

## On Being Religious

The problem is not, and never was, whether God exists or doesn't exist. Man is so made, that the word God has a special effect on him, even if only to afford a safety valve for his feelings when he must swear or burst. And there ends the vexation of questioning the existence of God. Whatever the queer little word means, it means something we can none of us ever quite get away from, or at something connected with our deepest explosions.

It isn't really quite a word. It's an ejaculation and a glyph. It never had a definition. "Give a definition of the word God," says somebody, and everybody smiles, with just a trifle of malice. There's going to be a bit of sport. .

Of course nobody can define it. And a word nobody can define isn't a word at all. It's just a noise and a shape, like pop! or Ra or Om.\*

When a man says: *There is a God*, or *There is no God*, or *I don't know whether there's a God or not*, he is merely using the little word like a toy pistol, to announce that he has taken an attitude. When he says: *There is no God*, he just means to say: *Nobody knows any better about life than I know myself so nobody need try to chirp it over\* me*. Which is the democratic attitude. When he says: *There is a God*, he is either sentimental or sincere. If he is sincere, it means he refers himself back to some undefinable pulse of life in him, which gives him his direction and his substance. If he is sentimental, it means he is subtly winking to his audience to imply: *Let's make an arrangement favorable to ourselves*. That's the

conservative attitude. Thirdly and lastly, when a man says: *I don't know whether there's a God or not*, he is merely making the crafty announcement: *I hold myself free to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, whichever I feel like at the time.*— And that's the so-called artistic or pagan attitude.

In the end, one becomes bored by the man who believes that nobody, ultimately, can tell him anything. One becomes very bored by the men who wink a God into existence for their own convenience. And the man who holds himself free to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds doesn't hold interest\* any more. All these three classes of men bore us even to the death of boredom.

Remains the man who sincerely says: *I believe in God*. He may still be an interesting fellow.

I: *How* do you believe in God?

He: I believe in goodness.

*Basta!*\* Turn him down and try again.

I: *How* do you believe in God?

He: I believe in love.

*Exit*. Call another.

I: *How* do you believe in God?

He: I don't know.

I: What difference does it make to you, whether you believe in God or not?

He: It makes a difference, but I couldn't quite put it into words.

I: Are you sure it makes a difference? Does it make you kinder or fiercer?

He: Oh—I think it makes me more tolerant.

*Retro me!*\*—

Enter another believer.

He: Hullo!

I: Hullo!

He: What's up?

I: Do you believe in God?

He: What the hell is that to you?

I: Oh, I'm just asking.

He: What about yourself?

I: Yes, I believe.

He: D'you say your prayers at night?

I: No.

He: When d'you say 'em then?

I: I don't.

He: Then what use is your god to you?

I: He merely isn't the sort you pray to.

He: What do you do with him then?

I: It's what he does with me.

He: And what does he do with you?

I: Oh, I don't know. He uses me as the thin end of the wedge.

He: Thin enough! What about the thick end?

I: That's what we're waiting for.

He: You're a funny customer.

I: Why not? Do you believe in God?

He: Oh, I don't know. I might, if it looked like fun.

I: Right you are.

This is what I call a conversation between two true believers.

Either believing in a real God looks like fun, or it's no go at all. The Great God has been treated to so many sighs, supplications, prayers, tears and yearnings that, for the time, He's had enough. There is, I believe, a great strike on in heaven. The Almighty has vacated the throne, abdicated, climbed down. It's

no good your looking up into the sky. It's empty. Where the Most High used to sit listening to woes, supplications and repentances, there's nothing but a great gap in the empyrean. You can still go on praying to that gap, if you like. The Most High has gone out.

He has climbed down. He has just calmly stepped down the ladder of the angels, and is standing behind you. You can go on gazing and yearning up the shaft of hollow heaven if you like. The Most High just stands behind you, grinning to Himself.

Now this isn't a deliberate piece of blasphemy. It's just one way of stating an everlasting truth: or pair of truths. First, there is always the Great God. Second, as regards man, He shifts His position in the Cosmos. The Great God departs from the heaven where man has located Him, and plumps His throne down somewhere else. Man, being an ass, keeps going to the same door to beg for his carrot, even when the Master has gone away to another house. The ass keeps on going to the same spring, to drink, even when the spring has dried up, and there's nothing but clay and hoof-marks. It doesn't occur to him to look round, to see where the water has broken out afresh, somewhere else, out of some live rock.\* Habit! God has become a human habit, and Man expects the Almighty habitually to lend Himself to it. Whereas the Almighty—it's one of His characteristics—won't. He makes a move, and laughs when man goes on praying to the gap in the Cosmos.

"Oh little hole in the wall! Oh little gap, holy little gap!" as the Russian peasants are supposed to have prayed, making a deity of the hole in the wall.\*

Which makes me laugh. And nobody will persuade me that the Lord Almighty doesn't roar with laughter, seeing all the Christians still rolling their imploring eyes to the skies where the hole is, which the Great God left when He picked up His throne and walked.\*

I tell you, it isn't blasphemy. Ask any philosopher or theologian, and he'll tell you that the real problem for humanity isn't, whether God exists or not. God always is, and we all know it. But the problem is, how to get at Him. That is the greatest problem ever set to our habit-making humanity. The theologians try to find out: How shall man put himself into relation to God, into a living relation? Which is, How shall man *find* God?—That's the real problem.

Because God doesn't just sit still somewhere in the Cosmos. Why should He? He too wanders His Own strange way down the avenues of time, across the intricacies of space. Just as the heavens shift. Just as the pole of heaven shifts. We know now that, in the strange widdishins<sup>\*</sup> movement of the heavens, called precession, the great stars and constellations and planets are all the time slowly, invisibly, but absolutely shifting their positions, even the pole-star is silently stealing away from the pole. Four thousand years ago, our pole-star wasn't a pole-star. The earth had another one. Even at the present moment, Polaris has side-stepped.<sup>\*</sup> He doesn't really stand at the axis of the heavens. Ask any astronomer. We shall soon have to have another pole-star.

So it is with the Great God. He slowly and silently and invisibly shifts His throne, inch by inch, across the Cosmos. Inch by inch, across the blue floor of heaven, till He comes to the stairs of the angels. Then step by step down the ladder.

Where is He now? Where is the Great God now? Where has He put His throne?

We have lost Him! We have lost the Great God! Oh God, Oh God, we have lost our Great God! Jesus, Jesus, Thou art the Way!<sup>\*</sup> Jesus, Jesus, Thou art the Way to the Father, to the Lord Everlasting.

But Jesus shakes his head. In the great wandering of the heavens, the foot of the Cross has shifted. The great and majestic movement of the heavens has

slowly carried away even the Cross of Jesus from its place on Calvary. And Jesus, who was our Way to God, has stepped aside, over the horizon, with the Father.

So it is. Man is only Man. And even the Gods and the Great God go their way; stepping slowly, invisibly across the heavens of time and space, going somewhere, we know not where. They do not stand still. They go and go, till they pass below the horizon of man.

Till man has lost his Great God, and there remains only the Gap, and images, and hollow words. The Way, even the Great Way of Salvation, leads only to the pit, the nothingness, the gap.

It is not our fault. It is nobody's fault. It is the mysterious and sublime fashion of the Almighty, who travels too. At least, as far as we are concerned, He travels. Apparently He is the same today, yesterday, and forever.\* Like the pole-star.—But now we know the pole-star slowly but inevitably side-steps. Polaris is no longer at the pole of the heavens.

Gradually, gradually God travels away from us, on His mysterious journey. And we, being creatures of obstinacy and will, we insist that He cannot move. God gave us a way to Himself. God gave us Jesus, and the way of repentance and love, the way to God. The salvation through Christ Jesus our Lord.

And hence, we assert that the Almighty cannot go back on it. He can never get away from us again. At the end of the way of repentance and love, there God *is*, and *must be*. Must be, because God Himself *said* that He would receive us at the end of the road of repentance and love.

And He *did* receive men at the end of this road. He received our fathers even, into peace and salvation.

Then He must receive us.

And He doesn't. The road no longer leads to the Throne.

We are let down.

Are we? Did Jesus ever say: *I am the way, and there is no other way?*<sup>\*</sup> At the moment, there was no other way. For many centuries, there was no other way. But all the time, the heavens were mysteriously revolving, and God was going His own unspeakable way. All the time, men had to be making the road afresh. Even the road called Jesus, the way of the Christian to God, had to be subtly altered, century by century. At the Renaissance, in the Eighteenth Century, great curves in the Christian road to God, new strange directions.

As a matter of fact, never did God or Jesus say that there was one straight way of salvation, forever and ever. On the contrary, Jesus plainly indicated the changing of the way. And what is more, he indicated the only means to the finding of the right way. The Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is within you. And it is a Ghost, forever a Ghost, never a Way or a Word. Jesus is a Way and a Word. God is the Goal. But the Holy Ghost is forever Ghostly, unrealisable. And against this unsubstantial unreality, you may never sin,<sup>\*</sup> or woe betide you.

Only the Holy Ghost within you can scent the new tracks of the Great God across the Cosmos of Creation. The Holy Ghost is the dark hound of Heaven<sup>\*</sup> whose baying we ought to listen to, as he runs ahead into the unknown, tracking the mysterious everlasting departing of the Lord God, who is forever departing from us.

And now the Lord God has gone over our horizon. The foot of the Cross is lifted from the Mound, and moved across the heavens. The pole-star no longer stands on guard at the true polaric centre. We are all disorientated, all is gone out of gear.

All right, the Lord God left us neither blind nor comfortless nor helpless. We've got the Holy Ghost. And we hear him baying down strange darknesses, in other places.

The Almighty has shifted His throne, and we've got to find a new road. Therefore we've got to get off the old road. You can't stay on the old road, and find a new road. We've got to find our way to God. From time to time Man wakes up and realises that the Lord Almighty has made a great removal, and passed over the known horizon. Then starts the frenzy, the howling, the despair. Much better listen to the dark hound of Heaven, and start off into the dark of the unknown, in search.

From time to time, the Great God sends a new saviour. Christians will no longer have the pettiness to assert that Jesus is the only Saviour ever sent by the everlasting God. There have been other saviours, in other lands, at other times, with other messages. And all of them Sons of God. All of them sharing the God-head with the Father. All of them showing the Way of Salvation and of Right. Different Saviours. Different Ways of Salvation. Different polestars, in the great wandering Cosmos of time. And the Infinite God, always changing, and always the same infinite God, at the end of the different Ways.

Now, if I ask you if you believe in God, I do not ask you if you know the Way to God. For the moment, we are lost. Let us admit it. None of us knows the way to God. The Lord of time and space has passed over our horizon, and here we sit in our mundane creation, rather flabbergasted. Let us admit it.

Jesus, the Saviour, is no longer our Way of Salvation. He *was* the Saviour, and is not. Once it was Mithras:<sup>\*</sup> and has not been Mithras for these many years. It never *was* Mithras for us. God sends different Saviours to different peoples at different times.

Now, for the moment, there is no Saviour. The Jews have waited for three thousand years. They preferred just to wait. We do not. Jesus taught us what to do, when He, Christ, could no longer save us.



We go in search of God, following the Holy Ghost, and depending on the Holy Ghost. There is no Way. There is no Word. There is no Light. The Holy Ghost is ghostly and invisible. The Holy Ghost is nothing, if you like. Yet we hear his strange calling, the strange calling like a hound on the scent, away in the unmapped wilderness. And it seems great fun to follow. Oh great fun, God's own good fun.

Myself, I believe in God. But I'm off on a different road.

*Adiós! And, if you like, au revoir!*