***Philip Stigger.***

***St Catherine’s Church. North Vancouver.***

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I believe, yet I doubt – in mundane matters as much as in those of faith.

There are three interrelated reasons why I am generally a doubting Thomas.

The first is that Nuns running the Convent School in Peshawar, Pakistan, in 1936 demonstrated to me, aged four, that Christian Protestants differed from Christian Roman Catholics. Living in then British India also caused me to recognise that Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Parsees manifestly lived and died in faith – BUT IN COMMUNITIES APART from one another.

The second and third reasons relate to events after returning to Britain in 1939.

I learned in the winter of 1942/43 through family connections with a German Jewish British Army Pioneer Corps unit that German supposed Christians were killing Jews *en masse*. The scale became common knowledge in 1944/45. Living in a military environment in 1946 through 1948, I learned how Jews and Muslims were killing one another in Palestine, in part because of their religious beliefs and practices. Also in 1947, on the partition of British India, I learned of the massacre of Hindus and Sikhs in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, where individuals who had been kind to me were probable victims. In brief, religious believers, in the “right” circumstances, will kill those held by them to be non-believers.

The third element stems from propaganda. I became aware of German broadcasts from Hamburg in 1939. In Dover early in 1940, I witnessed convoys of troops moving to the docks in trucks with propaganda messages scrawled on their sides as the soldiers sometimes sang “We’re going to hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line”. Then, at the end of May, 1940, as we were leaving Dover on Government urging, I saw an utterly dejected French soldier who had been rescued at Dunkirk. There was no victory in Northern France in 1940.

Exposure to propaganda in print, on film, and over the air continued – Radio Prague, Radio Moscow, Radio Peking, The Voice of America, RTE Dublin… My conclusion? “Truth “ is elusive and subject to manipulation.

Religious bodies are not opposed to adapting their message. Muslims recognise Jesus, not as the Christ but as a prophet – Jesu bin Mariam [Jesus the SON of Mary]. The rugby-playing ex-RAF Sky Pilot vicar who prepared me for confirmation in 1947 pointed out that custom was the sole basis for the then exclusion of women from the sanctuary [except possibly to clean it?]. Theologians and atheists regularly caste doubt on the Immaculate Conception and the Resurrection as the Bible expresses it – without acknowledging that scientific truth does not recognise any positive basis for any faith – all of which advocate acceptance of the impossible.

I know why I have doubts about faith, about politics, about people’s motivation.

I DO NOT YET KNOW why I have faith, confirmed in my case in part through the ministrations of the Sky Pilot Vicar and the example of two other men – Batemi or so-called “chiefs”. Both of these men had ‘Pagan’ religious responsibilities before they came in contact with missionaries. One lived as a Roman Catholic but declined baptism because he refused to put away the second wife he had had to take in order to carry out his traditional religious duties. The other lived strictly according to the rigid tenets of the evangelical Protestant Africa Inland Mission but was never baptised because he believe his people upheld their traditional beliefs and needed the traditional ceremonies to continue.

One guide set me on my path. The two others have helped me along it. However, when I probe for the reason why I respect the Batemi, my personal confusion mounts.

I know NOT why I have faith, but I do know that I have had it since at least the age of seven. I knew people on the *Yorkshire* and, on 17 October 1939, I witnessed the torpedoing and sinking of that ship.

To this day I cannot sing William Whiting’s hymn, *Eternal Father, strong to save…* without breaking up.