

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was, like Descartes, a French mathematician and philosopher—but a wit of a very different wisdom. Like every man or woman of intelligence, Pascal knew that belief in God was asking a great deal: the surrender of autonomy as a self-legislating Superman. Not only was the price high, but the guarantees were more than a trifle flimsy at times: no one has *seen* God. Neither the atheist nor the theist has a sure thing; both are left with acts of faith.

However, long before Nietzsche or Marx or Camus, Pascal realized that in the godless universe, with death always ready to annihilate you and all you had accomplished, you had to *pretend* that your life had some permanent value. Well, even if the atheist *is* right, why trudge through the few days you have before annihilations, kidding yourself that your for-the-moment Supermanship, your toil for the Workers' Paradise, or your firing the arm at faceless fate is important? It's so grim. Why not go all the way? Why not kid yourself that *Christianity* is the truth? Why not go out expecting a party?

No one *knows* what's beyond the door of death. It could be annihilation, or it could be a party. But one thing is sure: If Nietzsche is right, he's not going to be on the other side of the door, thumb to his nose, sneering, "I *told* ya so; I *told* ya so!" If Nietzsche was right, Nietzsche isn't real anymore. On the other hand, if I'm right, I'm gonna buy old Fred a beer!

We keep thinking that, if God and an afterlife are a hoax, we're going to wake up in the coffin, find out we've been had, and then cork off again. No. If God and the afterlife were only comforting illusions, once you have a flat EKG, there's no you anymore.

Pascal's "Wager" isn't the core of my faith by any means. All that went before it is far more important. But there are times, times when I say "Hey, what about *me*?" or "Why the *hell* did you let that kid die?" when the "Wager" sees me through for a while till I can remember my real reasons.

O'Malley, William (1973/1984). *Meeting the Living God*, 2nd ed. New York: Paulist Press, pp. 186-187.