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ENCOUNTERING GOD 4

As I have written these essays on encountering God, I have become more and more convinced that most Christians and our mainline churches in America are dying because Christ is not encountered. I know this is true from my experiences in the churches, in talking with ministers, and in evaluating Christian patients in my practice. Many of these persons have had a single personal encounter with the Lord at the time of their salvation experiences, some have not encountered him at all. To illustrate let me relate the story of a lovely woman who came to me many years ago.

Joan was a very successful and attractive woman in her fifties. She was married to a very successful businessman who loved her dearly. She had three sons who had done well academically and were successful in their own right in the world of business. They were happily married. She had every material comfort. She was active in her church, but somehow her life lacked meaning. A friend of hers gave her a tape I had done on Christian marriage. In it I said that to have a Christian marriage you had to be a Christian. I then defined what it took to be a Christian. She knew immediately that she did not fulfill the criteria to be called one. She took herself immediately to her pastor and told him that she was not a Christian. Unbelievably, he responded by saying, "Don't tell me you are not a Christian. You have been baptized in the church and are a member in good standing. You have served on the governing body, you have taught a Sunday school class, You have led a Bible study. You **are** a Christian."

Disheartened she went then to her Bible study, and told her friends there the same story. The response was the same. Finally she made an appointment with me since I was the cause of her unhappiness. After she related her story she asked me, "Do you think I am a Christian, Dr. Wilson?"

I said, "Tell me have you ever consciously asked Christ to be your Lord and Master?"

"No!"

"Have you ever felt God's Spirit join to your Spirit?" I asked.

"No!"

Then you are not a Christian. Would you like to become one?

"That's what I came here for." she said.

She encountered God then and there for the first time when we prayed. After that she had many other encounters.

As I coordinated Lay Witness Missions one of the exercises we asked of the people in the churches we visited was to make a graph of their spiritual life. On it they had to indicate where Christ had been most real to them. The greatest number of people who participated could not tell us that God had been real to them at any time. In retrospect it should have revealed to church leaders the state of the church and emphasized the emptiness of the preaching, teaching and worship in those churches.

To close let me say that I have had a difficult time writing this commentary. I did not want to be a virago (a scold) so I have tried to be gentle in my criticism. I found it is impossible to be gentle, when I attack the efforts of someone who sincerely feels they are doing a good job. When they are not seeking help, it stimulates the person attacked to defend themselves. I don't want to offend anyone, but we have to face reality and act on the problem to change things. Let us hope the church will wake up and take some action.