

These Things I Believe (Part II) (Dr. Charles Malik)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

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And when the woman of Samaria would again and again change the subject, he would again and again bring her back to it, until he finally told her bluntly that it was he speaking unto her who was the Christ who should come into the world.



And when Martha would change the subject by wandering off into some general cosmological expectation of the resurrection, he would bring her back to it by telling her, «I am the resurrection and the life.»

And when Thomas would change the subject by asking him to show them the Father, he would bring him back to it by telling him, «I am the way, the truth, and the life.»

And when Philip would change the subject by asking him to show them the Father, he would bring him back to it by telling him, «Have I been so long with you, and yet not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.»

His words were wonderful, his acts were wonderful, but these claims that he made about himself are infinitely more wonderful. And what is even more wonderful about these claims is that there have been innumerable people throughout history—normal people, sane people, useful people, responsible people, in full possession of their minds—who actually believe them. Wonder of wonders—countless decent people, some of them great scientists and great philosophers, have actually believed these unbelievable claims! And these people who understood him and believed him and came to love him know that he said what he said, and did what he did, only because he was who he said he was!

Theology is exactly that discipline that tries, in all humility and in all seriousness, and without any spirit of cleverness, to make sense of them, not by explaining them away, nor by reducing them to nonsense—as so many so-called theologies do—but by believing them, and then by trying to relate them among themselves and to the other propositions of Holy Writ, as well as the deliveries of sound reason and healthy human experience. Genuine theology cannot subordinate God and how he chose to reveal himself in what it calls reason and human experience. Genuine theology must take equally seriously all three—God, reason, and experience; keeping always in mind, however, that, if God exists, he must in the nature of the case always come first. And it is a very strange discipline indeed that entertains even the slightest doubt about the existence of its object.

Religion is the realm of the authentically personal, and I have been telling you what I believe. For there is nothing more authentic and more personal than what we ultimately believe. You may not be a Christian, but you are a man therefore you certainly believe something; and your rocks-bottom beliefs, even if you do not know them, or are shy or ashamed of expressing them, constitute precisely your religion. Nay, you are identically your ultimate beliefs. All these silly conversations and affected smiles that we daily and hourly carry on with one another, no doubt very innocently and well meaningly, are so many ways of «changing the subject» from our fundamental beliefs, either because we are not sure of our beliefs, or because we are ashamed of them, suspecting in our heart that they may be hollow, or because we are never quite thrown together into that peace and grace of the Spirit which enables us to be personal and authentic without being and appearing at the same time sentimental and silly. Common worship is precisely the means of inducing this peace, the grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby we can be authentically

transparent with each other.

This is the wonderful significance of the great liturgies, such as that of St. John Chrysostom with which I am best acquainted. It was only when «they were together in one place» that the disciples were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak in other tongues. And I am sure you agree with me that we in our hearts crave nothing more than such an experience of absolute power and illumination and certainly from above whereby we would perfectly understand each other even if we spoke «with other tongues,» or even if we did not speak at all. The «other tongues» with which I am speaking is the tongue of simple, personal conviction, which is faith in Jesus Christ. Believe me, all else is trash and dung by comparison, as Paul would say.

And so, moving on now a bit faster, I further believe—hoping and trusting that I will shock none of you, and that if I do shock you, you will forgive me—I further believe that «all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made»—a tremendous statement, certainly to be most carefully explained. I believe that this same Jesus of Nazareth who now sitteth at the right hand of God is going to come again—to come again! When? I haven't the slightest idea. How? I do not know. But, most assuredly, he is going to come again, to judge all mankind, the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life, whom Christ sent to our hearts, so that we will not be without him, and who inspires the faithful, and comforts them, and revives them, and reminds them of Christ, and God, and all truth, and empowers them to do wonders, a mighty token of God in our midst. I believe in one Church, holy, catholic or universal or all-embracing, and, most especially, apostolic. Finally, I believe in the resurrection of the body and in the life everlasting.

I beg you, once again, not to misunderstand me. I do not believe these things in order of physical science or cosmology, that is to say, not because physical science and cosmological speculation can prove them to me. I studied under the greatest cosmologist of this century, Alfred North Whitehead; it is not in his sense that I believe these things. I cannot demonstrate them to you mathematically, or scientifically, or through sense perception, or as I might argue from the truth of some political or historical proposition. Oh, I most emphatically and assuredly believe in the actual, historical, physical, certain death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This wonderful deposit of faith, which I have received, and of which I must prove worthy, and to which I must remain faithful, belongs to the order of sufferings, anxiety, love and death. He who suffers understands what I mean. He who daily wrestles with the devil understands what I mean. He who is anxious

understands what I mean. He who loves intensely understands what I mean. And he who faces death and all that this death actually and concretely means in his own life understands what I mean. Faith is grounded in the order of suffering and love, an order from which every other order, including science, philosophy, history, and politics, flows and emanates.

What now, I ask, are the reasons for my faith? After asking us to «sanctify the Lord God in our hearts»—people often forget this preamble—St. Paul adds: «Be ready always to give an answer to every man who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.» Obviously I cannot go into my reasons in great detail, but the kind of reasons I would argue from are the followings:

First: The teaching of these things from my earliest life by people, both religious and lay, who loved me most purely and who had absolutely no axe to grind save to witness to the deepest they knew. Therefore, I trust them.

Second: The authority of the Church in its teachings, its traditions, its doctrines, its liturgy, for 2,000 years. Here again I believe the motive is absolutely pure; therefore I believe the Church.

Third: The authority of the Bible which I love most dearly, and which, the more I read it, increasingly means everything to me.

Fourth: The witness of the saints, and I can name twenty of them, in whose intellectual and spiritual company I crave to live more than in the company of any other crowd of men, including the greatest non-religious philosophers, whom I also love.

Fifth: The testimony of what I have called the order of suffering, loneliness, love and death, in its daily, hourly, minutely, cumulative impact upon the whole of my life.

Sixth: In a sense, this is the most important reason: the Holy Spirit in my heart, when it is there and to the extent that it is there.

To the question, what is the reason of the hope that is in me, I answer—I trust in meekness and fear and after sanctifying the Lord God in my heart—these are my reasons, that which I cannot imagine anything more solid or more dependable.

Why have I plagued you so far with my personal faith? Why have I bored you with this queer recital of the Nicene Creed, which all of you know by heart! Because religion is the realm of the authentic person; and because the current crisis, at its

deepest, has to do precisely with these priceless articles of faith which were first formulated more than sixteen centuries ago and which have been faithfully confessed by the Church ever since. Today God is denied, or watered down, or changed beyond recognition. Creation is denied, or at least the world is conceived as self-creative. Jesus of Nazareth has become a «gallant young man,» as Mr. Hammarskjold called him in his book that all of you must read. His claims about himself are either denied outright or passed by in magnificent silence. His passion is denied, the cross is denied, his resurrection is a myth, and who would dare speak today of his second coming, or of the Holy Ghost, or of the apostolicity of the Church, or, in this age of science, of the resurrection of the body, without being ridiculed.

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