

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

The Evolution of Faith

by
Philip Gulley

THE EVOLUTION OF FAITH

1. Think for a moment of your earliest church experience, then reflect on your present relationship with the church. Has your understanding of what it means to be Christian changed over the span of your life?
2. Why do you suppose religion and science have not cooperated with each other? Do you believe they will always be mutually antagonistic, or can you envision a cooperative effort that furthers the aims of both institutions? If so, what might that look like?
3. It was noted that significant shifts in the church's structure are almost always accompanied by or inspired by a theological change. What do you think might be the

next significant shift in the church, and how will our theology change to defend and support such a change?

REVELATION: ON KNOWING GOD

1. Do you believe God has ever spoken or revealed something to you? How did that feel? Did it affect your life?
2. Are you skeptical if people tell you God has spoken to them? Why or why not?
3. How do you discern whether a revelation or insight is from God?

GOD

1. Can you recall your earliest image of God? How did that early understanding affect your spiritual life in later years?
2. Is it possible to make final conclusions about God and still remain open to spiritual enlightenment?
3. If asked, could you provide a one- or two-sentence definition of God?

JESUS AND JESUS-TYPES

1. Do you believe it diminishes or emphasizes the importance of Jesus to believe God might have created other God-bearers or Jesus-types?

2. Is the value of Jesus to be found in his uniqueness or in his openness to the Divine Presence, or both?
3. Is the divinity, or nondivinity, of Jesus important to your understanding of Christianity? Why or why not?

THE LIVING SPIRIT

1. Have you ever experienced what you believed to be the Holy Spirit? If so, how would you describe that experience?
2. In your experience, what are the indications of the Holy Spirit's presence?
3. Why do you suppose our leadings or insights from the Holy Spirit differ so widely? Why does the Holy Spirit seemingly cause one group of Christians to do or believe a certain thing while simultaneously leading another group of Christians to do or believe just the opposite?

WHO ARE WE?

1. Can you recall the first thing the church taught you about yourself? What effect did the church's understanding of humanity have on your life? Does it affect you still?
2. Has it been your experience that we tend to live up to or down to the expectations others have of us?

3. Is your current self-perception generally negative or positive? What role did religion have in forming your self-perception?

SUFFERING AND EVIL

1. What has been your experience with intercessory prayer? When you prayed in faith for someone to be healed or for an evil to be averted, were your prayers answered to your satisfaction?
2. Have you ever known anyone whose disappointment with God caused him or her to stop attending church? What were you able to say to that person? Have you ever been disappointed with God?
3. How have your perceptions of God affected your understanding of and response to evil and suffering?

SALVATION

1. What is your definition of salvation?
2. Do you believe humans are intrinsically depraved and in need of salvation? If so, how long have you believed that, and who taught you? Is it consistent with your experience of the people you know?
3. Do you believe salvation is possible because of Jesus, or do you believe Jesus exemplifies what it means to be saved? Perhaps you have another understanding of Jesus and his role in salvation. If so, can you explain it?

PRAYER

1. How would you define prayer? Have you found prayer helpful? Have you ever been disappointed by prayer?
2. Is prayer easy for you? Difficult? Has your understanding of prayer changed over the course of your life?
3. Gulley believes the root of prayer is attentiveness to the Creator and the created. Is prayer as attentiveness a helpful understanding for you?

THE CHURCH

1. Do you believe the following statement is true? To celebrate the life and witness of God in other faiths is not to diminish Christianity but to elevate a core conviction of its namesake.
2. Will the church, as it presently exists, be a force for good or ill in the future? What benefits do you believe the church has to offer the world? What are the shortcomings of the church?
3. Do you believe Jesus intended to start the church?

THE AFTERLIFE

1. If there were no afterlife, would you still participate in a community of faith?

2. Do you believe the concept of an afterlife has been a help or a hindrance to our spiritual well-being?
3. Has the possibility of an afterlife ever affected your treatment of others? If so, how?

AN ALTAR CALL

1. Have you ever made a public affirmation of your faith? Did it inspire you to a life of deeper commitment?
2. Do you believe God is creating a better Christianity? If so, how might God be doing that through you?
3. Do you believe there is a link between spiritual growth and human evolution?