

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) is to France what Plato is to Greece, Dante to Italy and Shakespeare to England. The National Library in Paris guards the manuscripts of Pascal more jealously than any other. Although he suffered from ill health most of his life, and died before reaching age 40, Pascal began at age sixteen to make great contributions to geometry, physics, applied mechanics and mathematical theory.

Reared as a Roman Catholic, he later became a devout and committed Christian, always conscious of his sinful nature and of his need for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Raised in the heyday of the enlightenment, French mathematician and physicist, Blaise Pascal was dramatically converted to Christ and became an effective Christian Apologist and accomplished scientist.

Pascal's mother died when he was four. His father moved the family from Clermont-Ferrand to Paris. Blaise and his sisters were home schooled by their father. By age ten Blaise was doing original experiments in mathematics and physical science.

Along with his two sisters, Gilberte and Jacqueline, his father Etienne personally guided their education. In 1639 the family moved to Rouen where Etienne Pascal was appointed Royal Commissioner of Finance for Normandy. Blaise Pascal's treaties written, when he was only 16, were received with amazement by the scientific community.

To help his father, who was a tax collector, Blaise invented the first calculating device, which some have called the forerunner of the computer. (In his honor a computer language is named after Pascal).

As a teenager Blaise had already made a name for himself as a scientist. He developed the law of hydraulics. Blaise Pascal proved that pressure on the surface of a fluid is transmitted equally to every point in the fluid. He produced important papers on the weight and density of air, and the arithmetic triangle, and on vacuum. He invented the syringe, the hydraulic lift, and is credited with inventing the wrist watch and mapping out the first (horse drawn) bus route in Paris.

On 23 November 1654 Blaise Pascal experienced, what he described as, a definitive conversion. He described seeing a clear vision of the Crucifixion: From about half past ten in the evening until half past twelve FIRE God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, and not of the philosophers and savants. Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace. God of Jesus Christ. My God and thy God. Thy God shall be my God.

He wrote of a vision of the Light of the Fire of the Living God who purged him of his sins, and brought him assurance, joy, peace and love. He knew that henceforth he must live for God and for God alone; to Him everything else must take second place. His lifestyle changed. He gave much to the poor. And while his scientific studies were not abandoned, they took second place to living in fellowship with Almighty God.

He recorded this experience on a piece of parchment (called the Memorial), which he carried with him the rest of his life.

His writings have been described as, not only masterpieces of French prose, but outstanding defenses of the Christian Faith. His *Les Provinciales* were 18 essays attacking the Catholic Jesuits and defending Reformed morality and St. Augustine's belief in sovereign grace and predestination. The Catholic Church placed *Les Provinciales* on the Index of Forbidden Books.

Blaise was attracted to the Augustinian view of grace and morality. He joined the Jansenists who opposed the Catholicism of the Jesuits and taught the doctrines of Grace and ethics of St. Augustine. Blaise later wrote of two conversions in his life, the first a conversion of his mind to right theology, and the second a conversion of his heart to the love of God.

Blaise's sister Jacqueline was also converted shortly after the death of their father in 1651. Pascal felt a deep Spiritual

hunger for reality.

His 18 Provincial Letters (1656-1657), because they criticised the teachings of the Jesuits, were published anonymously to avoid imprisonment.

Pascal's sister, Gilberte, wrote concerning her brother: *He had a natural eloquence which gave him a marvelous facility for saying what he wanted to say, but to this he had added certain rules which he had worked out for himself, which served him so well that not only could he say what he meant to say, but he would say it in the very manner of his choice, and so his discourse produced just the effect he intended.*

*Pensees*, a collection of Pascal's thoughts, was published after his death. In it he portrayed mankind as stretched between wretchedness and joy, helpless without God. People try to avoid facing reality by engaging in distractions. Blaise Pascal rejected the notion that reason and science alone can lead a person to God. He insisted that only by personally experiencing Christ, can anyone come to know God.

Do not be surprised at the sight of simple people who believe without arguing. God makes them love Him and hate themselves. He inclines their heart to believe. We shall never believe with a vigorous and unquestioning faith unless God touches our hearts; and we shall believe as soon as He does so.

The *Pensees* contains Pascal's famous wager: *If you win, you win everything; if you lose, you lose nothing.* He claimed that since reason alone cannot give one absolute certainty, every person must risk belief in something. When it comes to the Christian Faith, a wise person will gamble on it. We will certainly live a more joyful, fulfilled life on earth by adhering to Christian morality and faith. If Christianity is true you gain eternal life as well. If it is not, you have lost nothing.

Some have placed Pascal's *Pensees*, which he had planned as *A Defence of the Christian Religion* as similar to such great works as St. Augustine's *Confessions*.

Blaise Pascal lived throughout much of the Thirty Years War. He was a man of extraordinary scientific achievement with a brilliant and innovative mind.

Pascal's *Pensees* was written to speak directly to the agnostics and atheists of France. Instead of basing his case on traditional intellectual arguments, Pascal used proofs drawn from morality and history to appeal to the heart and personal experience. Blaise Pascal was attacked by anti-Christian Humanists such as Voltaire.

Blaise Pascal wrote: *Every religion is false which, as to its faith, does not worship one only God as the origin of all things, and, to its morality, does not worship one only God as the goal of all things.*

*It is dangerous to make man see his equality with the brutes without showing him his greatness. It is also dangerous to make him see his greatness too clearly, apart from his vileness. It is still more dangerous to leave him ignorant of both. But it is very advantageous to show him both.*

*The heart has its reasons which reason does not know.*

*Reason acts slowly and with slow views, on so many principles, which it must always keep before it, that it constantly stumbles and goes astray from having its principles to hand. The heart does not act thus; it acts in a moment, and it is always ready to act. We must then place faith in the heart or it will always be vacillating.*

*We know Truth, not only by reason but also by the heart, and it is from this last, that we know first principles.*

Pascal writes of the God of Miracles, including from personal experience of the miraculous healing of his niece in 1656. Pascal's scientific achievements had much to do with rigorous experimentation, leading to experimental knowledge. In the same way his faith was based much on his heart experiences with the Living God.

To Blaise Pascal, God Himself is the source of all

wisdom and knowledge, the One who orders all things, and of whom, and through whom, all things proceed, and return.

◆What a vast distance there is between knowing God and loving Him◆Human beings must be known to be loved, but God must be loved to be known.◆