, language.

C. The Bible as the book *[[book]]* of life.—The Bible is great literature because it is a great book of life. The Bible does not merely tell about life. It grows out of life in an extraordinarily direct and vivid way.

III. Christians should realize what the Bible can do for them.

A. The Bible helps us to realize afresh the perennial vitality of the central convictions of the Christian life, such truths as the love of God, the Lordship of Christ, the fact of sin, the need of redemption, the vitalizing influence of the Spirit of God, and the hope of immortality.

B. The Bible clarifies our thinking by making us acquainted with what the great men of the past have thought before us. It helps us to make right decisions by introducing us to those who have lived nobly and dared greatly for their faith.⁷

C. The Bible can deepen and purify our emotional life. We live by our appreciations, our hopes and our fears, our aspirations and our loyalties, our sympathies and our affections. If we are to make our lives what they ought to be, we must bring order into this often discordant realm.⁸

6. Brown, *Beliefs*, p. 221: “[The books of the Bible] tell the story of God’s progressive revelation, first to the people of Israel and afterward to the world through Jesus Christ.”

7. Brown, *Beliefs*, p. 231: “As the Bible clarifies our thinking by making us acquainted with what the great men of the past have thought before us, so it helps us to make right decisions by introducing us to those who have lived nobly and dared greatly for their faith.”

8. Brown, *Beliefs*, p. 231: “[The Bible] can deepen and purify our emotional life. We live by our appreciations, our hopes and our fears, our aspirations and our loyalties, our sympathies and

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“The Christian Faith
in the Immortal Life”

- I. The Wide-spread doubt of immortality.
 - A. The extent of the doubting.—For our forefathers the soul’s deathlessness was as a premise to be assumed, not as a conclusion to be established. Today we can no longer take belief in immortality for granted. Multitudes of people, even religious people, have lost the old, unquestioning faith in a life after death. Even where the fact is {not} denied, it is no longer confidently affirmed.
 - B. Reasons for this wide-spread loss of faith in immortality in our day.
 1. The Darwinian discovery concerning the evolutionary origin of man.
 2. Men have gathered new hopes of racial progress in our day, and at their best are increasingly inclined to sink their individual prospects in their expectations for humanity.
 3. The minds of men have been so preoccupied with the fascinating advances of this modern age that interest has been totally lost in anything beyond the grave.
- II. How to recover lost faith in immortality.
 - A. The contribution of this life to faith in immortality. If we are to make belief in immortality again a living issue to those who for the moment have it, we must begin by making them feel that life here is so significant that it deserves to go on. Men will recover faith in immortality when they have recovered faith in life.
 - B. The creative experience as a means of recovering lost faith in immortality. We shall recover, faith in immortality as we rediscover in ourselves and in others the possibilities of growth and progress which Jesus, our Lord, attributed to human beings. There are some people who make it easy to believe in immortality.
 1. Lincoln
 2. Dante
 3. Shakespeare.
 4. David Livingstone.
 5. Jesus Christ.⁹
- III. The Christian’s reason for believing in immortality.
 - A. The resurrection of Jesus a proof of immortality. Christian belief in immortality seems to have began with the resurrection of Jesus. Of course there are two ways to interpret the resurrection.
 1. Physical resurrection.
 2. Spiritual resurrection.

our affections. If we are to make our lives what they ought to be, we must bring order into this often discordant realm.”

9. King replaced Brown’s example of Michelangelo with Jesus Christ; otherwise, the list and the two sentences preceding it are also found in Brown, *Beliefs*, p. 301.

- B. The reasonableness of the universe as evidence of immortality. 15 Feb
Statement by Charles Darwin: "It is intolerable thought that man 1950
and all other sentient beings are doomed to complete annihilation,
after such long continued slow progress."¹⁰ The late professor
Palmer of Harvard expressed faith in the reasonableness of the
universe when he said the following words after the death of his
wife. "Though no regrets are proper for the manner of her death,
who can contemplate the fact of it and not call the world irrational,
if out of deference to a few particles of disordered matter it ex-
cludes so fair a spirit."¹¹
- C. The beneficence of God evidence of immortality. Man cannot con-
ceive of God as blotting out the choicest fruit of the evolutionary
process. Faith in immortality boils down to a faith in God. Chris-
tians believe that God will conserve all values of the universe.
- D. In the final analysis we believe in immortality because Jesus Christ
has revealed to us within ourselves, and in others, capacities which
require another life for their full expression. When a man of in-
sight demands a life to come, it is not because he seeks outward
recompense for a good life here; it is because his goodness here,
if it is to be passionate and earnest, must have the eternal chance
of being better. His value lies in what he may become, not in what
he [*remainder missing*].

THDS. MLKP-MBU: Box 115, folder 32.

10. The quotation is from *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, ed. Francis Darwin (1887): "Believing as I do that man in the distant future will be a far more perfect creature than he is now, it is an intolerable thought that he and all other sentient beings are doomed to complete annihilation after such long-continued progress. To those who fully admit the immortality of the human soul, the destruction of our world will not appear so dreadful" (quoted in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, 11th edition [Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1946], p. 515).

11. George Herbert Palmer, *The Life of Alice Freeman Palmer* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), p. 327.