

CHAPTER XIII

THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF JESUS

In 1909, Walser wrote his last book: "The Life and Teachings of Jesus." J.P. Moore considered this his most noted prose work. This is the book in which Walser described himself as a "converted infidel." The next year, Walser would be dead.

Unbelievers, like Walser, face a philosophical dilemma. H.G. Wells expressed it beautifully in this quotation (reported to have come from the American Magazine, July 1922.)

"Jesus of Nazareth . . . is easily the dominant figure in history. I am speaking of him, of course, as a man, for I conceive that the historian must treat Him as a man, just as the painter must paint him as a man . . . To assume that he never lived, that the accounts of his life are inventions, is more difficult and raises more problems in the path of the historian, than to accept the essential elements of the Gospel stories as fact . . . So, the historian, disregarding the theological significance of his life, writes the name of Jesus of Nazareth at the top of the world's greatest characters."

G.H. Walser claimed to be in search of truth. Yet, he could not be intellectually honest without personally investigating the historical Christ. Many, if not most unbelievers, have never personally investigated the claims of Christ. Perhaps this was true of Walser. When he did so, however, the teachings of Jesus apparently made more sense than anything else he had considered. Biblical faith rests upon evidence.

Walser was nearing the end of his life. His dreams of a liberal utopia had vanished like a vapor. His money was gone (Probate Court the following year appraised his assets at only \$1,661.60.) His health was gone. His home life had been a disaster. He was reduced to nothing. Someone has observed, however, that when God creates something, He starts from nothing. Walser's personal disaster was therefore something positive. The same is true of us. When we are reduced to nothing, God can begin a creative work in us.

It is not unusual for unbelievers to be converted when they consider the evidence.

Consider, for example, a contemporary of Walser by the name of Sir William Ramsay. Ramsay was also initially an unbeliever. He, like Walser, was also a man of action. He was not content to sit in a class room, or on a bar stool, and criticize Christ. He was a "doer" not just a "talker." Therefore, he decided to sponsor an archeological expedition and prove the Bible wrong.

Ramsay set out from England in 1881. His plan was to focus on the writings of Luke. Christians believe that Luke wrote two inspired books, the Gospel of Luke, and the Book of Acts. Luke was so specific, that Ramsay assumed it would be an easy task to prove him wrong.

Take, for example, the comments of Luke about Jesus as they are recorded in Luke 3:1-3:

"Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."

Luke claimed to be writing accurate history (see Luke 1:1-4.) This brief sample of his writing reveals his attention to detail. Ramsay could check on such specific historical references. Supplied with the best equipment of the day, he spent fifteen years in the lands of the Bible, digging for evidence. Skeptics confidently expected all of their allegations and assertions to be substantiated.

In 1896, however, Ramsay published a large volume in defence of the Christian faith. It was called: "St. Paul, the traveler and the Roman Citizen." Ramsay had been converted by evidence. He continued to study and write for many years. He not only became a Christian, but also a staunch defender of the Christian faith. This remarkable defence of Christianity was published at about the same time George was entering his third marriage.

Giovanni Papini, is another example of an unbeliever converted by evidence. He was also a contemporary of Walser. He shocked the world by publishing his "Life of Christ" in 1921. This famous enemy of Christ concluded that we need a more "Christlike"

world.

Lew Wallace was another contemporary of Walsers. There are a number of similarities in their lives. Both were born in Indiana. Both were lawyers. Both were officers in the Union Army. An atheist once predicted to Wallace that the little white churches in his beloved Indiana would some day be buried in the general crash of all religion. In the course of writing Ben Hur, however, Wallace actually studied the Bible for himself. His lawyer training in logic forced him to the inescapable conclusion that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the Living God.

The Christian Faith is unique in this regard. Many religions merely propose maxims to live by. Christianity, however, stands or falls upon historical facts. If Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, our faith is vain. The essence of the Christian Gospel is that Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again "according to the Scriptures." Every major event of his life and ministry was written in the Scriptures, and taught in the synagogues, centuries before it came to pass.

Walsers was a lawyer. His professional career involved the weighing of evidence. For many years he was paid to prove some conclusion "beyond a reasonable doubt." Nothing can ever be proven beyond "any" doubt. Some, for example, still insist that the world is flat, or that George Washington never lived. Their thinking, however, is not "reasonable."

So Walsers became reasonable. He once doubted Christ, and wound up doubting his doubts. The evidence he studied forced him to conclusions that he described as a conversion. Fortunately, God will determine the validity of his conversion. His openness to change, is nevertheless, commendable.

Since I have been unable to secure a copy of Walsers's book, "The Life and Teachings of Jesus," I am indebted to J.P. Moore for the following quotations. They are found on pages 147 - 149 of his book "The Strange Town."

"In my early life I rejected much of orthodox Christianity, and parts of the Old Testament as being merely history and the crude reasonings of primitive men in their first awakening to the belief and dependence on a power above and beyond themselves."

"As a Freethinker, I wandered into the field of Materialism, Atheism,

Agnosticism, and finally Spiritualism, and I am ever thankful for my schooling along these lines, for my mind has been broadened, my conception brightened, and my nature brought more in harmony with my duty towards my fellow men."

"I write from the standpoint of a converted Infidel. I have patiently investigated without bias all sides of mental and spiritual philosophies. All I desire is the truth whose footprints I will follow where it leadeth; for what is truth for me is truth for all, whether that truth is divine or secular."

"The life and teachings of the Master can only be fully appreciated through the aid of the imagination, guided and stimulated by all the facts and of the world at his time . . ."

"I have wandered in the desert of disbelief, waded in the river of doubt, and in the sands of desolation. I have looked for hope and found none . . . I felt there was something more, there must be something more, or nature is a fraud and life the gall of a bitter cheat."

Of the Bible, Walser wrote:

"I thought it to be a mixture of imaginations; a compendium of laws of ancient times or a peculiar people, with scraps of history interbedded with their notions of religion, which did not comport with my ideas of what religion is, or at least should be . . ."

"My conception was that true religion is the development of the soul. It is not measured by any particular cult, form of words, trained actions, or belief; but it is the soothing elevation of man's higher nature that best fits him for the needs of a proper life, according to his environment . . ."

"Reasoning . . . we must conclude that God is absolute mind. He is intelligence and absolute wisdom, hence he knows everything."

"If the heart is right the religion is good for those who profess it . . ."

"Jesus founded no church, built no temple, wrote no creed; nor did he establish a worship. He did by example soothe the sorrying heart, healed