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Mother Teresa's "Crisis of Faith"

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What are we to make of Mother Teresa's crisis of faith? That is a question I have been repeatedly asked in recent days. This week's *TIME* cover story by David van Biema caught the attention of millions around the world, and it raises some of the most important questions about the Christian faith.

In a new book, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, previously undisclosed letters raise basic questions about her understanding of the Gospel. David van Biema's article, "[Mother Teresa's Crisis of Faith](#)," brings many questions to light.

I have written a column on these questions at "[On Faith](#)," the project of *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek* magazine. Here is the main portion of my article:

The recent revelations of Mother Teresa's spiritual struggle should remind all believing Christians that our faith is in Christ — not in our feelings.

The disclosure of previous secret letters from Mother Teresa indicates that she was deeply troubled by doubts and a sense of Christ's absence. The fact is that many Christians struggle with doubt. Indeed, the most thoughtful believers are most likely of all to understand what is at stake, and thus to suffer pangs and seasons of doubt.

Doubt can be healthy. It can drive believers to a deeper knowledge of what we believe and a deeper embrace of the truth of the Gospel. It can deepen our trust in God and mature our faith. At the same time, doubt can be a form of sin . . . a refusal to trust God and his promises.

This can also be the root of depression, especially spiritual depression. I would not presume to read Mother Teresa's heart or soul, but I can reflect on the questions raised by her experience.

The Christian Gospel is the good news that God saves sinners through the atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ — his cross and resurrection. Salvation comes to those who believe in Christ — it is by grace we are saved through faith.

But the faith that saves is not faith in faith, nor faith in our ability to maintain faith, but faith in Christ. Our confidence is in Christ, not in ourselves.

There is a sweet and genuine emotional aspect to the Christian faith, and God made us emotional and feeling creatures. But we cannot trust our feelings. Our faith is not anchored in our feelings, but in the facts of the Gospel.

As an evangelical Christian, I have to be concerned that part of Mother Teresa's struggle was that she did not consider herself worthy of salvation. She was certainly not worthy of salvation. Nor am I. Nor is any sinner: The essence of the Gospel is that none is worthy of salvation. That is what makes salvation all about grace. As the Apostle Paul taught us, the wonder of God's grace is that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

Our confidence is in Christ, not in ourselves. We are weak; He is strong. We fluctuate; He is constant. We cannot trust our feelings nor our emotional state. We trust in Christ. Those who come to Christ by faith are not kept unto him by our faith, but by his faithfulness.

I possess no ability to read Mother Teresa's heart, but I do sincerely hope that her faith was in Christ, and not in her own faithfulness.

Be sure to read [the article](#) and reader comments — and also see what others have to say at “[On Faith](#).”



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