

SHAW'S RELIGIOUS STATEMENTS IN DRAMA--THE STAGE IS A PULPIT

THESIS

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Eula Moon Strahan
(San Antonio, Texas)

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For Wayne, Bubba and Marty--
who made this thesis necessary and possible

and

for Linda--who cared enough.

P R E F A C E

In Too True to Be Good, a play written by George Bernard Shaw in 1931, we find the following explanation of his religious mission:

. . . I am by nature and destiny a preacher. I am the new Ecclesiastes. But I have no Bible, no creed: the war has shot both out of my hands. The war has been a fiery forcing house in which we have grown with a rush like flowers in a late spring following a terrible winter. And with what result? This: that we have outgrown our religion, outgrown our political system, outgrown our own strength of mind and character. The fatal word NOT has been miraculously inserted into all our creeds; in the desecrated temples where we knelt murmuring "I believe" we stand with stiff knees and stiffer necks shouting "Up, all! the erect posture is the mark of the man: let lesser creatures kneel and crawl: we will not kneel and we do not believe." But what next? Is NO enough? For a boy, yes: for a man, never. Are we any the less obsessed with a belief when we are denying it than when we were affirming it? No: I must have affirmations to preach. Without them the young will not listen to me; for even the young grow tired of denials. The negative monger falls before the soldiers, the men of action, the fighters, strong in the old uncompromising affirmations which give them status, duties, certainty of consequences; so that the pugnacious spirit of man in them can reach out and strike deathblows with steadfastly closed minds. Their way is straight and sure; but it is the way of death; and the preacher must preach the way of life. Oh, if I could only find it! . . . I am ignorant: I have lost my nerve and am intimidated: all I know is that I must find the way of life, for myself and all of us, or we shall surely perish. And meanwhile my gift has possession of me: I must preach

and preach and preach no matter how late the hour
and how short the day, no matter whether I have
nothing to say-- . . . --or whether in some penta-
costal flame of revelation the Spirit will descend
on me and inspire me with a message the sound
whereof shall go out unto all lands and realize for
us at last the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory
for ever and ever. Amen.¹

Shaw used the stage as a medium for disseminating his messages to society. He wrote fifty-two plays and six playlets, most of which contain a message of religious significance. After a comprehensive study of Shaw's plays, I have selected for examination twenty-five in which the religious element is important. In including almost half of Shaw's plays in this study, I have selected not only those plays that are representative of Shaw's religious thought, but also a large sampling of his works to illustrate how extensively he concerned himself with religious matters in his drama. As early as 1892 when he wrote Mrs Warren's Profession,² Shaw portrayed a hypocritical clergyman; as late as

¹George Bernard Shaw, Too True to Be Good, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, IV (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1962), 719-720.

²Shaw's peculiarities of punctuation and spelling will be retained as they appear in the titles of the works cited and in quotations from the works.

1950 when he wrote Farfetched Fables, Shaw was still preaching.

Much of Shaw's religious thought was repeated again and again in his plays. For this reason, I have chosen to group his ideas topically. A chronological study of his religious thought in drama would create much repetition. After presenting an explanation of Shaw's religious beliefs, I have discussed the religious statements in his plays as they pertain to the individual, to society, and to the future of humanity.

Thus, in this thesis I have provided not only an extensive study of Shaw's religious statements in these twenty-five plays, but also a means of interpreting Shaw as a man with a religious mission. Ironically, Shaw, who in his youth proclaimed his atheism, devoted his life to the writing of plays that are affirmations of the divine purpose of man.

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C H A P T E R I

SHAW THE RELIGIONIST: EARLY RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AS EXPRESSED IN NONDRAMATIC WORKS

In a lecture delivered at the New Reform Club of London on March 21, 1912, George Bernard Shaw made the following statement:

What I mean by a religious person is one who conceives himself or herself to be the instrument of some purpose in the universe which is a high purpose, and is the native power of evolution--that is, of a continual ascent in organization and power and life, and extension of life. Any person who realizes that there is such a power, and that his business and joy in life is to do its work, and his pride and point of honor to identify himself with it, is religious, and the people who have not got that feeling are clearly irreligious, no matter what denomination they may belong to.¹

By his own definition of the religious person, Shaw must be considered a religious man. In spite of his

¹George Bernard Shaw, "Modern Religion I," in Religious Speeches of Bernard Shaw, ed. by Warren Sylvester Smith with a Foreword by Arthur H. Nethercot (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1963), pp. 38-39.

reputation as a religious heretic, Shaw's definition of the religious person is not radically different from the definition of a religionist to be found in any standard dictionary. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary defines a religionist as: "One addicted or attached to religion; one imbued with or zealous for, religion."²

Religion is defined as:

. . . Recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny, and as being entitled to obedience, reverence, and worship; the general mental and moral attitude resulting from this belief, with reference to its effect upon the individual or the community; personal or general acceptance of this feeling as a standard of spiritual and practical life. . . .³

The basic differences between Shaw's concept of religion and the standard definition are important. Shaw includes the idea of evolution in his definition, an idea not included in the Oxford English Dictionary definition; he omits the ideas of reverence and worship. These differences are the nucleus of Shaw's opposition to the established religions of his time.

²Oxford English Dictionary, 1933.

³Ibid.

The unorthodox religious beliefs that Shaw preached in his writings and speeches may be in part due to his childhood experiences. He was born in Dublin, Ireland on July 26, 1856. His parents, George Carr and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw, were Protestants in a predominantly Roman Catholic country, and they sent their son to the Protestant Episcopal Church of Ireland. Protestants in Ireland were the propertied class that had political, economic, and social domination over the Catholic majority, and George Carr Shaw was not lax in using his Protestantism to give himself status.⁴ The young Shaw was introduced to religious bigotry early in life by his father. Shaw recalled the following incident:

One evening I was playing on the street with a schoolfellow of mine, when my father came home. He questioned me about this boy, who was the son of a prosperous ironmonger. The feelings of my father, who was not prosperous and who sold flour by the sack, when he learned that his son had played on the public street with the son of a man who sold nails by the pennyworth in a shop, are not to be described. He impressed on me that my honour, my self-respect, my human dignity, all stood upon my determination not to associate with persons engaged in retail trade.⁵

⁴Anthony S. Abbott, Shaw and Christianity (New York: The Seabury Press, 1965), pp. 17-18.

⁵Ibid., p. 18, quoting "In the Days of My Youth," Mainly about People (London), September 17, 1898. Quoted in Archibald Henderson, George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1956), p. 16.

To George Carr Shaw, retail meant Catholic while wholesale meant Protestant. He did not want his son associating with a Catholic boy.

The young Shaw became the object of cruelty in the name of religion when, at the age of thirteen, he was enrolled in the Central Model Boys' School in Marlborough Street. George John Vandaleur Lee, music teacher and close friend of Shaw's mother, suggested that the boy be sent there. Unfortunately, no one realized in time to what this decision would lead. The school was Roman Catholic in everything but name. As a Protestant in a Catholic school, Shaw was rejected by Protestants and Catholics alike. This particular experience of Shaw's lasted only a year, but it had a lasting effect on the youth.⁶

The irreverent manner in which the playwright would discuss religious subjects had its beginning in the home of his youth. Shaw lost faith in his father because ". . . the senior Shaw, who liked to give thunderous lectures on the evils of drink, was himself a tippler."⁷

⁶Ibid., pp. 19-20.

⁷Richard M. Ohmann, Shaw: The Style and the Man (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), p. 74.

Shaw's irreverent attitude was not formed solely from his experiences with religious hypocrites. The attitude of his family was generally one of irreverence. When a death occurred in the family, the Shaws were more concerned with saving time than with maintaining a reverent attitude toward the deceased. They drove their coaches slowly only as far as the city limits, and then drove as fast as they could to the cemetery, speaking ill of the deceased all the way.⁸

This irreverence was carried into discussions of religion. The humor with which Shaw treated religious matters in his plays had its root in family discussions. The young Shaw would sometimes be rebuked by his father for scoffing at parts of the Bible. In recalling these discussions, Shaw said of his father,

. . . when he had reached the point of feeling really impressive, a convulsion of internal chuckling would wrinkle up his eyes; and (I knowing all the time quite well what was coming) he would cap his eulogy by assuring me, with an air of perfect fairness, that even the worst enemy of religion could say no worse of the Bible than that it was the damndest parcel of lies ever written.⁹

⁸Ibid., p. 75.

⁹Abbott, Shaw and Christianity, p. 26, quoting Preface to Immaturity, Standard Edition of the Works of Bernard Shaw, 37 vols. (London: Constable and Company, 1930-1950, xx-xxi.

Shaw recalled also a discussion concerning the account in the Bible of Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead. George Carr Shaw argued that the story was true and accurate; Vandaleur Lee said it never happened at all; Walter Gurly, Shaw's maternal uncle, had a different explanation of it:

. . . he said that the miracle was what would be called in these days a put-up job, by which he meant that Jesus had made a confederate of Lazarus--had made it worth his while, or had asked him for friendship's sake, to pretend he was dead and at the proper moment to pretend to come to life. . . . I listened with very great interest, and I confess to you that the view which recommended itself most to me was that of my maternal uncle. I think, on reflection, you will admit that that was the natural and healthy side for a growing boy to take, because my maternal uncle's view appealed to the sense of humor, which is a very good thing and a very human thing, whereas the other two views--one appealing to our mere credulity and the other to mere skepticism--really did not appeal to anything at all that had any genuine religious value.¹⁰

Just as Shaw's humorous treatment of religion can be traced to the days of his youth, so can the seriousness of his rejection of the fearful Jehovah be traced to his early religious training. Religion of fear was preached in the church that he attended. He commented on

¹⁰Shaw, "The Ideal of Citizenship," in Religious Speeches, p. 23.

the fears that were instilled in him as a young boy:

I remember at that time dreaming one night that I was dead and had gone to heaven. The picture of heaven which the efforts of the then Established Church of Ireland had conveyed to my childish imagination, was a waiting room with walls of skycolored tabbnet, and a pew-like bench running all around, except at one corner, where there was a door. I was, somehow, aware that God was in the next room, accessible through that door. I was seated on the bench with my ankles tightly interlaced to prevent my legs dangling, behaving myself with all my might before the grown-up people, who all belonged to the Sunday congregation, and were either sitting on the bench as if at church or else moving solemnly in and out as if there were a dead person in the house. A grimly-handsome lady who usually sat in a corner seat near me in church, and whom I believed to be thoroughly conversant with the arrangements of the almighty, was to introduce me presently into the next room--a moment which I was supposed to await with joy and enthusiasm. Really, of course, my heart sank like lead within me at the thought; for I felt that my feeble affectation of piety could not impose on Omniscience, and that one glance of that all-searching eye would discover that I had been allowed to come to heaven by mistake.¹¹

Shaw's rejection of this fearsome God led to his public declaration of himself as a atheist while he was in his teens. A great evangelical revival had occurred which prompted the young Shaw to write a letter to the press in which he announced that he was an atheist.¹²

¹¹Abbott, Shaw and Christianity, p. 24, quoting On Going to Church (Boston: John Luce, 1905), pp. 44-45. Originally published in Arthur Symon's The Savoy (January, 1896).

¹²Ibid., p. 33.

Shaw maintained his disbelief in the Hebrew God throughout his life. In "The New Theology," a speech given at the Kensington Town Hall on May 16, 1907, Shaw explained that it was impossible for him to believe in a God of vengeance. He cited the Bible story in which some young children made fun of the prophet Elisha's bald head, and God sent bears out of the woods to devour them. Shaw could not believe in a God ". . . capable of taking the most ferocious revenge."¹³ To further illustrate his point, Shaw told of his own test of the existence of such a God:

I say it seemed to me perfectly natural and proper, if the ruler of the universe were really the petty, spiteful criminal he was represented to be, for a man who denied his existence to take his watch out of his pocket and, instead of troubling about what happened many centuries ago, to ask him to strike him dead at the end of five minutes.¹⁴

Shaw had called himself an atheist in order to disassociate himself from this concept of God and from those people who ". . . worship such a monster. . . ." To Shaw, such a God ". . . is morally inconceivable." He continued:

¹³Shaw, "The New Theology," in Religious Speeches, p. 11.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 11-12.

The God who would send bears to eat up little children would be a wicked God--what Shelley called an Almighty Fiend. Why did not Shelley's protest produce very much impression on the people of this country? Because, believing he was an Almighty Fiend, they feared and obeyed him very largely as such and supposed that if they told him the truth to his face he would probably strike them dead for blasphemy. They saw that there was a great deal of terrible cruelty in the world, which rather confirmed the idea that the force at the back of things was wicked and cruel, and therefore the denunciations of Shelley and others of the current conception of God as immoral did not remove the presumption that he existed.¹⁵

Having already denounced orthodox religion and not yet having formulated his own, Shaw was without a religion when he went to London to join his mother in 1876.¹⁶ While his feelings about religion as he had seen it practiced in his childhood were negative, he brought with him to London a spiritual appreciation of music. Shaw could sing and whistle from end to end the works of Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Verdi and many others. His love for music was such that he credited music with being more truly religious than Ireland's religion.¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 12-13.

¹⁶Shaw, "Introduction," *ibid.*, p. xiii.

¹⁷Abbott, Shaw and Christianity, pp. 21-22.

The London that Shaw entered in 1876 was a ". . . geographical center of religious and intellectual turbulence almost without precedent."¹⁸ The number of reform movements that sprang up, most of them in the 1880's, was astounding. There were several branches of the secularist movement led by such people as G. W. Foote, George J. Holyoake, Charles Watts, W. Stewart Ross, and Charles Bradlaugh. Other movements included the Ethical Society, the Fellowship of the New Life, the Zetetical Society, the Humanitarian League, the Land Nationalization Society, the Land Reform Union, the Law and Liberty League, the Malthusian League or the Cooperative Movement. The socialist movement claimed branches including the Social Democratic Federation, the Socialist Union, the Socialist League, and the Fabian Society. There was also a reform movement within the Church of England and nonconformist Protestant organizations such as the Salvation Army.¹⁹

¹⁸Shaw, "Introduction," in Religious Speeches, p. xiii.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. xiii-xiv.

The only group that Shaw joined was the Fabian Society. He never joined any group that was specifically religious or atheistic. Because of his devotion to Fabianism, he attended meetings of other groups and made speeches whenever he could to spread his brand of socialism. Shaw explained, "All Fabians have their price, which is always the adoption of Fabian measures, no matter by what party."²⁰

Shaw's career as a dramatist began with Widowers' Houses, which he completed in 1892. His last play, Why She Would Not, was completed in 1950. The steady development of Shaw's religious thought is apparent in many of the plays he wrote in his long career as a dramatist. In several of his early plays, notably Widowers' Houses, The Philanderer, Mrs Warren's Profession, and Arms and the Man, Shaw addresses himself to social and moral questions but does not relate them to religion. Shaw progresses from this noncommittal position on religion in his drama to one in which religion becomes the major theme in some plays.

²⁰ Ibid., p. xv.

The religious ideas contained in Shaw's plays are to be found in his nondramatic writing in more explicit form. Since the following chapters of this thesis will examine the religious ideas contained in Shawian drama, it is fitting that these ideas as they are presented in Shaw's religious speeches and other nondramatic sources be explored first in order to provide a better understanding of Shaw's position in the realm of religious thought.

In The Quintessence of Ibsenism, Shaw defines three categories of people that are to appear in his later writings. These classes of people Shaw calls Philistines, Idealists, and Realists. The Philistine is the one who accepts things as they are without question. The religious Philistines are the persons who follow the customs of their parents and grandparents; they accept religion as they find it without questioning its validity.²¹ The Idealists do not accept everything as perfect but do not try to bring change. For example, they may find fault within the institution of marriage but do not have the strength to try to change it. Instead, they refuse to acknowledge this fault in the institution, and, in fact,

²¹Abbott, Shaw and Christianity, pp. 35-36.

idealize the institution ". . . because the institution is sacred and holy, ordained of God."²² The Realists are the people who respect and trust themselves. They speak what they believe to be the truth, though it may offend both the Philistines and the Idealists. Not surprisingly, Shaw places himself in the Realist category along with Blake, Shelley, Wagner, and Ibsen.²³

As a Realist, Shaw spoke his concept of truth in both his dramatic and nondramatic writing. His truth was also expressed in lectures that he gave on numerous occasions. In the introduction to The Religious Speeches of Bernard Shaw, Arthur H. Nethercot summarized Shaw's religious beliefs as follows:

Religion is a necessity. A divine purpose must be recognized in the universe. Life as a haphazard accident in the evolutionary process is too horrible to contemplate.

All present-day institutional religions are unsatisfactory. Though much of Jesus' personal theology is sound, no modern state would permit it to be put into practice. Institutional Christianity is a failure because the Christian church is still caught between the Old Testament horror gods and the intimidating salvationism of St. Paul.

²²Ibid., pp. 36-37.

²³Ibid., p. 37.

True religion is always mystical. It is carried on by prophets, not priests. The true protestant renounces all churches and all priesthoods.

Religion must be practical. It must concern itself with justice and economics and the social order and the divine value of human life--not other worldliness--but sheer pragmatism as a rule cannot be tolerated. A practice is not right simply because it can be made to work.

God is not an omnipotent personality, but a blind lifeforce, struggling through evolution and whatever means are available to it to develop what one day might be the Godhead. . . . The so-called natural selection of Darwinism reduces this force to chance or accident, thereby, as Samuel Butler has pointed out, banishing mind from the universe.

The life-force needs man to carry out its purposes. It needs his hands and his brains. If he does not do well enough, it will eventually scrap him and develop a more advanced species. . . .²⁴

An examination of Shaw's religious speeches reveals that he used the platform as a means of repeatedly disseminating his views on religion. In a speech delivered to the New Reform Club of London on March 21, 1912, Shaw explained the necessity of religion. Religion is necessary for the accomplishment of worthwhile things. He said, "If anything is to be done to get our civilization out of the horrible mess in which it now is, it must be done by men who have got a religion."²⁵ Of course, when

²⁴Shaw, "Introduction," in Religious Speeches, pp. xxii-xxiii.

²⁵Shaw, "Modern Religion I," *ibid.*, p. 38.

Shaw said that religion is a necessity, he was not referring to orthodox religion. He stated that an atheist is not necessarily a man without a religion, and a Christian is not necessarily a person with a religion. "Obviously, the majority of Christians today have not any religion, and they have less of Christianity than of any religion on earth."²⁶ Shaw made this distinction on the basis of his own definition of a religious man as given earlier in this paper.

Shaw recognized that some confusion could arise because of the difference in the terms used by various people in regard to religion. One man might use religious terms while another might simply speak of honor, but both would be talking about the same thing--that which is within man which makes him do certain things, or not do certain things, for the betterment of all, without regard for his own welfare.²⁷ Shaw believed that these religious persons must be the governing force. He warned, "If you allow people who are caddish and irreligious to become the governing force, the nation will be destroyed."²⁸

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 38-39.

²⁸Ibid., p. 39.

To Shaw, religion is a necessity not only for the benefit that the present civilization can derive from it, but also because it provides an explanation for the origin of man and an optimistic view of the future of man. Shaw's concept of religion denied Darwin's conception of the beginning of man. Since Darwin's theory of natural selection provided an explanation of life as accidentally evolving and surviving by the law of survival of the fittest, it ". . . abolished adaptation and design, and, . . . banished mind from the universe."²⁹ Shaw believed that if one accepted this explanation of man's existence, then man could not hope to improve himself intentionally; he must wait for accidents to bring change. Man could not claim credit for his achievements as the result of conscious effort on his part, nor could man be blamed for his failures. Shaw rejected Darwinism because it could not account for the "divine spark" in man, that which makes him do God's work--work that does not benefit him directly.³⁰

²⁹Shaw, "The New Theology," *ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

The scientific explanation of the existence of man was no less unsatisfactory to Shaw than was the orthodox Christian doctrine concerning the creation of man. The idea of an omnipotent and benevolent Creator was rejected by Shaw because it could not satisfactorily account for the deplorable condition of the world. While the theory of the divine Creator explained the presence of design in the universe, it could not satisfactorily explain the existence of cancer and diptheria unless one were willing to exclude the view of God as benevolent and be willing to worship a cruel Creator. Shaw reasoned that an omnipotent Creator must be held responsible for the evil as well as the good in the universe.³¹ In fact, Shaw could not believe that an omnipotent God would have created man at all. He reasoned:

If there are three orders of existence--man as we know him, the angels higher than man, and God higher than the angels--why did God first create something lower than himself, the angels, and then actually create something lower than the angels, man? I cannot believe in a God who would do that. If I were God, I should try to create something higher than myself, and then something higher than that, so that, beginning with a God the highest thing in creation, I should end with a God the lowest thing in creation.³²

³¹Ibid., p. 13.

³²Ibid., p. 17.

When Shaw said that ". . . there was not a single established religion in the world in which an intelligent or educated man could believe . . . ,"³³ he was not just rejecting ". . . the old tribal idol, Jehovah."³⁴ Shaw was strongly opposed to the doctrine of the New Testament that he called "Salvationism." He objected to the idea of atonement of sins by Jesus because it allowed man to shift his sin to innocent shoulders, thus allowing him to escape the consequences of his behavior. Shaw thought that this belief enabled a person to escape moral responsibility and should be abolished. He said, "I want to destroy the hope in every human soul that we could possibly shift our responsibility for our guilt on any sacrifice whatever."³⁵

Shaw's rejection of orthodox religion was part of his fulfillment of his own religious convictions. He excluded himself from the large majority of people to whom ". . . religion means adhesion to a church and observance of a ritual, and the placing of authority in

³³Ibid., p. 9

³⁴Ibid., p. 13.

³⁵Shaw, "Christianity and Equality," *ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

spiritual matters in the hands of a special class."³⁶

Shaw's religious mission to denounce orthodox religion is better understood in light of his self-identification with the religious outsider. He explained the function of the religious outsider or prophet as follows:

Now over against the natural-born churchman, there are men of another type, and these men are always really mystics. They do not believe in priests; they very often hate them, and they hate churches. They are deeply religious persons, and instead of priests they have prophets, and these prophets come, if I may say so, practically at the call of God. These men believe in the direct communion of their own spirit with whatever spirit it is that rules the universe. They believe that the inspiration of that spirit may come to anybody, and that he may become a prophet.³⁷

Shaw drew a distinct line between the prophet and the priest. He recognized that, in reading the Bible, one might mistakenly suppose that the prophets were ". . . a sort of old-fashioned clergy." They were, on the contrary, ". . . prophets who were stoned by the old-fashioned clergy."³⁸

³⁶Shaw, "Modern Religion II," *ibid.*, p. 62.

³⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 63.

Before Shaw's dramatic works appeared, he had experienced religious growth; his youthful, self-pronounced atheism had disappeared and had been replaced by deep religious beliefs. Shaw, the prophet, certainly assumed the role of the religious outsider whose purpose included pointing out the flaws in established religions, but he also suggested what he believed to be a better religion. This better religion must be pragmatic, but pragmatism alone is not enough.

There it is no use saying that the thing that works is right, because things that you know to be abominably wrong, and that you cannot pretend to be made right by any sort of working, can nevertheless be made to work politically if only you will put sufficient brute force into making them work.³⁹

To have a religion that is both pragmatic and good, Shaw saw the necessity of recognizing the divine value of life. By giving

. . . everybody the best possible chance in life, this evolution of life may go on, and after some time, if we begin to worship life, if instead of merely worshiping mammon, in the old scriptural phrase, and wanting to make money, if we begin to try to get a community in which life is given every possible chance, and in which the development of life

³⁹Ibid., p. 64.

is the one thing that is everybody's religion, that life is the thing, then cooperation with this power becomes your religion, you begin to feel your hands are the hands of God, as it were, that he has no other hands to work with, your mind is the mind of God, that he made your mind in order to work with.⁴⁰

If everyone is to have this best possible chance that Shaw called for, he believed that the religion of the future must be the source of all laws. These new laws must eliminate revenge and punishment and poverty; they must be based on the doctrine of the immanence of God.⁴¹

The present laws concerning punishment are, to Shaw, not wise because they allow the lawbreaker to escape his moral responsibility. If a man is punished for stealing, the slate is wiped clean. "A man can steal, and at the end of three months he is an honest man!"⁴² Of course, he also held that the number of criminal acts would be largely reduced if poverty were eliminated completely. Accordingly, Shaw advocated a kind of utopian communism as the solution to the inequitable distribution of wealth. "You cannot have people starving in any

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 78.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 66.

⁴²Shaw, "Christianity and Equality," *ibid.*, p. 57.

Christian country unless everybody is starving."⁴³ Everyone should be given an equal income. This would be possible if every man were recognized to be part of God and entitled to his equal share of the world's goods.⁴⁴

The God of this religion would not be an omnipotent one but a Life-Force that must carry out its work through man. Shaw explained his concept of this Life-Force and its relation to man as follows:

What you have got to understand is that somehow or other there is at the back of the universe a will, a life-force. You cannot think of him as a person, you have to think of him as a great purpose, a great will, and, furthermore, you have to think of him as engaged in a continual struggle to produce something higher and higher, to create organs to carry out his purpose; as wanting hands, and saying, "I must create something with hands"; arriving at that very slowly, after innumerable mistakes, because this power must be proceeding as we proceed, because if there were any other way it would put us in that way: we know that in all the progress we make we proceed by way of trial and error and experiment. Now conceive of the force behind the universe as a bodiless, impotent force, having no executive power of its own, wanting instruments, something to carry out its will in the world, making all manner of experiments, creating reptiles, birds, animals, trying one thing after another, rising higher and higher in the scale of organism, and finally producing man, and then inspiring man, putting his will into him, getting him to carry out his purpose, saying to him, "Remember, you

⁴³Ibid., pp. 57-58.

⁴⁴Ibid.

are not here merely to look after yourself. I have made you to do my work; I have made your brain, and I want you to work with that and try to find out the purpose of the universe; and when one instrument is worn out, I will make another, and another, always more and more intelligent and effective." One difficulty is that so many of the earlier efforts of this world-force--for example, the tiger--remains, and the incompatibility between them and man exists in the human being himself as the result of early experiments, so that there are certain organs in your body which are perishing away and are of no use and actually interfere with your later organs. And here you have, as it seems to me, the explanation of that great riddle which used to puzzle people--evil and pain.⁴⁵

Shaw did not present these ideas as new ones or as original with him. He said that much of this truth was to be found in the articles of the Church of England and in the writings of modern poets. He also believed that his religious truths were not irreconcilable with the Bible but were to be found in the teachings of Christ. Shaw said that his truth was not an idle heresy but a truth that ". . . has been germinating in people's minds for a century past and for much more than that in the great poets and leaders of mankind."⁴⁶

In his preface to Androcles and the Lion, Shaw discussed the teachings of the New Testament and concluded

⁴⁵Shaw, "The New Theology," *ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 19.

that the teaching of Jesus contained much of the truth to which he subscribed. The doctrine that Shaw found unacceptable was almost entirely that which the disciples of Jesus taught after the crucifixion. Shaw was particularly opposed to the teaching of St. Paul. According to Shaw, the Christian churches have adopted Pauline Christianity instead of Jesus' Christianity. Shaw attributes the success of Pauline Christianity to its placing a ". . . premium on sin." Shaw abhors this "Salvationist" doctrine that removes moral responsibility from the individual by teaching that all sins were atoned for by the crucifixion of Christ, and that one can commit any sin and go to Heaven afterwards.⁴⁷

Although he rejected completely the Salvationism of Paul, Shaw found himself in agreement with what he believed were the essential truths of Jesus. Shaw did not accept Jesus as a supernatural authority, but this rejection of Jesus' divinity did not prevent Shaw from accepting Jesus as a great thinker with a very real message. After denying the divinity of Jesus, Shaw said,

⁴⁷George Bernard Shaw, Androcles and the Lion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1962), 400-401.

But when, having entirely got rid of Salvationist Christianity, and even contracted a prejudice against Jesus on the score of his involuntary connection with it, we engage on a purely scientific study of economics, criminology, and biology, and find that our practical conclusions are virtually those of Jesus, we are distinctly pleased and encouraged to find that we were doing him an injustice, and that the nimbus that surrounds his head in the pictures may be interpreted some day as a light of science rather than a declaration of sentiment or a label of idolatry.⁴⁸

The doctrines ascribed to Jesus by Shaw and that Shaw found acceptable are as follows:

1. The kingdom of heaven is within you. You are the son of God; and God is the son of man. God is a spirit, to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and not an elderly gentleman to be bribed and begged from. We are members one of another; so that you cannot injure or help your neighbor without injuring or helping yourself. God is your father: you are here to do God's work; and you and your father are one.
2. Get rid of property by throwing it into the common stock. Disassociate your work entirely from money payments. If you let a child starve you are letting God starve. Get rid of all anxiety about tomorrow's dinner and clothes, because you cannot serve two masters: God and Mammon.
3. Get rid of judges and punishment and revenge. Love your neighbor as yourself, he being a part of yourself. And love your enemies: they are your neighbors.
4. Get rid of your family entanglements. Every mother you meet is as much your mother as the woman

⁴⁸George Bernard Shaw, Androcles and the Lion, in Bernard Shaw's Ready Reckoner, ed. by N. H. Leigh-Taylor (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. 23-24.

that bore you. Every man you meet is as much your brother as the man she bore after you. Dont waste your time at family funerals grieving for your relatives: attend to life, not to death: there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and better. In the kingdom of heaven, which as aforesaid, is within you, there is no marriage nor giving in marriage, because you cannot devote your life to two divinities: God and the person you are married to.⁴⁹

Although Shaw believed that the doctrine of Jesus was sound and must be implemented if society is to improve itself, he recognized that any individual attempt to follow the teaching of Jesus would be futile under the present social system. If one person follows the advice of Jesus and sells his property to give to the poor, he will only have succeeded in becoming poor himself. Whoever purchases his land and his shares ". . . will continue all those activities which oppress the poor." Nor would conditions be improved if all men took the advice and sold all their property. The result would be a complete collapse of the economy because ". . . the shares will fall to zero and the lands be unsaleable." Thus, Shaw concluded that Christianity cannot be practiced either individually or collectively in the present system.⁵⁰ If

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 24.

⁵⁰Shaw, Androcles and the Lion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 372.

Christianity is to be a success, there must be a revolutionary change in government. Shaw discussed the necessity for governmental implementation of Jesus' teachings:

We must therefore bear in mind that whereas, in the time of Jesus, and in the ages which grew darker and darker after his death until the darkness, after a brief false dawn in the Reformation and the Renaissance, culminated in the commercial night of the nineteenth century, it was believed that you could not make men good by Act of Parliament, we now know that you cannot make them good in any other way, and that a man who is better than his fellows is a nuisance. The rich man must sell up not only himself but his whole class; and that can be done only through the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The disciple cannot have his bread without money until there is bread for everybody without money; and that requires an elaborate municipal organization of the food supply, rate supported. Being members one of another means One Man One Vote, and One Woman One Vote, and universal suffrage and equal incomes and all sorts of modern political measures. Even in Syria in the time of Jesus his teachings could not possibly have been realized by a series of independent explosions of personal righteousness on the part of the separate units of the population. Jerusalem could not have done what even a village community cannot do, and what Robinson Crusoe himself could not have done if his conscience, and the stern compulsion of Nature, had not imposed a common rule on the half dozen Robinson Crusoes who struggled within him for not wholly compatible satisfactions. And what cannot be done in Jerusalem or Juan Fernandez cannot be done in London, New York, Paris, and Berlin.

In short, Christianity, good or bad, right or wrong, must perforce be left out of the question in human affairs until it is made practically applicable to them by complicated political devices; and to pretend that a field preacher under the governorship of Pontius Pilate, or even Pontius Pilate himself in council with all the wisdom of Rome, could have

worked out applications of Christianity or any other system of morals for the twentieth century, is to shelve the subject much more effectually than Nero and all its other persecutors ever succeeded in doing. Personal righteousness, and the view that you cannot make people moral by Act of Parliament, is, in fact, the favorite defensive resort of the people who, consciously or subconsciously, are quite determined not to have their property meddled with by Jesus or any other reformer.⁵¹

Thus, Shaw advocated the implementation of what he considered to be the essential truths of Jesus by the overthrow of the present system of government and its replacement with a government that would legislate the Christian ideals of equality and justice.

Shaw did not want to accept the entire Bible, the New Testament, or even all of the teaching of Jesus as a guidebook for the Christian state. Shaw was selective in deciding which parts of the Bible contain important truths and which do not. He did not believe that one must accept the whole Bible as the inspired word of God, or else reject it entirely.⁵² He did not think that the old

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 372-373.

⁵²George Bernard Shaw, The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., Inc., Capricorn Books, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 85.

ideas contained in the Old Testament should be mixed with those of the New Testament. Nor should those ideas contained in the New Testament which are no longer practical be clung to. The desire to hold on to old ideas in the face of new and better ones was, to Shaw, ridiculous. He said,

It forgets the prudent old precept, "Don't throw out your dirty water until you get in your clean" which is the very devil unless completed by "This I also say unto you, that when you get your fresh water you must throw out the dirty, and be particularly careful not to let the two get mixed."⁵³

To Shaw, the Bible represents

. . . a record of how the idea of God, which is the first effort of civilized mankind to account for the existence and origin and purpose of as much of the universe as we are conscious of, [and] develops from a childish idolatry of a thundering, earth-quaking, famine striking, pestilence launching, blinding, deafening, killing destructively omnipotent Bogey Man, maker of night and day and sun and moon, of the four seasons and their miracles of seed and harvest, to a braver idealization of a benevolent sage, a just judge, an affectionate father, evolving finally into the incorporeal word that never becomes flesh, . . .⁵⁴

⁵³Ibid., p. 76.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 88.

Thus, the Bible is valuable as an historical account of man's developing concept of God, but, as Shaw said:

. . . we spoil it all by that lazy and sluttish practice of not throwing out the dirty water when we get in the clean. The Bible presents us with a succession of gods, each being a striking improvement on the previous one, marking an Ascent of Man to a nobler and deeper conception of Nature, every step involving a purification of the water of life and calling for a thorough emptying and cleansing of the vessel before its replenishment by a fresh and cleaner supply. But we baffle the blessing by just sloshing the water from the new fountain into the contents of the dirty old bucket, and repeat this folly until our minds are in such a filthy mess that we are objects of pity to the superficial but clear-headed atheists who are content without metaphysics and can see nothing in the whole business but its confusions and absurdities. Practical men of business refuse to be bothered with such crazy matters at all.⁵⁵

Shaw satirized this "dirty water theology" in The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God. He wrote this, the most controversial of his nondramatic writings, in Kenya in 1932. Its publication brought ". . . storms of protest and indignation" ⁵⁶ In Shaw and Christianity, Abbott explains that this public reaction was a natural one because Shaw reached his zenith of unorthodoxy and seeming irreverence.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 89.

⁵⁶Abbott, Shaw and Christianity, pp. 78-79.

In his prefaces and other essays he had scandalized the public by talking about God, Christ, the Bible, and the Church in what was to them a sacrilegious way, but in The Black Girl he goes even further by putting his own views into the mouths of the prophets, Christ and even God himself.⁵⁷

Abbott also discusses the unique literary form of The Black Girl, and he explains the importance of The Black Girl as a statement of Shaw's concept of religion. Abbott says that The Black Girl cannot be classified as either a novel or a short story. Because it contains devices used in Plato's dialogues, the Book of Job, and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, " . . . this 'tale,' as Shaw calls it, may best be termed a series of allegorical dialogues in narrative form."⁵⁸ The Black Girl, in satirizing the "dirty water theology" of the masses, is also representative of Shaw's own journey in search of God. "As a result the work stands as the nearest thing we have to a summary of Shaw's attitudes toward Christianity."⁵⁹

The story opens with the black girl's question, "'Where is God?'" The missionary tells her to seek God

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 79.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 80.

and she will find him. Being innocent and sincere, the girl takes the missionary's instruction literally and goes on a journey through the forest in search of God. She takes with her a Bible and a knobkerry.⁶⁰ The first God that she encounters is the Old Testament God of Abraham who is an ". . . aristocratic looking white man with handsome regular features, an imposing beard and luxuriant wavy hair, both as white as isinglass, and a ruthlessly severe expression."⁶¹ She, like Shaw, rejects this God who loves ". . . the smell of newly spilled blood."⁶² The next God she meets is the argumentative God of Job. She rejects this God too when he cannot explain the presence of both good and evil in the world and wants only to argue.⁶³ She next meets Koheleth, the Ecclesiastes preacher, who tells her that ". . . to know God is to be God."⁶⁴ This thought represents an improvement over the teachings of the two previous Gods. In her confrontation with the prophet Micah, he instructs her to follow blindly

⁶⁰Shaw, Black Girl, pp. 7-9.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 10.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 14-15.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 20.

the guidance of God, and she cannot accept this. She reasons that since God has given her eyes with which to see and a mind to use, she cannot ask him to see and think for her.⁶⁵

Just as Shaw as a youth first broke away from orthodoxy by dismissing the various pictures of God in the Old Testament as false, so the black girl disposes of her new acquaintances quickly with the help of her wits and her knobkerry.⁶⁶

Shaw's rejection of the scientific explanation of the world as being the result of accident with no divine purpose is illustrated when the black girl meets Pavlov. She rejects him because he refuses to believe in the existence of the soul. His reason for disbelieving is that the soul cannot be examined in a laboratory experiment.⁶⁷ She rejects just as completely the Roman soldier who represents justice with its revenge and punishment.⁶⁸ Shaw was no more favorably disposed toward secular institutions than religious ones.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 23.

⁶⁶Abbott, Shaw and Christianity, p. 80.

⁶⁷Shaw, Black Girl, pp. 29-30.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 31-32.

The black girl next encounters the conjuror or Jesus. She thinks she has at last found God when he tells her that God is within her. Her hopes are shattered, however, when he exhibits his ability to perform miracles by making a cup disappear. Shaw did not accept Christ as a miracle-worker. He is concerned in The Black Girl ". . . with the blind manner in which many Christians accept the superstitious element in the Holy Eucharist and the purely supernatural part of Christ."⁶⁹

The black girl continues her journey and encounters St. Peter and several others, all of whom carry churches; each person claims that his is the true Church. An argument ensues and they begin throwing stones at each other. Thus, Shaw points out the ridiculous and destructive nature of interdenominational conflict.

Though the black girl cannot accept any of the specific denominations, she has not forgotten Christ; for, after a brief interlude with the Caravans of the Curious, a group of intellectual Philistines who talk pretentiously and senselessly about serious problems, she meets him again, this time posing on a large wooden cross for an artist.⁷⁰

⁶⁹Abbott, Shaw and Christianity, pp. 80-81.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 81.

Jesus laments that people do not listen to his message but worship him as an idol. He says,

But they refuse to believe me unless I do conjuring tricks for them; and when I do them they only throw me coppers and sometimes tickeys, and say what a wonderful man I am, and that there has been nobody like me ever on earth; but they go on being foolish and wicked and cruel all the same.⁷¹

Present also is an Arab who represents Islam and he writes ". . . terrible stories of the Day of Judgement, and of the hell in which evildoers will suffer eternally." And he also tells of a beautiful heaven ". . . maintained for those who do the will of Allah."⁷² Of Mahomet, the founder of Islam, Shaw says that he had

. . . made a colossal stride ahead from mere stock-and-stone idolatry to a very enlightened Unitarianism; but though he died a conqueror, and therefore escaped being made the chief attraction in an Arabian Chamber of Horrors, he found it impossible to control his Arabs without enticing and intimidating them by promises of a delightful life for the faithful, and threats of an eternity of disgusting torment for the wicked, after their bodily death, and also, after some honest protests, by accepting the supernatural character thrust on him by the childish superstition of his followers; so that he,

⁷¹Shaw, Black Girl, p. 51.

⁷²Ibid., p. 54.

too, now needs to be rediscovered in his true nature before Islam can come back to earth as a living faith.⁷³

Shaw's love of art is apparent in his description of the image maker's concept of God. The artist's concept of God as one who is himself an artist and strives to create things of beauty and perfection is similar to Shaw's doctrine of Creative Evolution. The black girl rejects the artist's Venus, however, because it is made of cold marble.⁷⁴

After her rejection of Jesus on the cross, the Arab, and the artist, the black girl encounters Voltaire in his garden. With Voltaire is an Irishman who greatly resembles Shaw. Voltaire tells her to dig in the garden for God. He says that humanity cannot bear the full presence of God ". . . until we have fulfilled all His purposes and become gods ourselves." Since man will never fulfill all the purposes of God, he can only ". . . cultivate this garden to His glory." The girl follows Voltaire's advice and gives up her search for God. She settles down and marries the Irishman. Her final

⁷³Ibid., p. 94.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 58-59.

concept of God is similar to Shaw's concept of the Life-Force.⁷⁵

Shaw's belief in Creative Evolution was maintained to his death. He wrote in his Last Will and Testament:

As my religious convictions and scientific views cannot at present be more specifically defined than those of a believer in Creative Evolution I desire that no public monument or work of art or inscription or sermon or ritual service commemorating me shall suggest that I accepted the tenets peculiar to any established Church or denomination nor take the form of a cross or any other instrument of torture or symbol of blood sacrifice.⁷⁶

In spite of his unorthodox religious views, Shaw was close friends with ". . . two of the outstanding religious figures of his time, the Anglican Dean of St. Paul's, William Ralph Inge, and the Roman Catholic Abbess of Stanbrook. . . ." ⁷⁷ Neither of these friends could totally agree with Shaw's theology, but on Shaw's ninetieth birthday Dean Inge indicated that even Christ would say of Shaw that the playwright was not far from the Kingdom of God.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 68-72.

⁷⁶Abbott, Shaw and Christianity, p. 89, quoting G. Bernard Shaw: Last Will and Testament, Foreword by William D. Chase (Flint, Michigan, 1954), p. 1.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 84.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 85.

C H A P T E R I I

RELIGION AND THE INDIVIDUAL: DEFINING THE RELIGIOUS PERSON AND EXPOSING THE IRRELIGIOUS PERSON IN DRAMA

George Bernard Shaw used the theatre as a means of transmitting his religious views. In a statement to the Parliamentary Committee on Censorship in 1909, he explained why he wrote plays:

I am not an ordinary playwright in general practice. I am a specialist in immoral and heretical plays. My reputation has been gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to reconsider its morals. In particular, I regard much current morality as to economic and sexual relations as disastrously wrong; and I regard certain doctrines of the Christian religion as understood in England with abhorrence. I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinions in these matters.¹

In his drama, Shaw's rejection of established religion is achieved, in part, through the characters that he creates. Shaw's concept of the truly religious person becomes apparent in his drama. Several of his characters

¹C. B. Purdom, A Guide to the Plays of Bernard Shaw (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1963), p. 98.

are representatives of established religions but are shown to be, nevertheless, basically irreligious. Others, though nonconformist in their religious views, are representatives of Shaw's definition of the religious person.

In The Devil's Disciple, the favored characters are an inversion of the typical religious character types. The long-suffering mother, the friendly minister, the devoted wife, and the strong military man all undergo severe changes at the hands of Shaw, and behind each change is an ideological purpose. The "long-suffering" mother says of her son, "Well, I am Richard's mother. If I am against him who has any right to be for him?"² The "long-suffering" mother feels put upon by her motherhood in general:

D'ye think I've not had enough trouble and care put upon me bringing up my own girls, let alone you and your good-for-nothing brother, without having your uncle's bastards--.³

Mrs. Dudgeon, the "long-suffering" mother, is the conventional religious Puritan woman; but Shaw, in creating her, indicates that her religion is a shallow one based on

²George Bernard Shaw, The Devil's Disciple, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1962), 277.

³Ibid., p. 274.

self-denial. Shaw describes her face as ". . . grimly trenched by the channels into which the barren forms and observances of a dead Puritanism can pen a bitter temper and a fierce pride."⁴ She is accepted in the community as a religious woman:

She is an elderly matron who has worked hard and got nothing by it except dominion and detestation in her sordid home, and an unquestioned reputation for piety and respectability among her neighbors, to whom drink and debauchery are still so much more tempting than religion and rectitude, that they conceive goodness simply as self-denial. This conception is easily extended to others-denial, and finally generalized as covering anything disagreeable. So Mrs Dudgeon, being exceedingly disagreeable, is held to be exceedingly good. Short of flat felony, she enjoys complete license except for amiable weaknesses of any sort, and is consequently, without knowing it, the most licentious woman in the parish on the strength of never having broken the seventh commandment or missed a Sunday at the Presbyterian Church.⁵

In Mrs. Dudgeon's concept of religion as self-denial there is also the belief in an elaborate system of reward and punishment. She practices self-denial in the hope that she will be rewarded both in this world and in the next. She has refused to marry the man she loved,

⁴Ibid., p. 271.

⁵Ibid.

believing that love is a form of self-indulgence.⁶ She does not love her children and attempts to force her religious beliefs on them. She tells her sleepy son, Christy, "Get up out of that; and be ashamed of yourself--sleeping, and your father dead!"⁷ She is particularly hostile toward her son Dick. She cannot tolerate his lack of respect for her self-denial, and she disapproves of his self-indulgence. The example that she has set in the home has caused him to turn away from her and become the Devil's Disciple. Because he rejects her, Mrs. Dudgeon says of Dick, "He will be punished for it--in both worlds."⁸ When her husband's will is read, she is shocked by its injustice; Dick is rewarded and she is punished. She exclaims, "And this is my reward!"⁹

Mrs. Dudgeon and her son Dick represent, respectively, the religious conformist who is irreligious and the religious nonconformist who is religious. She hides an irreligious nature beneath a pious facade, and he hides a

⁶Ibid., p. 278.

⁷Ibid., p. 279.

⁸Ibid., p. 277.

⁹Ibid., p. 290.

religious nature beneath the cloak of the Devil's Disciple.¹⁰ Dick deliberately antagonizes everyone who has gathered for the reading of his father's will except Essie. She is the "irregular" child of his favorite uncle, and Dick is tender toward her. He knows that his mother has been unkind to the child.¹¹ Dick attributes his kindness to his worship of the devil:

I was brought up in the other service; but I knew from the first that the Devil was my natural master and captain and friend. I saw that he was in the right, and the world cringed to his conqueror only through fear. I prayed secretly to him; and he comforted me, and saved me from having my spirit broken in this house of children's tears. I promised him my soul, and swore an oath that I would stand up for him in this world and stand by him in the next. . . . That promise and that oath made a man of me. From this day this house is his home; and no child shall cry in it: this hearth is his altar; and no child shall ever cower over it in the dark evenings and be afraid.¹²

Dick's rejection of his mother's God is shocking to those around him. Judith Anderson, the minister's wife, is a "good" woman who cannot understand Dick. When he changes places with her husband and is arrested, she thinks

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 287-288.

¹²Ibid., pp. 293-294.

he is doing it because he loves her. She does not understand the religious nature of his motivation. She urges him to save himself, and she indicates her willingness to leave her husband and go with him.¹³ But Dick replies:

If I said--to please you--that I did what I did ever so little for your sake, I lied as men always lie to women. You know how much I have lived with worthless men--aye, and worthless women too. Well, they could all rise to some sort of goodness and kindness when they were in love. . . . That has taught me to set very little store by the goodness that only comes out red hot. What I did last night, I did in cold blood, caring not half so much for your husband, or . . . for you . . . as I do for myself. I had no motive and no interest: all I can tell you is that when it came to the point whether I would take my neck out of the noose and put another man's into it, I could not do it. I don't know why not: I see myself as a fool for my pains; but I could not and I cannot. I have been brought up standing by the law of my own nature; and I may not go against it, gallows or no gallows. . . . I should have done the same for any other man in the town, or any other man's wife. . . . Do you understand that?¹⁴

The minister in The Devil's Disciple, Anthony Anderson, is criticized by Mrs. Dudgeon because he married for love.¹⁵ He is unlike the typical minister in that he refrains from exercising his prerogative as a minister to

¹³Ibid., pp. 321-322.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 322.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 279.

criticize Mrs. Dudgeon for her hypocrisy or Dick for his irreverence.¹⁶ He is active in his support of the rebels against King George, and he eventually gives up the ministry to become a full-time soldier. He explains his change as follows:

Sir: it is in the hour of trial that a man finds his true profession. This foolish young man . . . boasted himself the Devil's Disciple; but when the hour of trial came to him, he found that it was his destiny to suffer and be faithful to the death. I thought myself as a decent minister of the gospel of peace; but when the hour of trial came to me, I found that it was my destiny to be a man of action, and that my place was amid the thunder of the captains and the shouting. So I am starting life at fifty as Captain Anthony Anderson of the Springtown militia; and the Devil's Disciple here will start presently as the Reverend Richard Dudgeon, and wag his paw in my old pulpit, and give good advice to this silly sentimental little wife of mine. . . . Your mother told me, Richard, that I should never have chosen Judith if I'd been born for the ministry. I am afraid she was right; so, by your leave, you may keep my coat and I'll keep yours.¹⁷

Both Dick Dudgeon and Anthony Anderson change their positions in life, but neither man is criticized or made to look ridiculous by Shaw. They are different in many ways, but they are alike in that they finally realize

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 344-345.

that true religion for any man lies not in the observance of conventional obligations but in the discovery by each individual of the best that is within him.¹⁸

Characters similar to those in The Devil's Disciple appear in The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet. There are other similarities in the two plays as well. In the latter play, Shaw changed the setting from New England to the Old West, but the central situation and the hero are the same in both plays. Blanco Posnet is a rougher, cruder version of Dick Dudgeon and is even more determined than Dick to play the role of the bad man. Elder Daniels, with his hypocritical preoccupation with correct religious form, is similar to Mrs. Dudgeon. In both plays, the hero experiences a sudden conversion, is willingly captured and tried, and is given a last-minute reprieve.

Elder Daniels is a hypocritical drunkard who is primarily concerned with keeping up the appearance of religion. He also confuses his will with the will of God. Because he inverts the roles of God and man, Daniels represents institutional religion at its worst. He does not fulfill the Christian function of carrying out the will of

¹⁸Ibid.

God; nor does he fulfill the function of man to work for the growth of the Life-Force, as prescribed by Shaw. Confusing himself with God, Daniels uses religion as a convenient device to sanction his own personal desires. Using his religious authority, Daniels forces the townspeople to cooperate with him in his will to keep up the appearance of religious propriety in the irreligious atmosphere that prevails during the arrest and trial of Blanco Posnet. In one of his pious speeches, Daniels says, "While I am Elder here, I shall endeavour to keep up the dignity of Him I serve to the best of my ability."¹⁹

Blanco Posnet is a reprobate who is chosen to do the will of God in spite of his own wishes. The same force that causes Blanco to rise above himself and give a horse to a woman with a sick child eventually causes similar action by the townspeople. Blanco questions the reasoning behind such a force:

Why did I go soft myself? Why did the Sheriff go soft? Why did Feemy go soft? Whats this game that upsets our game? For seems to me theres two games bein played. Our game is a rotten game that makes me feel I'm dirt and that your all as rotten dirt as me. T' other game may be a silly game; but it aint rotten. When the

¹⁹Shaw, The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 247.

Sheriff played it he stopped being rotten. When Feemy played it the paint nearly dropped off her face. When I played it I cursed myself for a fool; but I lost the rotten feel all the same.²⁰

By his actions toward the woman and child, Blanco affirms the existence of the Life-Force within himself. His recognition of this higher purpose makes him a religious man. He is not likely to become associated with an established religion, but he has a religious purpose. He says:

No. No more paths. No more broad and narrow. No more good and bad. Theres no good and bad; but by Jiminy, gents, theres a rotten game, and theres a great game. I played the rotten game; but the great game was played on me; and now I'm for the great game everytime. Amen.²¹

Shaw's treatment of religious characters takes on a new dimension in Major Barbara. In this play the action arises from the conflict of ideas held by the major characters. In this play, Shaw creates characters with various ideologies which lead them to clashes of opinions. In Major Barbara conversion results from the rational imposition of one ideology upon another.

The characters in Major Barbara represent a number of religious attitudes. Lady Britomart and Stephen

²⁰Ibid., p. 274.

²¹Ibid., p. 275.

represent established religion. Lady Britomart is not a hypocrite, as is Mrs. Dudgeon in The Devil's Disciple. She conceives ". . .the universe exactly as if it were a large house in Wilton Crescent, though handling her corner of it very effectively. . . ." ²² For her, right and wrong mean good taste and poor taste, and she consistently acts on this assumption.

Stephen Undershaft is a more ridiculous character than his mother. He too represents the established religion, but he takes himself very seriously. In a discussion about Stephen's future, Undershaft asks him if he is interested in literature, art, philosophy, the army, the navy, the Church, or law. Stephen says he knows or cares nothing about any of them. Undershaft asks him if there is anything he knows or cares about, to which Stephen replies, "I know the difference between right and wrong." ²³ Undershaft ridicules Stephen for making such a statement:

You dont say so! What! no capacity for business, no knowledge of law, no sympathy with art, no pretension to philosophy; only a simple knowledge of the secret

²²Shaw, Major Barbara, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 341.

²³Ibid., pp. 414-415.

that has puzzled all the philosophers, baffled all the lawyers, muddled all the men of business, and ruined most of the artists; the secret of right and wrong. Why, man, youre a genius, a master of masters, a god! At twenty-four, too.²⁴

Shaw's treatment of the characters associated with the Salvation Army is sympathetic. Snobby Price and Rummy Mitchens are hypocrites but with reason. They confess to greater sins than they have committed in order to gratify the Salvation Army workers who give them the food they sorely need.²⁵ Peter Shirley is an humble man who is willing to work for what he needs. He accepts charity from the Salvation Army on the condition that he be allowed to pay it back when he can.²⁶ Bill Walker's sense of ethics makes him feel contrite when he hits Jenny Hill, and he tries to make amends.²⁷

Barbara's associates at the Salvation Army shelter are sincere, if misguided, women.- Jenny Hill shows remarkable fortitude in the face of a physical assault by Bill

²⁴Ibid., p. 415.

²⁵Ibid., p. 368.

²⁶Ibid., p. 370.

²⁷Ibid., p. 394.

Walker.²⁸ She acts on her religious conviction by freely forgiving Bill for hitting her.²⁹ Mrs. Baines is sincere but more practical than her co-workers. She feels that she is fulfilling a desirable religious purpose by feeding the poor and saving their souls, and at the same time, preventing riots by the poor against the rich. She does not refuse to take tainted money, but sees it as a gift from God. Of the whiskey maker's donation she says, "If heaven has found the way to make a good use of his money, are we to set ourselves up against the answer to our prayers?"³⁰

Cusins, Barbara's lover, is a humanist who joins the Salvation Army to please Barbara, and also because, as a "collector of religions," he is excited by the Dionysiac element in the Army's approach to religion.³¹

Barbara is, as Cusins says, ". . . quite original in her religion."³² She is a religious idealist whose beliefs are not the same as those of the other Salvation Army workers. She does not adhere strictly to the "Salvationist" doctrine of the Salvation Army.

²⁸Ibid., p. 372.

²⁹Ibid., p. 379.

³⁰Ibid., p. 399.

³¹Ibid., p. 385.

³²Ibid., p. 388.

Shaw is opposed to the "Salvationist" practices on which the Salvation Army is based:

And here my disagreement with the Salvation Army, and with all propagandists of the Cross (which I loathe as I loathe all gibbets) becomes deep indeed. Forgiveness, absolution, atonement, are figments: punishment is only a pretence of cancelling one crime by another; and you can no more have forgiveness without vindictiveness than you can have a cure without a disease. You will never get a high morality from people who conceive that their misdeeds are revocable and pardonable, or in a society where absolution and expiation are officially provided for us all.³³

Barbara requires more than confession of sin from Bill Walker as she guides him toward salvation. He has hit Jenny Hill and is troubled by his conscience when she forgives him. He talks with Barbara about his predicament, but she will not allow him to escape his conscience without completely reforming himself. He tries to bring about his own punishment by fighting Todger Fairmile.³⁴ Failing in this, he offers money in retribution, but Barbara says, "No: the Army is not to be bought. We want your soul, Bill; and we'll take nothing less."³⁵ Barbara almost

³³Ibid., p. 322.

³⁴Ibid., p. 393.

³⁵Ibid., p. 395.

persuades Bill that her way is the right way. She teaches him that he cannot pay for his sin by getting hit himself. She forgives him and refuses to accept his money in payment for his sin. The only choices she leaves him are to live with his guilty conscience or change his life and become a new man.³⁶

All that Barbara has worked for with Bill comes to an end when Mrs. Baines accepts tainted money in the form of a check from Undershaft. Barbara had refused Bill's money earlier, and now Bill sees Mrs. Baines accept a much larger sum of money from Undershaft. This prompts Bill to say, "Wot prawce selvytion nah?"³⁷

Barbara's religious faith is shattered by Mrs. Baines' acceptance of "tainted" money. She realizes that her idealism clashes with Mrs. Baines' pragmatism. She expresses her agony in words like those of Christ at the Crucifixion: "Drunkenness and Murder! My God: why hast thou forsaken me?"³⁸ Shaw's portrayal of Barbara in her religious crisis prompted one critic to write:

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 403.

³⁸Ibid.

It is a very honest and daring attempt to present the agony of a devout soul when the foundations of belief disappear. It is a play of a soul's tragedy--a theatrical adaptation of the most sacred of all themes. Since I saw the Passion Play at Oberammergau I have not seen any play which represented so vividly the pathos of Gethsemane, the tragedy of Calvary.³⁹

Barbara has to lose her old faith in order to find a new one. Shaw does not allow her faith to be destroyed without providing her with a newer, better one. She comes to realize that her association with the Salvation Army is an escape ". . . from the world into a paradise of enthusiasm and prayer and soul saving; . . . ,"⁴⁰ and that she must have a more realistic outlet for her religious fervor. She comes to accept something similar to Shaw's Creative Evolution, and sees herself as an instrument to carry out the work of the Life-Force:

My father shall never throw it in my teeth again that my converts were bribed with bread. . . . I have got rid of the bribe of bread. I have got rid of the bribe of heaven. Let God's work be done for its own sake: the work he had to create us to do because it cannot be done except by living men and women. When I die, let him be in my debt, not I in his; and let me forgive him as becomes a woman of my rank.⁴¹

³⁹Anthony S. Abbott, Shaw and Christianity (New York: The Seabury Press, 1965), p. 131.

⁴⁰Shaw, Major Barbara, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 443.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 444-445.

Barbara's father, Andrew Undershaft, is misunderstood by the other characters and appears to be a villain at the beginning of the play. Like Dick Dudgeon in The Devil's Disciple, Undershaft hides a religious nature under an irreligious facade. Lady Britomart tries to explain Undershaft's nature to her son Stephen:

But your father didn't exactly do wrong things: he said them and thought them: that was what was so dreadful. He really had a sort of religion of wrongness. Just as one doesn't mind men practising immorality so long as they own that they are in the wrong by preaching morality; so I couldn't forgive Andrew for preaching immorality while he practised morality.⁴²

Undershaft shocks Cusins by telling him that the two necessities for salvation are money and gunpowder. This is, of course, an irreligious statement, but it indicates the realistic nature of Undershaft's concept of religion. Money and gunpowder mean power and freedom, both of which are necessary in the furtherance of religious purposes. Cusins cannot accept a money-and-gunpowder religion, and he says to Undershaft, "Excuse me: is there any place in your religion for honor, justice, truth, love, mercy

⁴²Ibid., p. 349.

and so forth?"⁴³ To which Undershaft replies, "Yes: they are the graces and luxuries of a rich, strong, and safe life."⁴⁴

As a religious realist, Undershaft believes that financial security and freedom must precede morality. Because of this belief and his affection for Barbara, he wants to tear Barbara away from the Salvation Army. His motive is not simply a destructive one. He genuinely believes that the Salvation Army's approach to soul-saving is wrong and that Barbara cannot successfully fulfill her religious purpose until she breaks away from the Army. He explains this to Cusins:

Have you ever been in love with Poverty, like St Francis? Have you ever been in love with Dirt, like St Simeon? Have you ever been in love with disease and suffering, like our nurses and philanthropists? Such passions are not virtues, but the most unnatural of all the vices. This love of the common people may please an earl's granddaughter and a university professor; but I have been a common man and a poor man; and it has no romance for me. Leave it to the poor to pretend that poverty is a blessing; leave it to the coward to make a religion of his cowardice by preaching humility; we know better than that. We three must stand together above the common people: how else can we help their children to climb up beside us? Barbara must belong to us, not to the Salvation Army.⁴⁵

⁴³Ibid., p. 384.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 385.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 389.

Undershaft's pragmatism causes him to reject established religions because they do not fulfill the needs of people. He urges Barbara to do the same:

Well, you have made for yourself something that you call a morality or a religion or what not. It doesn't fit the facts. Well, scrap it. Scrap it and get one that does fit. That is what is wrong with the world at present. It scraps its obsolete steam engines and dynamos; but it won't scrap its old prejudices and its old moralities and its old religions and its old political constitutions. What's the result? In machinery it does very well; but in morals and religion and politics it is working at a loss that brings it nearer bankruptcy every year. Don't persist in that folly. If your old religion broke down yesterday, get a new and a better one for tomorrow.⁴⁶

Undershaft, in his own unorthodox way, is very much involved in soul-saving. He is concerned with the welfare of his fellowman, but his method of improving their lives is not through sermonizing; he provides them with economic security. He saves souls from what he calls the seven deadly sins. They are:

Food, clothing, firing, rent, taxes, respectability, and children. Nothing can lift those seven millstones from Man's neck but money; and the spirit cannot soar until the millstones are lifted.⁴⁷

This is salvation from the crime of poverty.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 433.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 434.

Major Barbara ends on an optimistic note as Barbara incorporates her father's realism into her concept of religion. She is still burning with soul-saving enthusiasm, but she will save souls that are free from the seven deadly sins. Cusins asks her, "Then the way of life lies through the factory of death."⁴⁸ And Barbara replies, "Yes, through the raising of hell to heaven and man to God, through the unveiling of an eternal light in the Valley of the Shadow."⁴⁹

Lady Britomart's view of religion as a matter of good taste is echoed in Androcles and the Lion. The conflict that arises between the Romans and the Christians is not entirely a matter of religious differences. The Captain reveals this in his attempt to persuade Lavinia to save herself: "I suggest to you that if you cannot burn a morsel /of incense as a matter of conviction, you might at least do so as a matter of good taste. . . ."⁵⁰ Once again, right and wrong become good taste and poor taste. He reasons that it is nonsense to become a martyr since martyrdom will not further the cause of Christianity.

With the exception of his portrayal of the Captain, Shaw is very critical of the Romans as religious

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 445.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Shaw, Androcles and the Lion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 437.

individuals. The Captain, like the other Romans, is a hypocrite, but he is a hypocrite because of his sense of duty to the state. The other Romans have no such excuse for their hypocrisy. Lentulus and Metullus use religion as an excuse to amuse themselves at the expense of the Christians.⁵¹ Caesar is a most despicable hypocrite. He is not a sincere believer in his own religion; he uses religion as an excuse to throw Christians to the lions to provide entertainment for himself and other spectators at the arena. He is so impressed by Ferrovius' killing of the six gladiators and by Androcles' "bewitching" of the lion that Caesar decides all Romans must convert to Christianity.⁵² His conversion to Christianity is no more sincere than his former religious practice. He mistakenly believes that it is militarily expedient that his gladiators convert to Christianity. Obviously, Caesar has not accepted the Christian doctrine of pacifism. Christianity has not really triumphed; it is employed only as a political convenience.⁵³

Each of the Christians in the play has his own version of Christianity. Ferrovius uses his physical

⁵¹Ibid., p. 441.

⁵²Ibid., p. 465.

⁵³Ibid.

strength to convert others.⁵⁴ His nature is that of a fighter and he makes a genuine effort to control himself and practice Christian pacifism.⁵⁵ Although sincere in his desire to be a Christian, Ferrovius learns that he must follow his true nature when faced with a hard test. After killing six Romans he says:

In my youth I worshipped Mars, the God of War. I turned from him to serve the Christian god: but today the Christian god forsook me; and Mars overcame me and took back his own. The Christian god is not yet. He will come when Mars and I are dust; but meanwhile I must serve the gods that are, not the God that will be. Until then I accept service in the Guard, Caesar.⁵⁶

Ferrovius discovers that he must follow his own nature; his nature is still very physical. He cannot follow the example of Christ until his nature is changed through evolution. Meanwhile, he will not be a hypocrite.

Spintho is a pitiful character for whom religion is no more than a belief in stories.⁵⁷ He bases his religion on the salvationist doctrine that allows man to escape

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 445.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 459.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 470.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 462.

moral responsibility for his actions. He agrees to burn incense to the Roman Gods, believing that he can be forgiven and saved at a later date. After agreeing to sacrifice to the Roman gods, he says:

I'll repent afterwards. I fully mean to die in the arena: I'll die a martyr and go to heaven; but not this time, not now, not until my nerves are better. Besides, I'm too young: I want to have just one more good time.⁵⁸

Ironically, Spintho is the only Christian to die. His cowardice brings about his own death.⁵⁹

Androcles' strongest conviction is that animals should be treated kindly. He, like the other Christians, faces death in the arena. When he is facing his test, he sees himself as no more a martyred Christian than a martyred tailor. He says: "No: on the faith of a Christian and the honor of a tailor, I accept the lot that has fallen on me. . . . Caesar: go to your box and see how a tailor can die."⁶⁰ He is willing to die because something within him, no matter whether it is called Christian faith or tailor's honor, causes him to put personal considerations aside.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 453.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 454.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 466-467.

Lavinia, too, believes in a guiding force but considers its name unimportant. She refuses to kneel before a statue of Diana, not because it is contrary to her Christian belief, but because the Romans are insincere in their religion. The statue has come to symbolize not religion, but oppression and terror. She explains to the Captain:

Religion is such a great thing that when I meet really religious people we are friends at once, no matter what name we give to the divine will that made us and moves us. Oh, do you think that I, a woman, would quarrel with you for sacrificing to a woman god like Diana, if Diana meant to you what Christ means to me? No: we should kneel side by side before her altar like two children. But when men who believe neither in my god nor in their own--men who do not know the meaning of the word religion--when these men drag me to the foot of an iron statue that has become the symbol of the terror and darkness through which they walk, of their cruelty and greed, of their hatred of God and their oppression of man--when they ask me to pledge my soul before the people that this hideous idol is God, and that all this wickedness and falsehood is divine truth, I cannot do it, not if they could put a thousand cruel deaths on me.⁶¹

She further explains that to accept Diana would be against her nature. Lavinia, like Ferrovius, realizes that she must ultimately follow her own nature even if it causes her

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 439-440.

to go against some Christian doctrines. She must follow the will of the Life-Force within her as it presently guides her.

Like Ferrovius in Androcles and the Lion, Julius Caesar in Caesar and Cleopatra is a warrior who believes in the wisdom of practicing Christian pacifism. Although he has killed men in battle, Caesar preaches pacifism to Cleopatra after he learns that Ftatateeta, her servant, has killed Cleopatra's enemies. Caesar explains to Cleopatra that murder, no matter how it is justified, is wrong. The murders committed by Ftatateeta must be avenged; thus, murder will continue endlessly. Caesar explains,

And so, to the end of history, murder shall breed murder, always in the name of right and honor and peace, until the gods are tired of blood and create a race that can understand.⁶²

Joan in Saint Joan finds that she must fulfill a religious purpose that is contrary to the teachings of the Church. She has a deep spiritual nature like Barbara in Major Barbara and Lavinia in Androcles and the Lion, but her method of fulfilling her religious purpose is more

⁶²Shaw, Caesar and Cleopatra, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 457.

vigorous than theirs. She has the audacity and the determination to lead men in war in order to obey the will of God. The Church is upset by Joan's personal kind of religion. The churchmen recognize it as a threat to the established system of religion, and they oppose Joan. The clash arises from the threat to the power of the institution presented by the force of individuality.

Most of the churchmen in the play are sincere in their religious beliefs and not treated badly by Shaw. He does not portray the Inquisitor or Cauchon as evil but simply as men defending the Church. The Inquisitor states the position of the Church in such a way as to make the reader understand the serious nature of the problem created by Joan's individuality and audacity in her religious practice. By flying against traditional doctrine and with such success, Joan threatened the very existence of the Church and its hierarchy.

Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais, is not opposed to Joan as a person, but he fights what she represents. He believes that Joan is a helpless agent of the Devil who is using her to destroy the Church. Cauchon wants Joan destroyed only if she will not recant her heretical remarks. He expresses his intention to try to save Joan's soul, and

he regards the soul of this peasant girl as being as important as the soul of a king or bishop. When Joan is burned, Cauchon believes that her death is necessary for the preservation of the Church. Cauchon's sincere belief in the necessity of protecting the Church against its destruction by the Devil is the Bishop's sole purpose in prosecuting Joan.

Ladvenu, a monk, tries to save Joan as her trial progresses. He, like Cauchon, recognizes that Joan represents a threat to the Church but is more compassionate than the other churchmen. He tries to excuse Joan's heretical behavior on the grounds that she is a simple country girl, ignorant of her heresy. He tries to save her by explaining her heresy to her and by pleading with her to repent. It is Ladvenu's hand that guides Joan's hand when she signs the form of recantation. Then, when Joan chooses to burn rather than be imprisoned, it is Ladvenu who goes with her to the fire. He carries a cross for her to look at and stays with her at the fire until he is almost burned too. When Joan dies, Ladvenu believes that she is beginning a new life in Heaven.

Contrasting the religious sincerity of Ladvenu is the hypocrisy of Master de Stogumber. Chaplain de Stogumber

is far less religious than patriotic. He is extremely offended by Joan's repeated victories over the English. He is a most ridiculous figure because Shaw develops him satirically as a jingoist. The Chaplain calls Joan a witch and attributes her military victories to sorcery. Later, he complains because she does not do her religious duty by turning her conquests over to the English. He reasons that if God gave Joan the ability to be a leader, it is only fair that she turn this ability into profit for England. He lists her rebellions against Nature, the Church and God. He reasons that these rebellions are simply excuses for her to rebel against England, and this last rebellion cannot be endured. For Joan's rebellion against England, she must burn. When Joan burns, de Stogumber is pleased that the man who gave her a make-shift cross is an Englishman. His repentance after Joan is burned does little to improve this disagreeable character. Hence, in him we see a portrayal of what Shaw conceives as the epitome of the evil-doer wearing the cloak of Christianity.

Joan is betrayed by her own innocence, and prefers to burn rather than be imprisoned for the rest of her life. Shaw does not allow the play to end with her death, however. In the Epilogue, Joan is revealed to be such a

truly religious person that the world is not ready to accept her goodness. Joan is completely a religious outsider. She is not welcome back in the world even after she has been declared a saint. Such people in power as kings and bishops are uncomfortable in the presence of saints because saints do not follow the morally "easy" pattern of behavior. Saints have such a tendency to defy tradition, attack venerated institutions, and in general create havoc in a stagnating society, that it is difficult to tell a saint from a heretic or even a lunatic. It is more comfortable for most people if the saint remains safely dead. Joan learns this and the play ends with her saying, "O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?"⁶³

Father Keegan in John Bull's Other Island is also a religious outsider. He expresses strong opinions against the capitalistic exploitation of Ireland by the British. He expounds a theory about the nature of heaven that is in reality a restatement of Shaw's theory of creative evolution. Under the guise of a madman, he is at liberty to make bold statements concerning the divinity of man and of the

⁶³Shaw, Saint Joan, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, II, 429.

unity of the Church, the State and the people. His views are not those of the Church, but he is not burned as Joan is. Instead, he is cast out of the Church and regarded as a madman.⁶⁴ He, like Joan, realizes that the world is not a fit place for a truly religious person. In answer to Larry's question about the mystery of the world, Keegan says:

This world, sir, is very clearly a place of torment and penance, a place where the fool flourishes and the good and wise are hated and persecuted, . . . it is plain to me that this earth of ours must be hell, and that we are all here, as the Indian revealed to me--perhaps he was sent to reveal it to me--to expiate crimes committed by us in a former existence.⁶⁵

Shaw's sympathetic treatment of Father Keegan does not extend to all representatives of the clergy portrayed in Shavian drama. It is significant that Father Keegan in John Bull's Other Island and Anthony Anderson in The Devil's Disciple, both sympathetically portrayed clergymen, find that they can best fulfill their religious purposes outside the pulpit. George Fox in "In Good King Charles's Golden Days" is also unconventional in his

⁶⁴Shaw, John Bull's Other Island, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, II, 584.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 585.

religious views, but one character says to him, "Pray for me, Friend Fox: I think you have God by the ear closer than the bishops."⁶⁶ In Getting Married the two clergymen, the Bishop of Chelsea and his curate Soames, are allowed to give their unconventional views of marriage. The bishop is one of the favored characters in the play, and Soames, though often laughed at, is never harshly ridiculed.⁶⁷ This is true also of Morell in Candida. At times he and his curate, Lexy Mills, are made to look ridiculous, but Shaw allows them their say and does not treat them maliciously.⁶⁸

Other members of the clergy do not fare so well in Shaw's plays. Samuel Gardner, the clergyman in Mrs. Warren's Profession, is a pompous hypocrite who consorted with Mrs. Warren when she was a barmaid and tried to buy his letters from her to protect himself. He is also prone to alcoholism, and he buys his sermons instead of writing them himself;⁶⁹ but even he is not made to look as ridiculous

⁶⁶Shaw, "In Good King Charles's Golden Days", in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, VI, 23.

⁶⁷Shaw, Getting Married, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, IV, 454-455.

⁶⁸Shaw, Candida, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 222-223.

⁶⁹Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 74.

as some of Shaw's clerical characters. The Elder and his son in Too True to Be Good are examples of the worst kinds of clergymen. The Elder will not believe in God or science but makes a ridiculous religion of atheism. He explains his nonbelief:

Nothing can save us from a perpetual headlong fall into a bottomless abyss but a solid footing of dogma; and we no sooner agree to that than we find that the only trustworthy dogma is that there is no dogma.⁷⁰

The son, Aubrey, reconciles his thievery with his religion. He was formerly an army chaplain and has since made his living by stealing. He says, "I shall spend another six years on the make, and then I shall retire and be a saint."⁷¹

The bishop in Geneva is perhaps the most ridiculous of all the clergymen portrayed by Shaw. He is not the most hypocritical nor the most evil, but he drops dead from narrow-mindedness. He launches an attack on Karl Marx because Marx said religion is an opiate for the poor. The Bishop asks the Russian Commissar if the Komintern teaches such blasphemy. The Commissar says it is impossible to

⁷⁰Shaw, Too True to Be Good, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, IV, 696.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 701.

teach this because there are no poor in Russia. This statement so shocks the poor bishop that he immediately drops dead.⁷²

The missionary in Captain Brassbound's Conversion may be the least successful of all the clergymen described by Shaw. He has been a missionary to a particular part of North Africa for twenty-five years. In all that time he has made one convert. That one convert is a fellow Englishman, not a native of Africa. The convert, Drinkwater, is a scoundrel and a brigand. This example of missionary zeal makes the whole idea of attempting to spread "Salvationism" into all the world seem ridiculous.⁷³

Shaw's portrayal of religious characters in his drama reveals that he can acknowledge the validity of an individual's religious concept if the person is sincere, if the religion is compatible with that person's nature, and if the religion as practiced is beneficial to society. He attacks religious hypocrisy at all levels; thus, a number of the religiously orthodox characters are made ridiculous. Occasionally, as in John Bull's Other Island and Saint Joan,

⁷²Shaw, Geneva, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 671.

⁷³Shaw, Captain Brassbound's Conversion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 604.

Shaw seems to have given up hope for the betterment of the world by religious persons, but more often his drama is an expression of his optimistic view of man continually striving to improve society through selfless actions and with some hope of success.

C H A P T E R I I I

RELIGION FOR SOCIAL REFORM

As a professed realist, George Bernard Shaw worked to bring about changes in society. His drama was a medium through which he could reveal his views on the ills of society and propose cures for those ills. The ills of society were curable in Shaw's opinion through his concept of religion. His rejection of established religion through the characters that he created was only a part of his use of drama as a vehicle to carry his message of religious reform. Shaw recognized that the religious ideas that he proposed would not be effective in bringing social change if they were put into practice only by individuals acting independently of each other; therefore, Shaw went beyond his creating of individual irreligious characters representative of established religion, and beyond his creating of characters who were nonconformist in their religious views but representative of his definition of the religious person. Many of Shaw's plays have themes that call for social reform through implementation of his concept of religion, not by individuals, but by governments. Shaw said:

. . . Christianity, good or bad, right or wrong, must perforce be left out of the question in human affairs until it is made practically applicable to them by complicated political devices; and to pretend that a field preacher under the governorship of Pontius Pilate, or even Pontius Pilate himself in council with all the wisdom of Rome, could have worked out applications of Christianity or any other system of morals for the twentieth century, is to shelve the subject much more effectually than Nero and all its other persecutors ever succeeded in doing. Personal righteousness, and the view that you cannot make people moral by Act of Parliament, is, in fact, the favorite defensive resort of the people who, consciously or subconsciously, are quite determined not to have their property meddled with by Jesus or any other reformer.¹

Shaw believed that religious reform, hence social reform, could only be successful through governmental legislation. He advocated giving the teachings of Jesus, as Shaw interpreted them, a trial as a means of improving society. Since Jesus' teachings had not been implemented by government, Shaw said that Jesus

. . . has not been a failure yet; for nobody has ever been sane enough to try his way The moneyed, respectable, capable world has been steadily anti-Christian and Barabbasque since the crucifixion; and the specific doctrine of Jesus has not in all that time been put into political or general social practice.²

¹George Bernard Shaw, Androcles and the Lion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1962), 373.

²Ibid, p. 323.

Shaw continued,

. . . I am ready to admit that after contemplating the world and human nature for nearly sixty years, I see no way out of the world's misery but the way which would have been found by Christ's will if he had undertaken the work of a modern practical statesman.³

In his drama, Shaw uses four basic doctrines that he ascribes to Jesus and finds acceptable. The first of these doctrines, as Shaw lists them in his Preface to Androcles and the Lion, is:

1. The kingdom of heaven is within you. You are the son of God; and God is the son of man. God is a spirit to be worshipped in spirit and in truth and not an elderly gentleman to be bribed and begged from. We are members one of another; so that you cannot injure or help your neighbor without injuring or helping yourself. God is your father; you are here to do God's work; and you and your father are one.⁴

This doctrine is compatible with Shaw's theory of Creative Evolution through the workings of the Life-Force. In the Prologue to Caesar and Cleopatra, Ra says, "the spirit of man is the will of the gods."⁵ Shaw urges society to

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid, pp. 370-371.

⁵Shaw, Caesar and Cleopatra, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 359.

recognize the Life-Force which will lead to its betterment, and to reject "Salvationism" or "Crosstianity" which removes moral responsibility and permits social inequities.

Shaw expresses his belief that all members of society are equal in that all have divinity or the Life-Force in them. The Reverend Fox in "In Good King Charles's Golden Days", says:

Sir: there is nobody who is not good enough for me. Have I not warned our Christian friends who are now captives in Barbary not to forget that the life of God and the power of God are in their heathen masters the Turks and the Moors as well as in themselves?⁶

Fox goes further to denounce churches and urges King Charles to follow the guidance of the Life-Force:

You are right there: Churches are snares of the divvle. But why not follow the inner light that has saved you from the churches?⁷

That man is on earth to do the work which cannot be done by the spirit of God is expressed in an argument between Fox and the Painter, Kneller. Fox is offended

⁶Shaw, "In Good King Charles's Golden Days", in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, VI, 21.

⁷Ibid., p. 57.

when Kneller suggests that his painting hands are necessary tools of God. Kneller explains:

But the hands that can draw the images of God and reveal the soul in them, and is inspired to do this . . .: is not his hand the hand used by God, who, being a spirit without body, parts or passions, has no hands,⁸

Another of Shaw's characters that reveals that man must help himself without begging from an "elderly gentleman" God is Reverend Anderson in The Devil's Disciple. Judith, Anderson's wife, suggests prayer as a means of saving Richard Dudgeon from the hangman's noose. At Judith's suggestion of prayer, her husband scoffs, "Pray! Can we pray Swindon's rope off Richard's neck?"⁹ He continues, "I am not God and I must go to work another way."¹⁰

Richard Dudgeon, too, reveals that he answers to only the Life-Force within himself when he tries to explain why he placed his own life in jeopardy, committing

⁸Ibid., p. 66.

⁹Shaw, The Devil's Disciple, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 316.

¹⁰Ibid.

a noble act that he does not fully understand, rather than allow the minister to be captured:

I had no motive and no interest: all I can tell you is that when it came to the point whether I would take my neck out of the noose and put another man's into it, I could not do it. I dont know why not: I see myself as a fool for my pains; but I could not and I cannot. I have been brought up standing by the law of my own nature; and I may not go against it, gallows or no gallows.¹¹

In this statement, Richard explains the workings of the Life-Force that causes a man to think not of his individual well-being but of the brotherhood expressed in the teachings of Jesus. It is this rising above self for the benefit of society that Shaw advocates.

Shaw's belief that every man's reason for living is to improve society was so strong that he defined the concept of soul in terms of the individual's relationship to society. In Man and Superman, Tanner explains how one comes to possess a soul. He tells Ann:

You didnt notice at that time that you were getting a soul too. But you were. It was not for nothing that you suddenly found you had a moral duty to chastise and reform Rachel. Up to that time you had traded pretty extensively in being a good child; but

¹¹Ibid., p. 322.

you had never set up a sense of duty to others. Well, I set one up too. Up to that time I had played the boy buccaneer with no more conscience than a fox in a poultry farm. But now I began to have scruples, to feel obligations, to find that veracity and honor were no longer goody-goody expressions in the mouths of grown-up people, but compelling principle in myself . . . the change that came to me was the birth in me of moral passion; and I declare that according to my experience moral passion is the only real passion.¹²

Tanner continues to explain that the birth of moral passion, the acquiring of a soul, turns a child into a man. Once the soul is born, the moral passion demands action. Tanner says:

The moral passion has taken my destructiveness in hand and directed it to moral ends. I have become a reformer, and, like all reformers, an iconoclast. I no longer break cucumber frames and burn gorse bushes: I shatter creeds and demolish idols.¹³

This destruction is necessary because,

Construction cumbers the ground with institutions made by busybodies. Destruction clears it and gives us breathing space and liberty.¹⁴

¹²Shaw, Man and Superman, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 549.

¹³Ibid., p. 550.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 551.

The affirmation of the soul, moral passion or the Life-Force is present in much Shavian drama; and wherever this affirmation of soul is found, the moral passion is active in the destruction of dead institutions or active in some other way in the improving of society. In The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet, a whole town changes because Blanco finds his soul and helps a mother with a sick child.¹⁵

In Major Barbara, Cusins, Barbara's intellectual fiancé, finds his soul when he joins Undershaft to use power for good. He sees the need to destroy institutions to improve society:

I love the common people. I want to arm them against the lawyers, the doctors, the priests, the literary men, the professors, the artists, and the politicians, who, once in authority are more disastrous and tyrannical than all the fools, rascals, and imposters. I want a power simple enough for common men to use, yet strong enough to force the intellectual oligarchy to use its genius for the general good.¹⁶

Barbara, too, finds her soul when she realizes that God's work can best be done not in saving

¹⁵Shaw, The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 245-276.

¹⁶Shaw, Major Barbara, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 442.

. . . weak souls in starved bodies, sobbing with gratitude for a scrap of bread and treacle, but full-fed, quarrelsome, snobbish, uppish creatures, all standing on their little rights and dignities¹⁷

These are the people who are in position to find their souls and improve society. Barbara recognizes the Life-Force in herself when she says,

Let God's work be done for its own sake: the work he had to create us to do because it cannot be done except by living men and women. When I die, let him be in my debt, not I in his; and let me forgive him as becomes a woman of my rank.¹⁸

Shaw makes a strong statement concerning the acquisition of a soul in The Glimpse of Reality. When Ferruccio presses Squarcio concerning whether or not God and the soul exist, Squarcio replies:

I think, Excellency, that the soul is so precious a gift that God will not give it to a man for nothing. He must earn it by being something and doing something.¹⁹

Then, according to Shaw, a soul exists only for the benefit of society. The person with a soul has earned it, and

¹⁷Ibid., p. 444.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 444-445.

¹⁹Shaw, The Glimpse of Reality, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, IV, 738-739.

by definition, uses it to further society. This person, by means of the Life-Force inside him, is obeying the law of Creative Evolution. He accepts the moral responsibility of his actions and recognizes the brotherhood of man.

Shaw's definition of the soul and its purpose contradicts the "Salvationist" doctrine advocated by orthodox Christian religion. He frequently attacks this "Salvationism" or "Crosstianity" that allows members of society to escape moral responsibility for their actions by placing their guilt on the shoulders of Christ. He also opposes this doctrine because its followers are not inclined to improve social conditions in this world because of the bribe of Heaven. To Shaw, "Salvationists" are irreligious and an obstacle to social improvement.

In Geneva, the missionaries who went to Russia from England to proselytize are described as subversive. The Russian Commissar innocently, but brutally, describes the missionaries' Salvationism:

They have been very patiently examined by our official psychologists, who report that they can discover nothing that could reasonably be called religion in their minds. They are obsessed with tribal superstitions of the most barbarous kind. They believe in human sacrifices, in what they call the

remission of sins by the shedding of blood. No man's life would be safe in Russia if such doctrines were propagated there.²⁰

The deaconess in Geneva is also made to look ridiculous for her joy in "Salvationism." It is rumored that the world is coming to an end, but she does not anticipate with pleasure her chance to go to Heaven, because she is enjoying her sorrowing with Jesus. She complains:

But in Heaven I shall lose my Jesus. There He will be a king; and there will be no more sorrows and sins to bring to Him. My life has been so happy since I found Him and came to him a year ago! He made heaven for me on earth; and now that is all over. I cannot bear it.²¹

Shaw is no less harsh in his treatment of Spintho in Androcles and the Lion. Spintho is a miserable person who has not helped society in any way. He is a cowardly thief who depends on his martyrdom to wash away all sins and assure him of a place in Heaven. This kind of thinking does not serve Spintho because he does not die a martyr's death; nor does it serve society because Spintho has hurt

²⁰Shaw, Geneva, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 669-670.

²¹Ibid., p. 755.

society, thinking he would be redeemed in the end.²² If he had not held the Salvationist belief, he might have tried harder to be an asset to society.

In The Doctor's Dilemma, Shaw is explicit in describing how the "Salvationist" doctrine is harmful to society in that it allows any sin against society by removing moral responsibility from people. Sir Patrick, addressing Louis, says:

I assure you, young man, my father learnt the doctrine of deliverance from sin from John Wesley's own lips before you or Mr. Shaw were born. It used to be very popular as an excuse for putting sand in sugar and water in milk.²³

Since Salvationism frees man to commit crimes against society and still find redemption through repentance, it removes the incentive to improve society with the promise of Heaven; therefore Shaw's attacks on it are frequent and sharp. He preaches moral responsibility for everyone. Prayers will not improve society; only men and women using their hands to fulfill the drive of the

²²Shaw, Androcles and the Lion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 447, 454.

²³Shaw, The Doctor's Dilemma, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 150.

Life-Force can remove misery from the world. In Buoyant Billions, the native explains that he cannot believe in an omnipotent God or a malevolent Devil; however, he believes

. . . that justice and benevolence are mighty powers in the world, but that they have no effective existence save in ourselves, and that except to the extent to which you and I and our like are just and benevolent there is no justice and no benevolence.²⁴

Believing as he did in the soul of man as the primary tool of Creative Evolution and social improvement, Shaw dismisses science as unimportant to social betterment.

In The Doctor's Dilemma, Shaw ridicules the doctors for their ignorance, greed and self-assurance. Ridgeon denies the existence of the soul. He says: "The soul is an organ I have not come across in the course of my anatomical work."²⁵ Shaw considers this scientific opinion as unsafe grounds upon which to base one's religious belief. It can lead only to classic atheism which negates the existence of any divinity.

²⁴Shaw, Buoyant Billions, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 769.

²⁵Shaw, The Doctor's Dilemma, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 182.

In Too True to Be Good, Shaw illustrates how atheism based on scientific "fact" leads to nothingness. The Elder, once a confirmed atheist and believer in the Truth of Science, explains how science failed him:

. . . the universe of Isaac Newton, which has been an impregnable citadel of modern civilization for three hundred years, has crumbled like the walls of Jericho before the criticism of Einstein. Newton's universe was the stronghold of rational determinism: the stars in their orbit obeyed immutably fixed laws; and when we turned from surveying their vastness to study the infinite littleness of atoms, there too we found the electrons in their orbits obeying the same universal laws. Every moment of time dictated and determined the following moment, and was itself dictated and determined by the moment that came before it. Everything was calculable: everything happened because it must: the commandments were erased from the tables of the law; and in their place came the cosmic algebra: the equations of the mathematicians. Here was my faith; here I found my dogma of infallibility: I, who scorned alike the Catholic with his vain dream of responsible Free Will, and the Protestant with his pretence of private judgement. And now-now-what is left of it? The orbit of the electron obeys no law; it chooses one path and rejects another: it is as capricious as the planet Mercury, who wanders from his road to warm his hands at the sun. All is caprice: the calculable world has become incalculable: Purpose and Design, the pretexts for the vilest superstitions, have risen from the dead to cast down the mighty from their seats and put paper crowns on presumptuous fools. Formerly when differences with my wife, or business worries, tried me too hard, I sought consolation and reassurance in our natural history museums, where I could forget all common cares in wondering at the diversity of forms and colors in the birds and fishes and animals, all produced without the agency of any designer by the operation of Natural Selection.

Today I dare not enter an aquarium, because I can see nothing in those grotesque monsters of the deep but the caricatures of some freakish demon artist: some Zeus-Mephistopheles with paintbox and plasticine, trying to surpass himself in the production of fantastic and laughable creatures to people a Noah's ark for his baby. I have to rush from the building lest I go mad, crying, like the man in your book, 'What must I do to be saved?' Nothing can save us from a perpetual headlong fall into a bottomless abyss but a solid footing of dogma; and we no sooner agree to that than we find that the only trustworthy dogma is that there is no dogma. As I stand here I am falling into that abyss, down, down, down.²⁶

In Shavian drama, cure for society's problems cannot come from a belief in science, the nature of which is rapidly changing. The cures cannot come from atheism because this nonbelief gives no hope for improvement. The cures for social ills cannot come from orthodox religion with its elderly gray-haired God, which in fact perpetuates social problems and provides an escape for the enemies of society through Salvationism. The cure for social ills can come only through the organized effort of individuals who have found their souls and will use their minds and hands to change society for the betterment of all. This is one of the religious doctrines that Shaw set forth

²⁶Shaw, Too True to Be Good, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, IV, 694-696.

in his drama. This doctrine must be implemented before society can make any long-term advancement; as Shaw indicated, Christianity must be legislated to be effective.

The second doctrine of Christ that Shaw confirmed and was redundant in expounding in his drama is:

2. Get rid of property by throwing it into the common stock. Disassociate your work entirely from money payments. If you let a child starve you are letting God starve. Get rid of all anxiety about tomorrow's dinner and clothes, because you cannot serve two master: God and Mammon.²⁷

Major Barbara is perhaps Shaw's strongest statement in a play on economics in relation to religion. In this play he shows religion that provides salvation through the bribe of food as a failure; it must depend on tainted money for support, and the salvation of the individual is abolished when his hunger is abolished. Poverty must be eliminated before humanity can rise above the level of beasts. Undershaft says,

. . . if you wish to know, as the long days go, that to live is happy, you must first acquire money enough for a decent life, and power enough to be your own master.²⁸

²⁷Shaw, Androcles and the Lion, in Complete Plays, With Prefaces, V, 371.

²⁸Shaw, Major Barbara, in Complete Plays, With Prefaces, I, 386.

The importance of money as a means to the well-being of society and as a prerequisite to the religious life is explained by Undershaft when he enumerates the seven deadly sins:

Food, clothing, firing, rent, taxes, respectability and children. Nothing can lift those seven millstones from man's neck but money; and the spirit cannot soar until the millstones are lifted. I lifted them from your spirit. I enabled Barbara to become Major Barbara; and I saved her from the crime of poverty.²⁹

In rejecting the doctrine of humility and poverty as destroyers of society Shaw expresses his opinion again through Undershaft, who calls poverty the worst of crimes.

All other crimes are virtues beside it: all the other dishonors are chivalry itself by comparison. Poverty blights whole cities; spreads horrible pestilences; strikes dead the very soul of all who come within sight, sound or smell of it [T]here are millions of poor people, abject people, dirty people, ill fed, ill clothed people. They poison us morally and physically: they kill the happiness of society: they force us to do away with our own liberties and to organize unnatural cruelties for fear they should rise against us and drag us down into their abyss. Only fools fear crime: we all fear poverty . . . you talk of your half-saved ruffian in West Ham: you accuse me of dragging his soul back to perdition.

²⁹Ibid., p. 434.

Well, bring him to me here; and I will drag his soul back again to salvation for you. Not by words and dreams; but by thirty-eight shillings a week, a sound house in a handsome street, and a permanent job It is cheap work converting starving men with a Bible in one hand and a slice of bread in the other Try your hand on my men: their souls are hungry because their bodies are full.³⁰

In Heartbreak House, the necessity of money for spiritual well-being is expressed by Ellie when she says:

Old fashioned people think you can have a soul without money. They think the less money you have, the more soul you have. Young people nowadays know better. A soul is a very expensive thing to keep: much more so than a motor car It eats music and pictures and books and mountains and lakes and beautiful things to wear and nice people to be with. In this country you cant have them without lots of money: that is why our souls are so horribly starved I shall pretend to sell myself . . . to save my soul from the poverty that is damning me by inches We know now that the soul is the body, and the body the soul. They tell us they are different because they want to persuade us that we can keep our souls if we let them make slaves of our bodies.³¹

In Mrs Warren's Profession, Shaw says that poverty forces poverty-stricken women into prostitution in the open market or into prostitution by marrying for money.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 434-435.

³¹Shaw, Heartbreak House, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 564-566.

He finds either form of prostitution preferable to starvation and slavery which abolish self-respect. Thus, the vice of prostitution is preferable to the sin of poverty.³²

The socioeconomic structure of England comes under attack in Widower's Houses: Shaw reveals that the "justice" of the slum landlord means depriving and harassing the poor as long as the law is not broken.³³ The poor are forced to destroy their houses to use the wood for fuel and are hated for their poorness. Ironically, poverty and dirt for the poor provide money and respectability for the rich. Money buys the scoundrel Lickcheese respectability.³⁴ Shaw recognizes that an individual cannot alter society; therefore, romantic love and love of money win over morality.³⁵

Since Shaw's religious convictions strongly dictate equal distribution of money and goods to all people and indicate that "to let a child starve is to let God

³²Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 67-69.

³³Shaw, Widower's Houses, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, IV, 518-519.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 533-551.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 543-558.

starve," he attacks the Church that uses its power to further enrich the rich while preaching humility and poverty as virtues to the poor.

In Major Barbara, Undershaft says, "All religious organizations exist by selling themselves to the rich."³⁶ He proves this by buying the blessings of the Salvation Army. Mrs. Baines, the leader of the Salvation Army, accepts Undershaft's money and explains how the existence of the Church aids the rich by keeping the poor from rebelling and causing property damage.³⁷

The minister's wife in Candida explains another way in which the Church furthers the ambitions of the greedy. Church attendance on Sunday eases their minds and enables them to be more efficient during the rest of the week. Candida addresses her husband:

Look at our congregation at St. Dominic's! Why do they come to hear you talking about Christianity every Sunday? Why, just because they've been so full of business and money-making for six days that they want to forget all about it and have a rest on the

³⁶Shaw, Major Barbara, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 389.

³⁷Ibid., p. 396.

seventh; so that they can go back fresh and make money harder than ever! You positively help them at it instead of hindering them.³⁸

In Too True to Be Good, Shaw shows the contradiction in the "poor but honest" virtue as taught by the Church. Through Aubrey, Shaw reveals that only the rich can afford to be honest and that religious education teaches this. Aubrey, the outlaw, says:

If I became an honest man I shall become a poor man; and then nobody will respect me: nobody will admire me: nobody will say thank you to me. If on the contrary I am bold, unscrupulous, acquisitive, successful and rich, everyone will respect me, admire me, court me, grovel before me. Then no doubt I shall be able to afford the luxury of honesty. I learnt that from my religious education So I learnt my lesson. Six days on the make, and on the seventh shalt thou rest. I shall spend another six years on the make, and then I shall retire and be a saint.³⁹

The religious view of poverty as punishment is renounced by the Patient in Too True to Be Good. Apparently, when poverty cannot be defended as a virtue, it can be explained as a punishment from God. Either way,

³⁸Shaw, Candida, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 389.

³⁹Shaw, Too True to Be Good, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, IV, 700-701.

the Church and society are excused from any obligation to abolish poverty and redistribute the wealth. The Patient, seeing the truth, says:

I dont belong to the poor and dont want to. I always knew that there were thousands of poor people; and I was taught to believe that they were poor because God arranged it that way to punish them for being dirty and drunken and dishonest, and not knowing how to read and write. But I didnt know that the rich were miserable. I didnt know that I was miserable. I didnt know that our respectability was uppish snobbery and our religion gluttonous selfishness, and that my soul was starving on them. I know now.⁴⁰

The total failure of established religion to follow the economic doctrine of Christ that Shaw expounded as the cure for many social ills is compounded by abuse of society in the name of religion. In The Man of Destiny, Shaw indicts the English people for using religion as an alibi for committing any aggressive act to fulfill national greed for money, land or power. Napoleon exposes the nature of the people who can conveniently bend religion and morality to suit their purposes, no matter how immoral those purposes:

No Englishman is too low to have scruples: no Englishman is high enough to be free from their tyranny.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 705.

But every Englishman is born with a certain miraculous power that makes him master of the world. When he wants a thing, he never tells himself that he wants it. He waits patiently until there comes into his mind, no one knows how, a burning conviction that it is his moral and religious duty to conquer those who possess the thing he wants. Then he becomes irresistible. Like the aristocrat, he does what pleases him and grabs what he covets: like the shopkeeper, he pursues his purpose with the industry and steadfastness that comes from strong religious conviction and deep sense of moral responsibility. He is never at a loss for an effective moral attitude. As the great champion of freedom and national independence, he conquers and annexes half the world and calls it Colonization. When he wants a new market for his adulterated Manchester goods, he sends a missionary to teach the natives the Gospel of Peace. The natives kill the missionary: he flies to arms in defense of Christianity; fights for it; conquers for it; and takes the market as a reward from heaven. In defense of his island shores, he puts a chaplain on board his ship; nails a flag with a cross on it to his top-gallant mast; and sails to the ends of the earth, sinking, burning, and destroying all who dispute the empire of seas with him. He boasts that a slave is free the moment his foot touches British soil; and sells the children of his poor at six years of age to work under the lash in his factories for sixteen hours a day There is nothing so bad or so good that you will not find Englishmen doing it; but you will never find an Englishman in the wrong. He does everything on principle.⁴¹

These same religious Englishmen will, for war,

. . . egg their Governments on to spend hundreds of millions of money in the slaughter, whilst

⁴¹Shaw, The Man of Destiny, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 742-743.

the strongest Ministers dare not spend an extra penny in the pound against the poverty and pestilence through which they themselves walk daily.⁴²

Shaw wished to change the economic structure sufficiently to eliminate the class structure in which, for the upper level, morality equals gentility--"an excuse for consuming without producing;"⁴³ and, in which for the lower level, morality equals starving and slaving with a pretense of honor, but which is actually spiritual and physical degradation.

Although Shaw advocated the equal distribution of wealth, he was aware of the inequities in Russian Communism with its unwieldy bureaucracy. In Geneva, the Russian Commissar criticizes capitalism and praises communism:

These gentlemen talk of their countries. But they do not own their countries. Their people do not own the land they starve in. Their countries are owned by a handful of landlords and capitalists who allow them to live on it on condition that they work like bees and keep barely enough of the honey to keep themselves miserably alive. Russia belongs to the Russians. We shall look on whilst you eat each other

⁴²Shaw, Man and Superman, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 621.

⁴³Ibid., p. 620.

up. When you have done that, Russia--Holy Russia--will save the soul of the world by teaching it to feed its people instead of robbing them.⁴⁴

To this, the reply is that the bureaucracy now robs the people of Russia more than the former landlords did; the children are being taught atheism; conspirators are being shot by the dozens every month because they want to get the old order back.⁴⁵

Mendoza, in Man and Superman, borrows Robin Hood's idea for the redistribution of wealth. His business:

. . . is to hold up motor cars and secure a more equitable distribution of wealth All made by labor, and on its way to be squandered by wealthy vagabonds We intercept that wealth. We restore it to circulation among the class that produced it: the working class.⁴⁶

Shaw is not seriously proposing that the bandit, Mendoza, is the cure needed for the inequitable and anti-Christian economic system. Shaw does express the irony

⁴⁴Shaw, Geneva, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 748.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Shaw, Man and Superman, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 590.

in the injustice of the economic system. Mendoza says, "I am a brigand: I live by robbing the rich." Tanner says, "I am a gentleman: I live by robbing the poor."⁴⁷

The solution to the problem of reforming the economic system in accordance with the teaching of Christ is to allow, somehow, each person to work at whatever job he is best suited for, and for him to receive the necessities of life that free the spirit. This can only be achieved by a complete redistribution of wealth. Since people of wealth are not anxious to give what they have to the poor, this revision of the economic system will have to have governmental power for its implementation. This power can be obtained only if enough people with the religious vision of Shaw act together to apply power, wherever necessary, to "knock the whole social system to pieces with most beneficial reconstructive results."⁴⁸ The destruction of an antireligious and oppressive economic system is in keeping with the moral responsibility of the person who has found his soul. Shaw was certainly such a person. His calls for economic reform are repeated again and again in his drama.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 591.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 586.

The iconoclastic Shaw wanted more changes in society, and again he used religion, specifically the teaching of Christ, in his drama in the hope of improving society. The third doctrine of Christ as interpreted and used by Shaw is:

3. Get rid of judges and punishment and revenge. Love your neighbor as yourself, he being a part of yourself. And love your enemies: they are your neighbors.⁴⁹

Shaw objects to judges because they are at best ineffective in improving society, and more likely to create injustice than justice. They, with their human failings, are given authority over other human beings as if they, the judges, are omniscient. The judge in Captain Brassbound's Conversion is neither good nor wise. His friend says of him:

Of course he does dreadful things as a judge; but then if you take a man and pay him 5,000 pounds a year to be wicked, and praise him for it, and have policemen and courts and laws and juries to drive him into it so that he can't help doing it, what can you expect?⁵⁰

⁴⁹Shaw, Androcles and the Lion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 371.

⁵⁰Shaw, Captain Brassbound's Conversion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 646.

In The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet, one of the citizens observes that "justice in this place is nothing but a breaking out of the devil thats in all of us."⁵¹ The sheriff, presiding as judge, assures Blanco before the trial begins that he will receive justice--the justice due a horse-thief--hanging.⁵²

The judge in Geneva makes a valiant effort to settle the disputes of the representatives of various countries but is ineffective in doing so. His decision is that "Man is a failure as a political animal. The creative forces which produce him must produce something better."⁵³

Shaw's religious grounds for objecting to punishment are, in part, akin to his objection to "Salvationism." Shaw believes that society is best served if the criminal has to accept the moral responsibility for his crime instead of being absolved of his guilt through punishment. This point is illustrated in

⁵¹Shaw, The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 246.

⁵²Ibid., p. 261.

⁵³Shaw, Geneva, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 750.

Heartbreak House when the burglar pleads to be sent to jail in order to "work my sin off my conscience."⁵⁴

Shaw also objects to punishment because anything can be declared a punishable offense, and someone must decide who deserves punishment and why. This can lead to great restrictions on society. In Geneva, the Judge admits that when a government is alarmed, it begins to prosecute its citizens without regard for human rights. "The British Government has just passed a new law under which any person obnoxious to the government can be imprisoned for opening his mouth or dipping his pen in the ink."⁵⁵ The Russian Commissar says, "I don't expect any government to tolerate any doctrine that threatens its existence or the incomes of its rulers."⁵⁶

Since the idea of punishment is directly contradictory to the teaching of Christ, Shaw is very sharp in his criticism of punishment that is sanctified in the name of religion. In Geneva, the Widow advocates shooting

⁵⁴Shaw, Heartbreak House, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 556.

⁵⁵Shaw, Geneva, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 697.

⁵⁶Ibid.

every Jew. Her reason for such drastic punishment is based on her religion:

Because they crucified my Savior: that is why. I am a religious woman; and when I meet a God murderer I can hardly keep my hands off my gun If you were Christians you would help me kill this dirty Jew.⁵⁷

This woman appears ridiculous in her obvious ignorance of what a Christian is. That murder and Christianity, even if murder is done in the name of justice, are mutually contradictory is brought into focus by Shaw repeatedly in his drama.

Charles, in "In Good King Charles's Golden Days", is afraid of the Protestants because of their great religious zeal that has led to bloodshed. Charles explains that the Protestants, for religious reasons, of course, have committed murder and are not yet satisfied with their religious purge:

They killed my great grandmother. They killed my father. They would kill you if I were not a little too clever for them! They are great killers, these Protestants.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 693-694.

⁵⁸Shaw, "In Good King Charles's Golden Days", in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, VI, 76.

In The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet, Shaw ridicules the self-righteous but corrupt townspeople for the hypocrites that they are. He proposes that men hang another man "pretending they do it in horror of his wickedness";⁵⁹ however, they kill for the pleasure of it.

They shoot for the love of it. Look at them at a lynching. They're not content to hang the man: but directly the poor creature is swung up they shoot him full of holes, wasting their cartridges that cost solid money . . . though half of them would have a rope round their own necks if all they did was known.⁶⁰

The irony of trying to make a Christian convert of a man who is about to be hanged illustrates the ridiculous manner in which religion is practiced. Elder Daniels tries to save the soul of Blanco Posnet before Blanco "goes into his Maker's presence after the trial."⁶¹

The conflict between religion and punishment is clearly expressed in The Devil's Disciple. Once again, a man is facing the executioner. Once again, the traditional attempt to save his soul before he dies is being

⁵⁹Shaw, The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 245.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 247.

made by the religious leader. The Chaplain urges Richard to "submit to the divine will."⁶² To which Richard replies:

Answer for your own will, sir, and those of your accomplices here: I see little divinity about them or you. You talk to me of Christianity when you are in the act of hanging your enemies. Was there ever such blasphemous nonsense Youve got up the solemnity of the occasion, as you call it, to impress the people with your own dignity--Handel's music and a clergyman to make murder look like piety! Do you suppose I am going to help you?⁶³

In spite of Richard's harsh revelation of the incongruity of the situation, the Chaplain makes one last attempt to carry out his religious duty to convert the condemned man. The Chaplain is forced to silence when Richard quotes one sentence from the Bible: "'Thou shalt not kill.'"⁶⁴

Revenge is closely related to punishment and equally contrary to the teachings of Christ. While punishment is usually carried out by some kind of authority, revenge is carried out by individuals. These individuals seek revenge out of a sense of duty or honor. The Widow, in Geneva, is the spokesman for revenge in the world court.

⁶²Shaw, The Devil's Disciple, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 340.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 341.

She identifies herself as "Revenge" and "Jealousy." "My name is the unwritten law that is no law."⁶⁵ Revenge for justice, honor or etiquette is made to look ridiculous as the Widow speaks. She killed her friend as an obligation of etiquette because the friend gave the Widow's husband satisfaction.⁶⁶ The Widow is deeply troubled because her son refuses to avenge his father's death. Her society cannot

. . . tolerate such a monstrous violation of natural justice as leaving the murder of a father unavenged. . . . Even cousins five times removed have to be avenged if they have no nearer relative to take on that duty.⁶⁷

Thus, murder for revenge could go on forever since, once begun, it is self-perpetuating.

Man's ability to rationalize his anti-Christian acceptance of judges, punishment and revenge also enables him to ignore other tenets of Christianity and still call himself a Christian. Shaw wanted the abolishment of judges, punishment and revenge; he wanted the implementation of

⁶⁵Shaw, Geneva, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 734.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 690-691.

the remainder of this Christian doctrine: "Love your neighbor as yourself, he being part of yourself. And love your enemies: they are neighbors."⁶⁸ If this doctrine of love were universally practiced, it would eliminate many of society's problems.

In Geneva, Shaw presents some of the problems in society that exist because the doctrine of loving one's neighbors is not practiced. He reveals the pettiness of self-righteous statesmen who think that their countries are the greatest countries in the world and their people God's chosen race.⁶⁹ Thus, patriotism leads to irreconcilable international problems that would not exist if people were truly religious and loved their neighbors. Racism would also be abolished if people accepted other people as being a part of themselves. Instead, racial lines are drawn that result in social strife and persecution. The Jew is excluded from one country, the Japanese from another, the Chinese from another, etc.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Shaw, Androcles and the Lion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 371.

⁶⁹Shaw, Geneva, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 692.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 731.

The policy of the Sermon on the Mount is proposed as a basis of agreement to end international dispute. The policy of loving one another is rejected when the Secretary says:

It turns out that we do not and cannot love one another--that the problem before us is how to establish peace among people who heartily dislike one another, and have very good reasons for doing so: in short, that the human race does not at present consist exclusively or even largely of likeable persons.⁷¹

Man fails at loving either his neighbor or his enemy. Shaw preaches pacifism as part of his religion for the redemption of society; but man's eagerness to fight prevails. Organized murder, war, is resorted to repeatedly, always with moral or religious reasons used to lend it an aura of righteousness. Shaw abhors war as antireligious, antisocial and criminal.

In Geneva, the Judge describes acts of war as criminal; and he presents war "heroes" as criminals responsible for their crimes, unjustified for committing them even under orders. Soldiers who bomb cities are mass murderers. "It is a crime of the most horrible character to drop a bomb upon a crowded city."⁷²

⁷¹Ibid., p. 741.

⁷²Ibid., p. 726.

War, as glorified in the Old Testament, is rejected in favor of the pacifism of Christ by the Sergeant in Too True to Be Good. Before he had experienced war, the Sergeant saw "spoiling the Egyptians as something holy." He later recognized it as thieving. The Sergeant, like the author who created him, rejects parts of the Bible and accepts other parts according to his religious convictions. The Sergeant explains:

Some of this scripture is all right. Do justice; love mercy; and walk humbly before your God But all this thieving, and slaughtering your enemies without giving quarter, and offering up human sacrifices, and thinking you can do what you like to other people because youre the chosen people of God, and you are right and everyone else is in the wrong: how does that look when you have had four years of the real thing instead of merely reading about it. No: damn it, we're civilized men; and though it may have gone down with those old Jews it isnt religion.⁷³

After declaring that war is irreligious, Shaw continues his antiwar theme by explaining the effect of war on social morality. A conscience cannot be divided "into a war department and a peace department." A man who "will commit murder for political ends" will "commit

⁷³Shaw, Too True to Be Good, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, IV, 693.

theft for personal ends." And isn't it logical that you cannot "make a man the mortal enemy of sixty millions of his fellow creatures without making him a little less scrupulous about his next door neighbor?"⁷⁴

The Sergeant's conclusion that war is contrary to Christian doctrine is concurred in by Ferrovius in Androcles and the Lion. Ferrovius has the nature of a warrior but the religious creed of a pacifist. Throughout the play, he struggles to practice the pacifism required by Jesus. He truly believes the Christian way is the right one. In the end, however, he kills his oppressors. He becomes a hero in the eyes of Caesar; and Caesar, ignorant of Christian pacifism, fails to recognize Ferrovius' battle success as a contradiction of Ferrovius' Christian faith. Consequently, Caesar decrees that all his warriors must become Christians; he thinks Christianity makes men good soldiers, but it is Ferrovius' failure as a Christian that allows him to do battle. Ferrovius realizes that he cannot serve two gods: The Christian God of Peace and Mars, the God of War. Ferrovius is realistic enough to recognize that he and the world are not yet ready for the

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 699.

God of Peace; he chooses to serve Mars as a good soldier rather than Jesus as a miserable failure.⁷⁵

Shaw's concern for society manifests itself in Man and Superman when he describes how Man allows the desire for success in warfare to deprive society of advancement in all other areas:

. . . in the arts of life man invents nothing; but in the arts of death he outdoes Nature herself, and produces by chemistry and machinery all the slaughter of plague, pestilence, and famine. The peasant today eats and drinks what was eaten and drunk by the peasants of ten thousand years ago; and the house he lives in has not altered as much in a thousand centuries as the fashion of a lady's bonnet in a score of weeks. But when he goes out to slay, he carries a marvel of mechanism that lets loose at the touch of his finger all the hidden molecular energies, and leaves the javelin, the arrow, the blowpipe of his fathers far behind. In the arts of peace Man is a bungler.⁷⁶

The indictment of Man as a warmonger continues as the inventions for life are described as clumsy, bungling, tedious; these are such things as factories and locomotives. They are miserable failures compared to the machines of

⁷⁵Shaw, Androcles and the Lion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 470.

⁷⁶Shaw, Man and Superman, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 619.

war. "There is nothing in Man's industrial machinery but his greed and sloth: his heart is in his weapons."⁷⁷

Shaw's view of war as antireligious and dangerous to society is expressed in Farfetched Fables as a direct warning to society to turn away from the development of increasingly powerful tools of war. In the First Fable, a young chemist conceives the idea of producing poisonous gas that is lighter than air and capable of destroying the inhabitants of a city without destroying the city itself.⁷⁸ In the Second Fable, the poisonous gas is used and destroys society as it presently exists.⁷⁹ This represents a strong stand by Shaw against war; it also represents a pessimistic view of society's willingness to preserve and improve itself by adhering to a religious faith that would abolish war and stimulate social progress.

The fourth doctrine of Jesus, as interpreted and accepted by Shaw, is as follows:

4. Get rid of your family entanglements. Every mother you meet is as much your mother as the woman

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Shaw, Farfetched Fables, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, VI, 493-494.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 495-498.

who bore you. Every man you meet is as much your brother as the man she bore after you. Dont waste your time at family funerals grieving for your relatives; attend to life, not to death; there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and better. In the kingdom of heaven, which, as aforesaid, is within you, there is no marriage nor giving in marriage, because you cannot devote your life to two divinities: God and the person you are married to.⁸⁰

This doctrine is one that Shaw would consider as necessarily destructive. For the advancement of society, all ties that bind people together in small units must be broken in order for every individual to discover his special ability. When he finds his purpose in life, he should not be bound by entanglements that would prevent his fulfilling his potential for the good of society. He should be free to serve society as a whole instead of using his energy for the benefit of a small group.

In Major Barbara, Undershaft is obligated to break the entanglement with his own son to insure that his business will be run by the most capable man available. A foundling is his choice to succeed him because a foundling has no family entanglements to distract him; and, by his being a foundling, he has proven his strength

⁸⁰Shaw, Androcles and the Lion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V, 371.

by surviving on his own.⁸¹ Eliza, in Pygmalion, improves her station in life by breaking away from her father. She could not have developed her potential if she had stayed on his level.⁸²

The kinship of all humanity must be recognized if society is to improve. The hypocrisy that exists in family ties is exposed in Man and Superman when Don Juan says,

. . . the death of anyone we knew, even those we liked best, was always mingled with a certain satisfaction at being finally done with them . . . family ties are rarely kept up here. Your father . . . will not expect any devotion from you.⁸³

An equalitarian Heaven is described in Pygmalion as Higgins instructs Eliza to have the same manners for all human souls "as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another."⁸⁴

⁸¹Shaw, Major Barbara, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 411-412.

⁸²Shaw, Pygmalion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 274.

⁸³Shaw, Man and Superman, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 607.

⁸⁴Shaw, Pygmalion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 274.

Shaw discussed the futility of attending to death rather than life in Man and Superman. A funeral is described as "a festivity in black, especially the funeral of a relative." Ana is ridiculed because she has worn mourning for her dead father all her life.⁸⁵ Another woman is ridiculed because she spent all the money left by her husband on his funeral and went into the workhouse the next day, taking her seven children with her. She would spend nothing on her children's schooling but spent it all on death.⁸⁶

Shaw's statements opposing marriage are too numerous to make feasible a complete listing of them here. He opposed marriage as an entanglement that prevents one from guiding his own destiny. In Captain Brassbound's Conversion, Captain Brassbound prefers to pursue his own purpose in life--steer his own course, rather than marry for love. Marriage conflicts with self-determination.⁸⁷ Marriage forces one to substitute his partner's will for

⁸⁵Shaw, Man and Superman, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 607.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 620.

⁸⁷Shaw, Captain Brassbound's Conversion, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, I, 681-687.

his own. Shaw approves of marriage only as it serves the Life-Force by providing a large number of children and by providing for their care.⁸⁸

It is the Life-Force that drives a woman to seek a proper man to father her children, and this Life-Force cannot be resisted. Marriage is not necessary for the fulfillment of the woman's role as a mother. Shaw calls virtue the "Trade Unionism" of the married and marriage the most licentious of institutions.⁸⁹

Since popular morality insists on marriage for the fulfillment of the Life-Force, the only reasonable answer to ridding oneself of this entanglement is to "make divorce reasonable and decent: that is all."⁹⁰ This is the conclusion of the Bishop in Getting Married. In this play, Shaw examines all the evils of marriage. Various solutions for the problems inherent in marriage are suggested, but easy divorce seems to be the most practical answer. Thus, one can marry at the will of the Life-Force; and one can divorce at will for the benefit of self and society.

⁸⁸Shaw, Man and Superman, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 552, 553, 633.

⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 633-635.

⁹⁰Shaw, Getting Married, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, IV, 455.

Most of the important ideas contained in this chapter can be found in one play. In Man and Superman, Shaw includes a dream sequence that takes place in Hell. Mendoza, who steals money, becomes the Devil who steals souls. The Devil is successful at winning souls because his Hell offers the material pleasures that Man seeks. The Devil offers an abundance of the physical pleasures to satisfy the greed of the wealthy who could not find their souls because they did not accept their moral obligations to society. Hell is also appealing to the poor who could not find their souls because they were too pressed to fulfill the needs of the body while on earth. Ironically, Hell is not a place of punishment but a place where the Devil rules a pleasure-oriented empire in which there is no hope and no moral obligation. Only pleasure exists in Hell. Thus Shaw, through the Devil and other characters, discusses the condition of the world and the four religious doctrines that Shaw prescribes for social improvement. They are: moral obligation to society; equality in economy; pacifism; and avoidance of family entanglements. The people who are in Hell have no form of moral responsibility.⁹¹ Their individual greeds and

⁹¹Shaw, Man and Superman, in Complete Plays, With Prefaces, III, 610.

desires are fulfilled.⁹² Man is described as being war-like, a sure way to increase the population of Hell.⁹³ Man's ability to destroy his fellowman has made giant strides since Joan in Saint Joan was put to death in the name of religion.⁹⁴ Family entanglements no longer exist after death,⁹⁵ but in Hell the disentanglement serves no purpose because there no one desires to devote himself to a meaningful life.

As the Devil reigns in Hell, it seems that Shaw's four-point message to society has failed. In Heaven, where the inhabitants devote their time to contemplating life and fulfilling the will of the Life-Force, the population is actually decreasing because some inhabitants give up the reality of Heaven for the pursuit of pleasure in Hell.⁹⁶ The Devil is optimistic about his eventual supremacy in the universe. He says:

⁹²Ibid., p. 616.

⁹³Ibid., p. 619.

⁹⁴Shaw, Saint Joan, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, II, 410.

⁹⁵Shaw, Man and Superman, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 607.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 615.

From the beginning of my career I knew that I should win in the long run by sheer weight of public opinion, in spite of the long campaign of misrepresentation and calumny against me. At bottom the universe is a constitutional one; and with such a majority as mine I cannot be kept permanently out of office.⁹⁷

Although Shaw preached certain Christian doctrines as the basis for social improvement, he did not base his entire hope for Man on the implementation of these doctrines. The failure of society to save itself through religiously oriented reform, as predicted by the Devil, did not leave Shaw without hope for future societies. Christian doctrine may fail to save society, but Shaw envisions a better society brought about through Creative Evolution. As the dream sequence of Man and Superman closes, Don Juan is leaving Hell to create something better than himself through the Life-Force, and Ana is leaving to create the Superman.⁹⁸ With his belief in Creative Evolution, Shaw could always be optimistic about the future of society regardless of the bleakness of the current social conditions.

⁹⁷Ibid., pp. 615-616.

⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 647, 649.

C H A P T E R I V

RELIGIOUS PROPHECY: A NEW SOCIETY THROUGH CREATIVE EVOLUTION

In his drama, Shaw never ceased to expound his religious beliefs as the ultimate solution to the imperfection of society. He attacked orthodox religion by exposing the hypocrisy of individual practitioners and by criticizing those doctrines of the Church that he considered antireligious and socially harmful. He proposed his own religion as the answer to social problems, but he knew that his proposals for social reform were impractical unless they were legislated by government. Shaw apparently realized that until Man had advanced beyond his present state, the chance of his proposals for legislated social improvement being implemented was unlikely. In Geneva, the Judge grows weary of trying to settle disputes between nations through his court that can make only moral judgments. Man still prefers destruction and death to peace and life. The process of Creative Evolution has not gone far enough in man to effect real social progress. The Judge, speaking to the quarreling group of representatives

of the world's nations, says, "I give you up as hopeless. Man is a failure as a political animal. The creative forces which produce him must produce something better."¹ Shaw expresses this pessimism while still preaching the doctrines of Christ as a hope for social improvement as discussed in the preceding chapter. Also, as noted in the preceding chapter, Shaw envisions the destruction of society through military use of poison gas.²

In Farfetched Fables, the play in which society is destroyed, Shaw explores the idea of rebuilding a society superior to the old one, but not perfect. In the new society, the members scoff at the foolishness of the old society as they view it with their superior intellect. They are capable of producing people in a chemical laboratory, but they want to go beyond this. In this drama, Shaw negates the necessity of a material body and introduces the idea of an ideal society of pure intellect: "We must get rid of our physical bodies altogether . . .

¹George Bernard Shaw, Geneva, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, V (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1962), 750.

²Shaw, Farfetched Fables, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, VI, 495-498.

I don't want to be a body: I want to be a mind and nothing but a mind."³

Shaw may have been pessimistic about the present civilization's ability or willingness to adopt his religious views and follow them to reconstruct a better society; but his religious faith, as it includes the concept of Creative Evolution, enables him to envision a new civilization that will surpass the present one, even if today's society makes the reforms that Shaw proposes.

Since Shaw believes that there is a Life-Force in man that is the means through which Creative Evolution takes place, in time man will evolve into a Superman. This Life-Force is the divinity that Shaw believes in, and it wills man to seek perfection. Hence, as the Life-Force struggles to create higher and higher species of life, man will evolve into spirits of pure intellect and gods will have evolved.

In Man and Superman, Don Juan expresses this evolutionary process:

. . . Life is a force which has made innumerable experiments in organizing itself; that the mammoth and

³Ibid., p. 510.

the man, the mouse and the megatherium, the flies and the fleas and the Fathers of the Church, are all more or less successful attempts to build up that raw force into higher and higher individuals, the ideal individual being omnipotent, omniscient, infallible, and withal completely, unilludedly self-conscious: in short, a god?⁴

Shaw's vision is that a perfect society of creative intelligence will be evolved in the same way that simple organisms have evolved. Shaw speaks again through Don Juan in explaining how the new civilization will evolve:

Just as Life, after ages of struggle, evolved that wonderful bodily organ the eye, so that the living organism could see where it was going and what was coming to help or threaten it, and thus avoid a thousand dangers that formerly slew it, so it is evolving today a mind's eye that shall see, not the physical world, but the purpose of Life, and thereby enable the individual to work for that purpose instead of thwarting and baffling it by setting up shortsighted personal aims as at present.⁵

The Life-Force that will create the perfect civilization uses men and women in sexual relations in its attempt to create the Superman. Thus, mating takes place, not according to the will of the individual couple, but because

⁴Shaw, Man and Superman, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 626.

⁵Ibid., pp. 627-628.

the will of the Life-Force cannot be resisted. The Life-Force ignores all personal considerations and relations in fulfilling the sex relation of creative energy. A couple ". . . with no bond between them but a possibility of that fecundity for the sake of which the Life Force throws them into one another's arms . . ." ⁶ are agents in the process of creative evolution that builds toward the perfect civilization.

Don Juan recognizes the working of the Life-Force in himself as he explains:

I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. That is the law of my life. That is the working within me of Life's incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding. ⁷

The woman's function in creative evolution is selecting and ensnaring a male and using him to make possible her primary purpose--motherhood. Women are agents of the Life-Force in its attempt to create the superhuman. When Ana, in Man and Superman, learns that the superhuman

⁶Ibid., p. 637.

⁷Ibid., p. 641.

does not yet exist, she is overwhelmed by the will of the Life-Force. She exclaims: "Not yet created! Then my work is not yet done."⁸ Urgently, she cries to the universe: "A father! a father for the Superman!"⁹

Shaw's vision of the perfect civilization of the future is combined with religious satire in Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles. The play is based on an experimental culture that is struggling to evolve into the perfect society. Only two of the characters in the play have evolved to an intellectual level that is close to Shaw's requirement for his superhuman. These characters are Pra and Prola. Since the other characters in the play are not near the intellectual perfection necessary for the existence of Shaw's futuristic civilization, they must be removed in order for the society to advance.

In reordering this society, Shaw uses the Christian doctrine of the "Day of Judgment" to remove the undesirables from society rather than using the much slower process of Creative Evolution to rid the world of all but the intellectually superior people.

⁸Ibid., p. 649.

⁹Ibid.

On the "Day of Judgment," an angel, at first mistaken for an albatross, appears. The Christian doctrine of the elect's being lifted from the earth and the sinners' being left is reversed in Shaw's vision of the "Day of Judgment." If the perfect civilization is to be developed, the superior humans must be left on earth to develop it; and the inferior humans must be obliterated to clear the way for a better world.

When the angel explains the terms on which the inhabitants of the Unexpected Isles will be judged, he is articulating Shaw's belief in the individual's moral responsibility to contribute to society. The angel says: "The lives which have no use, no meaning, no purpose, will fade out. You will have to justify your existence or perish. Only the elect shall survive."¹⁰ As for those who cannot justify their existence, they ". . . will simply disappear: that is all" ¹¹

When all the useless people are removed on the "Day of Judgment," Pra and Prola are left alone on their island. Although they had not succeeded in creating a

¹⁰Shaw, Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, VI, 598.

¹¹Ibid., p. 595.

perfect civilization before the "Day of Judgment," they are allowed to survive and try again. They are both willing to discard old experiments and forever begin new ones.

Both Pra and Prola are optimistic about the future. Prola will ". . . wrestle with life as it comes."¹²
Pra will

. . . continue to strive for more knowledge and more power, though the new knowledge always contradicts the old, and the new power is the destruction of the fools who misuse it.¹³

Shaw's eternal optimism for a better world through creative evolution is expressed by Pra and Prola at the conclusion of the play. Pra exclaims: "All hail, then the life to come!" and Prola agrees: "All hail. Let it come."¹⁴

Shaw's vision of the new civilization as it evolves through Creative Evolution appears in its complete form in Back to Methuselah. In this lengthy five-part play, Shaw goes beyond stating his philosophy of Creative

¹²Ibid., p. 610.

¹³Ibid., p. 611.

¹⁴Ibid.

Evolution. He portrays the civilization that will be produced by Creative Evolution. In this play, he traces the evolution of man from his beginning to his near-perfection. This play may be Shaw's most profound expression of his religious faith that man will evolve into divinity.

Back to Methuselah opens with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In Part One, Shaw describes Lilith's creation of man by pure thought. The serpent is introduced and Adam and Eve learn that they can reproduce themselves. The immortality with which life began is eliminated when Cain invents murder. Thus, man is reduced to mortality and can no longer reproduce himself by thought. He is bound by his physical body.¹⁵

The idea of extending life to three hundred years is being discussed by twentieth-century clergymen as Part Two opens. They want a longer life in order to benefit from experience, but not a life so long that life itself would be burdensome.¹⁶ They will achieve the longer life through Creative Evolution: "It is going to be the religion of the twentieth century: a religion that

¹⁵Shaw, Back to Methuselah, in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, II, 34.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 39.

has its intellectual roots in philosophy and science just as medieval Christianity had its roots in Aristotle."¹⁷

In Part Three the action begins in the year 2170 A.D. Certain people have acquired the gift of long life, but they hide their ages because they do not fit in a society in which most of the people have normal life spans.¹⁸ At this point, Creative Evolution is not yet working systematically and has not yet achieved a high level of society.

The action in Part Four begins in the year 3000 A.D. By now there is a civilization organized of "long-livers." Creative Evolution has caused society to advance. A "long-liver" tells a "short-liver" that it is the true destiny of the "long-livers" to supplant and supercede the "short-livers."¹⁹

Shaw calls Part Five "As Far As Thought Can Reach." It is in this section of the play that Shaw presents his philosophy most completely. The year is 31,930 A.D. By this time, Creative Evolution has produced a society in which the Ancients have reached a level

¹⁷Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 109-110.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 171.

of life and thought through the exercise of the Life-Force that is within them.

In this progressive civilization, the concern for physical pleasure and comfort lasts only four years. There are no children in this society since asexual reproduction has been achieved, and childhood has already passed before the new person is hatched from the egg. From hatching until about the age of four, the young people are physically attracted to the opposite sex and enjoy such frivolities as dancing.²⁰

After reaching the age of four, the youth becomes more serious and loses interest in physical pleasures. With progressing age, the intellect increases and the body decreases. The Ancients reach such a high intellectual level that they seek to rid themselves of the body because it is subject to death through accident.²¹

A He-Ancient expresses immortality as his destiny.²² A She-Ancient expresses the goal of complete

²⁰Ibid., pp. 207-215.

²¹Ibid., p. 253.

²²Ibid.

redemption from the flesh: ". . . when there will be no people, only thought."²³

Lilith returns to view the progress of man through the Life-Force. She recognizes that great progress has been made, but still more progress must come. She says:

. . . I will not supercede them until they have forded this last stream that lies between flesh and spirit, and disentangled their life from the matter that has always mocked it. I can wait: waiting and patience mean nothing to the eternal.²⁴

Shaw's peculiar religious faith gave him the assurance that, in time, humanity would progress beyond the bonds of the body that caused such great social problems for his generation. The plays discussed in this chapter are indicative of the great vision that Shaw had for the future of the world. Only a deeply religious man could have such faith and dedicate his life to the dissemination of this faith for the benefit of society. Shaw's drama is certainly the work of a religious prophet.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 261.

Conclusions

George Bernard Shaw, who first came to public attention in religious matters by declaring himself an atheist, spent a lifetime writing drama in which he affirmed his belief in a divinity. Shaw remained opposed to orthodox religious practices and was never reticent in his criticism of them; however, he was not simply a destroyer of religious creeds. Shaw interjected his own religious beliefs into his drama and hoped that, somehow, society would benefit from his dramatic lessons in religion. Through the creation of characters in his drama, Shaw exposed the religious hypocrite and gave his definition of the truly religious person. Thus, Shaw provided a mirror for every individual who encounters his dramatic works--a mirror that allows each individual to see his own religious practices in the light wherein Shaw would view them. Shaw's characters portray the religious Philistines, the religious Idealists, and the religious Realists. The Philistines are ridiculed unmercifully. The Idealists are more sympathetically treated but are portrayed as impractical. The religious Realists are the best of Shaw's religious characters. The Realist approaches religion both sincerely and pragmatically; he

scraps old beliefs that do not work and seeks new and better beliefs that will serve himself, society and the divine will, or Life-Force. Shaw's religious message to the individual is clear: Become a religious Realist.

Shaw's religious message to society, as set forth in his drama, shows his deep concern for the betterment of society. He suggests that some of Christ's doctrines be implemented--doctrines which Shaw believes have never been tried. He is critical of a society which calls itself Christian and ignores Christ's social teachings. In his drama, Shaw calls for an equalitarian society based on the teachings of Christ; this equalitarian society must be implemented by government. The old social and religious system which perpetuates poverty and war should be replaced with a new one in which moral responsibility is practiced; equal distribution of wealth is achieved; abolishment of punishment, revenge, and war is effected; and family entanglements that reduce the individual's ability to function for social progress are eliminated.

Shaw's obvious deviation from orthodox religious thought is apparent in his drama that is concerned with the future of humanity. Shaw's rejection of an omnipotent and benevolent God does not lead him to a pessimistic

portrayal of the ultimate end of Man. Shaw's belief in Creative Evolution through the workings of the Life-Force appears in his drama as he forecasts the destiny of Man. Shaw's drama reflects his religious belief that Man will evolve into a better species. In his drama, Shaw predicts the evolvement of the Superman who will exist in a utopian society of pure intellect. Man will achieve this spiritual state through the divinity that is within him--the Life-Force.

As the religious outsider, or prophet, Shaw used drama to carry his message of religious reform. He spoke to the individual and to society. Religion is such an important element in Shavian drama that one cannot easily eliminate any of Shaw's plays in a discussion of his religious thought in his drama. His recognition of the essentiality of religion as an explanation of the existence of Man, as a reason for that existence and a solution for the problems of that existence, motivated Shaw to employ the stage extensively for the dissemination of his religious beliefs. Shavian drama presents the thoughts of a man who was quite unorthodox in his religion but deeply religious, nevertheless. Shaw preached not the omnipotence of God but the divinity of Man. It is to that spark of divinity in Man that Shaw directed his religious statements in his drama.

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