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**CITY BIBLE FORUM**

*Ask the bigger questions*

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## A divine experience

### ***1 John: Confidence and faith - Session 1***

#### **Q1. What questions do comments like the one above raise for you?**

"I don't know if a flesh and blood Jesus really walked this earth...let alone whether he was actually God in human form. It doesn't matter anyway...the Bible was written by his followers who wanted us to believe certain things about the one they called Jesus."

The letter of 1 John was written by John. John was one of the original 12 disciples of Jesus.

#### **1 John 1:1-4**

*1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We write this to make our joy complete.*

**Q2. This might sound to you like an abrupt and convoluted start to a letter! The author John is writing about the person of Jesus Christ. What is he saying about Jesus?**

#### **Q3. What is John saying about his experience of Jesus?**

John and the apostles aren't the only ones who have claimed to have an experience of the divine.

## The Fathers, the Sun and the Holy Post

Hundreds of believers flocked to the Coogee Beach headland yesterday to witness what they say is an **apparition of the Virgin Mary**. (...) As the sunlight reflected off a crook in the fence throughout the afternoon, hundreds claimed they could discern the shape of a veiled figure, and most agreed it was "Our Lady".

Understandably, the Catholic Church appears less keen to make that conclusion. (...) as far as Father Denis Holm - who took over the Coogee parish of St Brigid's just two weeks ago - is concerned, **the daily appearance of the Virgin Mary on the headland is nothing more than an optical illusion**. "I'm not putting a great amount of store on the significance of it," Fr Holm said yesterday ...

..."However, if people are experiencing a sense of peace by being there, then I see it as a good thing." Unfortunately, the sense of peace does not seem to extend to the locals of the beachside suburb as grid-locked traffic and choked carparks sorely tested their patience yesterday. **"I see a fence post," said local resident Henrietta Dean. "And I have seen that same fence post for many years.** "If all these people want to come to Coogee then that's wonderful but the parking has become horrendous."

*Story Kelly Burke, Sydney Morning Herald, 31 January 2003*

We can speak of truth in four (4) ways: mathematical truth ( $2+2 = 4$ ); scientific truth (an experience confirms a theory); historical truth (Hitler started World War 2); and personal truth (my wife loves me). It's important to use the right truth test for the situation. For example, to work out whether your wife loves you, you can't run a scientific experiment!

**Q4. What proof test is being used when it comes to the apparition of the Virgin Mary and what is the limitation of this approach?**

**Q5. What proof tests can be used to work out whether what John says about Jesus is true and how would you go about performing these tests?**

John writes: *'... that we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ.'* (1 John 1:3).

The word 'fellowship' essentially means 'partnership', where people are united together for a common purpose (think of a business partnership). What John is saying here is that if someone believes his words, they are in partnership with him, and if they are in partnership with him, then they are also in partnership with God.

**Q6. According to John, how does someone have a genuine experience of God?**

At the end of the letter John explains his purpose in writing.

**1 John 5:13**

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

**Q7. If John is writing to Christians (those who believe in the name of the Son of God) then wouldn't they already know they have eternal life?**

**Q8. How can confidence be everything - and nothing - when it comes to trusting Jesus?**

**Q9. How does this section of the letter (1 John 1:1-4) help the readers with their confidence?**

*"When it comes to trusting Jesus, confidence is everything - but it's also nothing."*

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