

MY CREDENTIALS.

CHAPTER 3.

Maybe it is worth making an attempt to rewrite religion in modern thought idioms, and in modern English; but what are the chances of success? None; unless one has had sufficient experience to test the truths of religion to the limit. So what are my credentials?

Before answering that question, it is more logical to ask what Christianity is all about; because only when one knows that, is anyone in a position to decide whether my experience was a valid test of it, or not. Jesus Christ, whom I firmly believe saved mankind, saw himself as the Jewish Messiah, foretold by the prophets. He may have been right, or he may have been wrong; but that was how he saw himself. I do not think he had any alternative. The Jewish authorities of his day rejected his claims; but if he had claimed to be mankind's Saviour in any other way, nobody would even have listened to him. A fine apology for him is Professor Sir John Seeley's *Ecce Homo*, first published in 1865. And I gather Gladstone gave him the professorship on the strength of this book. He looked at things through Jesus' own eyes, set out his claims to kingship, the partial legislative and judicial functions which he claimed, and showed how his life was consistent with this thesis. Essentially his Kingdom was to be a return to the theocracy of the early Israel; so civic duty became loyalty to himself!

Well, unfortunately he did not get the chance to put it all into practice in this world of flesh and blood; so whilst his example is incomparable, his teaching may not be all that much help to us today. If the Gospels are anything like accurate, Jesus Christ never recognised the civic duty of a man to work for the welfare of the community. If the story of the Gadarene swine has any truth in it, he tore up Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Yet we could not return to the theocracy of ancient Israel, even if we wanted to; and after the experience of the corruption of the later Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the Thirty Years War, heaven save us from another theocracy! So we are faced with the uncomfortable choice, that if we take the

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Sermon on the Mount literally it is an end to the Rule of Law and all civilized society; on the other hand if we insist on regarding the Rule of Law as one of the greatest blessings mankind has ever experienced, which must be retained at all costs, then we have no alternative but to substitute our judgement for that of Jesus. Yet what I have been slow to recognize is that his solution to the problem of conflicting loyalties, loyalty to his God and loyalty to his family, was to invoke the Divine Creativeness. He did this particularly in his healings, of which there are many stories; most of which I firmly believe to be true. There have been healers in every age, including our own. And my view is that to deny that healing happens from time to time is just perverse. By invoking the Divine creativeness I suppose he hoped to synthesize a greater whole out of the conflicting parts, and I expect he did. Furthermore, great leader that he was, if the Last Discourses in John's Gospel are anything like accurate, he invited his followers to carry on from where he left off. So it is no disrespect to him to say that today we prefer to rely on our own judgement.

So what does Christianity stand for today, if indeed it stands for anything? Is it a road to Heaven in a world beyond death? Or is it an inspiration to live aright in this world, and a consolation when things go wrong, as they usually do? I suppose the answer is a bit of both. Historically the Church has been ambivalent about the secular world. Jesus called it "Mammon", and told his followers they had to choose between God and Mammon. St. Paul in his letters exhorted men to be law-abiding, and as an encouragement told them that Judges were appointed by God. Actually he was unduly flattering to those exercising the power of appointment. Judges are appointed by cronyism; and I doubt if it was any different then. Certainly the Emperor Julian, if Gibbon is reliable, agrees with me. So does the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Bible's book of secular wisdom. By the time the Book of Revelation was written, the pendulum had swung back. Rome was the "Great Harlot". I feel this was a somewhat prejudiced opinion, fuelled no doubt by the author's experience in the salt mines

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during the persecution of one of the Roman Emperors, probably Domitian. Finally we return to sanity with Augustine. In his City of God, he sees the Church sitting beside the City of Rome, nurturing it, inspiring it, occasionally reproofing it, but essentially sympathetic to its struggle to maintain some sort of order in the midst of the chaos all around it. I agree with Augustine.

So to return to my question. What was the situation in which I found myself, when I had my relevant experience? The Second World War had ended some years before; but memories were still vivid, and Germany was still the enemy. Of course I saw that after a terrible war, it was desirable and indeed necessary that there should be a reconciliation of some sort between the countries that had been on opposite sides in the conflict. One cannot continue the hatred that War engenders indefinitely. But the problem only becomes practical, and therefore real, when the love for a person who was on the other side in the conflict, becomes superimposed on the continuing hatred of the society from which she comes. What is one supposed to do? How does one cope with the Romeo and Juliet situation? If one gives way to physical and emotional passion, both you and she will be engulfed by the cold antipathy of the two societies. If one does not dare to express one's love, one plays the coward; and the shame of the betrayal will remain as a lifelong companion. At least it will, if one is any sort of a man. The decision would be a difficult one if only one's own emotions were involved; it becomes doubly difficult if hers are too, if the love is mutual. Having had enough sense to give myself time to think, I attempted to transcend the horrid dichotomy, by invoking the Divine creativeness; by seeking to recreate between her soul and mine the same relationship or indwelling that is supposed to exist between God and the soul. That at least could end in nothing worse than heartbreak; it would not end in catastrophe or dishonour. In my book I make it plain that this was my decision. I say so in the Introduction, in Chapter 1 which I call the Prelude, and at the end of Part II. Even if I had succeeded in effecting a

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reconciliation, it was a situation where there were still going to be conflicting loyalties; but I hoped there would be no conflict which God did not share. It had the advantage that I might hope to be able to put into practice one set of standards, and not two; I would not be faced by divided loyalty.

But most certainly I did not seek to escape from the conflict of duties. I sought to resolve them in a greater whole. Of course I accepted in practice the possibility, or as it seemed to me at the time the apparent inevitability, of failure. And the only readjustment I had to make when it became obvious that I had failed, was to limit the ambitions of my creativeness in future, and endeavour to heal a few of the misunderstandings and some of the pain with a little kindness! Maybe my attempt was misconceived; but I hope anyone who is impertinent enough to say so, will be able to suggest something better; and if he cannot do that, will keep his mouth firmly shut. Of course I saw our love-affair as symbolizing the reconciliation of England and Germany after the War. But she declined; so that was that.

The embarrassing choice for me was not directly between public and private duty; but rather between a love which I could not deny except at the price of dishonesty or heartlessness, and the recognition that by the standards of prudence, good sense, and social convenience, it was a forlorn love, because national hatreds were still too fierce, and that convention would have condemned it as hopelessly unsuitable.

What was I to do? It is difficult to imagine a more searching decision. It was to search and find out what I was made of; and search out too the worth of any systems of belief and prejudice in my mind. As I have said, my decision was to attempt to create between us a relationship or indwelling which mirrored the indwelling that is supposed to exist between God and the soul. In this way I hoped to avoid any divided loyalty, by honouring one set of standards, and not two; but this almost inevitably involved rejection. In practical terms it meant saying that it was better that my heart broke, than hers. But that is where the

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difficulties began, because having made my decision, I found it impossible to go back on my word; life lost all meaning if I tried to do so. So I was trapped until I saw it through to completion. Ironically my solution was the same as that of Jesus. In resorting to miracles, Jesus clearly believed he was creating a greater synthesis out of the more parochial parts, as evidenced by his condemnation of Bethsaida and Capernaum for not repenting. He said in terms that a greater than Solomon was present, and that they should recognise the fact. And I expect that once he had started, he too found it impossible to turn back. Hence his blistering condemnation of Bethsaida and Capernaum; by failing to repent, they effectively condemned him to death. They did not mean to, of course; it was just the inevitable consequence of their actions, or lack of action. Adopting similar thoughts, you could say that my stance was that no man need face choices that God (standing beside him or dwelling within him) was not willing to face as well. I too expected a miracle; not that of a paralysed man taking up his bed and walking, nor of a woman miraculously rising above national antipathy, but of the creation of a relationship between two human souls which, of course, they were utterly incapable of creating by themselves. But by invoking the creativeness of God, I too was condemned after rejection to see it through to completion. And though I can take little credit for my actions, I think only one brief bitter reproach escaped my lips or my pen. In my opinion Jesus carried the analysis of conflicting duties a great deal further than the Greek poets, Aeschylus or Sophocles, whom I must soon consider; and I imitated him, without knowing it! Like Monsieur Jourdain talking prose.

How could anyone be faced with a more searching decision? In my first book, to which the publishers gave the title "Man's Relationship with God", although I would have preferred "Spiritual Adventure", I describe my choice in the only sensible way I could; not by revealing what happened which would have been almost meaningless, and grossly disloyal, but by describing the spiritual or intangible world as I found it to be. So I tell the story

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obliquely. It took me three years to write the first draft of the book; but with many necessary revisions, it took thirty one years to get it published. It was the work of a lifetime; but it was worth it, because the decision was the decision of a lifetime. So I am well qualified to say whether religion as a whole is a help in resolving the decisions of everyday life, and whether religion as preached by the clergy of the C.of E. is a help, or is strangely irrelevant.