

# The Freethinker

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THE RESPECTIVE DATES of the birth and of the crucifixion of Jesus have bearing on the history of the Judaeans during the Second Commonwealth. Hence it is imperative, if possible, to ascertain the dates so as to place them in the proper perspective of the history of that period.

According to Matthew, Jesus was born during the reign of King Herod.<sup>1</sup> The evangelist states that when Herod heard that the king of the Jews was born he sent messengers to Bethlehem to search for the infant. When they could not find him Herod was angered and ordered that all infants born in Bethlehem and its environs within the last two years should be killed.<sup>2</sup>

Herod reigned thirty-four years after Antigonus the Hasmonean was put to death. Herod, with the help of the Romans, conquered Jerusalem in January, 37 BCE, 717AUC.<sup>3</sup> Josephus states that shortly before Herod died there was an eclipse of the moon.<sup>4</sup> The eclipse occurred on March 13, 750 AUC, 4 BCE.<sup>5</sup> The date given by Matthew is in contradiction of the date of Herod's death as given by Josephus.

Luke tells that Jesus was born at the time when Cyrenius (Quirenius) the legate of Syria took a census of all the inhabitants of Judaea<sup>6</sup> on the order of Augustus Caesar. After stating that Joseph went from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Bethlehem to be taxed, Luke wrote, "And so it was that they (Joseph and Mariam) were there, the days were accomplished and she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first born son. . . . And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them. . . . and the angel said unto them Fear not; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Messiah, Christ the Lord."<sup>7</sup>

The first census that Cyrenius had taken was at the time when Archelaus was deposed from his kingdom and Judaea became a province of Rome;<sup>8</sup> the date was 579 AUC, 6CE. Thus there is a difference between the date given by Matthew and that given by Luke of 9-10 years. Luke is correct when he states that the first census of Judaea was taken by Cyrenius, the legate of Syria. Rome took no census of Judaea before that time. Judaea had been an independent state and was in the status of *reges socii*. King Herod was held in high esteem by Augustus Caesar, who did not interfere in the internal affairs of Judaea. Herod was an entirely independent king and was held a *rex socius*. When Augustus confirmed Archelaus as ethnarch of Judaea, in accordance with the will of Herod, Rome did not take a census of Judaea as it was an independent state. Rome took a census of Judaea when it became a province of Rome in the year 6 CE. It was Rome's policy that when a country the first procedure was to take a census of the inhabitants and to list their properties for the purpose of taxation.<sup>9</sup> Josephus makes three references in his work *The Wars*, regarding this taxation. In Book 7, speaking of Eleazar, the leader of the Sicarii,

he states, "He was a descendant of Judas who, as we have previously related, induced multitudes of the Judaeans to refuse to enrol themselves when Cyrenius was sent as censor to Judaea."<sup>10</sup> Acts also makes reference to this taxation. The author wrote, "After this man (Theudas) rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of taxing, and drew away much people after him."<sup>11</sup>

Tertullian, in his treatise against Marcion, states that in the time of Jesus a census was taken in Judaea by Sentius Saturninus.<sup>12</sup> Saturninus was the legate of Syria during the years 9-6 BCE.<sup>13</sup> It can be seen from another treatise by Tertullian that he erred in his statement. In his treatise *An Answer to the Jews* he

wrote, "Let us see, moreover, how in the forty-first years of the empire of Augustus, when he had been reigning XX and VIII years after the death of Cleopatra Christ is born."<sup>14</sup> Thus Tertullian placed the date of the birth of Jesus in the twenty-eighth year after Cleopatra's death. She died on the first day of the seventh month, renamed Augustus, in the year 30 BCE.<sup>15</sup> Twenty eight years after the death of Cleopatra would be the year 2 BCE. Thus Jesus could not have been living during the time of Saturninus who was a legate of Syria between 745-748 AUC, 9-6 BCE.

Clement of Alexandria (d. c. 217 CE) in his treatise, *The Stromata*, wrote, "From the birth of the Lord to the death of Commodus are, in all, C and XCIV years, one month thirteen days."<sup>16</sup> Emperor Commodus was slain on the thirty-first of December 192 CE,<sup>17</sup> which would make the date of the birth of Jesus 2 BCE.<sup>18</sup>

Through Irenaeus does not speak specifically of the date of the birth of Jesus, it can be deduced from his treatise *Against Heresies* that he places it a few years before the year one CE. According to the gospel of Luke, Jesus was thirty years of age when he was baptised by John and began his ministry.<sup>19</sup> Some have believed that the ministry of Jesus lasted for one year. Irenaeus argued against this contention. He wrote that it is stated in the Gospel according to John, Jesus said "Your father Abraham, rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad." The Judaeans retorted, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?"<sup>20</sup> Irenaeus argued as follows, "Now, such language is fittingly applied to one who has already passed the age of forty, without having as yet reached his fiftieth year, yet is not far from the latter period. But to one who is only thirty years old it would unquestionably be said 'thou art not yet forty years old'"<sup>21</sup> Irenaeus endeavoured to prove that the ministry of Jesus lasted more than eleven years. Thus Jesus at the time of his death was considerably more than forty. Jesus was crucified during the time when Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judaea. He assumed this position in the year 26 CE and held it until 36 CE.<sup>22</sup> Thus the crucifixion should at the latest be placed in 35-36 CE. If at that time Jesus was more than forty then the birth occurred at

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### *The Dates of the Birth and Crucifixion of Jesus*

By SOLOMON ZEITLIN

the latest in the year 7-6 BCE. The Gospels of Mark and John did not refer to the date of the birth of Jesus nor did the Apostolic Fathers.

The Church historian, Eusebius, placed the birth of Jesus in the forty-second year of the reign of Augustus. He adds that it occurred in, "the twenty-eighth year after the submission of Egypt and the death of Antony and Cleopatra."<sup>23</sup> If Eusebius reckoned the year of the reign of Augustus from the date of the assassination of Julius Caesar, which took place in the year 44 BCE, then the birth of Jesus would have been in the year two BCE. If however, he dated the reign of Augustus from his victory over Cassius and Brutus, which occurred in forty-two BCE,<sup>24</sup> then Jesus must have been born in the year one CE. But this would not be in accordance with the other date given by the historian—that Jesus was born in the twenty-eighth year after the submission of Egypt and the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra. They died in the year thirty BCE.<sup>25</sup> Hence twenty-eight years after their death would be the year two BCE—the date of the birth of Jesus. Furthermore in the same paragraph Eusebius places the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, "at the time of the census which then first took place, while Quirinius (Cyrenius) was governor of Syria."<sup>26</sup> As was previously stated, Cyrenius took the census of Judaea in the year six CE. Thus the historian gives contradictory dates as to the birth of Jesus. Furthermore in another passage Eusebius places the birth of Jesus at the time of Herod stating that when Herod heard of the birth of Jesus he ordered the slaughtering of all infants born within the last two years in Bethlehem and its environs.<sup>27</sup> Herod died in the Spring of 4 BCE. The last date given by the historian adds still more confusion as to the date of the birth of Jesus.

It is to be noted that the early Church Fathers, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, who wrote of the birth of Jesus, did not refer to the slaughter of the infants by Herod. Is there not a possibility that the story of the slaughter of the infants, in Matthew, is a later interpolation?

To sum up—the date of the birth of Jesus was unknown to the early Church Fathers. They recorded different dates as to the birth but there was no exact tradition, and hence there were conflicting dates. Therefore the date of the birth of Jesus cannot be associated with any historical event in the history of the Second Jewish commonwealth. It is also to be noted that the month and the day of the month were not known in the early period of Christianity. Different months and days were assigned to the birth of Jesus. Clement of Alexandria recorded different months and days of the birth of Jesus. He stated, "Others say that he was born on the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth Pharmuthi."<sup>28</sup> Josephus wrote that the Egyptian month, Pharmuthi, is called Nisan by the Hebrews, and Xanthicus by the Macedonians.<sup>29</sup> Thus Jesus was born the twenty-fourth or the twenty-fifth of March or April.

The reason that the early Church Fathers were not aware of the date of the birth of Jesus is that Jesus was born a Jew, and the Jews did not pay particular attention to birthdays and did not observe them. Thus the birth of Jesus passed unnoticed, as was the case with respect to other Jewish children. It was the Roman custom to observe birthdays and this had its impact on Western civilisation.

Jesus was crucified during the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate, who was governor of Judaea during 26-36 CE. Caiphas was high priest at that time and held this  
(Concluded on page 407)

## Secular Education Month

THE ALLIANCE, HALL, London was packed to capacity on November 30th for the final meeting of the Secular Education Month organised by the National Secular Society. The President, David Tribe, in the chair, said that the Month was the first of a series of campaigns to bring the institutions of the country into line with the beliefs of the majority.

Playwright Harold Pinter, author of *The Caretaker*, spoke primarily as a parent. The freedom to withdraw one's child from the daily act of worship was a merely nominal freedom, he said because most of the parents who, disagreed with it, let their children attend rather than make them seem "different." The basic question, Mr. Pinter said, was not whether religion was right or wrong, but whether it should be imposed. Practising Christians were a minority of the population, but they regarded themselves as a majority, and while adults mostly ignored Christianity, children were confronted daily with religious propositions presented dogmatically as facts, in glib, sentimentalised terms.

The segregation of school children on religious lines Mr. Pinter continued, contradicted an important function of the school—the promotion of understanding. At present teachers were forced to conceal their personal convictions, which was a dreadful thing.

Margaret Knight (whose speech will appear more fully in next week's issue) outlined the present legal position of religious education and the denominational schools. Roman Catholic schools aimed primarily at indoctrination, she said. Their educational standards were low, particularly in science, and their moral education was so inadequate, that the delinquency rate of Roman Catholics was two to three times the national average.

Our immediate aim, Mrs. Knight said, should be no further grants for these schools. The Church should have to pay the whole cost of rebuilding or let its schools go. Objections by individual ratepayers against extensions to local denominational schools could be effective.

Our ultimate aim, she went on, should be the ending of religious instruction in county schools. Religious instruction was at best a bit of a farce, and at worst a menace. Besides being poor intellectual training, religious instruction produced emotional disturbance. Such stories as Abraham's readiness to sacrifice Isaac, and the doctrines of atonement and hell were emotionally and morally damaging. A survey had shown that at the age of 12, one third of even Protestant children actually believed in hell.

Moral training should, Mrs. Knight said, be based on some better foundation than incredible myths. At present there was a danger of adolescents abandoning morality when they realised the ridiculous nature of the religious doctrines they had been given as the reason for moral behaviour.

David Collis complained of apathy among parents, and said it was urgently necessary to counter organised Roman Catholic pressure. Those present who agreed with the meeting's aims should not go home and forget all about it.

A lively discussion followed, to which a number of Christian teachers contributed. The meeting was filmed by Independent Television and it is understood that excerpts will be used in a future edition of the programme *This Week*.

MARGARET McILROY

# Why the Mass Matters

By GILLIAN HAWTIN

THE ROMAN CHURCH, in introducing the mass in English, is not concerned solely to make Catholicism less alien to converts. It needs little perspicacity on our part to appreciate that the Church which believes it has a divine mandate to teach all nations, is out thereby to catch converts. St. Peter's net has been drawing them in quite a long time; it still is, for that matter. For, whatever the leakage in the contrary direction, she claims to be making 14,000 converts a year in this country even now. That is more than the combined membership of the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society. We may hope that we make up in quality what we lack in numbers, yet we must never forget that in a democracy, one head equals one vote. The more that are labelled "RC," the more can be mobilised in support of the policies directed by the hierarchy at national level.

No, the Church is not concerned with such partial or intermediate aims alone. It will, even should it take another five hundred, or a thousand, years, and whatever the setbacks, keep its final aim in view, which is the recapture of England. This aim, though devoutly hoped for by the laity, who pray for it at the end of every low mass, can yet by many of them only be regarded as an ideal, a pious hope, having little relation to possibility or any ultimate reality. But the hierarchy would no doubt consider itself failing in its duty to posterity, if it did not work actively and militantly for such an end. I am not concerned to give words of comfort to Freethinkers, or the pleasure of poking fun at an antiquated Church.

Am I an alarmist? Why not, when the situation alarms? That the Church is antiquated only makes her the more dangerous. In any case, she has always shown a remarkable capacity for pulling up her socks, when she realises how far behind in the race of human progress she has fallen. Close scrutiny of her history shows that throughout she has survived by alternate entrenchments and sudden spurts. We have recently witnessed attempts, in the creaking machinery of the Vatican Council, to make at least a bit of a spurt forward. I do not believe we can afford to pooh-pooh the idea of the Church's revival in England. Only children, or those entirely lacking in historical sense, do not know that error *can* prevail. Christians are a minority in this country, but so are committed Freethinkers. The majority are "don't-know-ers". They can be extremely dangerous. Revolutions ride to power on them. Today, in England, Catholicism is riding to power on the backs of the Protestants who think that Catholicism no longer counts. Yet everywhere around us we see proofs that the attack is at all levels.

The Church which began in the catacombs has never hesitated to work in the catacombs—or the sewers!—when the times demand it. Would the Catholic Church have had full page articles drawing attention to itself (under guise of repentant self-examination) in the "quality" Sunday papers half, even a quarter, of a century ago? Two hundred years ago the mass was proscribed in this country. A hundred and thirty-five years ago, in 1829, the Catholics cringed merely for toleration. Until then, a system of Vicars-Apostolic had been their only organisation, but in 1850 they felt strong enough to "restore" the hierarchy. Even at that date, Cardinal Wiseman's *Letter from the Flaminian*

*Gate* plainly spoke of the intention to recapture this country, Lord John Russell closed his eyes to the danger.

I have already shown how the mass is central to Catholic life, the *cardinal* doctrine, that on which all else hinges (Latin *cardo* = hinge), even for plain laity. Thus, each morning, on my way to the station, I meet one or more members of the large Catholic family next door, returning from church. The mass is the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ. Christianity is Christ; Christ equals the mass, therefore the mass equals Christianity.

This being so, anybody who wanted to restore this country to Catholicism could attempt it in one of two ways. Popular freethinking and Protestant imagination considers itself safe because there seems little chance of any wholesale revival of Catholicism. Even to the most fervent Catholic, the return of the mass to the altars of the cathedrals of England, seems possible only in moments of wildest exaltation. But suppose it were done the other way round! If you wish to go through a door, it matters little which foot goes first! The importance of the vestments measure, at the self same time as the Roman Church introduces mass in English, can hardly be overestimated.

What is the position? The Anglican Church, by the vestments of ministers measure, is holding its communion services—essentially the pre-Reformation mass, and called so by many Anglicans—in Roman vestments. The Roman Catholic Church is holding *its* communion service, the mass, in English.

Where, then, is the difference? If distinctions are so blurred, and similarities so highly stressed, surely not merely a few converts, but wholesale defections, and eventually corporate reunion, will follow? I know there are those who disagree with me that disestablishment is a burning issue, but should the Church of England remain established, as is likely, we would then see the Church of Rome by law established in this realm!

Such a possibility would have most far-reaching repercussions, nothing less than the reversal of the constitution, and legal achievements of four hundred years. We must not delude ourselves, because they do not go as far as we want, that the liberties won by the Reformation, the Acts of Settlement, and 1688, have not been cornerstones on which further liberties were won by Carlile, Holyoake or Bradlaugh. These are not academic points; they are the life-blood of our freedom.

There are more measures still to come before Parliament, many of which vitally effect the interests of Freethinkers. We must not leave opposition to a handful of evangelical peers, who at least in this one instance fought our battle too. When the mass was expelled from England, the faith left England; but should the mass creep surreptitiously back, the way is open for the faith that goes with it. To get the mass back is a tactical *sine-qua-non* for the fanatics who work for nothing less than the submission of England to the Holy See.

## "TOTAL WAR"

The National Secular Society has been threatened with "total war" by the vicar of St. Mark's Church, Battersea Rise, the Rev. Stanley Evans, if its influence spreads into South Battersea. He made his intention known after the society's recent meeting in Tooting at which they called for a ban on religious instruction in all schools.

—South Western Star (27/11/64)

## This Believing World

Once again we must hand it to the Vatican publicity experts. Journals all over the world and radio and TV as well, put the Pope and his visit to India the top news in current affairs. He has even outdone the Beatles. "Pope Paul's Amazing Journey" and "Triumphant in India", occupy nearly two pages between them in the *Daily Express* (December 5th) and we are told of the hundreds of thousands of Hindus lining the streets to see the pontiff. In fact, we were prepared to find them all grovelling before him just like fervent Catholics, so great was the impression made upon them.

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One thing we can be sure of—the Archbishop of Canterbury would never get all this adulation, nor the publicity, which the Pope commands everywhere. Nor would the Moderator of the Free Churches. The truth would seem to be that the majority of Christians, though they would not acknowledge it, have still a sneaking belief that the Church of Rome really was founded by Jesus, and that breaking away from it was a great sin. Hence the deep desire for "unity". And no doubt whatever, the other churches may fold up one day and join again the One True Church. The latter certainly won't come to them!

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However, while Rome seems to be always the centre of world-wide publicity, some of the bishops in the Church of England—with perhaps, many a humble parson behind them—are like Freethinkers, beginning to find out how Rome, and for that matter Canterbury as well, has so thoroughly hoaxed them. The Bishop of Woolwich is not letting the bombshell he let fly two years ago be his last one. In that, he dislodged God from his seat in the clouds, and now an article in the *Sunday Mirror* (November 29th) pulverises the miracles of Jesus quite as thoroughly at Foote or Bradlaugh did in the past.

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Dr. Robinson in fact does not like to talk of "miracles" at all, and "more properly" describes them as "signs" or "wonders," though some of us still think that a rose is still a rose even under another name. But the Bishop now knows that the miracles of Jesus, so thoroughly believed in by all Christians, are just silly—silly nonsense—and his difficulty is to persuade his followers to give them up and yet believe in Jesus "as a man so completely one with the Father that in Him and through Him no limit can be set to the power of the Spirit of God". We have an idea that most good Christians would prefer still to believe in the faith of their fathers, miracles and all.

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In spite of the fact that a Christmas crib represents God Almighty in his infancy, five parsons in Biddulph, Staffordshire, are objecting to one being put up in the town's High Street. Perhaps they don't mind the crib so much as they object to it being put up by Roman Catholics "in the spirit of Christmas" (though one devout churchman in the town deplores his vicar starting an anti-crib campaign). Yet in Biddulph, all Christians believe in the Babe of Bethlehem and his Virgin Birth on December 25th, 1 AD; all devotedly worship him, and most of them, thank heaven, are blissfully unaware that outside the Bible, there isn't a scrap of evidence that it ever took place.

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Most towns in England on Sundays are pretty dull, but the Crathorne report has advocated a brighter Sunday plan. But why? After all, the duller a Sunday can be under our Sabbatarian laws, the more perfectly

religious it is. Can anyone imagine "our blessed Lord" sporting a happy time on a Sunday—the day devoted entirely to worshipping and adoring him? Besides, that powerful body of miserable religionists, the members of the Lord's Day Observance Society, would strongly oppose any measures to make Sunday a happy day. Indeed, they would advocate keeping Sunday at least as it now is, but better still, to go back to those dear old Puritan times when everything making for happiness was sternly suppressed. That would be true Christianity.

### CONSPIRACY?

Certain recent experiences I have had with the local and national newspapers suggest to me that there is hidden conspiracy among them to protect the Church and its representatives from the criticism and alternative views of those who see that the religious ideas offered in schools are hopelessly out-of-date and positively detrimental to education.

No doubt you will be aware that I spoke to the Glasgow Secular Society on this subject and that a notice of the meeting and a leading article commenting on it appeared in the *Glasgow Herald*.

This in turn moved the BBC TV in Glasgow to include a feature on the subject in *Checkpoint* on November 13th.

The accompanying letter was sent to the *Glasgow Herald* following what happened behind the scenes and I had a telephone call from a representative of that paper asking me to verify that I had written the enclosed letter and saying that I "seemed to have made a point" and that my letter would go before the Editor. However the letter did not appear and this is part of my evidence for the general conclusion I have stated at the beginning of this letter.

I have other evidence available which seems to point to the same conclusion and I will give it to you later if necessary.

E. G. MACFARLANE

To the Editor, *The Glasgow Herald*.

MONOPOLY FOR CHRISTIANS

13/11/64

Dear Sir,

If you were watching *Checkpoint* tonight you might have seen featured in this BBC TV programme from Glasgow a commentary stemming from the above headline from *The Glasgow Herald* leader for 9/11/64.

I do not think I could have invented a more apt illustration of the very complaint I was making against the present monopoly of Christian influence in schools; though here the monopoly for Christians was among adults on TV!

The story—and its a true one—was that, after your leader appeared, I was approached by a representative of the BBC who announced himself as "Bill Hook". He made arrangements for me to make myself available for a recording interview at my own home on Wednesday evening for this issue of *Checkpoint*. But after vainly waiting until after 11 p.m. I decided to ring him up to find out why the appointment had not been kept. He told me bluntly that they had changed their plans and that I would not now be interviewed. Naturally I was annoyed and let him know it. Then I asked if any other representative of our point of view would be on the programme and he said he could not find anyone "articulate enough"! Instead he would have extracts from the literature of the Secular Society read by a member of BBC staff.

The resulting programme was of course simply a farce from our point of view. Two people interviewed stated the falsehood that this is a Christian country and any secularist or humanist would have pounced upon this point immediately. After all it was only the other night that Lord Devlin said on a TV interview that Britain is clearly a secular state so far as the law is concerned since "it is not illegal to state anti-Christian views in public". Then we had several statements from Dr. Inglis who isn't a humanist or secularist since he believes in Christian services and teaching only in the primary schools.

May I say that this was a desperately shoddy way of treating the issue and that I am sure that all humanists and secularists will join with me in demanding that the BBC should adopt a more fearlessly democratic attitude in presenting minority viewpoints by allowing us to speak for ourselves.

Finally I challenge Mr. Hook to reveal to us all the full truth about why he changed his mind about interviewing me or some other representative of our point of view. Even if I am considered to be inarticulate by his standards I am willing to try to support my views as best I can on TV any time he likes.

Yours etc.,

E. G. MACFARLANE

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## Lecture Notices, Etc.

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.  
London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS J. W. BARKER, L. EBURY, J. A. MILLAR and C. E. WOOD.  
(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: L. EBURY.  
Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street,) Sunday Evenings  
Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.  
North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.  
Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, December 20th, 6.30 p.m.: J. H. PECK, "What Next for Socialism?"  
Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1.), Sunday, December 20th, 7.30 p.m.: "Christmas Crackers".  
North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, December 18th, 7 p.m.: A Meeting.  
Richmond and Twickenham Humanist Group (Room 5, The Community Centre, Sheen Road), Friday, December 18th, 8 p.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, "Christmas Today".  
Sutton Humanist Group (Red Cross House, 11 Park Hill, Carshalton Beeches), Saturday, December 19th, 7.30 p.m.: G. FRASER GILLIE, "What the Samaritans Do".

## Notes and News

AS CHRISTMAS approaches cribs (often ever-so-generously provided by the Knights of Columbus) will appear in our towns and cities, and radio, TV and press will prepare to sing the praises of the Son of God—or at least the foremost ethical teacher the world has known. But his own people the Jews, have never accepted Jesus on either of these counts. And it is appropriate at this time that we should take a look at the stories of his birth and crucifixion as seen by a noted Jewish scholar, Solomon Zeitlin, ThD, PhD, LLD, Horace Stern Professor of Rabbinic Law and Lore at the Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, Philadelphia. Dr. Zeitlin's article first appeared in the *Jewish Quarterly* for July 1964, and is reproduced by permission of that paper, obtained through the intercession of Rabbi Dr. Joseph Litvin.

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ROMAN CATHOLIC councillors and public officials may now—by permission of their hierarchy—attend mayors' Sunday services in non-Catholic churches and chapels. Catholics may even be bridesmaids and best men at "outside" weddings (*The Observer*, 6/12/64) and be present at services at local war memorials. But "there

can be no sharing in a non-Catholic Eucharist." Even the unity line has to be drawn somewhere and, as Miss Gillian Hawtin says elsewhere in this issue, it's the mass that matters.

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NAUGHT for the comfort of Protestants in the *Guardian* on December 7th. "The ministry as we know it is in imminent danger of breaking down completely within the next 10 or 20 years", the Bishop of Landaff, Dr. Glyn Simon, warned the Church in Wales. Simultaneously, Canon Stanley Evans told ordination candidates at Southwark Cathedral in London that the Church had "no answer for [a] troubled world." Many theological books published in the last year had seen that there were questions to be asked, said the Canon, but they did not have the answers, and even in some cases deprecated the idea that the Church should ever provide any answers.

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TWENTY YEARS AGO the Church in Wales had 1,250 clergy, today that number had decreased by 18.6 per cent, said Dr. Simon. There had also been drops in the Congregational, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches of 24.3, 31.4 and over 30 per cent respectively during the same period. Indeed, the Roman Catholic Church was the only large denomination that had shown an increase in the number of its clergy. In 1944 it had 300, now it had more than 400, though these figures did include the monks of Caldy Island. The Bishop also noted the passing of the traditional Welsh preacher, whose "key influence...in the religious and cultural life of his country in the past hundred years cannot be exaggerated." Today, if we were to judge from the Eisteddfod at Swansea, we were, Dr. Simon said, "on the threshold of a spate of novel writing about adulterous ministers." His metaphors may be mixed, but we think we know what he means.

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COAL MINERS at Treeton Colliery, near Sheffield, are reported to have been upset by reports that a ghost was haunting the loneliest part of their pit. The story spread that a phantom miner had been seen in seams 1,400 ft. below the surface of the pit-shaft (*The Yorkshire Post*, 7/12/64). But they have "now been reassured" by an investigation which revealed the the ghost was nothing more than the reflection of pit helmet lamps seen in corrugated metal sheeting. Mr. R. Whittaker, NUM Secretary at the colliery thought that most of the men had treated the story as a joke, but one of the overmen went to investigate because "there was so much talk about this ghost." And now, no story here, alas, for *Psychic News*.

★

THE EDUCATION correspondent of the *Glasgow Herald* (7/12/64) welcomed Dr. Ronald Goldman's *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 32s.) for "its responsible and serious attempt to inform us about the way a child is able to form religious concepts." Religious people might disagree with Dr. Goldman's assumptions that "religious thinking is capable of psychological investigation" and that it is no different "in mode and method" from non-religious thinking, but he had "produced serious and responsible conclusions which it will profit all interested in religious education to heed." We heeded, Teachers must, Dr. Goldman says "overcome their fears of disturbing the simple childlike faith of the young, and educate to the realistic possibilities of a deity who is not in contradiction with their growing logical powers and scientific concepts." Quite a tall order.

# The Venerable Bede

By AKIBA

THE work of the Venerable Bede, historian and scholar, theologian and translator, has come down the centuries to provide us with a picture of the pre-Norman phase of Christianity—the Anglo-Saxon phase.

Bede (Baeda or Beda) was born in 672 or 673 and died 735, and his fame principally rests on his production of the first English history, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*. Indeed, little is known of his life apart from the short autobiographical note appended to his main work. "Thus much concerning the ecclesiastical history of Britain, and equally of the race of the English, I, Baeda, a servant of Christ and priest of the monastery of the blessed Apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul, which is at Wearmouth and at Jarrow, have with the Lord's help, composed, so far as I could gather, either from ancient documents, or from the tradition of the elders, or from my own knowledge. I was born in the territory of the said monastery, and at the age of 7 I was, by the care of my relations, given to the Reverent Abbott Benedict (Bishop) and afterwards to Ceolfrid, to be educated. From that year I have spent the rest of my life within this monastery, dedicating all my powers to the study of the Scriptures, and amid the observance of monastic discipline and the daily charge of singing in the church, it has ever been my delight to learn or teach or write. In my 19th year, I was admitted to the diaconry, in my 30th to the priesthood, both by the hands of Bishop John (of Hexton), and at the bidding of Abbot Ceolfrid. From the time of my admission into the priesthood to my (present) 59th year, I have endeavoured for my own use, and that of my brethren, to make brief notes upon the Holy Scriptures, either out of the works of the Venerable Fathers or in conformity with their meaning and interpretation."

The main events—if that is the right description of milestones in an uneventful life—are: his birth 672 or 673, his entrance to the monastery 679-680; his ordination as deacon 691-692, and as priest in 702-703.

Apart from his *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede wrote other works, such as *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert* and *The Epistle to Egbert*. The collected works of Bede, edited by J. A. Giles in 12 volumes (1843-44) have been superseded by editions of the separate works. A Leningrad manuscript of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, has been edited in facsimile recently (1952), by O. Arngart.

It is exceedingly difficult to separate hard fact from tenuous fiction in most histories. Bede's is no exception to the rule. However, even a cursory reading of his monumental work suggests a number of uncomfortable possibilities. Uncomfortable, that is, for the romantic, idyllic view of Christian origins in Britain.

In chapter IV the reader is informed that, "In the year of Our Lord's Incarnation 156, Marcus Antonius Verus, the fourteenth from Augustus, was made Emperor, together with his brother, Aurelius Commodus. In their time, whilst Eleutherus, a holy man, presided over the Roman Church, Lucius, King of the Britons, sent a letter to him, entreating that by his command he might be made a Christian. He soon obtained his pious request, and the Britons preserved the faith, which they had received, uncorrupted and entire, in peace and tranquility until the time of the Emperor Diocletian." In the sixth chapter Bede relates the happenings of the reign of Diocletian, "and how he persecuted the Christians". The persecution "at length" reached Britain also, "and many persons, with

the constancy of martyrs died in the confession of their faith." A gap of some one hundred and thirty years from Verus to Diocletian is left without comment. The seventh chapter describes the Passion of St. Alban and his companions, who, at the time "shed their blood for Our Lord" (AD 305), but it is not until the eighth chapter that with the "persecution ceasing" the Church in Britain enjoyed peace until the time of the Arian Heresy.

An idyllic picture of Christianity is painted here—"the faithful Christians, who, during the time of danger, had hidden themselves in woods and deserts, and secret caves, appearing in public, rebuilt the churches which had been levelled to the ground... they celebrated festivals, and performed their sacred rites with clean hearts and pure mouths." This period of tranquility comes to an abrupt end in the narrative:—"This peace continued in the churches of Britain until the time of the Arian madness, which, having corrupted the whole world, infected this island also; and when the plague was thus conveyed across the sea, all the venom of the heresy immediately rushed into the island, ever fond of something new, and never holding firm to anything". (Italics A.) The verulence of the description of the Arian "madness" is indeed revealing, in its testimony to the strength, persistence, and tenacity of the heresy on the "island".

It is this interesting chapter, together with the tenth which casts some interesting light on the origins of British Christianity. References are made to the wicked Briton, Pelagius, who "spread far and near the infection of the perfidious doctrine against the assurance of the Divine grace, being seconded therein by his associate Julianus of Campania, whose anger was kindled by the loss of his bishopric, of which he had just been deprived. St. Augustine and the other orthodox fathers, quoted many thousand catholic authorities against them, yet they would not correct their madness; but, on the contrary, their folly was rather increased by contradiction, and they refused to embrace the truth...".

It cannot be exactly a coincidence that the first time Bede deals with a transparently real, historic personage, he deals with a "heretic". The chapters previous to this deal with a fictionalised history, a pious reconstruction of Christian origins, which, by their very nature, the absence of fact, and even the pretence of fact, place them outside serious consideration as history. With Pelagius and the Pelagian "heresy", with the spread of the Arian "heresy", Bede touches upon real history, the true origins of British Christianity. Chapter XVII contains further information on the Pelagian heresy and the story of Germanus, the Bishop, sailing into Britain with Lupus, first quelling the tempest of the sea, and afterwards that of the Pelagians, by divine power (AD 429).

A verbal confrontation between Germanus and Lupus on the one side, and Pelagius "on the other" is graphically described here. "An immense multitude was there assembled with their wives and children. The people stood around as spectators and judges; but the parties differed much in appearance; on the one side was the Divine faith, on the other human presumption; on the one side piety, on the other pride; on the one side Pelagius, on the other Christ. The holy priests, Germanus and Lupus, permitted their adversaries to speak first, who long took up the time, and filled the ears with empty words. Then the venerable prelates poured forth the torrent of their

apostolical and evangelical eloquence. Their discourse was interspersed with scriptural sentences, and they supported their most weighty assertions by reading the testimonies of famous writers... The people, who were judges, could scarcely refrain from violence, but signified their judgement by their acclamations". Further references to the Pelagian heresy "recurring", despite the "refutations" of the orthodox, are found later. Germanus was sent back to Britain with Severus, who, we are told, "first healed a lame youth, then having condemned or converted the heretics, restored spiritual health to the people of God" (AD 447). The overall impression is that the first Christian missionaries were "heretics". Or, perhaps, the orthodoxy of yesterday became the heresy of the morrow! The Romans had difficulty in bringing the British churches into line with the increasingly totalitarian and monolithic structure of the Church. Again and again, Bede refers to the heretics, the Arians, Pelagians and those who refused to accept the date of the observance of Easter "as laid down by Rome", as if to underline Rome's difficulty with her British flock.

In AD 634, Pope Honorius I writing to the Scots condemned these heresies in no uncertain terms. "And we have also understood that the poison of the Pelagian heresy again springs up among you, we, therefore, exhort you, that you put away from your thoughts all such venomous and superstitious wickedness. For you cannot be ignorant how that execrable heresy has been condemned: for it has not only been abolished these two hundred years, but it is also daily anathematised for ever by us" and so on, in this vein. The Pelagian "heresy" appears to have been a tenacious one.

As late as AD 710 the Abbot Ceolfrid was sending an epistle to the King of the Picts, concerning the Catholic Easter and Tonsure. This suggests that the old celebration of Easter had some connection with the Pelagian date of the festival, and was, therefore, regarded with suspicion by Rome. In long and tortuous arguments, the epistle attempts to demolish the case of the Celtic Christians who "contend that the full Paschal moon can happen before the equinox", accusing them of deviation from the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. And in the medieval Catholic Thomas Stapleton version, the translator comments, "He meaneth the Pelagians". Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* from beginning to end seems to be a polemic rather than a history, but a polemic which unwittingly reveals facets of historical truth. It lends revealing support to the view that Christianity in Britain always had a Protestant, and anti-Roman flavour, and that Pelagius was the first apostle of the faith in these Isles.

## THE DATES OF THE BIRTH AND CRUCIFIXION

(Concluded from page 402)

position from the years 18 to 36.<sup>30</sup> The exact year of the crucifixion had not been determined. Clement of Alexandria wrote that some people place it in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar,<sup>31</sup> who succeeded Augustus in the year 14,<sup>32</sup> thus the fifteenth year would be 29 CE. Others, he said, placed the passion as having occurred in the year 16 of Tiberius. This would mean that Jesus was crucified in the year 30. According to Irenaeus, who maintained that Jesus's ministry lasted for several years after he was baptised by John, then we must assume that the crucifixion took place at a later time between 35-36 CE. The Gospels do not record the

year in which Jesus was crucified. There is a discrepancy between the synoptic Gospels and the unsynoptic as to the date of the month. According to the former Jesus was crucified on the first day of Passover,<sup>33</sup> the fifteenth of Nisan, while John states that Jesus was crucified on the eve of Passover,<sup>34</sup> the 14th of Nisan. They are in agreement as to the day of the week, Friday, called by John, *Paraskeue*, the day of preparedness. Jesus was crucified on Friday, the day Adam was created, the day he committed the original sin, was judged by God and condemned to death.<sup>35</sup> (The underlying reason for the discrepancy in the Gospels as to the date of the month of the crucifixion has been dealt with elsewhere.)<sup>36</sup>

On the cross was inscribed in Hebrew, Greek and Latin: *Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum*, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Judaeans." It was the Roman custom to write the reason for the execution.<sup>37</sup> Pilate followed the established method. Jesus was crucified for claiming to be the king of the Judaeans.

Jesus was born a Jew some time between the years 6 BCE, and 6 CE, was crucified by the Romans between the years 30-35 as a political offender, claiming to be king of the Judaeans.

1 2. 1.

2 2.3-16.

3 Cf. S. Zeitlin, *The Rise and Fall of the Judaeac State*, pp. 409-11.

4 See *Ant.* 17. 6. 4 (167). Cf. Ginzel, *Spezieller Kanon der Sonnen- und Mond-finsternisse*, Berlin, 1899.

5 In the second volume of *The Rise and Fall of the Judaeac State*, I endeavour to point out that Herod died on the 28th of Adar, in the year 750 AUC, 4 BCE.

6 2. 1.

7 Luke 2. 3-11.

8 Cf. *Ant.* 17. 13. 5 (355); 18. 2. 1. (26-27); *Wars.* 2. 8. 1 (117); *Acts* 5. 37. Cf. also E. Schürer, *Geschichte*, 1, the literature there quoted; Leancy, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, New York, 1958.

9 See Tacitus, *Annals* 6. 41.

10 7. 8. 1 (253).

11 5. 37.

12 4, 19, *Sed et census constat actos sub Augusto nunc in Iudaea per Sentium Saturninum apud quos genus eius inquirere potuissent.*

13 *Ant.* 16. 9. 1 (277).

14 *Adversus Iudaeos*, 8. *Videamus autem quoniam quadragesimo et primo anno imperii Augusti, quo post mortem Cleopatrae XX et VIII annos imperavit, nascitur Christus.*

15 Cf. Livy, *Periochae* 133; Plutarch, *Antony* 86; Dio Cass. 51; C. Velleius Paterculus, *Historiae Romanae* 87.

16 1. 21.

17 Cf. Dio Cass. 73; A. Lampridius, *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Commodus* 17.

18 In November 2 BCE.

19 3. 23.

20 8. 56-57.

21 *Contra Haereses* 2. 22. 6. *Hoc autem consequenter dicitur ei, qui jam XL annos excessit, quinquagesimum autem annum mundum attingit, non tamen multum a quinquagesimo anno absistat. Ei autem, qui sit XXX annorum diceretur utique; Quadraginta annorum mundum es.*

22 See *Ant.* 18. 4. 2 (88-89).

23 *Ecclesiastical History* 1. 5. 1-3.

24 Livy 124; Dio Cass. 47.

25 See note 15.

26 *Op. cit.* 1. 5.

27 *Ibid.* 1. 8.

28 *Stromata* 1. 21.

29 *Ant.* 2. 14. 6 (311).

30 *Ibid.* 18. 2. 2 (35); 4. 3 (95).

31 *Stromata* 21.

32 Suetonius, *Tiberius*.

33 Cf. Mark. 14. 12; Matt. 27. 2; Luke 22. 7.

34 John 13. 1; 18. 28; 19. 31.

35 See S. Zeitlin, *REJ*, 1926, n. 163-164.

36 *Ibid.* *idem*, *Who crucified Jesus?*, ch. 10.

37 See Suetonius, *Caligula* 32, *praecedente titulo qui causam poenae indicaret per coetus epulantium circumduceretur.*

## CORRESPONDENCE

## CORRECTION

Would you care to correct your paragraph in the issue of December 4th in which an action requesting the abandonment of a plan for Sunday ferries to Skye was attributed to the Commission of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. This should have referred to the Free Church of Scotland (see *Glasgow Herald*, of November 19th). The Free Church of Scotland is a very small body, though fundamentalist and through some of its ministers vocal in issues of this kind.

Perhaps its membership is about two per cent of that of the Church of Scotland.

I am not in membership of either church.

J.S.

## FREEMASONRY

It should be noted that original, orthodox English Freemasonry was "Free" thinking, as can be seen by reading its original "Constitutions" of 1723 and 1738 and thereafter up to 1813, when a New First Charge was introduced of an innovative nature. This changed English (and much other) Freemasonry into a pietistic institution of a pseudo-religious nature through clerical sabotage. Much Continental and Irish and Scottish Masonry is much closer to the original English Masonry in spirit than present-day English Masonry is. British Freemasonry discourages discussion with foreign Brethren because it might bring out some facts that would not suit the English "Rulers of the Craft."

A FREE MASON

## HUMANIST ADRIFT?

Kit Mouat is an able and interesting writer who leaves us in no doubt as to her own position of rationality. Yet in some respects her article "Labels and the Fifth Column" would seem to do a disservice to that very position. For it is not concerned with labels and fifth-columns very much, if at all, but adoption, secular education and various other humanist activities. However desirable and commendable, these have nothing to do with whether or no a fifth column exists! I am convinced from my own observations of the movement, that one does. That is my answer to Robert Dent. Nor, reading, and re-reading Dr. Purcell's article, can I put any other construction on that. Mr. Dent seems to me to play with words; those he quotes certainly convey to me, at least, and to others I have conferred with, that enemy-inspired forces are at work among

us, and I cannot whittle it down to less. Obviously, if this be so, it requires drastic action.

That is why, basically, I feel the line taken by Kit Mouat, moderate and tolerant, does not go far enough. The Rationalist Press Association and National Secular Society as may be amply illustrated from their histories, have always been militant organisations. The activities listed by Kit Mouat may only be indulged in under the umbrella of a freedom won for us in the past by militants, a freedom which can only be maintained and extended by militant action now and which would dissolve overnight if the churches regained paramount authority. It is one thing for moderates and militants to co-exist on a common basis of rationality; it is quite another that in recent years many so-called "moderates" (crypto-Christians?) have been telling us that we, the militants must not be militant! Perhaps just because I have been a Christian (i.e. born agnostic and absorbed by a militant and proselytising Church of Rome) I understand the nature of the Churches better than those who have had the good fortune never to be tainted by them. Their whole imagery and vocabulary is martial. Their philosophy is a nihilistic dualism, and they stand for views the very opposite, in many cases, of those which Kit Mouat, myself, and other rationalists hold. We are duty bound to extirpate superstition. Very few organisations exist to wage this fight except the British Humanist Association and NSS. The Churches would have every motive to kill or maim these by means fair or foul, by infiltration methods.

It has not yet been proved to me that this is not happening. I have many other grounds, which I dare not publish, for myself stating categorically—whatever Dr. Purcell wrote—that it is happening!

Mr. Dent's remarks about "personal bitterness" in Mr. Micklewright's article, merely appear, to those who know Mr. Micklewright as full of zest for life, concern at the growth of the Churches in this country because of his genuine enlightenment as a piece of gratuitous rudeness. I, too, see the Churches making unopposed progress on all sides. Shame on those with whom it is necessary to use dramatic terms in order to rouse them from their lethargy as to what goes on before their eyes! To fight effectively, we have to rid ourselves of the fifth column, whether one employs the word "purify", or "purge" or any other, seems irrelevant. No body of people with a common object, from a cricket club to a universal Church, can possibly be expected to tolerate enemies within the gate.

(Miss) GILLIAN HAWTIN

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