

FAITH  
AND  
THOUGHT

*Journal of the Victoria Institute*

*Published by*  
THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE  
22 DINGWALL ROAD  
CROYDON, SURREY  
ENGLAND

Vol. 92

Number 1

Summer 1961

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT  
THE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
ABERDEEN

# Faith and Thought

A Journal devoted to the study of the inter-relation  
of the Christian revelation and modern research

Vol. 92

Number 1

Summer 1961

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## EDITORIAL

Continual reference seems to be made, from various quarters, to Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man* which appeared in 1959. Reviewers have claimed in several instances that de Chardin has raised too many problems in his book to make it of any permanent significance. Others maintain, however, that de Chardin has been credited with a good deal of obscurity because a great many of his readers have failed to grasp his phenomenological approach. But although de Chardin is a mystic this should not, we suppose, make his writing so obscure as some suggest. One reviewer in *Scientific American* has said that de Chardin is primarily a mystic and secondarily a scientist. He has attempted to form a synthesis of science and mysticism in which evolutionary man is lifted into a new kind of existence, the foundation of which is the Incarnation. The book is undoubtedly the work of a calm and deep thinker. But it is vaguely gnostic in tone, and hardly does justice to the Biblical doctrine of the Incarnation. Perhaps one of the clearest warnings which it brings, however, is against an over-specialisation in the study of man to the exclusion of the view of him in totality.

★ ★ ★

*The Nature of Man* is the title which has been given to the forthcoming Symposium which is to be held on Saturday, 14 October 1961. It is to be held in Church House, Great Smith Street, London, S.W.1 and will commence at 11 a.m. continuing until 5 p.m. approximately, with a break for lunch. The speakers expected are Dr R. J. Berry of

University College, London, Dr Ian Lodge-Patch of Springfield Hospital, London, and Dr Philip E. Hughes of Oxford. There will be ample opportunity for discussion after each of the addresses which will cover the nature of man from the biological, psychological and theological aspects. Fellows and Members of the Institute are urged to do everything in their power to publicise this meeting and, if possible, to make sure of attending themselves. The cost for the whole Symposium, inclusive of lunch, is not yet known but will be in the region of ten shillings. All enquiries and bookings should be addressed to *15 Quarry Road, London, S.W.18*. Individual booking forms will be sent to Fellows and Members shortly.

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### CONTRIBUTORS

F. F. BRUCE, D.D. needs little introduction to those who are regularly associated with the Victoria Institute. Both as a member of the Society and as its President he has made a number of valuable contributions. He is the Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis in the University of Manchester. His latest book which happily coincided with the publication of the New English Bible New Testament, is called *The English Bible* (Oxford 1961), and has been accorded an enthusiastic welcome throughout the world.

THOMAS MCPHERSON, M.A., B.PHIL. is welcomed as a new contributor to Faith and Thought. He has studied in New Zealand and Oxford, and is at present Lecturer in Philosophy at University College, Bangor, N. Wales.

A. SKEVINGTON WOOD, PH.D., F.R.HIST.S. is Minister of Southlands Methodist Church, York. His treatment of spiritual revival called *And With Fire* has been succeeded by a fine account of eighteenth-century awakening, fittingly entitled *The Inextinguishable Blaze*.

F. F. BRUCE, D.D.

## The Gospel of Thomas

Presidential Address, 14 May 1960

### *Introduction*

IN 1945, or perhaps a year or two earlier, some peasants in Upper Egypt accidentally dug into an early Christian tomb. In it they found a large jar containing thirteen leather-bound papyrus codices. These codices proved to contain forty-eight or forty-nine separate works, mostly Coptic translations from Greek.<sup>1</sup> One of the codices was acquired by the Jung Institute in Zürich, whence it is now known as the Jung Codex.<sup>2</sup> Its chief importance lies in the fact that it contains a Coptic version of the *Gospel of Truth*, a speculative meditation on the Christian message emanating from the Valentinian school of Gnosticism, and quite possibly composed by Valentinus himself (c. A.D. 150).<sup>3</sup> The remaining codices are housed in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, and it is one of these codices that contains the *Gospel of Thomas*.<sup>4</sup>

The discovery was made in the vicinity of the ancient town of Chenoboskion ('goose-pasture'), on the east bank of the Nile, about thirty miles north of Luxor. Here one of the earliest Christian monasteries was founded by Pachomius (c. A.D. 320). The documents are frequently referred to as the Nag Hammadi papyri, presumably because it was in Nag Hammadi, west of the river, that the discovery was first reported. Nag Hammadi is the nearest modern town to the scene of the discovery.

The documents belong to the fourth century A.D. or thereby, but the Greek originals were composed a century or two earlier. Some of

<sup>1</sup> See W. C. van Unnik, *Newly Discovered Gnostic Writings* (London, 1960); J. Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (London, 1960).

<sup>2</sup> See F. L. Cross (ed.), *The Jung Codex* (London, 1955).

<sup>3</sup> First edited by M. Malinine, H. C. Puech and G. Quispel, *Evangelium Veritatis* (Zürich, 1956); cf. K. Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth* (London, 1960).

<sup>4</sup> First edited by A. Guillaumont, H. C. Puech, G. Quispel and Y. Abd al-Masih, *The Gospel according to Thomas* (Leiden and London, 1959). An excellent account is given by R. M. Grant and D. N. Freedman in *The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, with an English translation by W. R. Schoedel (London, 1960). Cf. also J. Doresse, *l'Évangile selon Thomas* (Paris, 1959).

them are known to have existed in the time of Irenaeus (c. A.D. 180), and some go back to the first half of the second century. Practically all of them are Gnostic treatises, and bear eloquent witness to the Gnostic influence in early Egyptian Christianity.

Gnosticism took a bewildering variety of forms, but basically it teaches salvation through knowledge (*gnosis*). Its underlying philosophy is a dualism which regards matter as inherently evil, the product of a demiurge or master-workman who is an inferior being to the Supreme God. The Supreme God, being pure spirit, naturally cannot allow Himself to contract defilement by coming into contact with matter in any way. (Hence Gnosticism cannot accept in their fullness the biblical doctrines of creation, incarnation or resurrection.) One Gnostic sect, the Naassenes,<sup>1</sup> held the serpent (Hebrew *nahash*) in honour because he defied the ban which the demiurge had placed on the impartation of knowledge (this reinterpretation of the fall narrative of Genesis reminds us that the demiurge was commonly identified with the God of the Old Testament, as distinct from the God whom Jesus revealed). In this life men are souls imprisoned in material bodies; it is by true knowledge that they can be liberated from this imprisonment and from the entanglements of the material universe, and thus ascend to the upper world of light where the spiritual nature has its home. Jesus appears in Gnosticism as the redeemer who came to communicate this saving knowledge and effect this liberation; He communicated the knowledge to selected disciples in the interval between His resurrection and ascension, that they in turn might impart it to a spiritual élite.

Hitherto much of our knowledge about Gnosticism has been derived from orthodox writers like Irenaeus and Hippolytus who refuted the Gnostic systems in detail; now, when the recently discovered documents are published in full and available for study, we shall have a most valuable arsenal of source-material from the Gnostic side.

### *Sayings of Jesus*

The document with which we are concerned at present, the *Gospel of Thomas*, does not bear a Gnostic appearance on its face. Only when we examine it more closely do we see how well adapted it is to the literary company which it keeps.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies*, v. 1-6. They were also called Ophites, from the Greek word for 'serpent' (*ophis*).

This document is a compilation of about 114 sayings ascribed to Jesus. It is described in the colophon as *The Gospel according to Thomas*. The significance of this title is amplified in the opening words of the document:

These are the secret words which Jesus the Living One spoke and Didymus Judas Thomas<sup>1</sup> wrote down. And he said: 'Whosoever finds the interpretation of these sayings shall never taste death.'<sup>2</sup> Jesus said: 'Let not him who seeks desist until he finds. When he finds he will be troubled; when he is troubled he will marvel, and he will reign over the universe.'<sup>3</sup>

It is not the sayings themselves that are secret, but their interpretation; and that was evidently an interpretation in line with the principles of a particular Gnostic school.

This emerges more clearly from a curious variant of the Caesarea Philippi incident which is related in the *Gospel of Thomas* (Saying 13):

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Compare me and tell me who I am like.' Simon Peter said to him: 'You are like a holy angel.' Matthew said to him: 'You are like a wise man and a philosopher.' Thomas said to him: 'Master, my face is quite unable to grasp who you are like, that I may express it.' Jesus said: 'I am not your Master, for you have drunk; you are intoxicated with the bubbling spring which belongs to me and which I have spread abroad.' Then he took him and drew him aside, and spoke three words to him. When Thomas came back to his companions, they asked him: 'What did Jesus say to you?' Thomas answered: 'If I tell you one of the words which he spoke to me, you will take stones and throw them at me, and a fire will come out of the stones and burn you!'

One of the Gnostic sects, the Naassenes, believed stones to be animate beings, and held that the existence of the world depended on three secret words—*Caulacau*, *Saulasau*, *Zeesar*.<sup>4</sup> These words certainly

<sup>1</sup> Didymus (Greek) and Thomas (Aramaic) both mean 'twin'. The name Judas Thomas suggests a Syrian origin; in the Old Syriac Gospels 'Judas not Iscariot' of John xiv. 22 is identified with Thomas.

<sup>2</sup> A Johannine expression (cf. John viii. 51 f.), recurring elsewhere in the *Gospel of Thomas*.

<sup>3</sup> This saying (No. 2 in the *Gospel of Thomas*) is quoted by Clement of Alexandria (*Miscellanies* ii. 45. 5; v. 96.3) as coming from the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*; it appears in Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 654.

<sup>4</sup> Hippolytus, *op. cit.* v. 3.

convey an impression of mystery, until one realises that they are simply corruptions of the Hebrew phrases in Isaiah xxviii. 10, 13, translated 'line upon line', 'precept upon precept', and 'here a little'! And it is probably more than a mere coincidence that Hippolytus refers to a *Gospel of Thomas* which he says was used by the Naassenes.<sup>1</sup>

About half of the sayings preserved in this document are identical with, or quite similar to, sayings recorded in our canonical Gospels. Some of the others were already known from quotations in early Christian writers, or from the fragmentary sayings of Jesus found on some papyrus scraps from Oxyrhynchus.

About the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth considerable excitement was caused by the announcement that papyri had been found at Oxyrhynchus containing sayings of Jesus most of which were previously unknown. From an unfortunate association of these sayings with the Dominical Logia mentioned by Papias they came to be widely known as the Oxyrhynchus Logia. Seven of these sayings were found in Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1, discovered in 1897; six years later six further sayings were found in Papyrus 654 and two or three in Papyrus 655.<sup>2</sup>

It is now established that these fragments belong to the Greek original of the compilation which has now come to light in a Coptic translation as the *Gospel of Thomas*. The Coptic version indeed seems to represent a somewhat different recension from that represented by the Oxyrhynchus papyri, but there can be little doubt about the essential identity of the two.

It is plain from our canonical Gospels that Jesus was accustomed to say memorable things in a memorable way, and it is in any case unlikely that none of His sayings was remembered apart from those which the four Evangelists have recorded. In fact one saying is explicitly attributed to Him in Acts xx, 35 which has no precise canonical parallel: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' There may be other echoes of His words in the New Testament which we cannot detect so certainly because they lack an express ascription to Him. Christian writers in the post-apostolic generations preserve other sayings which they ascribe to Him. These sayings are commonly

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit. v. 2. Hippolytus quotes a passage from the *Gospel of Thomas* which is paralleled in Saying 4 of our Coptic version and in Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 654, but is either quoted very freely or taken from yet another recension.

<sup>2</sup> The English reader will find all these fragmentary sayings conveniently translated in Grant and Freedman, op. cit. pp. 44 ff.



denoted by the term *agrapha*—a misleading term, for it means ‘unwritten things’, and these sayings are not unwritten; the term is applicable only in so far as the sayings in question are not written in the canonical Gospels.

Memorable words of great men are frequently remembered in their own right, without being related to a firm context. We can see this happening in the case of one of our own great contemporaries, Sir Winston Churchill. Some sayings are attributed to him in oral tradition whose authenticity is doubtful at best, and of those that may be accepted as genuine many are not securely attached to a historical setting. But from this oral tradition one fact emerges with clarity: Sir Winston Churchill is the kind of man to whom such pithy sayings are credibly assigned; no one would assign a typical Churchillism to his wartime colleague Earl Attlee!

Another example comes to mind. For a couple of generations many pulpits in the Church of Scotland have been occupied by men who studied under Principal James Denney. One thing above all characterises Denney’s men; they can never stop quoting him. Great numbers of Denney’s pointed sayings have thus passed into common circulation; but it is difficult, if not impossible, to give chapter and verse for them. They have a quality which makes their authenticity unmistakable, even if Denney himself never put them on paper. Being preserved in oral tradition, they have no doubt been subjected to those influences to which form critics draw our attention, and they may have had attached to them some anonymous sayings which are sufficiently like the sort of thing that Denney said to deceive all but Denney’s own students. When once Denney’s last student has gone the way of all flesh, it will be very difficult for anyone who is challenged to demonstrate the authenticity of any particular one of Denney’s *agrapha*; yet there is a self-consistency about the bulk of them which will continue to serve as a general guarantee.

Similarly, when we find sayings attributed to Jesus which are not recorded in our primary sources, but are sufficiently in keeping with those which are so recorded, we may accord them a high rating of probability. When, on the other hand, we find sayings attributed to Him (as sometimes we do in the *Gospel of Thomas* and related writings) which are wildly out of character, we need not hesitate to regard them as spurious and to look to other sources than the apostolic tradition for their motivation.

*Sayings with Canonical Parallels*

Saying 10 in the *Gospel of Thomas* is practically identical with Luke xii. 49:

Jesus said: 'I have cast fire on the world, and see, I am watching over it until it sets it aflame!'

Saying 16 is closely related to this, and has a canonical parallel in Matthew x. 34-36 and Luke xii. 51-53:

Jesus said: 'Verily, people think that I have come to send peace on the world. But they do not know that I have come to send on earth dissensions, fire, sword and war. Verily, if there are five in a house, they will find themselves ranged three against two and two against three—father against son and son against father—and they will rise up in isolation.'

'They will rise up in isolation' means that they will isolate themselves from their families, severing all family ties (see p. 13 below).

Those sayings which have canonical parallels do not help us to establish the original text of those parallels, apart possibly from one or two exceptional places. But from the way in which the canonical sayings are modified or amplified in the *Gospel of Thomas* we can gather something of the outlook of the compilers of the anthology. Thus the saying in Luke xvii. 21, 'the kingdom of God is within you', probably meant in its original context that the divine kingdom was present in the midst of Jesus' contemporaries by virtue of His ministry among them. But the saying is given a curious twist in the *Gospel of Thomas* (No. 3a):

If those who entice you say to you, 'See, the kingdom is in heaven!'—then the birds of heaven will be there before you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea!'—then the fishes will be there before you. But the kingdom is within you—and without as well.

This is one of the sayings which were already known from one of the Oxyrhynchus papyri (No. 654), although there are verbal differences between the two recensions. It was on the Oxyrhynchus form of the saying that Francis Thompson based his beautiful lines beginning, 'O world invisible, we view thee'.

Papyrus 654, it is now clear, represents the beginning of the compilation, in which this saying is one of a group dealing with the question

of seeking and finding. In the *Gospel of Thomas* this saying follows immediately on the opening words of the document, quoted above on p. 5. The group of sayings represents a recasting of Jesus' injunction 'Seek, and ye shall find' (Matt. vii. 7; Luke xi. 9) together with His words about seeking the kingdom (Matt. vi. 33; Luke xii. 31), and to this recast version of His words the saying about the presence of the kingdom is attached. Whereas in the canonical context of these sayings they are closely related to the historical circumstances of Jesus' ministry, in the *Gospel of Thomas* they are dehistoricised and given the status of general truths.

Here is another saying about the kingdom (No. 113):

His disciples said to him: 'When will the kingdom come?' 'It will not come when it is expected. They will not say "See, here it is!" or "See, there it is!"—but the kingdom of the Father is spread abroad on the earth and men do not see it'.<sup>1</sup>

Again, the kingdom has been detached from the historic mission of Jesus and given a universal reference.

One saying (No. 39) is immediately recognisable as a variant of Luke xi. 52 (cf. Matt. xxiii. 13):

Jesus said:

'The Pharisees and the scribes have taken the keys of knowledge and hidden them; they have neither entered in themselves nor allowed those who wished to enter in to do so.'<sup>2</sup>

'Knowledge' is no doubt given the more technical sense of saving *gnosis*.<sup>3</sup> A commentator might well sum up these words by saying that Jesus condemns the 'dog-in-the-manger' attitude of the scribes (referring to one of Aesop's fables). It is remarkable that another saying in the *Gospel of Thomas* (No. 102) uses the picture of the dog in the manger in this very way:

Jesus said: 'Woe to them, the Pharisees, because they are like a dog lying on a pile of fodder, who will not eat it of himself and will not allow it to be eaten by anyone else.'

<sup>1</sup> This saying plainly goes back to the same original as No. 3a (Luke xvii. 20 f.; see p. 8); cf. the beginning of No. 37 (p. 19).

<sup>2</sup> The saying continues: 'But as for you, be prudent as serpents and harmless as doves' (cf. Matt. x. 16); Naassenes or Ophites may have seen special significance in the reference to serpents.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Saying 3b: 'When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will know that you are the children of the living Father. . . .'

*Canonical Sayings Amplified or Conflated*

No. 31 runs:

Jesus said: 'A prophet is not welcomed in his own town, and a physician works no cure on those who know him.'

The saying about a prophet appears in all four canonical Gospels (Matt. xiii. 57; Mark vi. 4; Luke iv. 24; John iv. 44); the Synoptic writers quote it with reference to Nazareth, the Fourth Evangelist with reference to Judaea. But it is probably from Luke's version, or a version akin to Luke's, that it found its way in this form into the *Gospel of Thomas*, for it is only in Luke that it stands in close association with a saying about a physician.<sup>1</sup> And there are several features of the *Gospel of Thomas* which suggest dependence on Luke's Gospel in particular.

Saying 25 is at first blush in line with those canonical sayings of Jesus which enjoin brotherly love:

Jesus said: 'Love your brother as your own soul; guard him like the apple of your eye.'

We may also compare the words quoted by Jerome<sup>2</sup> from the 'Hebrew Gospel': 'And never be joyful except when you look upon your brother in love.' But in the *Gospel of Thomas* it is quite likely that 'brother' is understood in the sense of 'fellow-Gnostic'.

In No. 47 we have quite an elaborate conflation of originally independent sayings:

Jesus said: 'No man can mount two horses or draw two bows at once. And no servant can serve two masters, otherwise he will honour the one and be roughly treated by the other. No man ever drinks old wine and desires the same instant to drink new wine; new wine is not poured into old skins, lest they burst, nor is old wine poured into new skins, lest it spoils. And no one sews an old patch on to a new garment, for a rent would be made.'

Here the saying about the impossibility of serving two masters (Matt. vi. 24; Luke xvi. 13) is amplified by two illustrations from life, and followed by sayings contrasting the old order and the new, sufficiently similar to Mark ii. 21 f. and its parallels—Matthew ix. 16 f. and Luke v. 36–39, especially the Lukan parallel—but with curious differences

<sup>1</sup> Luke iv. 23: 'Physician, heal thyself.'

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on Ephesians*, v. 4.

whose secondary character is plain. The pouring of old wine into new skins is not envisaged in the canonical sayings, still less the pointless patching of a new garment with an old piece of cloth. These divergences from the canonical wording are no doubt deliberate: the true Gnostic will not allow his new doctrine to be encumbered with relics from the past.

Another addition to a canonical saying appears in No. 100:

Jesus was shown a gold coin and was told: 'Caesar's people are demanding the taxes from us.' He said to them: 'Give Caesar what is Caesar's; give God what is God's; and give me what is mine!'

For once, the historical setting of the saying is tolerably well preserved—except that in the original form it was not a *gold* coin that He was shown, but a (silver) denarius (Mark xii. 15 and parallels). But the added words 'and give me what is mine' blunt the point of the incident, so far as its historical meaning is concerned. They do, however, make a new point. It has been noted that this is the only place in the *Gospel of Thomas* where 'God' is mentioned. Here probably it is the Old Testament God,<sup>1</sup> the demiurge, that is intended, so that we have an ascending order of dignity: Caesar, God and Jesus. Jesus is viewed as the Gnostic Revealer and Redeemer, and the true Gnostic will make it his chief concern to follow the requirements of saving *gnosis* and so give Jesus His due.

### *New Sayings*

Some of the sayings have no proper canonical counterpart. Such is No. 77:

Jesus said: 'I am the Light which shines upon all. I am the All; All has gone forth from me and All has come back to me. Split the wood, and I am there; lift the stone and you will find me there!'

The first words of this saying, of course, remind us of various passages in the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus is presented as the Light of the world, coming into the world to provide light for every man (John i. 9, iii. 19, viii. 12, ix. 5). But it is not the Incarnate Word who speaks

<sup>1</sup> Where the Supreme Being, the God revealed by Jesus, is intended, the *Gospel of Thomas* regularly speaks of 'the Father'.

here in the *Gospel of Thomas* but something much more like the pantheistic Logos of Stoicism. The final sentence of the saying has been known since the discovery of Oxyrhynchus Papyrus I in 1897; it has sometimes been treated as a variant of the words of Jesus in Matthew xviii. 20 ('For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'); but in reality it means something quite different.

Jesus said: 'He who is near me is near the fire, and he who is far from me is far from the kingdom.'

This saying (No. 82) was known to Origen, who expressed some doubt about its authenticity: 'I have read somewhere that our Saviour said—and I wonder whether someone has falsely assumed our Saviour's role, or recalled the words from memory, or if in fact it is true that He said so—"He who is near me . . ."'<sup>1</sup> If the fire is to be understood in the same sense as in Saying 10 (quoted above on p. 8), then this is another saying about the contention that is the sequel to taking sides with Jesus. But the fire here may be more particularly the fiery trial by which the faith of true disciples must be tested. Joachim Jeremias<sup>2</sup> is disposed to accept this as a genuine saying: those who decide to follow Jesus must be prepared to pass through the fire, but it is only through the fire that they can attain the kingdom. If it is a genuine saying, however, its original meaning need not be identical with the meaning which it had for the compiler and readers of the *Gospel of Thomas*.

Another saying (No. 42) in which Jesus says to His disciples, 'Be like those who pass over', has a parallel in an unexpected place. On a gateway of the mosque erected in 1601 in Fatehpur-Sikri, south of Delhi, by the Mogul Akbar, these words are inscribed: 'Jesus, on whom be peace, said: "This world is a bridge. Pass over it, but do not build your dwelling there."' Akbar evidently derived this saying from Muslim tradition: it is ascribed to Jesus quite early in Arabic literature.<sup>3</sup>

The principle that the eater assimilates what he eats, taken along with the idea of gradation in the scale of being, leads to a saying like this (No. 7):

<sup>1</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, xx; Didymus of Alexandria (on Ps. lxxxviii. 8) quotes it from Origen.

<sup>2</sup> *Unknown Sayings of Jesus* (London, 1957), pp. 54 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Jeremias, *op. cit.* pp. 99 f.

Jesus said: 'Happy is the lion whom the man eats, so that the lion becomes man; but woe to the man whom the lion eats, so that the man becomes lion!'<sup>1</sup>

A man descends in the scale of value by being assimilated to the lion that devours him; but a lion would be ennobled by being eaten by a man. For some Gnostic schools, indeed, being devoured by a wild beast would mean being confined more securely than ever in a prison-house of flesh. (This is a very different attitude from that with which Ignatius faced the prospect of being devoured by wild beasts.)

### *Beatitudes*

The saying last quoted is a combined beatitude and woe. Quite a number of beatitudes occur in the *Gospel of Thomas*, several of them being echoes of those in the Sermon on the Mount, especially in its Lukan form. Such, for example, are No. 54:

Jesus said: 'Happy are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven';

No. 68:

Jesus said: 'Happy will you be when you are hated and persecuted; but they will find no room in this place till they have driven you forth!';

and No. 69:

Jesus said: 'Happy are those who have been persecuted in heart. It is they who have come to know the Father. Happy are they who are famished, because they will be filled and satisfied.'

Others are new, like No. 49:

Jesus said: 'Happy are the solitary and the chosen ones, for you will find the kingdom. Because you have come forth from it, you will return there again.'

The 'solitary' are probably those who have disowned family ties, like those described in Saying 116, who 'rise up in isolation, after contention has broken out in their family circle (see p. 8 above).<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. C. Till, *BJRL*, 41 (1958-59), p. 457. The same principle is expressed at the beginning of Saying 116: 'Today you eat dead things and make them alive . . . '—and even more simply in Walter de la Mare's short poem, 'Little Miss T—'.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. No. 75: 'Many stand outside at the door, but it is only the solitary who will enter the bridal chamber.' This saying, with its companion-piece No. 74,

kingdom is evidently the upper world of light, from which the souls of men have come and to which they may return if they are liberated by *gnosis* from their material environment.

A previous existence in the upper world of light is probably implied also in No. 19a:

Jesus said: 'Happy is he who existed before he came to birth.'

In an orthodox sense this might refer to Jesus Himself, but a wider reference is more likely in the context of the *Gospel of Thomas*.

Here is a conflation of two quite independent beatitudes, which have an accidental verbal contact which lends itself to a very different interpretation from that which both had in the canonical tradition (No. 79):

In the crowd a woman said to him: 'Happy the womb that gave you birth and the breasts that suckled you!' He said to her: 'Happy are those who have heard the Father's word and keep it. Verily, the days will come when you will say: "Happy the womb that never gave birth and the breasts that never suckled children!"'

The first part of this saying, found in Luke xi. 27, originally implies that there is something more wonderful than being the mother of Jesus—namely, doing the will of God. But here this saying is linked to the following one in such a way as to suggest that the bearing of children is contrary to the Father's will, and that those who renounce marriage and family life are to be congratulated. This, of course, completely dehistoricises the second part of the saying, where Jesus in Luke xxiii. 29 is not laying down a permanent principle, but telling the weeping women on the Via Dolorosa that, when the impending distress overtakes Jerusalem, childless women will have something to be thankful for.

### Parables

Several of the parables familiar to us from the canonical Gospels reappear in this collection, such as the parables of the sower (No. 9),<sup>1</sup>

'there are many round the opening but no one in the well'—quoted by Celsus from the Ophite *Heavenly Dialogue* (Origen, *Against Celsus*, viii. 15 f.)—is reminiscent of the canonical 'Many are called, but few are chosen' (Matt. xxii. 14).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. No. 21c for a parallel to the Markan parable of the seed growing secretly.



the rich fool (No. 63), the vineyard (No. 65) and the great feast (No. 64). But there is no exact New Testament parallel to No. 8:

Then he said: 'Man is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea. He brought it up out of the sea full of little fishes, in the midst of which this wise fisherman found a large, excellent fish. He threw all the little fishes back into the sea; without hesitation he chose the big fish. He that has ears to hear, let him hear!'

This parable is quite unlike the New Testament parable of the dragnet (Matt. xiii. 47 ff.); so far as its lesson is concerned, it bears a closer resemblance to the New Testament parables of the hidden treasure and the costly pearl (Matt. xiii. 44-46).

The parables of the treasure (No. 109) and the pearl (No. 76) both appear in the *Gospel of Thomas*, along with several others which begin with some such words as 'The kingdom is like . . .'; these include the parables of the mustard-seed (No. 20), the tares (No. 57), the leaven (No. 96), and the sheep that went astray (No. 107). But the kingdom in these parables, as understood by the community to which we owe the *Gospel of Thomas*, is not the kingdom of the Synoptic Gospels; it is that spiritual realm to which the Gnostic is admitted by his cultivation of *gnosis*. Sometimes the original form of the parable has to be modified in order to make it bear this new significance. Contrast, for example, the Synoptic parable of the stray sheep with Saying 107 in the *Gospel of Thomas*:

Jesus said: 'The kingdom is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them, the biggest, wandered away. He left the ninety-nine others and sought this single sheep until he found it. After taking this trouble, he said to the sheep: "I love you more than the ninety-nine others!"'

Here the shepherd takes extra trouble over the hundredth sheep because it is the biggest one, and more valuable than all the others—probably representing the Gnostic in contrast to the many who make up the rank and file of the faithful.

The parable of the costly pearl is conflated with another saying of Jesus, about laying up treasure in heaven (Matt. vi. 19 ff.; cf. Luke xii. 33 f.). When the merchant has sold all his load to buy the one pearl, the admonition is added:

Do you also seek for his [the Father's] imperishable treasure, which abides, where the moth does not enter and eat it up nor does the worm destroy it.

The parable of the hidden treasure has an uncanonical ending: when the buyer of the field had acquired the treasure, then (we are told):

he began to lend money at interest to whomsoever he would.

This addition is probably not drawn from Matt. xxv. 27 or Luke xix. 23, where the unprofitable servant is told that he might at least have allowed his master's money to accumulate interest if he was unable or unwilling to trade with it more remuneratively.

Here are two uncanonical parables of the kingdom. First comes No. 97:

Jesus said: 'The kingdom of the Father is like a woman carrying a jar full of meal and walking along a long road. The handle of the jar broke, and the meal poured out behind her on the road without her knowing it or being able to do anything about it. When she reached home, she set down the jar and found that it was empty.'

This may be a warning against self-confidence, against thinking that one possesses the saving knowledge when in fact one has lost it.

No. 98 points a different kind of moral:

The kingdom of the Father is like a man who wishes to kill a magnate. In his own house he unsheathes his sword and thrusts it into the wall to make sure that his hand will be steady; then he kills his victim.

The lesson of this odd parable seems to be much the same as that of the parables of Luke xiv. 28-32; anyone who embarks upon a costly enterprise must first make sure that he has the resources to carry it out. The magnate who is attacked in the parable may further be identified with the strong man whose house is invaded and whose goods are plundered in Matthew xii. 29 and Luke xi. 21,<sup>1</sup> the strong man being understood as the demiurge or ruler of the material order. It is unlikely that the wall into which the sword is first thrust should be allegorised.

#### *Fasting, Circumcision, Marriage*

There are sayings about fasting and circumcision which reflect a thoroughly emancipated and non-ascetic attitude towards these institutions. In such matters there were considerable differences of outlook among Gnostic sects. In the *Gospel of Thomas* fasting and

<sup>1</sup> This canonical saying is paralleled in No. 35.

related religious practices can be performed in a purely external manner which is positively sinful. So Saying 14 insists:

Jesus said to them: 'When you fast, you will bring sin upon yourselves; when you pray, you will be condemned; when you give alms, you will injure your spirit. When you enter any land and go through the countryside, when you are entertained, eat what is set before you and heal the sick in those places. For nothing that enters into your mouth will defile you, but what comes out of your mouth, that is what will defile you.'

The opening words about fasting, prayer and almsgiving represent a summarised reworking of Matthew vi. 1-18, and they have had appended to them passages from the commission to the seventy (Luke x. 8 f.) and Jesus' teaching about the source of real defilement (Mark vii. 14 f.).

Here is another saying on the subject (No. 104):

They said: 'Come, let us pray and fast today.' Jesus said: 'What sin have I committed, or what omission am I guilty of? When the bridegroom comes forth from the bridal chamber, one never fasts or prays then.'

The introduction of the bridegroom into a context where fasting is under discussion is reminiscent of Mark ii. 19 f.; but the form which Jesus' reply takes is similar to the account in the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* of Jesus' rejoinder to His family's suggestion that they should go and be baptised by John: 'What sin have I committed, that I should go and be baptized by him?'<sup>1</sup>

True fasting, however, is inculcated, as in Saying 27:

If you do not fast in relation to the world, you will not find the kingdom. If you do not make the sabbath the (true) sabbath, you will not see the Father.

And the character of this true fasting and related religious observances is indicated in No. 6:<sup>2</sup>

His disciples questioned him; they said: 'Do you wish us to fast? How shall we pray and give alms, and what shall we feed upon?' Jesus said: 'Tell no falsehood and do not [to others] what is hateful to yourselves; for all these things are manifest in the sight

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Jerome, *Against Pelagius*, iii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Partially preserved in Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 654.

of heaven. Nothing hidden will fail to be revealed and nothing concealed will fail to be published abroad.<sup>1</sup>

With this transformation of religious obligations into ethical injunctions we may compare the process revealed in the Western text of Acts xv. 20, 29, where the terms of the Apostolic Decree have been ethicised and amplified by the addition of the Golden Rule (in its negative form, as here).

As for circumcision, it has no value unless it is spiritualised. According to Saying 53:

His disciples said to him: 'Is circumcision useful or not?' He said to them: 'If it were useful, men's mothers would have borne them to their fathers circumcised already. But it is the true circumcision in the spirit that is profitable.'

A modern reader will find the references to women and to marriage out of keeping with the general tenor of the canonical Gospels. Sexual life and the propagation of children are discouraged, as we have seen in Saying 79 (p. 14 above). The ideal state is to be as free from sexual self-consciousness as little children are.<sup>2</sup> There are several sayings to this effect which are obviously related to words ascribed to Jesus in the *Gospel according to the Egyptians*, another work of Naassene affinities. In the *Gospel according to the Egyptians* this attitude is summed up in the statement: 'I came to destroy the works of the female.'<sup>3</sup> This statement is not reproduced in the *Gospel of Thomas*, but others from the same source and to the same effect are found. Thus Saying 22 contains the words:

Jesus said to them: 'When you make the two one<sup>4</sup> . . . and when you make the male and the female one, so that the male is no longer male and the female no longer female, . . . then you will enter the kingdom.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> With the last sentence in this saying cf. Mark iv. 22 and its parallels (Luke viii. 17; also Matt. x. 26 and Luke xii. 2).

<sup>2</sup> This is how Saying 22 in the *Gospel of Thomas* reinterprets the canonical saying that only by becoming like little children can one enter the kingdom (Matt. xviii. 3).

<sup>3</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* iii. 9. This statement might almost be regarded as the text of Robert Graves' *King Jesus* (London, 1946).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the opening words of Saying 106: 'When you make the two one, you will become sons of man. . . .'

<sup>5</sup> In the *Gospel according to the Egyptians* words like these are spoken by Jesus to Salome (Clement of Alexandria, *op. cit.* iii. 13). They could represent a Gnostic interpretation of the words of Paul in Gal. iii. 28: 'there can be no male and female.'

And Saying 37 runs thus:

His disciples said to him: 'When will you appear to us? When shall we see you?'<sup>1</sup> Jesus said: 'When you disrobe yourselves without being ashamed, when you take off your garments and lay them at your feet as small children do, and trample on them, then you will become the sons of the Living One, and you will have no fear.'<sup>2</sup>

Just as the primal sin in Eden was followed by sexual awareness and a sense of fear and shame at the consciousness of being naked, so the restoration of original innocence will be marked by a loss of sexual awareness (and indeed of sexual distinction) and an absence of any sense of embarrassment at appearing unclothed.

Women, one gathers, cannot attain to the higher life. This is the implication of Saying 114:

Simon Peter said to them: 'Let Mary depart from our midst, because women are not worthy of the life [that is life indeed].'  
Jesus said: 'See, I will so clothe her that I may make her a man, in order that she also may become a living spirit like you men. For every woman who becomes a man will enter into the kingdom of heaven.'

In spite of her faithfulness as a disciple, even Mary Magdalene can enter the kingdom only by being changed into a man (perhaps in a future phase of existence). We may infer that women, because of their function in conception and childbirth, were judged incapable of ever achieving complete liberation from material entanglements.

### *John the Baptist and James the Just*

Other Gospel personages who are mentioned by name in the *Gospel of Thomas* are John the Baptist and James the Just. Saying 46 recasts a well-known canonical reference to John (Matt. xi. 11; Luke vii. 28):

Jesus said: 'From Adam to John the Baptist, among those who have been born of women none is greater than John the Baptist. But lest your eyes [should be blinded] I have said: "He among you

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps a rewording of the question of Mark xiii. 4 and parallels (Luke xxi. 7 and more especially Matt. xxiv. 3). Cf. No. 113 (p. 9).

<sup>2</sup> This saying survives in a fragmentary form in Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 655. The passage from the *Gospel according to the Egyptians* quoted on p. 18 above includes a reference to 'trampling on the garment of shame'.

who is least will come to know the kingdom, and will be more exalted than John.”’

But in the present context the meaning of the words is that the true Gnostic is more exalted than even the greatest of men belonging to the old order. Another canonical saying about John (Matt. xi. 7 f.; Luke vii. 24 f.) is reproduced in Saying 78, but the reference to John is omitted:

Jesus said: ‘Why did you go out to the open country? Was it to see a reed shaken by the wind, or to see a man dressed in fine apparel? [No; such persons are found in the houses of ] your kings and magnates, those who are so dressed; but they do not know the truth.’

Here the contrast is not between the well-to-do and John, but between the well-to-do and those who know the truth (that is, the Gnostics).

We know the answer which the disciples received from Jesus in the canonical Gospels when they asked who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>1</sup> A different answer is given in Saying 12 in the *Gospel of Thomas*:

The disciples said to Jesus: ‘We know that you are going to leave us: who will be greatest over us?’ Jesus said to them: ‘In the place where you go, you will betake yourselves to James the Just, on whose behalf heaven and earth alike were made.’

This idea evidently goes back to that wing of the Church of Jerusalem which regarded James as high priest and representative of the new Israel. According to Hippolytus (*Refutation* v. 2) the Naassenes claimed to derive their doctrines from James.

### Conclusion

The most careful sifting will be necessary before we can venture to accept some of the uncanonical sayings preserved in this collection as genuine utterances of Jesus. Certainly the collection has no claim to be described as a ‘Fifth Gospel’ alongside the canonical four. Even a collection of genuine sayings of Jesus would not be a gospel in the proper sense of the term. For example, the digest of Jesus’ sayings which is thought to underlie the non-Markan material common to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (the ‘Q’ material) cannot be called a Gospel, if only because it seems never to have contained a

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xviii. 1 ff.; cf. Mark ix. 34; Luke ix. 46, xxii. 24 ff.

passion narrative. The sayings of Jesus can be appreciated properly only in the context of His life, death and resurrection. It is these events that constitute the basis of the gospel; the sayings of Jesus help us to understand the events. But not only the passion narrative, but even sayings of Jesus relating to His passion, are conspicuously absent from the *Gospel of Thomas*.

The *Gospel of Thomas* presents us with the product of an oral tradition of the sayings of Jesus within a circle whose basic presuppositions differ considerably from those of apostolic Christianity. The relationship of the sayings which it contains to the Synoptic and Johannine traditions is difficult to assess, and cannot be stated in a simple sentence. In a number of places where the Synoptic tradition is followed fairly closely, the resemblance is closest to the Lukan form of that tradition. Probably the *Gospel of Thomas* is partly dependent on the canonical Gospels, and partly on separate traditions. But in either case, the original material appears to have been subjected to some Gnosticisation.

A further difficulty arises from the probability that a collection like the *Gospel of Thomas* has an inner development of its own. The Oxyrhynchus fragments suggest that different recensions of the collection were current, and one would like to have a second-century Greek text of the collection as complete as the fourth-century Coptic translation which is now available. Then perhaps we could speak with greater confidence about the relation of the work to the canonical Gospels.

At one point it has been suggested that a passage in the *Gospel of Thomas* goes back to an independent version of Jesus' Aramaic wording: that is in the parable of the sower (No. 9) where the *Gospel of Thomas* says that some seed fell *on* the road, not *by* the road, as the Greek Gospels (and the Coptic versions of the Greek Gospels) say. It has frequently been pointed out that the Aramaic preposition was no doubt 'al, which can mean either 'on' or 'by' according to the context, and that *epi* would have been a preferable Greek rendering of it in this context to *para*. The Coptic preposition used in Saying 9 presupposes Greek *epi* rather than the canonical *para*.

When we come to the most important question of all—the testimony which this document bears to Jesus—we feel that we are no longer in touch, even remotely, with the evidence of eyewitnesses. The Jesus of the *Gospel of Thomas* is not the Jesus who came to serve others, not the Jesus who taught the law of love to one's neighbour in the way portrayed in the parable of the good Samaritan. The religion of the

*Gospel of Thomas*, as of Gnosticism in general, is an affair of the individual. Unlike the Bible, the *Gospel of Thomas* sets forth the ideal of the 'solitary' believer. When the Jesus of the *Gospel of Thomas* speaks of His mission in the world, this is what he says (Saying 28):

I stood in the midst of the world and I manifested myself in the flesh to these. I found them all intoxicated; I found none thirsty among them. And my soul was grieved for the children of men, because they are blind in heart and do not see; because they have come into the world empty, they still seek to go out of the world empty. But may someone come and set them right! Then, when they have slept themselves sober, they will repent.

No doubt there is a real concern for the blindness and ignorance of men expressed in these words, but on the whole it is the concern of one who has come to show them the true way rather than of one who has come to lay down his own life that true life may be theirs. What the Jesus of the *Gospel of Thomas* has come to give is secret knowledge, as Saying 17 once more makes plain:

Jesus said: 'I will give you what eye never saw, what ear never heard, what hand never touched, and what never entered the heart of man.'

This reminds us at once of the words quoted by Paul from some unknown source in 1 Corinthians ii. 9. The *Gospel of Thomas* is not the only work to ascribe them to Jesus; they are so ascribed in other second-century apocrypha.<sup>1</sup> But in the present context they may well have formed part of a Naassene formula of initiation, referring to the secret knowledge imparted to the initiates under oath. And this underlines an essential difference between New Testament Christianity and Gnosticism. In the context where Paul quotes words similar to these he does indeed speak of the hidden wisdom which the Corinthian Christians are incapable of receiving, but the reason for their incapacity is their spiritual immaturity. And this spiritual immaturity has more to do with ethics than with intellect; the Corinthians' deficiency was not in *gnosis* but in *agape*. To mature Christians this wisdom is freely imparted, not to a select minority, but to all.

So, too, the First Epistle of John opens with a declaration that the writer is about to share with his readers everything that he and his companions had seen and heard of the Word of Life. To all his readers without distinction—children, young men, and fathers—he can say:

<sup>1</sup> E.g. in the *Acts of Peter*, xxxix.



' you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know ' (1 John ii. 20, R.S.V.). And this anointing which gives them all access to the true knowledge is the anointing which binds them all together with God in the community of that love which finds its crowning revelation in the self-sacrifice of Christ. ' By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren ' (1 John iii. 16). It is the absence of this self-sacrificing love more than anything else that puts the *Gospel of Thomas* and similar works into a class apart from the New Testament writings.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since this paper was read to the Victoria Institute, two important studies of the subject have appeared in English: R. McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London, 1960), and B. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London, 1961).

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## Ayer on Religion

THE great success of Professor Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*<sup>1</sup> is at least partly due to its combination of brevity and comprehensiveness. In a single chapter an ethical theory is developed, theology is refuted, and a disabling blow is aimed at aesthetics in a passing paragraph. Generations of university students, at sea among the conflicting theories of past philosophers, have discovered with relief in *Language, Truth and Logic* a book that states confidently a straightforward point of view on most of the main questions of philosophy—a point of view easy to understand and easy to summarise. It is a book which more than any other recent philosophical work in this country may be said to have made converts. It is certainly by far the best-known exposition of logical positivism: and it will remain so, for it is unlikely that anyone would wish to embark at this stage upon the writing of a new, detailed, logical positivist work; indeed, in 1961 even to write critically of logical positivism may strike some as having the air of flogging a dead philosophy. Whether Professor Ayer would still accept the label 'logical positivist' I do not know; it is certain that no other professional academic philosopher in Britain would. I have heard the late Dr F. Waismann use the name as though there were still in existence a school of philosophy properly to be denominated 'logical positivism', but this was twelve years or so ago, and even at that time Dr Waismann's own views (though he seemed willing to call them logical positivist) could much more accurately be described as belonging to the type generally known nowadays as 'Oxford philosophy'.

Whatever may be true of America, in Britain there are probably no logical positivists today. None, that is, among professional philosophers. I have, however, mentioned the attraction that Ayer's book has for university students. Most of these 'grow out of' logical positivism, but not all; but, what is more to the point, most of them will never become professional philosophers. The academic philosopher is perhaps too ready to assume that philosophy is properly a rather abstruse technical discipline pursued in universities. His reaction

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Gollancz). First edition, 1936; second revised edition, with a long Introduction containing amendments to a number of points, 1946.

to articles of the ' My Philosophy of Life ' kind is apt to be an amused smile, however eminent—as scientists, military men, or whatever—the authors of such articles may be. But philosophy, of all subjects, is probably the one that the layman (meaning here the non-professional philosopher) feels himself most qualified to contribute to. If we understand by ' the present state of philosophy ' not just ' philosophy as the professional academic philosopher sees it ' but also ' philosophy as the layman sees it ', then logical positivism is not dead in this country. In any case, although logical positivism in its pure form is highly unfashionable among academic philosophers, most of them would admit to having learned something from it, or from its shortcomings, and to that extent it will for a long time merit discussion.

Professor Ayer must doubtless dislike having his views constantly referred to by people writing about logical positivism; but he is himself responsible for this attention: if he wrote less well he would avoid it. Certainly, if one's topic is logical positivism and religion, it is to Professor Ayer's writings that one must turn. For all its brevity there is no discussion comparable with his. I shall begin by presenting, to a large extent in his own words, an account of the views on religion expounded in the second half of Chapter VI of *Language, Truth and Logic*. We can, I think, distinguish six points that Ayer wishes chiefly to make—or six steps in his argument.

(1) Ayer begins by saying that the possibility of religious knowledge is ruled out by his treatment of metaphysics. Let us see this point clearly before we proceed further. That is to say, it is ruled out by the logical positivist rejection of all metaphysics as nonsense. In his first chapter Ayer had written, ' We may begin by criticising the metaphysical thesis that philosophy affords us knowledge of a reality transcending the world of science and common sense '.<sup>1</sup> And a little later: ' We shall maintain that no statement which refers to a " reality " transcending the limits of all possible sense-experience can possibly have any literal significance; from which it must follow that the labours of those who have striven to describe such a reality have all been devoted to the production of nonsense.'<sup>2</sup> The pejorative word ' nonsense ' is used here, of course, somewhat as a technical term. On the logical positivist definition of meaning, a statement is meaningful (or is genuinely a proposition, Ayer would say) only if it is either (a)

<sup>1</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 33. All quotations are from the second edition.

<sup>2</sup> p. 34.

analytic or (b) empirically verifiable (as Ayer says, is an empirical hypothesis); otherwise it is meaningless, or nonsensical. Religious statements are a sub-class of metaphysical statements and are accordingly meaningless. Religious knowledge, then, is impossible in the sense that the statements in which it purports to be expressed are not genuine propositions but are meaningless or nonsensical statements.

(2) Ayer next says: 'It is now generally admitted, at any rate by philosophers, that the existence of a being having the attributes which define the god of any non-animistic religion cannot be demonstratively proved.'<sup>1</sup> This, says Ayer, is for the following reason. If the conclusion that God exists is to be demonstratively certain the premises from which it is deduced must themselves be certain. Only *a priori* propositions are logically certain. 'But we cannot deduce the existence of a god from an *a priori* proposition. For we know that the reason why *a priori* propositions are certain is that they are tautologies. And from a set of tautologies nothing but a further tautology can be validly deduced. It follows that there is no possibility of demonstrating the existence of a god.'<sup>2</sup>

(3) Not only can the existence of God not be demonstrated; it cannot even be shown to be probable. Here Ayer makes in the context of the present argument the general point already noted under (1) above. The religious man would hold that 'in talking about God, he was talking about a transcendent being who might be known through certain empirical manifestations, but certainly could not be defined in terms of those manifestations. But in that case the term "god" is a metaphysical term. And if "god" is a metaphysical term, then it cannot be even probable that a god exists. For to say that "God exists" is to make a metaphysical utterance which cannot be either true or false. And by the same criterion, no sentence which purports to describe the nature of a transcendent god can possess any literal significance.'<sup>3</sup>

(4) Ayer distinguishes his position from that of atheism or agnosticism. Both atheist and agnostic assume that the statement 'God exists' makes sense. They must assume this, otherwise there would be no point in denying that God exists or in saying that one was not sure whether or not God exists. But this statement does *not* make sense. 'If the assertion that there is a god is nonsensical, then the atheist's assertion that there is no god is equally nonsensical, since it is only a significant proposition that can be significantly contradicted. As for the agnostic,

<sup>1</sup> p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 114-115.

<sup>3</sup> p. 115.

although he refrains from saying either that there is or that there is not a god, he does not deny that the question whether a transcendent god exists is a genuine question. He does not deny that the two sentences "There is a transcendent god" and "There is no transcendent god" express propositions one of which is actually true and the other false. All he says is that we have no means of telling which of them is true, and therefore ought not to commit ourselves to either. But we have seen that the sentences in question do not express propositions at all. And this means that agnosticism also is ruled out.<sup>1</sup>

(5) 'There is no logical ground for antagonism between religion and natural science. As far as the question of truth or falsehood is concerned, there is no opposition between the natural scientist and the theist who believes in a transcendent god. For since the religious utterances of the theist are not genuine propositions at all, they cannot stand in any logical relation to the propositions of science.'<sup>2</sup> There may, however, be antagonism of a kind, on the emotional level. 'For it is acknowledged that one of the ultimate sources of religious feeling lies in the inability of men to determine their own destiny; and science tends to destroy the feeling of awe with which men regard an alien world, by making them believe that they can understand and anticipate the course of natural phenomena, and even to some extent control it.'<sup>3</sup>

(6) Ayer finally makes some remarks about mysticism and about the argument from religious experience. He calls attention to an apparent likeness between his own conclusions—that the statements which the theist utters in attempting to express religious knowledge are not literally significant—and the views that many theists themselves maintain. 'For we are often told that the nature of God is a mystery which transcends the human understanding. But to say that something transcends the human understanding is to say that it is unintelligible. And what is unintelligible cannot significantly be described. Again, we are told that God is not an object of reason but an object of faith. This may be nothing more than an admission that the existence of God must be taken on trust, since it cannot be proved. But it may also be an assertion that God is the object of a purely mystical intuition, and cannot therefore be defined in terms which are intelligible to the reason. And I think there are many theists who would assert this. But if one allows that it is impossible to define God in intelligible terms, then one is allowing that it is impossible for a sentence both to be significant and

<sup>1</sup> pp. 115-116.

<sup>2</sup> p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

to be about God. If a mystic admits that the object of his vision is something which cannot be described, then he must also admit that he is bound to talk nonsense when he describes it.<sup>1</sup> Ayer has no wish to rule out the possibility that 'truths' may be acquired through the 'faculty of intuition' of the mystic. 'We do not in any way deny that a synthetic truth may be discovered by purely intuitive methods as well as by the rational method of induction.' However, there is a difficulty. 'But we do say that every synthetic proposition, however it may have been arrived at, must be subject to the test of actual experience. We do not deny *a priori* that the mystic is able to discover truths by his own special methods. We wait to hear what are the propositions which embody his discoveries, in order to see whether they are verified or confuted by our empirical observations. But the mystic, so far from producing propositions which are empirically verified, is unable to produce any intelligible propositions at all. And therefore we say that his intuition has not revealed to him any facts. It is no use his saying that he has apprehended facts but is unable to express them. For we know that if he really had acquired any information, he would be able to express it. He would be able to indicate in some way or other how the genuineness of his discovery might be empirically determined. The fact that he cannot reveal what he "knows", or even himself devise an empirical test to validate his "knowledge", shows that his state of mystical intuition is not a genuinely cognitive state. So that in describing his vision the mystic does not give us any information about the external world; he merely gives us indirect information about the condition of his own mind.'<sup>2</sup> It follows that the argument from religious experience is invalid. A man who claims experience of God is on safe ground in so far as he is merely 'asserting that he is experiencing a peculiar kind of sense-content', but he goes astray when he asserts that 'there exists a transcendent being who is the object of this emotion'; for 'the sentence "There exists a transcendent god" has, as we have seen, no literal significance'. Ayer goes on: 'We conclude, therefore, that the argument from religious experience is altogether fallacious. The fact that people have religious experiences is interesting from the psychological point of view, but it does not in any way imply that there is such a thing as religious knowledge. . . . The theist . . . may believe that his experiences are cognitive experiences, but, unless he can formulate his "knowledge" in propositions that are empirically verifiable, we may be sure that he is deceiving himself.

<sup>1</sup> p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 118-119.

It follows that those philosophers who fill their books with assertions that they intuitively "know" this or that . . . religious "truth" are merely providing material for the psycho-analyst. For no act of intuition can be said to reveal a truth about any matter of fact unless it issues in verifiable propositions. And all such propositions are to be incorporated in the system of empirical propositions which constitutes science.<sup>1</sup>

This completes my presentation of the argument Ayer puts before us in *Language, Truth and Logic*. I have quoted from him at what may seem unnecessary length: but although it may be far from true that every philosopher is his own best interpreter, this probably *is* true in the case of Ayer. I proceed now to some comments on his views as I have paraphrased or quoted them.

(1) With the first point we come immediately to the crux of the matter. It is the verification principle which eliminates religious statements from the class of meaningful statements. 'The criterion which we use to test the genuineness of apparent statements of fact is the criterion of verifiability. We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express—that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false.'<sup>2</sup>

The scientific background and interests of the most prominent members of the original Vienna Circle is clearly responsible for their adoption of the verification principle. Indeed, the logical positivist account of meaning makes good sense when applied to natural science (with its great use of mathematics—i.e. statements meaningful because analytic—and consisting as it does to a great extent of empirical observation statements). It makes less sense when it is applied in fields outside science. But, of course, the intention of the logical positivists precisely *was* to give a scientific-type explanation of all kinds of knowledge; and if any kind of knowledge could not easily be made to fit the accepted model then so much the worse for it. The intention, naturally, was bound not to meet with universal acceptance; and it was neither more nor less proper, on the face of it, than the contrary attempt to provide an account of all kinds of knowledge in non-scientific (metaphysical or theological) terms would have been. The verification principle is not self-evidently true, though it was perhaps apt to seem so in a scientific age (and to some extent is, of course, still

<sup>1</sup> pp. 119–120.

<sup>2</sup> p. 35.

apt to seem so). Further, it has notoriously been found extremely difficult to devise a completely satisfactory formulation of the verification principle in the face of detailed criticism (Ayer considers some of the problems of formulation in the Introduction to the second edition of *Language, Truth and Logic*).

I have just suggested that a philosophy based on the verification principle is no more self-evidently a 'right' philosophy than a contrary position would be. This statement, however, might be fairly generally resisted, and not by the ghosts of the early logical positivists only. It would be widely maintained that in some form or other the verification principle needs to be retained even after what we may call 'classical' logical positivism, with its crudities and over-simplifications, has been abandoned.<sup>1</sup> The verification principle may, indeed, be said to be one of the tenets of empiricism in philosophy (Hume has generally been claimed by logical positivists as one of their ancestors); and to the extent that British philosophy has always had a strong tendency to empiricism, some version of the verification principle may be expected to find a place in it.

But the value of the verification principle is less as a *definition* of meaningfulness in general than as a useful method of establishing the actual meaning of particular utterances. Wittgenstein, taking upon himself the credit for the verification principle (and certainly the members of the Vienna Circle were greatly influenced by Wittgenstein and by his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, though he was never himself a logical positivist), complains at the same time of the way in which it was elevated into a dogma. He is reported as pointing out in lectures that he has suggested that one way in which one could 'get clear how a certain sentence is used' was by asking how it could be verified. But this was only one way of getting clear about the use of a word or a sentence. There are others, he says; and he instances the asking of the question, 'How would I set about teaching a child to use this word?' But, he says, some have taken his suggestion about asking for the verification and treated it as if it were a *theory* about meaning.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. for example, T. R. Miles, *Religion and the Scientific Outlook* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959). This book, by a Christian, makes use of a modified form of the verification principle, which the author considers to be an important and useful legacy of logical positivism.

<sup>2</sup> See the Memoir of Wittgenstein, in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, August 1951.



To what extent Wittgenstein himself was responsible for the adoption of the verification principle is a matter of history that need not concern us. Nor need we inquire into how far he may have been understood or misunderstood by others. What is of interest here, however, is his assertion that there are several ways in which the meaning of a statement may be made clear. Let me, following his suggestion, mention something which, whether or not it was in Wittgenstein's mind, can certainly come appropriately under this heading. One way of explaining what a given statement means is by explaining it in other words. This, indeed, is probably the method generally followed in teaching some fairly abstruse subject. The relatively unfamiliar is explained in terms of the relatively familiar. Consider the way in which Otto, in *The Idea of the Holy*, attempts to explain the nature of the numinous experience. Having said that it is indefinable, he nevertheless attempts to explain what he is talking about by referring to other and more familiar sorts of experience that he claims are related to it. It would be perverse to say that Otto has given no meaning to his statements. Admittedly, an appeal to sense-experience is likely to be involved in all such cases somewhere towards the end of the line; but it would be a misdescription of the method being followed to say that it *consists in* an appeal to the verification principle: such an appeal would be only one aspect of a method whose greater part consisted in something else.

But the view that the verification principle ought to be regarded not as a definition of meaning, but rather as only one among several methods of arriving at the meaning of a given statement, would hardly be accepted by Professor Ayer; and we need now therefore to consider it more directly in its role of suggested *definition* of meaning.

The three concepts of meaning, explanation (which I have just been using), and understanding are closely linked. Ayer, elsewhere than in *Language, Truth and Logic*, has provided an account of the verification principle in which he makes an explicit connection between meaning (or 'significance') and understanding. This is in the B.B.C. Third Programme debate on Logical Positivism between himself and Father F. C. Copleston, S.J., which took place originally on 13 June 1949.<sup>1</sup> Here Ayer states: 'To be significant a statement must be either, on the

<sup>1</sup> This debate has been published in *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, edited by Paul Edwards and the late Arthur Pap (The Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1957), a collection of "readings from classical and contemporary sources".

one hand, a formal statement, one that I should call analytic, or on the other hand empirically testable, and I should try to derive this principle from an analysis of understanding. I should say that understanding a statement meant knowing what would be the case if it were true. Knowing what would be the case if it were true means knowing what observations would verify it, and that in turn means being disposed to accept certain situations as warranting the acceptance or rejection of the statement in question.<sup>1</sup> A page or two later, Ayer, speaking of statements that are not scientific or common sense statements, says: 'I totally fail to understand—again, I'm afraid, using my own use of understanding: what else can I do?—I fail to understand what these other non-scientific statements and non-common sense statements, which don't satisfy these criteria, are supposed to be. Someone may say he understands them, in some sense of understanding other than the one I've defined. I reply, it's not clear to me what this sense of understanding is, nor, *a fortiori* of course, what it is he understands, nor how these statements function.'<sup>2</sup> In his closing contribution to the debate he says: 'The principle of verifiability is not itself a descriptive statement. Its status is that of a persuasive definition. I am persuaded by it, but why should you be? Can I prove it? Yes, on the basis of other definitions. I have, in fact, tried to show you how it can be derived from an analysis of understanding. But if you are really obstinate, you will reject these other definitions too.'<sup>3</sup>

This is a curious train of thought. Ayer speaks of 'my own sense of understanding' and contrasts it with 'some sense of understanding other than the one I've defined', but then seems almost to throw doubt on the whole notion of there being any sense of understanding other than 'the one I've defined' ('It's not clear to me what this [other] sense of understanding is'). One would have thought that he would need to be reasonably clear what the other uses of 'understanding' are in order to be sure that his own was different from them. On the whole, it seems a fair interpretation of his view that there is only *one* (true, proper) sense of 'understanding'. And this is no doubt correct. To understand is to understand. But there seems to be no reason to accept Ayer's further view that to understand a statement means to know what observations would verify it. Unless, that is, 'statement' here means 'the kind of statement that can be verified or falsified by observations', which is pretty clearly what it does mean

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit. p. 604.

<sup>2</sup> p. 606.

<sup>3</sup> p. 617.

for Ayer. But this is to beg the question. The point at issue is precisely whether all meaningful statements *are* of this type. Ayer's attempt to 'prove' the verification principle by deriving it from an analysis of the concept of understanding is not likely to meet with acceptance from metaphysicians or theologians (as he himself, of course, recognises) because precisely the same differences of opinion exist about the analysis of understanding as exist about the analysis of meaning. Of course, Ayer's analysis of meaning is connected with his analysis of understanding and also with his analysis of explanation,<sup>1</sup> but all three would be rejected by someone who does not accept what is common to all of them—the account in terms of verifiability. His recognition in one of the quoted passages that the verification principle is really a persuasive definition is significant. And it is certainly not the case, as I remarked above, that this principle is self-evident.

What seems to me to be the main objection to the verification principle may now be brought out explicitly. It is that the principle seems to involve a confusion between meaning and truth. Whether a statement is meaningful or meaningless is one thing. Whether it is true or false is another. But logical positivism seeks to define one of these in terms of the other: it says that being meaningful *means* being capable of being shown to be true or false. This sounds all right when one is thinking of the type of statement which the logical positivists take as their standard (Ayer's 'empirical hypotheses'), but this is because in the case of statements of this type it comes naturally to us to explain them in terms of the method of their verification. ('The cat is sitting on the mat' *means* 'If you go into the room you will observe etc., etc.'). But as an account of, say, moral principles, or particular moral judgments, it sounds much less immediately plausible—hence, of course, the emotivist theory of ethics developed by Ayer. But why assume a very narrow definition of meaning and then go to the trouble of developing a theory of ethics to show that moral utterances though literally meaningless nevertheless have some other function? Why not begin from the natural assumption that moral judgments have meaning and then go on to develop a definition of meaning (if one must have a definition of meaning) wide enough to include them? Once more, it is an indication of the extent to which classical logical positivism is outmoded that a purely emotivist theory of ethics is likely

<sup>1</sup> 'No, I want to say that I rule out nothing as an explanation so long as it explains. . . . My objection to the kind of statements that we've agreed to call metaphysical is that they don't explain' (p. 615).

to find few supporters today. But to return to the main point. Meaning and truth are indeed connected; but they are far from identical. In order for a statement to be true or false it is first necessary for it to be meaningful. Certainly. But it is possible for a statement to be meaningful without our being in a position to establish whether it is true or false. Statements about the past and statements about other minds are recognised by Ayer in *Language, Truth and Logic* as creating difficulties for the verificationist position, as also do counterfactual conditionals ('If Hannibal had marched on Rome he would have taken it'—we know what this means, but how is its truth or falsity to be established; for after all Hannibal never did march on Rome?).<sup>1</sup> Moral and metaphysical utterances (unless one approaches them with the pre-conceived idea that they are meaningless) also clearly must cause trouble. And if one does not limit oneself to statements (which Ayer, of course, does), but considers also questions, commands, regulations, etc., it appears even more clearly that meaning and truth ought not to be identified. A question or a command are meaningful but are not properly to be called true or false. In the Third Programme debate referred to above both Ayer and Copleston seem to me to confuse meaning and truth.

As we have noted already, Ayer is in general aware that his account of meaning is a narrow (though not, he would claim, an arbitrary) one. In the Introduction to *Language, Truth and Logic* he writes: 'In putting forward the principle of verification as a [note: *a*] criterion of meaning, I do not overlook the fact that the word "meaning" is commonly used in a variety of senses, and I do not wish to deny that in some of these senses a statement may properly be said to be meaningful even though it is neither analytic nor empirically verifiable.'<sup>2</sup> Naturally, these other senses are frowned on by Ayer as unproductive; but perhaps, even so, in this admission he has given the religious believer all, or nearly all, he needs.

My comments on the other aspects of Ayer's argument in *Language, Truth and Logic* must be much more summary.

(2) His second point is open to question. 'It is now generally admitted, at any rate by philosophers, that the existence of a being having the attributes which define the god of any non-animistic religion cannot be demonstratively proved.'<sup>3</sup> Unless Thomist philosophers are

<sup>1</sup> Ayer provides a full account of his views on statements about the past and statements about other minds in his *Philosophical Essays* and *The Problem of Knowledge*.

<sup>2</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 15.

to be classed as not genuine philosophers (perhaps, as metaphysicians, Ayer might indeed say that they are not), this is not *universally* admitted; but certainly Ayer is right in what he says here about a *general* agreement among philosophers. However, the argument he gives to show the impossibility of a demonstration of the existence of God is not clear. His account, I suspect, is based on the Ontological Argument; it does not obviously seem to apply to the Cosmological Argument or the Argument from Design. Neither of these latter two arguments begins from a *a priori* propositions, not, that is, in the sense of 'a *a priori* proposition' which Ayer himself adopts.<sup>1</sup> It is true that those philosophers who have made use of the theistic proofs have generally wished to conclude the existence of a Necessary Being, and there are problems involved in the notion of an existential proposition about a Necessary Being (Is such a proposition both empirical—because existential—and necessary—because about a Necessary Being?); but this does not seem to be the point that Ayer is making, and it is difficult to see the relevance of his remarks about a *a priori* propositions to the theistic proofs as these have actually been developed.

(3) The third point I have already discussed under (1).

(4) This is an important point and Ayer is certainly right to distinguish his position from both atheism and agnosticism as these are usually understood. One consequence of logical positivism has been the general recognition that the issues involved in religious belief are a great deal less easy to understand than has often been thought in the past—and this is a recognition that has survived the abandonment of the classical logical positivist position. It has frequently been remarked that to the present-day philosopher the puzzling question is not *whether* God exists but the preliminary one of what it *means to say* 'God exists'.<sup>2</sup> Though no doubt philosophers in the past have not been unaware of this difficulty.

(5) Ayer's views on the relation between religion and science are worthy of a fuller discussion than I can provide here. There is a view, which has recently received several expressions by philosophers, that

<sup>1</sup> *A priori* propositions, Ayer says, are those of logic and pure mathematics, and are necessary because analytic.

<sup>2</sup> Although the term 'atheist' is certainly out of place, the term 'agnostic' is no doubt capable of being so interpreted as to make it applicable to Ayer. See Professor R. W. Hepburn's *Christianity and Paradox* (London: Watts and Co., 1958) for a discussion of some central problems of meaning in Christianity from the post-logical positivist point of view (the author calls himself, or is called in the dust-jacket blurb, 'a reverent agnostic').

can be roughly summarised as follows: religion is outmoded, because what it did for past ages, science now does for us very much better; religion, a kind of pseudo-science, attempts to explain the nature of the universe, but now that genuine science has developed so successfully, religion can be thanked for its past services and seen off into retirement with no regrets. (This is the kind of view, to take an older instance of it, that Freud expresses in some parts of *The Future of an Illusion*.) But this is to take one of the aspects of the highly complex thing called religion and treat it as if it were the whole. It is true enough that religion has sometimes been presented as pseudo-science, but this is only one of the ways in which religion has been presented; when this aspect of religion is (rightly) set on one side religion still has plenty of other tasks to fulfil, tasks which are more peculiarly its own. What is interesting in Ayer's view is that he does not take up this position—one which it might be thought would be congenial to him. His view is, indeed, more extreme than this; but it is at the same time truer; for he recognises the *difference* between religion and science, and does not make the mistake of treating religion as no more than primitive science, or bad science. He also calls attention to the tendency among physicists to be sympathetic towards religion, and remarks that this is a point in favour of his view. 'For this sympathy towards religion marks the physicists' own lack of confidence in the validity of their hypotheses, which is a reaction on their part from the anti-religious dogmatism of nineteenth-century scientists, and a natural outcome of the crisis through which physics has just passed.'<sup>1</sup>

(6) 'The mystic, so far from producing propositions which are empirically verified, is unable to produce any intelligible propositions at all.' Yes; if 'intelligible proposition' is to be taken as meaning 'empirically verifiable proposition'. But Ayer is certainly not right on a wider interpretation of 'intelligible proposition'. The mystics may not have found it easy to say what they wanted to say, but they generally succeed in conveying something. 'Do not think that because I call it a "darkness" or a "cloud" it is the sort of cloud you see in the sky, or the kind of darkness you know at home when the light is out. That kind of darkness or cloud you can picture in your mind's eye in the height of summer, just as in the depth of a winter's night you can picture a clear and shining light. I do not mean this at all. By "darkness" I mean "a lack of knowing"—just as anything that you do not know or may have forgotten may be said to be "dark" to

<sup>1</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 117.

you, for you cannot see it with your inward eye. For this reason it is called "a cloud", not of the sky, of course, but "of unknowing", a cloud of unknowing between you and your God.<sup>1</sup> The *via negativa* has generally been held to have some positive significance; for knowing what God is not is one way of knowing what God is. One is struck, further, in much mystical writing, by the amount of space given to straightforward advice on how to pray or meditate, or conduct oneself in general, or information about psychological states. But Ayer's account of what is achieved by the mystic is at fault in a more important respect. He presents the mystic as someone who claims to have attained *knowledge* or *truth*. To quote yet again: 'The mystic, so far from producing propositions which are empirically verified, is unable to produce any intelligible propositions at all. And therefore we say that his intuition *has not revealed to him any facts*. It is no use his saying that he has apprehended facts but is unable to express them. For we know that if he really had *acquired any information* he would be able to express it.' [my italics] This is an odd way to describe what the mystic is trying to do. The mystic, in the Christian tradition anyway, aims ultimately at *union with God*, and however difficult this notion may be to explain I am sure that Ayer's language of 'acquiring information', 'apprehending facts' is totally out of place. It could be said, perhaps, that the mystic believes himself to know certain facts, or possess certain information, before he starts; and, of course, the mystic may well claim that his knowledge is deepened as a result of his mystical practices; but he is likely to mean by this, knowledge in the sense of knowledge *of* a person ('the object of his vision', to use Ayer's phrase) rather than knowledge *about* anything. In any case, mysticism, it is generally held, requires discipline and deep study, and it is perhaps not to be expected that the apparent extent of Professor Ayer's acquaintance with it would qualify him to understand easily what mystics say. I do not mean that it can ever be very easy.

Ayer seems to treat 'mysticism' and 'religious experience' as synonyms. This, I think, is inadvisable. The expression 'religious experience' has a wider connotation than has 'mysticism'. Men may claim to have had religious experiences, or even to have them frequently, without being described, and without wishing to describe themselves, as mystics.

<sup>1</sup> From *The Cloud of Unknowing*. I am quoting from the version in modern English (by Clifton Wolters), recently published in the Penguin Classics series.

In spite of these criticisms I find myself in a large measure of agreement with Ayer over this, his last, point. Religious experiences (let us leave mysticism out of the question as, if anything, its introduction only confuses the issue) are frequently appealed to as grounds for belief in God. At the present time this appeal is extremely fashionable.<sup>1</sup> But I agree with Ayer that the argument from religious experience is fallacious. The essentially private nature of religious experience, as this is generally understood by those who make use of the argument (it has also a different 'public' sense, but this is not usually in question here), makes it an unsatisfactory basis for a theistic proof; it is too easy for a man to deceive either himself, or others, or both. The three traditional theistic arguments (the Ontological Argument, the Cosmological Argument, the Argument from Design), whatever else may be wrong with them, have at least the merit of making their appeal to, in some sense, 'public' things: the idea of God, an idea widely held; the existence of chairs, tables, etc.; the order and design alleged to be discoverable in the Solar System, the workings of the human ear or eye, etc., etc. But I cannot argue this point fully here. I am all too aware that the virtue of brevity in Ayer's presentation of his views on religion that I began by calling attention to is not shared by the present discussion of these views.

<sup>1</sup> See Professor H. D. Lewis' *Our Experience of God* for a detailed recent attempt to prove the truth of religion by appeal to the evidence of religious experience.



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## Dr Sargant and Mr Wesley

### A Psychiatrist's Theory of Conversion

IN recent years a number of books have subjected the phenomena of religion, and more specifically of Christianity, to analysis from the psychological and psycho-somatic angle, but none has been more widely read and more heatedly discussed than Dr William Sargant's *Battle for the Mind*. Its republication in a popular paper-back edition has placed it within the reach of all who wish to familiarise themselves with the author's thesis. Dr Sargant, who is a physician in psychological medicine at a well-known London teaching hospital, sets out to enquire into the neuro-physiology of religious conversion and political brain-washing. He finds that politicians, priests and psychiatrists often face the same problem: namely, how to discover the most rapid and lasting means of changing a man's beliefs. He believes that the same mechanistic process underlies each of these apparently diverse projects.

The basis of his entire argument is contained in the opening chapters in which he examines Pavlov's experiments on conditioned reflexes in dogs. Under insistent pressure an ultra-paradoxical stage was reached in which a complete reversal of reaction was produced. 'The possible relevance of these experiments to sudden religious and political conversion', Sargant suggests, 'should be obvious even to the most sceptical'.<sup>1</sup> Now it seems to a mere layman in matters medical that the connection is not quite as transparent as Sargant would like us to suppose, and it is reassuring to learn that such an acknowledged expert as Professor R. H. Thouless is equally suspicious. 'This phrase "should be obvious"', he says in a review, 'seems to cover a considerable leap in thought'.<sup>2</sup> The cases are not so closely parallel as Sargant wants us to believe.

But quite apart from the dubious premiss upon which Sargant's theory rather unsteadily rests, it is evident that when he moves into the field of religious experience he is even less convincing. He apologises in advance for any inaccuracies incident to this excursion beyond his specialised sphere, and here we must take him seriously. And, in

<sup>1</sup> W. Sargant, *Battle for the Mind*, Pan Edition, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Thouless in *Theology*, vol. lxi, p. 209.

fairness to him, it must be said that he genuinely endeavours to avoid offending the religious susceptibilities of his readers and claims, somewhat naively, that he is not concerned with the truth or falsity of any particular belief. This indifference is nothing short of alarming, not to say criminal, when he argues that, since almost identical physiological and psychological phenomena may result from healing methods and conversion techniques associated with widely divergent faiths, what matters most is the underlying mechanistic principle which determines human response. Whatever Dr Sargant himself may say in protest, it nevertheless remains apparent that the overall impression conveyed by his book to the lay mind is that he has succeeded in explaining away the spiritual miracle of conversion. He echoes the conclusion reached by Professor J. H. Leuba that 'in religious lives accessible to psychological investigation nothing requiring the admission of superhuman influences has been found'.<sup>1</sup>

The most vulnerable sections of *Battle for the Mind* are those which even dare to trespass on the Word of God and present us with a psychologised version of Acts 2 and 9. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones deals very faithfully with that travesty of exegesis in his admirable little I.V.F. Pocket Book entitled *Conversions Psychological and Spiritual*. Our purpose in this brief article is to examine the evidence adduced by Sargant from the preaching of John Wesley. He tells us that his selection of Wesley for detailed treatment was prompted by his own Methodist upbringing. It was whilst he was involved in the rehabilitation of war-shock victims by abreaction techniques that he happened to pick up a copy of Wesley's *Journal* in his father's house. 'My eye was caught by Wesley's detailed reports of the occurrence, two hundred years before, of almost identical states of emotional excitement, often leading to temporary emotional collapse, which he induced by a particular sort of preaching. These phenomena often appeared when he had persuaded his hearers that they must make an immediate choice between certain damnation and the acceptance of his own soul-saving religious views. The fear of burning in hell induced by his graphic preaching could be compared to the suggestion we might force on a returned soldier, during treatment, that he was in danger of being burned alive in his tank and must fight his way out. The two techniques seemed startlingly similar'.<sup>2</sup> This analysis of Wesley's preaching is expanded later in the book.

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Leuba, *A Psychological Study of Religion*, p. 272.

<sup>2</sup> Sargant, *op. cit.* pp. 18-19.

There are several points raised by Dr Sargant's account of Wesley which must be taken up. In the first place it should be noted that it was the *Journal* for the years 1739 and 1740 to which Dr Sargant turned, and it is well known to students of the period that certain revivalistic features manifested themselves in the early days of the Methodist movement, which almost entirely disappeared later. What I have elsewhere called 'The Years of Visitation' gave way in 1742 to 'The Years of Evangelisation'.<sup>1</sup> No firm line of transition can be fixed, of course, but it is generally agreed that somewhere around the years 1742 and 1743 there was a noticeable consolidation. From this time forward the hysterical accompaniments of Wesley's preaching were only occasional. Dr Sydney G. Dimond has carefully examined 234 individual cases enumerated and reported on during the period 1739-43.<sup>2</sup> Monsignor Ronald Knox disputes the contention that such phenomena faded out altogether after that, but the most he can do is to produce an isolated instance here and there spread over the next forty-five years.<sup>3</sup> The only really notable exception was the Weardale revival of 1772, and it is significant that with reference to some of the signs following Wesley comments: 'Now these circumstances are common at the dawn of a work, but afterwards very uncommon.'<sup>4</sup> The violent emotional consequences of Wesley's preaching, then, were largely confined to the limited period at the outset of the Awakening: they are not representative of the mainstream of his ministry.

An objection must be raised against Dr Sargant's repetition of the word 'induced' in the paragraph quoted above. There is no ground whatsoever for the assumption that Wesley deliberately played upon his hearers in order to produce the effects described in his *Journal*. The injustice to Wesley is aggravated by the attribution of a 'technique'. Nothing was further from his mind. Dr Sargant even imagines that Wesley anticipated twentieth-century scientific research and 'speculated about possible physiological factors'.<sup>5</sup> But the quotation Sargant supplies from Wesley's *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* will hardly bear the interpretation he puts upon it. All Wesley is saying is that it is not surprising that a sinner suddenly faced with the heinousness of sin, the wrath of God and the pains of eternal death should be

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. S. Wood, *The Inextinguishable Blaze*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> S. G. Dimond, *The Psychology of the Methodist Revival*, pp. 127-139.

<sup>3</sup> R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm*, pp. 530-533.

<sup>4</sup> *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. N. Curnock, vol. v, p. 471.

<sup>5</sup> Sargant, *op. cit.* p. 126.

affected in body as well as in soul. And he hastens on to justify his assertion from the Word of God and claims that 'there is plain Scripture precedent of every symptom which has lately appeared'.<sup>1</sup> 'First of all, Wesley would create high emotional tension in his potential converts', Dr Sargant states: 'but once again contemporary evidence contradicts him.'<sup>2</sup> It was Whitefield, not Wesley, who was the emotional preacher of the revival, and yet it was only rarely that any outburst followed his message. By contrast, Wesley's manner was calm and logical. His appeal was directed to the mind, the will and the conscience. He was no 'ranter'. He avoided exaggerated gestures. He was on his guard against eccentric mannerisms. He constantly warned his preachers against the unseemliness of shouting. 'Never scream', he wrote to one. 'Never speak above the natural pitch of your voice: it is disgusting to the hearers. It gives them pain, not pleasure. And it is destroying to yourself. It is offering God murder for sacrifice.'<sup>3</sup> It may well have been that the very restraint of his demeanour made it the more likely that when he had finished his discourse pent-up emotion would seek an outlet, but to suggest that Wesley adopted this style as a conscious technique is to go beyond the evidence.

In the same connection Dr Sargant observes: 'The increase of suggestibility, often brought about by such methods (he has been referring to what Hecker calls a "religious epidemic" at Redruth in 1814), comes out clearly in the Rev. Jonathan Edwards' account of the 1735 revival that he initiated at Northampton, Massachusetts. Wesley, may, in fact, have read Edwards' account before starting his own campaign four years later.'<sup>4</sup> Once again the phraseology is tendentious, for anyone who reads Edwards' *Narrative* will realise that he was the last man to think it possible to initiate a revival, whilst Wesley certainly had no intention of 'starting a campaign' in 1739, as Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones effectively shows.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand we must challenge the latter's dismissal of the possibility that Wesley might have seen Edwards' report prior to the *annus mirabilis* of the eighteenth-century awakening in Britain, 1739. The entry in Wesley's *Journal* for 9 October 1738, is decisive: 'I set out for Oxford. In walking I read

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 3rd edn. vol. viii, p. 131. Dr Sargant does not manage to supply a correct transcription.

<sup>2</sup> Sargant, *op. cit.* p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. J. Telford, vol. viii, p. 190.

<sup>4</sup> Sargant, *op. cit.* p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Conversions Psychological and Spiritual*, p. 23.

the truly surprising narrative of the conversions lately wrought in and about the town of Northampton, in New England. Surely "this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."<sup>1</sup> In view of this explicit statement and the confirmatory knowledge we have that Isaac Watts and John Guyse published the *Narrative* in England in 1737 and that it was widely read and instrumental in focusing attention on the need for revival here, we can hardly agree with Dr Lloyd-Jones that Sargant's suggestion is 'pure hypothesis, and there is no evidence to confirm it'.<sup>2</sup> But whilst Wesley undoubtedly knew of the American awakening before he began to take the message of free salvation to the masses of the people, and no doubt prayed that God would bestow a similar blessing in Britain, there is no hint of conscious imitation. Indeed, nothing was plainer to Wesley's own mind than that the exceptional effectiveness of his preaching from 1738 onwards was not due to any psychological technique or attempt to reproduce the conditions of a transatlantic revival, but to his rediscovery of the basic evangelical message in the Word of God, and his fearless proclamation of it. 'As soon as I saw clearly the nature of saving faith and made it the standing topic of my preaching,' he declared, 'God then began to work by my ministry as He never had done before.'<sup>3</sup>

Dr Sargant makes no real attempt to examine the content of Wesley's sermons nor to arrive at a satisfactory theological understanding of the Spirit's work in conviction, yet without this, of course, it is quite impossible to assess the nature of such preaching. He reiterates the common misconception that Wesley's ultimate appeal was couched in lurid terms exhorting sinners to flee from the wrath to come. He refers to the fear of everlasting hell as 'one of Wesley's powerful conversion weapons'.<sup>4</sup> Whilst it is true that Wesley gave more place to this Scriptural emphasis than is allowed in our liberalised pulpits today, it cannot be regarded as an unduly dominant factor. There were thorough-going hell-fire preachers in the eighteenth century (though not perhaps so many as in the nineteenth), but Wesley was not one of them. Even when he reaches his application, as we can see from his

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, vol. ii, pp. 83-84. From Wesley's Diary we learn that three or four hours were occupied in reading the story of the New England revival and that when he arrived in Oxford he apparently sent an account of it to an unnamed friend.

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *op. cit.* p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Works*, vol. viii, pp. 28-29; *Letters*, vol. ii, p. 264.

<sup>4</sup> Sargant, *op. cit.* p. 127; cf. p. 84.

Standard Sermons, his stress is on the ethical more than on the eschatological. 'What sermons do we find by experience to be attended with the greatest blessing?' he asked at the Conference of 1746. And this is the reply he gave: 'Such as are most close, convincing, practical. Such as have most of Christ the Priest, the Atonement. Such as urge the heinousness of men living in contempt or ignorance of Him.'<sup>1</sup> And he epitomises his essential message in these terms: 'God loves you; therefore love and obey Him. Christ died for you; therefore die to sin. Christ is risen; therefore rise in the image of God. Christ liveth evermore; therefore live to God till you live with Him in glory! So we preached.'<sup>2</sup>

We have seen that the more extreme reactions to Wesley's evangelistic preaching were virtually confined to the years 1739 to 1742 or 1743 when the fire of revival was at its height. Thenceforward recurrences were rare. But this is not to suggest that even these outbursts are susceptible of the explanation that Dr Sargant would infer. We do not regard them as the normal effects of Gospel preaching, but the historical records of Christianity remind us that they do in fact appear from time to time when the Church experiences a Pentecostal reinvigoration. We must indeed test the spirits whether they be of God, but they are not to be dismissed out of hand. When George Whitefield first learned of the strange scenes that accompanied Wesley's preaching in 1739—convulsive tearings, violent trembling, strong cries and tears, unutterable groanings, men and women dropping down as dead—he was inclined to be suspicious. 'That there is something of God in it, I doubt not,' he wrote. 'But the devil, I believe, interposes. I think it will encourage the French prophets, take people from the written word, and make them depend on visions, convulsions, etc. more than on the promises and precepts of the Gospel.'<sup>3</sup> But a few days later Whitefield visited Wesley at Bristol, where these phenomena occurred, and Wesley was able to report in his *Journal*: 'I had an opportunity to talk with him of those outward signs which had so often accompanied the inward work of God. I found his objections were chiefly grounded on gross misrepresentations of matter of fact. But the next day he had an opportunity of informing himself better: for no sooner had he begun (in the application of his sermon) to invite all sinners to believe in Christ, than four persons sunk down close to him, almost in the same moment. . . . From this time, I trust, we shall all suffer God to

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes* 1746.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. xi, p. 486.

<sup>3</sup> L. Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, vol. i. p. 253.

carry on His own work in the way that pleaseth Him.<sup>1</sup> 'That good, great good, is done is evident,' was Whitefield's verdict. 'It is little less than blasphemy against the Holy Ghost to impute this great work, that has been wrought in so short a time in this kingdom, to delusion and the power of the devil.'<sup>2</sup>

Wesley's own defence of the genuineness of this Divine work is contained in the noble and moving answer he gave to his own brother Samuel, who had queried the manifestations from a distance. 'My dear brother, the whole question turns chiefly, if not wholly, on matter of fact. You deny that God does now work these effects—at least, that He works them in such a manner: I affirm both, because I have heard those facts with my ears and seen them with my eyes. I have seen, as far as it can be seen, very many persons changed in a moment from the spirit of horror, fear, and despair, to the spirit of hope, joy, peace, and from sinful desires (till then reigning over them) to a pure desire of doing the will of God. These are matters of fact, whereof I have been, and almost daily am, eye- or ear-witness. . . . Saw you him that was a lion till then, and is now a lamb; him that was a drunkard, but now exemplarily sober; the whoremonger that was, who now abhors the very lusts of the flesh? These are my living arguments for what I assert—that God now, as aforetime, gives remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost, which may be called visions. If it be not so, I am found a false witness; but, however, I do and will testify the things I have both seen and heard.'<sup>3</sup> Later, in dispassionate retrospect from the vantage point of 1781 he added a discerning comment: 'Satan mimicked this part of the work of God in order to discredit the whole: and yet it is not wise to *give up* this part, any more than to give up the whole.'<sup>4</sup>

Dr Sargant's fundamental failure lies in his inability to recognise the supernatural character of Christian experience. He even endeavours to explain the conversion of Wesley in terms of his theory, although it would seem that almost every item in the circumstances of that epochal event is ranged against him. As Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones rightly points out, 'the fallacy which seems to run right through the book *Battle for the Mind*, is that the Person and work of the Holy Spirit are entirely

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, vol. ii, pp. 239–240.

<sup>2</sup> *George Whitefield's Journals*, ed. I. Murray, p. 299.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, vol. i, pp. 290–291.

<sup>4</sup> A. Stevens, *The History of the Religious Movement in the Eighteenth Century Called Methodism*, vol. i, p. 188.

overlooked.<sup>1</sup> Should it not be the function of a valid psychology to recognise the reality of the spiritual? We do not subscribe to the view that psychology and religion must necessarily be at loggerheads. Indeed it is in this very realm of experience that they should be able to meet and embrace each other. For, as Dr Dimond has finely observed, 'in all the history of psychological science there is no saying more profoundly significant than that of Jesus, "Ye must be born again."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *op. cit.* p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Dimond, *op. cit.* p. 207.



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## The New English Bible

14 March 1961, was the most important day in the history of the Bible in Britain since 19 May 1885, when the Revised Version of the Old and New Testaments was published in one volume. The Revised Version was an enterprise in which representatives of the Churches of England and Scotland and several other British Churches took part. Since its appearance we have had many other versions of the Bible, in whole or in part, produced by individual translators or by committees, but now once again we have a version sponsored by the principal Churches of Great Britain and Ireland. The New Testament in this new version has just appeared, in two editions—a library edition with full translators' notes and introduction, selling at 21s., and a popular edition with a minimum of notes and a shorter introduction, selling at 8s. 6d. The publishers are the Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press. For the Old Testament we shall have to wait a few more years.

When the Revised Version was launched, the initiative was taken by the Anglican communion—more precisely, by the Upper House of Convocation of Canterbury. The initiative in regard to the New English Bible was taken by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1946, in response to an overture from the Presbytery of Stirling and Dunblane. The ministers and elders of Stirling and Dunblane may well take some pardonable pride in contemplating the effect of their overture! The Church of Scotland approached other British Churches, and a Joint Committee of the Churches was set up to direct the work. It was recognised from the beginning that what was required was no mere revision of one or more earlier versions but a completely new translation.

The Joint Committee, on which the Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, the British and Foreign Bible Society and the National Bible Society of Scotland were represented in addition to the Churches, set up three panels of translators—one for the Old Testament, one for the Apocrypha and one for the New Testament. They also set up a panel of literary experts whose task it should be to review the work of the translators and suggest improvements in style and diction. This last provision was a wise one, in the light of the many

(and not unjustified) criticisms that had been made of the Revised Version on this score.

The panels for the Old Testament and Apocrypha are still pursuing their course, under the convenership of Professor G. R. Driver and Professor G. D. Kilpatrick respectively. The convener of the New Testament panel was Professor C. H. Dodd, who is also Director of the whole enterprise. Professor Dodd is, by general consent, the most distinguished biblical scholar in the British Isles today, and it is both gratifying and encouraging to know that such an important work as the New English Bible is being carried on under his direction. But he is director, not dictator; here and there in the New Testament version one comes upon renderings which would probably not be his personal preference, to judge by what he has written elsewhere. While individuals have contributed in many ways to the translation, their contributions have been subject to the judgment of the whole panel, whose members accept corporate responsibility for the work. The New Testament version was finally approved by the Joint Committee at a meeting in the historic Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey in March 1960.

One thing that biblical translators have to make up their minds about before they start translating is the text that they are going to use. The men who gave us the Authorized Version of 1611 did not concern themselves about this; so far as concerns the New Testament, they simply followed the text of the early printed editions of the Greek Testament. The Revised Version, largely under the influence of Westcott and Hort, paid chief respect to the ancient Alexandrian text, represented principally by the Sinaitic and Vatican Codices. This policy marked a great advance on the Authorized Version; and one of the abiding virtues of the Revised Version of the New Testament is the great superiority of its underlying Greek text over that which underlay the older version. Today, however, the Alexandrian text, reliable as it is, would not be accorded the same solitary pre-eminence as was given it by Westcott and Hort. The Introduction to the New English Bible says: 'There is not at the present time any critical text which would command the same degree of general acceptance as the Revisers' text did in its day. Nor has the time come, in the judgment of competent scholars, to construct such a text, since new material constantly comes to light, and the debate continues. The present translators therefore could do no other than consider variant readings on their merits, and, having weighed the evidence for themselves, select for translation in

each passage the reading which to the best of their judgment seemed most likely to represent what the author wrote. Where other readings seemed to deserve serious consideration they have been recorded in footnotes.' This decision in favour of an eclectic text is inevitable and wise in the present situation; although one might wish that the footnotes sometimes, instead of merely saying that 'some witnesses read' something different from what appears in the text, could have given a little indication of the relative support given to variant readings. But then it was no part of the translators' responsibility to provide an *apparatus criticus* to their text.

Rarely if ever has conjecture been resorted to. There is one reading which used to be called the only certain conjecture in the New Testament. That is the reading 'javelin' for 'hyssop' in Jolin xix. 29. The advantage of adopting this reading in such a context is fairly obvious. It was first suggested by a scholar in the sixteenth century, on the ground that an original *hyssoperithentes* might have become *hyssopoperithentes* by the accidental dittography of two letters. More recently the reading *hyssop* ('on a javelin') has been identified in the first hand of a mediaeval manuscript, in which however a later hand changed it to *hyssopo* ('on hyssop') in accordance with the general text.

This reading was examined by Professor G. D. Kilpatrick in a paper which he read to the VICTORIA INSTITUTE some years ago on 'The Transmission of the New Testament and its Reliability' (see *Journal of Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 89 (1957), pp. 98 f.) He pointed out that, for all its attractiveness, 'this plausible conjecture lands us in improbabilities and difficulties greater than those of the text of our manuscript'. His main reason for saying this was that the Greek word *hyssos* was used as the equivalent of the Latin *pilum*, not of any kind of javelin without distinction. Now the *pilum* was the weapon of Roman legionary troops, not of auxiliary troops; but until A.D. 66 no legionary troops were stationed in Judaea. In that case, no *hyssos* would have been available at the time of our Lord's crucifixion to be used for putting the vinegar-soaked sponge to His lips. Yet the New English Bible gives the rendering: 'they soaked a sponge with the wine, fixed it on a javelin, and held it up to his lips.' A footnote on 'javelin' says: 'So one witness; the others read "on marjoram".' In preferring 'javelin' in the text the new translation follows Moffatt, the Basic Bible, Goodspeed, Rieu, Phillips and Kingsley Williams; but on Dr Kilpatrick's showing this reading cannot be accepted, unless indeed we hold that John used the word in a looser sense than any other Greek writer who uses it.

As regards the translation, it must be reiterated that it is an utterly new translation, not a revision of any existing version. This being so, it does not lend itself to comparison with, say, the Revised Standard Version, which was simply a revision and therefore retains much of what the English-speaking world has come to regard as 'Bible English'. Still less does the new version lend itself to comparison with the Authorized Version, although its sponsors make it plain that it is not intended to supersede the Authorized Version, but rather to be used alongside it. Yet, because throughout the English-speaking world the Bible is best known in the Authorized Version, the New English Bible is bound to be compared with it, and many people will come to their own conclusions about the new version in the light of such a comparison, and express their 'like' or 'dislike' of it accordingly.

The sonorous English of the Authorized Version, which in essence we owe to William Tyndale, and which makes the Authorized Version so eminently suitable for public reading, will probably be missed from the New English Bible. Yet the new translators have achieved some noble passages. The canticles in Luke's nativity narrative, for example, do full justice to the poetic quality of the original; here is the beginning of the *Magnificat*:

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord,  
rejoice, rejoice, my spirit, in God my saviour;  
so tenderly has he looked upon his servant,  
    humble as she is.  
For, from this day forth,  
all generations will count me blessed,  
so wonderfully has he dealt with me,  
    the Lord, the Mighty One.

In some respects the new translation follows the Authorized Version rather than the Revised Version: for example, it does not imitate the Revised Version in using the same English word, as far as possible, to represent the same Greek word throughout the New Testament. This feature of the Revised Version is one which makes it so admirable as a student's version, and no doubt exact students of the New Testament, who wish to have the vocabulary of the original represented as precisely as possible by English equivalents, will continue to value the Revised Version for this reason. The Greek word *xylon* (literally meaning 'wood') is used five times in the New Testament in reference to the cross (which elsewhere is indicated by another Greek word, *stauros*). For those five occurrences the older versions have 'tree';

the New English Bible has 'gibbet' in Acts v. 30; x. 39; xiii. 29; 'tree' in Galatians iii. 13 (quoting from Deut. xxi. 23); 'gallows' in 1 Peter ii. 24. (The other word, *stauros*, is regularly rendered 'cross'.)

Sometimes the new translation goes back to even earlier models than the Authorized Version. The translators of the Authorized Version claim to have avoided 'the scrupulosity of the Puritanes, who leave the old Ecclesiastical words, and betake them to other, as when they put . . . *congregation* instead of *Church*'. But whether it was Puritan scrupulosity or some other consideration that moved the new translators, they have shown a preference for 'congregation' over 'church' where a local church is in view. In Matthew xvi. 18 they make Jesus say, 'on this rock I will build my church'; but in Matthew xviii. 17 we find 'report the matter to the congregation, and if he will not listen even to the congregation, you must then treat him as you would a pagan or a tax-gatherer'. So Tyndale comes into his own again.

Some books on the English Bible have quoted for its quaintness the rendering of 1 Corinthians xvi. 8 in most of the older English versions from Wycliffe to Geneva: 'I will tarry at Ephesus until Whitsuntide.' Now the New English Bible can be added to the list: 'I shall remain at Ephesus until Whitsuntide.' When the reviewer saw this, he looked up Revelation i. 10 in pleasurable anticipation, hoping that (after Tyndale and Coverdale) John might say that he was in spirit 'on a Sunday', but no: 'It was on the Lord's day.' Nor has Passover reverted to Easter in Acts xii. 4. The preceding verse says: 'This happened during the festival of Unleavened Bread.' But the translators' propensity for using now one phrase and now another to represent the same original appears when we compare Acts xx. 6; here 'after the days of Unleavened Bread' is relegated to a footnote as the literal rendering, while the text reads: 'after the Passover season.'

Great care is taken to distinguish between the present and aorist tenses of such a verb as 'believe' by the use of such phrases as 'have faith in' and 'put faith in'; phrases like these have the additional advantage of making the relation between the verb 'believe' and the noun 'faith' immediately apparent. This is specially helpful in the Epistle to the Romans.

The unit in this translation is not the individual word but the clause or sentence; sometimes, indeed, it may be more extensive still. In following this principle the new translators have followed one of their earliest English predecessors, John Purvey, who edited the second Wycliffite version in 1395. John Purvey had a sound grasp of the

principles of translation, and he laid it down that the good translator will 'translate after the sentence and not only after the words'. It may be that by 'sentence' Purvey meant what we should call the meaning; but it makes little practical difference; a translator who aims at reproducing the meaning of the original in the idiom of his own day will make the clause or sentence and not the single word his working unit.

A review which is written so soon after publication must, of course, be a provisional one. The usefulness of the new version for use in church can only be proved by experience. For private use it can confidently be said that it will commend itself to many. Not only the language but the format draws the reader on; he cannot be content with a small portion as enough to be going on with, but finds himself reading further to see what comes next. At present, no doubt, this is partly due to the novelty of the version. How have they translated this? What will they make of that? From time to time he is pulled up with a jerk. The last clause of John i. 1 reads: 'what God was, the Word was.' Is that what the clause really means? Or have the translators perhaps been moved by an unconscious desire to give a rather different rendering from the Authorized Version? Sometimes the idiom is positively homely: 'This is more than we can stomach!' say the offended listeners to our Lord's discourse about the bread of life (John vi. 60). 'Why listen to such words?'

There is nothing in the way of denominational or sectional bias in the New English Bible; that really goes without saying, in view of the many Churches represented on the panels, not to mention the reputation of the individual translators. The great verities of the historic Christian faith come to clear expression; that too is only what was to be expected in a version whose sole aim is to let the biblical writers convey their own message in mid-twentieth century English.

The reviewer comes across things now and then which he is tempted to think he could have rendered better himself. But he reflects that in the multitude of counsellors there is safety; and, having occasionally tried his hand at Bible translation in the way of private enterprise, he is the less inclined to criticise other translators. It is, however, not people who do some translating themselves who will have the last word to say about the New English Bible. The man in the street (with rare exceptions) cannot make shoes, but he knows whether shoes fit him or not. And it is the common reader who will decide the fortunes of the New English Bible. If in this version he hears the Word of God addressing

itself to his heart and meeting his need, he will give it a welcome that will surpass the translators' most sanguine hopes. The reign of Elizabeth II will then be looked back upon as an epoch in the history of the English Bible no less glorious than the reign of her great namesake of four hundred years ago.

#### Books Received

- J. Cuttat, *The Encounter of Religions*, Desclee.  
A. Guirdham, *Christ and Freud*, Allen and Unwin.  
E. Harris, *Revelation Through Reason*, Allen and Unwin.  
T. R. Miles, *Religion and the Scientific Outlook*, Allen and Unwin.  
C. W. Hume, *The Status of Animals in the Christian Religion*, U.F.A.W.  
E. McLoughlin, *American and Catholic Schools*, Lyle Stuart.  
A. R. M. H., *Religion Culture and Mental Health*, New York.  
A. R. M. H., *Religion in the Developing Personality*, New York.  
J. Wilson, *Philosophy and Religion*, Oxford.