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"Do It Yourself"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Readers in England will recognise that the heading is borrowed from that popular creative enterprise which has been growing so extensively in recent years. Behind the title there seem to be a number of implied questions, such as: Why not have all the interest, pleasure and satisfaction of making things yourself? Why pay all the extra cost of having others do for you what you can do for yourself? Why live only on the creativeness, skill and ingenuity of others when these very abilities may be lying latent in yourself? Why be solely objective in your possessions when, having 'done it yourself', you can have the inward joy and knowledge that comes from originality? Why live a secondhand life, when a whole realm of reality may remain in yourself, unexploited? Why not 'Do it yourself'? If you do 'Do it yourself' you will, at least, know the genuineness, the value, of the article, and how much it can be depended upon.

All this opens a door to very much real thought and possibility, and if we transfer the idea to the life of the Christian, it at once presents us with some very vital considerations. May I suggest some of these to you?

Is it not true that a vast amount of our Christianity is secondhand, in the wrong sense? Of course, we know quite well that, in the matter of our redemption and all that goes with the grace of God, there is nothing that we can do; it is received as God's gift, made by Him. But it is not of that that we are thinking. The substance and form of Christianity for very many is not the original, deep, heart-relatedness but is a tradition, a creation by men, a product of history, a crystallized system. It may be the work - even hard work - of our preachers, teachers, parents, churches, schools, but - in the deepest and most vital sense - it is not *ours*; it has not been wrought in the travail, the 'sweat and tears', of our own souls. Shaped by others, we have taken it ready made. We have taken it for granted, as a matter of course. There is a challenge which, sooner or later, will be a life-or-death

issue as to our spiritual life. That challenge is: 'How much of what you have is really your own? How much of your faith, *i.e.* belief, is really yours? How much of your position stands true to that historic declaration: 'Here I am - I can do no other. God help me!' - in other words, 'I have no alternative; this is my very life!'?

There are other aspects of this 'Do it yourself' matter. When Jesus challenged Pilate with the interrogation: "Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it thee...?" (John 18:34), He touched a key to a vast amount bound up with the same issue. The issue was that Christ was being handed over to crucifixion on the uncertain and dangerous ground of mere report. We know that the whole case was false. It rested upon the words of suborned false witnesses, upon distortion and misrepresentation of things that He had said, upon fear of the consequences of allegiance to Him, upon policy, upon *prejudice*. Jesus was an inconvenience to their way of life, to their religious system, to their ambitions. So, Jesus must be got out of the way, and 'the end justifies the means'. But Pilate was offered this ready-made report, and, finding it a convenient way out of a predicament or embarrassment, he was ready to use it. His retort only shows how it pierced his armour and stung him. He only confirmed the truth and genuineness of the implied charge: "Thine own nation..." (v. 35). So Jesus went to the Cross because (at least in this particular) Pilate did not 'do it himself' - track this thing to its source and ascertain its real nature and cause.

Is it not true that our Lord is suffering shame, reproach, and rejection now because of an immense amount of falsehood and misrepresentation in Christianity itself? If Christianity, rather than being a mere 'religion', were really a *life* - that is, Christ as an indwelling reality checking us up on our behaviour, conduct, manners, speech, appearance, influence, courtesies or discourtesies - would He not be saved from the hands of many who want a case against Him and find it too easily in those who bear His name? This kind of life is not to be purchased in religious stores. It is not procured cheaply and from others. It is not something 'put on'. It is wrought in the very souls of those concerned, so that others are able to say - 'Something has *been done* in that one'; and to this we have to give ourselves. There is infinite value in a firsthand knowledge of the Lord.

We venture to press our point into another realm, and here it is a venture indeed. But its importance calls for boldness.

Is it not true that a very great amount of the weakness, shame, dishonour, and even disgrace, characterizing Christianity, is due to the ease with which Christians can take up and retail rumours, reports, insinuations, suspicions, and the like? 'Information' is passed on, and, without investigation, substantiation, or verification, it is accepted as true and repeated.

Is it not true that the ever increasing number of divisions and alienations among Christians can be laid to the account of this failure to verify at first hand the criticisms and judgments that are current? Surely we are being forced to realise that this whole world - secular and otherwise - is wrapped around with a growingly dense blanket of suspicions, misrepresentations, distortions, insinuations, and lies! Confidence is well-nigh obliterated. Loyalty and mutual trust have almost entirely disappeared. The last precious thing in fellowship is assailed. Unless we constantly draw our breath from Heaven, this evil atmosphere gets into our own spiritual lungs, and we too breathe it out. Scepticism, mistrust, suspicion, from which very little indeed escapes, is the evil ether of this world. It wrapped itself around Jesus when He was here, so that He could only live and do anything at all by constantly resorting to the pure atmosphere of Heaven. The same spirit of prejudice and discrediting dogged the steps of Paul wherever he went. Attach a question-mark to anything, and the object is at once suspect.

The most poignant and tragic aspect of this sinister campaign of the evil powers is the facility with which Christians sponsor it. That destructive and blighting 'But' is the common pitfall. 'Yes, there is a lot of good in it (or him); *but* - you know...' That 'But' does not rest upon the solid ground of investigated and verified proof, but upon mere hearsay, or, at best, the prejudiced judgment of someone who has some private interest to protect.

We are zealous for the inspiration of the Scriptures, but we are not allowed to be selective in this. Not only are the glorious Scriptures of our salvation and the grace of God inspired, but equally such other Scriptures as: "Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that slandereth not with his tongue... nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour" (Psalm 15:1,3). Or: "Prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21). Satan's workshop is kept busy night and day making what Paul calls "evil report" (2 Cor. 6:8), and his business is thriving. The Lord save us all from being accessories to that prosperity.

Here is a realm where we should not be cheated with the cheap words of this nefarious business, but, in the matter of being sure and 'knowing the truth' - 'Do it ourselves'.