

Clip: DICKENS GEOFFREY_GEOFFREY DICKENS WITH BOB

**Name: DICKENS GEOFFREY_GEOFFREY DICKENS WITH
BOB SCRIBNER HARVARD _ORIGINAL HIBAND TAPE 2 1
MIN BARS ODB TONE AUDIO_BOX2 _cust
ref_MID19725869**

S1 **00:00:49:18**

The Foreign Secretary. The British Academy? Yeah. Yeah. And take it.

S2 **00:00:54:09**

On to say a word.

S1 **00:00:55:17**

Take it in on from there. Um, I. I won't try to lead in the sentence we finish. I'll just start off with a kind of a new sentence, and they'll splice it together where it seems best. Um.

S3 **00:01:09:14**

Are you. Are we ready to start?

S1 **00:01:11:09**

They'll tell us over the talkback when to give a countdown. I'll just count back from ten when he says to. I think I can remember. Count back from ten.

S4 **00:01:20:02**

Yes, yes.

S5 **00:01:21:23**

I've heard a message from those that can see. Um. Professor Dickens just polished Jack down very slightly.

S1 **00:01:30:01**

Ah, yes. Look back.

S2 **00:01:32:00**

Back. Oh, yes, yes. Yeah. It's very, very, very inelegant.

Clip: DICKENS GEOFFREY_GEOFFREY DICKENS WITH BOI

S1 **00:01:37:07**

Yes. Okay.

S2 **00:01:39:17**

This is a Marks and Spencer suit, and it probably doesn't fit as well as it should.

S1 **00:01:44:10**

Is your waistcoat riding up just a little bit So it's it's slightly distorting the mic. Yeah. So it looks okay. Is that.

S2 **00:01:51:12**

Any better?

S1 **00:01:52:21**

How's that? It looks.

S2 **00:01:53:15**

Nicer. Thank you. Thank you.

S1 **00:01:55:07**

Yes. Yes. Okay. Well, when have you already. Ah. Gulp. Another slug of water.

S6 **00:02:01:09**

Right. Well, we're we have started to record. So if you just again mentally sort of count up to ten.

S1 **00:02:07:18**

Yes. Okay.

S6 **00:02:08:11**

Off you go. Right.

Clip: DICKENS GEOFFREY_GEOFFREY DICKENS WITH BOI

S1

00:02:15:16

Well, Jeff, you then added to the duties of director of the Institute of Historical Research, the post of Foreign Secretary of the British Academy, which then takes you back into the European context.

S2

00:02:27:21

Yes, That was probably not a very wise thing to do at that time, but I grew into that partly through the job of the director of the institute here, who has in any case, a lot to do with the Foreign relations because the institute runs a lot of conferences with historians of other countries and one rather gravitates toward the foreign field in that job. When at the British Academy, a few years after I became a fellow there, was wanting a new foreign secretary. I said I'd take it on for Britain in the event I did it for ten years.

S1

00:03:17:02

And then you found yourself, so to speak, anticipating subsequent developments again by building bridges into Eastern Europe.

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S2 **00:03:25:08**

Yes, well, that was quite deliberate. The Academy Committee for Foreign Affairs gave me a very free hand, and I thought what would be the the coherent thing to do, so to speak? It seemed to me at that time our relationships with the scholars of East European countries, particularly with the humanistic, as distinct from the scientific scholars, those relationships were very weak. In fact, we had most of us had very little touch with them. So it struck me that what the Academy should do would be to extend to the the countries of Eastern Europe, if you'd like to put it. The communist countries should extend the ideas they had in regard to America. In other words, promote a two way traffic insofar as means allowed with these countries. And with that in view, I visited nearly all the communist countries as some of them several times and did my best to start up a two way traffic. In senior academics, these were not just for the academics as a whole, but for senior scholars who wanted to establish contacts and also in some cases to do work research or personal relationships within these various countries from which we had, to a very large extent being cut off in any real sense because we were not concerned with going there as tourists, but getting a bit deeper under the surface of things. And creating something.

S1 **00:05:17:06**

It must have been a very difficult thing to set up diplomatically because you want to bring their scholars to us as well as sending our people.

Clip: DICKENS GEOFFREY_GEOFFREY DICKENS WITH BOI
S2 **00:05:25:02**

Indeed, that was very much part of the idea. And oddly enough, bringing them here was easier than taking ourselves there in this sense that we found, or at least I certainly found from the first, a great desire among these scholars to visit Western Europe and England in particular. They were very keen indeed, and they didn't bother to disguise it, although at that time, especially in the Soviet Union, this idea of going to the West was not very favoured by the powers, and they nevertheless did make it very clear that they were glad to accept. I went several times to negotiate with the the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow and in Leningrad and I found them surprisingly forthcoming. They did things in rather grand style. I was rather surprised when I was interviewed by a committee of them in a former palace of one of the Tsarist nobility with splendid marble pillars on every side and very refined tea brought in in those glasses that they use and tea. And it was it was surprisingly formal and surprisingly aristocratic. And anyhow, we went from that point onwards. The only communist countries I didn't didn't visit were the the German Democratic Republic, which we we corresponded with it or rather later stage. We, we didn't like the thought of their government at that time very much. And anyhow, we did that, so to speak, by post. And the other one I didn't visit was Albania. Into the obvious reasons that was not a prime task. Yes, I did visit all the others on several occasions, but.

S1 **00:07:23:15**

These are Academy to Academy Exchange. They are indeed, which are almost bypassing the politicians. I mean, how did the politicians react to that? You need their permission, of course.

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S2

00:07:32:22

Yes. The there are a lot of this, for instance, in the Soviet Union was in the Brezhnev era when things were not too easy from from that point of view. One felt there was certain people, no doubt they were historians, but the certain people who were there rather in an observer's capacity rather than in a promotional capacity, but they behaved well and I hadn't any grumbles from that point of view. And it all worked with surprising smoothness.

S1

00:08:02:12

And there was never any difficulty with relation to, say, American policy, which obviously waxed and waned with its view to relations with countries like Yes.

S2

00:08:11:15

I didn't, although I'm fond of American, have spent time there. I didn't in any way attempt to represent the American point of view. I thought we'd better have our own national point of view, which at that time was somewhat different, of course, from that by held by most of the American politicians. And that issue didn't really enter into the thing very much. I was never given the feeling that we were sort of representatives of America in any way or that we were entirely tied to them, which of course, we never were.

S1

00:08:47:02

What sort of relationship you have with the Foreign Office through this? I mean, obviously there was support, but did they play a big role in.

S2

00:08:53:18

I wouldn't say they played a big role. They were very helpful. When I wonder, I asked them about particular people and how useful those people were likely to be, and they were strikingly well informed very often along these lines and were very sympathetic.

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S1

00:09:08:21

Though obviously one crucial point in discussing these sort of things is how the scholars coming this way, we're going to be picked. Did you have any sticky moments about discussing that or was it just left to you?

S2

00:09:21:04

Well, no, I. I took the line. We should leave it to them rather than try to pick them ourselves, which wouldn't have been very welcome at times. This could prove one occasion, at any rate, on which it proved rather embarrassing when one of the professors sent by one of these countries. I better not say which at this particular moment, but he didn't have a good reputation for liberalism in his own country and was it was tended to be a creature of the regime then in power. And this was picked on by certain people when he arrived here. And of course, I took the line, I can't possibly be a policeman or an agent who would probe into the inner lives of all these foreign academics. Nevertheless, things like that had their danger. Yes. And one that one had to be discreet as far as possible in matters of that kind.

S1

00:10:23:03

But it's now worked very well and is well established, which a lot of us have benefit enormously.

S2

00:10:28:17

Yes. Well, this was more by good luck than good management. I think I happened to go there at exactly the right moment. So so happened they were just ripe for this sort of interchange and it certainly proceeded very, very well.

S1

00:10:46:04

But we now have these exchanges at all levels, down to undergraduates, mainly through the British Council. Was there a sort of knock on effect from this British Academy initiative, do you think, that encouraged something like the British Council to get involved?

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S2

00:10:59:14

I hope it did. I didn't have I have had to do with the British Council earlier in life, and they were very useful in promoting our exchanges, for instance, between Oxford and Finland, which I was doing in 1947. In fact, when I was still at Oxford on the student level, we had these interchange visits and so on. And I remember one of the earliest people I took with me in going to Finland was Lord Quinton, the present Lord Quinton, who at that time was a sort of senior undergraduate who had been in the forces and all that sort of thing. And we started off very favourable exchange. Of course, I should explain, of course, even at that time Finland was not a communist country and relationships were very sort of normal and easy. And at that particular moment, Yes, yes.

S1

00:12:00:15

Yes. Well then you after a pretty full career move to the phase of retirement, but certainly not retirement from scholarly work and then into another. The phase which is historiography with this blockbusting book, *The Reformation in Historical thought*. Yes. Yes. Came out in 85, written with John Tonkin.

S2

00:12:24:10

Yes.

S1

00:12:25:09

Was that another shift of gear for you to to. Uh.

Clip: DICKENS GEOFFREY_GEOFFREY DICKENS WITH BOI

S2

00:12:29:17

Yes. I'd taken some interest in the questions of historiography and what sort of historians wrote, what sort of stuff and how views of history changed. I mean, the minute one begins writing foreign history, particularly one is plunged in that sort of situation. Indeed, writing reformation history, whether English or foreign, I mean, involves one in problems of historiography. And it struck me at a certain point that, in fact, about the time I retired, that a general book on the Reformation from that angle and done on an international basis would be very valuable for particularly research students perhaps, and indeed for a for more senior people. And this was a gigantic job. And I was grateful for my friend Tonkin, who is a professor, associate professor at the University of Perth in Western Australia. I was very grateful when he came in and did quite a lot of the the job. He didn't so much write. The book itself was organize it and question me and probe me and sort things out as we went along. It was most valuable the first time I'd ever written a major work in conjunction with somebody else. And I was very lucky there, I think, in getting the Right man.

S1

00:14:02:08

But given that writing a book like this is like tackling the universe, isn't it? It was. How do you go about making your selection? I mean, when you think of how many histories of the reformation they've been.

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S2

00:14:13:15

I know. Yes. Well, it's a hit and miss business. I mean, I made mistakes in in it. And I think if I did it now, I might choose some rather different people. For instance, I put quite a bit in it about people like McAuley and Carlyle, but partly because they were people we still talk about in England, perhaps rather than for any very deeply meritorious work they did on the Reformation. And in itself I think there was a bit of a bit of playing to the gallery perhaps in it, but I thought, after all, these are British readers who are going to read this very largely and they ought to be well represented. I think it was a successful book on the German side. You would know that better than I would. But on the German side, more than on the French side, if I were doing it again, I'd write more about French historians. I did write something about it. The difficulty was that one was not just choosing the best books written on the Reformation, but one was trying to make a a broad picture of the sort of books which were written and the sort of viewpoints. And unfortunately it missed out a number of, of meritorious works, which in terms of their merits, one would have wanted to come in and indeed one had to have some rather strange fish brought in and some rather shapely fish missed out. And I think I should do it a bit differently now, perhaps. But that was the general idea because it must have caused offence. Perhaps in some cases one of the ones omissions might have produced some offence, but it had to be like that more or less.

S1

00:16:01:06

Because it's a bit like picking your best ever test team, isn't it?

S2

00:16:04:07

Well.

S1

00:16:05:05

Somebody's favorite author is always going to.

Clip: DICKENS GEOFFREY_GEOFFREY DICKENS WITH BOI

S2

00:16:07:08

Be missed out. Yes, this is so and I, I hope nobody has been disturbed by this, but I had a good many afterthoughts when we'd finished it, but I was surprised to get it finished, to be quite honest. And it looked, as you say, a rather impossible job but worked out after fashion. I hope somebody will do it better later on.

S1

00:16:30:10

Now, what interested me about that book, in a way, is that throughout your career you've been doing things that you might say are a kind of English version of what the school are doing. You've found yourself continually arriving at the same platform and well in advance of a lot of trends and looking across the other platform. And there are the French doing this sort of history and the Americans doing this sort of history. How at what stage did you start to bring your work into conjunction with what the French were doing? I think we ever talked about this, but it's interesting. How would you measure what you've done against what the French have done?

S2

00:17:08:02

Well, I never consciously measured it in that way. I don't say I was entirely out of touch with the French I've been to. From Sears there. And I knew Professor Munir, for example, who was a very important man. There was still on the go, and I met 1 or 2 French Reformation historians like Show Knew and people of that sort. I already knew something about their written work at this period. I don't think actually going there and meeting people made very much difference. But certainly the French have made some very notable contributions in this field. And as I say, if I were doing it again, I slammed it a bit more on their side.

S1

00:17:57:18

And then you've come back to revising the classic work on the English Reformation, a generational it's been around for 25 years and now we're going to have a new version. How is the new version going to be different from the old?

S2

00:18:14:19

Well, it was published two weeks ago. In fact, you will be seeing copy. I ought to brought one with me for you today. But no, I I've retained a fair amount of it with a lot of small corrections, which I've deduced from the writings of others in the later 60s, 70s and 80s. And then there were certain major things I now felt called upon to do, however, and one of them was to have a short introductory chapter looking at the Reformation on the broadest international and temporal basis. I mean, in other words, rather facing the question that the Protestant reformers faced. Why do you think the church has gone wrong? When did it, if at all, go wrong? And how do we see this thing in terms of 2000 years of Christianity rather than just in terms of late medieval religion and disciplinary corrections and the church things of that sort? That's one thing I did. And I also found I had to write some additional sections on certain topics which had become very controversial of late years and could not have been absorbed into the more or less chronological chapters which had told the story before. And one of these, for example, was the role played by anti clericalism and the development of the Reformation. And clericalism was obviously existed in the Middle Ages on a large scale. What did that contribute to the Reformation? And there some revisionist historians had tried to show that its effect was negligible, with which I entirely disagree. And I said so. Another new section I wrote was concerning the geographical expansion of Protestantism in the early years from 1520 when Lutheranism came into the picture as well as Lady, and going on to the accession of Elizabeth, that vital period which involved the Henrickson Reformation. They had warred in reformation and the Marian reaction and the Marian persecution. Of course, in that period, in my view, Protestantism became not necessarily a majority religion, but it became ineradicable by such persecutions as could be mounted and indeed were mounted at that time. And it was necessary to see what sort of people got involved in it. And indeed what classes of people, what sort of occupational groups and social classes and so on was involved. But it was also important to see which parts of the country

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became relatively Protestant ized in the early stages. And that brought me back to my local history. I now find myself suddenly not just doing Yorkshire, but doing all England on a sort of county basis as quickly as possible and picking up the clues as to where Protestantism started, not among the religious men and the politicians, but among the common people as a whole. That's perhaps the most important bit of it. I'd written an article about that in the Archive for Reformation History, of which by chapter there is a slightly different version. Another general problem I put into this same new part of the book was concerning the age groups of early. The Protestants, which, uh, uh, Dr. Susan Brogden at Oxford had written interestingly about. And I followed up her view with much approbation that it was, in a certain sense, a youth movement, then a division of the generations which attracted the younger generation, indeed, from the 3000 early Protestants whose biographies we could write, a considerable number of them were obviously came into the thing even when they were apprentices. And probably if you take an age survey of those few thousand early Protestants about whom we know a lot, you would probably find the median ages when they came in were still in their 20s and this would be a common sense supposition. But to prove it was true was an important point. I think we have more or less proved this.

S1

00:23:25:19

So. So this is really locating the new edition very much within the current historical debate at the most controversial exit of.

Clip: DICKENS GEOFFREY_GEOFFREY DICKENS WITH BOI
S2 **00:23:34:14**

It, you see that there is yet another controversial point where I was opposed to revision of some of the revisionists, namely that they sometimes think of the real conversion which mattered, the real conversion. And the English people came quite late in the reign of Elizabeth rather than earlier. Well, numerically, it's conceivable that that should have been so. But I felt that the important stage of the thing really lay in the reign of Edward the Sixth and the resistance to the Marian persecution that his traditional view. I go back to that traditional view. I think that was the real crisis of the Reformation, when enough people were converted to resist what a Tudor government could bring against them, and that that was the real crisis came at that point. And the point, of course, it brought out, of course, the importance of martyrdom to the survival of a movement at a crucial point of its development.

S1 **00:24:39:16**

Yes, because I remember you were working on on the question of martyrdom some years ago. And this is now a topic which is suddenly starting to come into its own again.

Clip: DICKENS GEOFFREY_GEOFFREY DICKENS WITH BOI
S2 **00:24:49:06**

Yes, indeed it has. It from point of view of the map, of course, it has. One brother expected the early Protestant areas were London and the southeastern counties, Not not exclusively so, but so. London, Kent, Essex, East Anglia, East Sussex and the Thames Valley were the places where it was quite obvious that Protestantism was strongest previous to the reign of Elizabeth. This is it was a difficult thing to write about because we have to follow probabilities rather than statistics. No survey, no census of early Protestantism was made by contemporaries and one had to work on various clues of one sort or another and not be too dogmatic about all this. But the general picture seemed to me to be very clear beyond all question and the most conservative parts of the realm being the the Northwest, as we all know, Lancashire probably to this day, the most historically Catholic county in England and Wales, again, obviously was very conservative. And the West country to a certain extent, as we've seen in the revolts in Devon, Cornwall, which were partly social but also partly conservative religious in and being London is very important. I've got more interested in the history of London ever since I started looking at this kind of thing. But I think with reasonable probability you show that sort of thing on a map of England now.

S1 **00:26:41:08**

Because what is interesting about this, this later work is that it exemplifies very well your ability to pick up very different approaches, sometimes anticipate very different approaches and merge them into a consistent practice of history. And I suppose the things always puzzled me, though, is whether you have a unifying, if you like, philosophy of history or approach to history underneath all this. I mean, looking back over what you've done, there's a consistency of practice. But do you feel that.

Clip: DICKENS GEOFFREY_GEOFFREY DICKENS WITH BOI

S2

00:27:11:18

I, I don't, I don't feel this. It would. Be nice if one of this wasn't pre-planned in any sense. And one goes on from one thing to another. I mean, rather like fighting a campaign. I mean, you don't plan it all at the beginning. And I think each of these steps did rather suggest the next step. And one never altogether loses touch with what one did 30 or 40 years earlier. I mean, it keeps coming back to one as one is writing. Writing is a rather slow and deliberate business and you don't have to fire off quick fire clips of one sort or another about it. And you you bring in a lot of experience assuming you have a lot of experience, and it's gone that way. I think that's probably all I ought to say about it, because one mustn't claim to be too consistent when no one has been rather instinctive and opportunistic.

S1

00:28:12:16

So it's instinctive. There's no consistent philosophy of how history should be written. It's more history as it has evolved through your own practice.

S2

00:28:22:05

And yes, I think my only philosophy there is that it's the job of the historian to attack as far as possible many aspects or all aspects, if you like, of the history of a country or a region. And this is very far from being original to me. I mean, everybody in my generation has been feeling this, I think with the development of social and cultural history and religious history. But I think in my lifetime, this this multi aspect, history has been brought to a higher reach of perfection. And before I like to think so anyhow, but people have been doing it.

S1

00:29:02:23

It's often lacking one thing that you exemplify and this is the historian ask me who writes called literature. The historian is stylist. Yes. Is this something you feel strongly about because your books are so readable?

Clip: DICKENS GEOFFREY_GEOFFREY DICKENS WITH BOI

S2

00:29:14:22

Well, it's not for me to say that I'm very strong about English style, and I dislike books which are written in conversational English among my young, younger contemporaries. This is growing very much. I mean, you feel you see them talking. That wouldn't be for me. I've read too much good English, I think, to like this, and I think good English is deliberate and it should not be profuse of slang and neologism in any form or other. I sometimes ask myself when I've written a passage, would Dr. Johnston have understood this? I'm not saying would have admired it. Would he have written it like that, but would he have understood it? And that is one of my criteria, because if he wouldn't, I might have been on the right line. But I'd want to know why.

S1

00:30:13:13

Yes, because it strikes me very much of what you were saying earlier. This is very much a kind of Victorian approach to writing.

S2

00:30:19:16

Oh, yes, very much so.

S1

00:30:20:19

Yes.

S2

00:30:21:09

My style is modelled on 19th century writing.

S1

00:30:24:15

So perhaps your inclination towards Macaulay and.

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S2 00:30:27:09

Yes, yes. Not not going quite as far as Macaulay and these resonant things. But no, I think English prose reached one of its heights in the 19th century after one can't say it did in the 16th century and write it like that. But you can still write it in more or less 19th century terms, maybe a little less formally than they did, but it should be English That's understood by everybody who knows the English language, and it should be accessible to more than one generation. I would have thought.

S1 00:31:05:10

That prose is analytical prose and not just as narrative, which seems to me what is different from what you've done? Yes, that of a lot of other stylists, to use their style just to write good stories in the narrative.

S2 00:31:18:24

I think in writing history, one is constantly interchanging between narrative and analysis, at least in writing the what am I call the bigger books. Why are you not just writing an article or analyzing a particular problem, but you've got to move from one thing to the other. I believe by and large, in a general work being chronological in character, I still stick to that idea. But you have to pause from time to time for rather prolonged periods and analyse situations which have come about or which are about to come about in your narrative. I think this is quite a healthy way of doing it and I've always attempted to fulfil those criteria without without analysis you wouldn't get far with your social history and your cultural history. And so even those parts of it which are. Relevant to the narrative have to be spoken about separately? To a certain extent, yes.

S1 00:32:20:01

Yes. Of only many sides of your history writing, how would you describe yourself at the end of the day, looking back on what you've done? Would you if you just say, I'm this type of historian, what sort of label would you stick on yourself?

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S2

00:32:34:14

Well, I think basically I would call myself a social historian rather than an otherwise, because I have tried to look back at all sides of society and all those social and intellectual activities of society that would be as near as one could get with the conventional labels. But I think by this stage we have reached a position where perhaps some new kind of terminology ought to be used, which is to suggest what it should be.

S1

00:33:07:17

A socialist one without banging a gong about.

S2

00:33:09:21

Well, exactly. Without banging gongs. I think that's where are the past Doing that and banging gongs is a bit like revisionism. It's a rather dangerous trade, isn't it?

S1

00:33:22:16

Yes. A bit too self-conscious.

S2

00:33:24:03

Well, exactly. Yes.

S1

00:33:25:13

Yes. Well, the last question I kept up my sleeve is probably the toughest one. And this really echoes this thing about picking your world best cricket 11. And if we got you to pick your the historical greats that you admire, who would they be? Mean if we sent you to the equivalent of Desert Island Discs or the world best who would you who would you also great heroes Be?

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S2

00:33:49:11

Oh, I think it would have to be rancour. I don't know. Apart from him, I don't have many. I would class as all time greats. I think it's a much greater historian than, say, Macaulay. Much as I admire Macaulay and still read him. But he certainly did a better book on the Reformation than any of his British contemporaries did that I can say without question, I think it's a very fine Balkan is still one of his most popular books in Germany, as I understand it. And I once went through a good lot of it, trying to find out what sources he used, because there was already in his time there was a great deal of talk about the use of sources and manuscripts and so on. And as far as I could make out, he used very largely printed sources but earlier German scholars and made enormous collections of documents. So, as you well know, affecting many of the regions of the German speaking lands, for example. And he made very good use of that sort of material, which was, shall I say, regional, perhaps rather than local. But he knew his local history. And that's one of the reasons, of course, why one would admire him. But that sort of the resolution which he wrote, major works and the sheer sort of moral force with which he stuck at it as a sort of stick ability, not merely Yorkshire stick ability, but stick ability. General is the characteristic I think historians must have if they're going to be any good. And the the that is what one most admires.

S1

00:35:29:05

So historians no Teflon men. That's right. Yeah that's right. Because about rank you've often said to me that rank wasn't just a political historian, that he was a social and economic and it says the unknown side of rank or isn't it?

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S2 00:35:43:21

Well, yes, it is. If you read the one on the Reformation in Germany, though, there is a lot of social stuff rather buried and a bit. I would personally want to treat it at greater length if I were writing that kind of book. But he knew a lot about that side of things and he didn't raise it into an angelic, scholastic plain where ordinary people didn't really understand what what is going on. I mean, he was a man of religion, but he showed various rather bristling characteristic toward men of religion who wrote history from confessional, confessional standpoints and all this kind of thing that, again, I admire very much.

S1 00:36:27:18
Well, Jeff, it's been very useful and very informative, and I find it very highly appropriate that we end with rancour, because if I were to compare you with anyone, it would perhaps be with rancour.

S2 00:36:39:06
And I couldn't be more flattered, but at the same time very embarrassed.

S7 00:36:43:04
Well, thank you very much. It's been a great pleasure.

S1 00:36:46:02
Thank you.

S2 00:36:46:12
So much.