

The Freethinker

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THERE may still be people who think, or pretend to think, that no such person as Jesus of Nazareth ever existed. One hears them saying that the story of Jesus was invented to account for the emergence of a strange salvation myth, intended by those who invented it to bring hope to the oppressed masses living under the sway of imperial Rome. No doubt, there are in the New Testament mythical features, but the persons who figure in the story, Jesus and his disciples, are not mythical characters; they are historical persons. Jesus of Nazareth lived, and he died. He died on the cross.

This much, at least, is confirmed by two ancient historians, Josephus and Tacitus, both of whom record that Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea, condemned Jesus. Josephus explicitly mentions the mode of execution—crucifixion; Tacitus does not say in what manner the execution was carried out. However, neither the reason for the execution of Jesus nor the character of the penal proceedings which preceded it, is disclosed by either of the two historians, who, moreover, show a marked difference in their manner of referring to Jesus. Josephus, the Jew, speaks rather respectfully of him, calling him "a wise man", "a teacher of people".¹ By contrast, Tacitus, the aristocratic Roman, is full of scorn for one whom he considers to have been "the originator of a pernicious superstition", an agitator among barbarian orientals, and an enemy of the law and order introduced and upheld by Rome in a distant province. (He seems to connect the teachings of Jesus and the activities of Jesus's disciples after their master's death with the outbreak of the great Jewish revolt in the year 66.)

Place and Time of the Arrest

The four Gospels concordantly report where Jesus was arrested. Visitors to the Arab part of Jerusalem will be shown a grove on the Mount of Olives called "the Garden of the Agony". There, or somewhere not far from that place, Jesus was apprehended. He was then taken to the house of the Jewish high-priest, and from there, according to the Gospel of Luke, to the meeting place of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council, before being handed over for trial to Pilate. We do not know where the high-priest's house stood. The locality shown by Jerusalem cicerones as "The House of Caiaphas" is certainly not the spot; it is the ruin of a large building from Byzantine times. As for the location of the Sanhedrin's meeting place, we have conflicting reports; it seems, however, to have been situated on the Temple Mount, in the area known today as the Haram esh-Sherif. And the residence of Pilate, when the governor stayed in Jerusalem for official or for private reasons, was the Herodian Palace which was located in the south-western sector of the present-day walled city, near the Jaffa Gate.

We do not know the exact year of Jesus's death; nor do we know the day. All that is certain is that he was crucified while Pontius Pilate held office as Prefect of Judaea—that is, some time between 26 and 36 of the current era—and that his crucifixion took place shortly before or on the

feast of Passover. Since Jesus is popularly supposed to have been born in the year 1, since the Gospel of Luke reports that he was approximately 30 years old when he began to preach, and since the Gospel of John seems to lend some support to the assumption that his preaching activities lasted three years, the year of his death has widely been thought to be 33. But all the premises on which this calculation is based are wrong. In recent times, the year 30 has been suggested by an increasing number of scholars, notably continental Roman Catholic scholars, but I believe that we have to go still further back, to 29 or even 28.

Three arguments favour this earlier dating. First of all, a 2nd-century tradition,

preserved by Clement of Alexandria, states that Jesus died forty-two years before the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus—that is, in 28. Secondly, Josephus places the crucifixion among those events which occurred close to the beginning of Pilate's governorship. The third reason, and in my opinion the decisive one, for dating the crucifixion before the year 30, lies in the chronology of the Apostle Paul's missionary travels. Fourteen years after his conversion, Paul attended what is traditionally called the "Council of Jerusalem", a meeting of the elders of the Church which is believed to have taken place during the reign of Agrippa I. If this Council met as late as the year of Agrippa's death, 44, Paul's conversion would fall somewhere around the year 30. Paul was not one of the original disciples of Jesus, but on the contrary an opponent of the messianist sect whose members he is said to have persecuted in the beginning. Hence, we must assume that some time elapsed between the death of Jesus and Paul's conversion. How long this time was, we do not know. But it pushes the year of Jesus's crucifixion back before 30.

We do not know the exact day. The fact that all four Gospels place the trial either on the eve of Passover or on the day of the actual festival, makes it virtually a certainty that Jesus was arrested and tried around that time, but it might well have been a few days earlier or later. The information provided by the Gospels is interpretative rather than factual. We have to probe what it was that motivated the evangelists' interpretation. It would appear that one group of his followers drew a comparison between the death of Jesus and the slaying of the paschal lamb, and therefore had the moment of the crucifixion coincide with that event. This tradition, mentioned already by the Apostle Paul, was preserved by John, who dates the crucifixion on the fourteenth of Nisan. Another early group of Christians connected the festive Passover meal, the *seder*, with the establishment of the New Covenant, the institution of the Eucharist, and to allow Jesus to partake of the *seder*, his crucifixion had to be dated after it. This tradition influenced the Marcan dating, placing the crucifixion on the fifteenth of Nisan. Since both datings are inspired by religious motivation, there is little to choose between them from the historian's point of view. All we can say for sure is that the trial and subsequent crucifixion

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Trial of Jesus

By PAUL WINTER

fell on a day close to the Passover.

Arrested by Whom?

All four Gospels report that Jesus was arrested at night. According to Mark, Matthew, and Luke, his arrest was carried out by a team, some men being armed with swords, others with staves or cudgels. According to John, the arrest was carried out by a detachment of soldiers under the command of a Roman officer, and accompanied by Jewish policemen. At first sight, these reports conflict with each other, but the conflict is resolved if we remember that Roman soldiers carried swords, while the Jewish police carried batons. Thus the men who are mentioned in Mark as having been armed with staves are Jewish policemen, while those members of the crowd whom Mark describes as carrying swords are identical with the detachment that is specified as a cohort of soldiers by John.

Mark, we must remember, was written in Rome, at a time when Christians were exposed to attack by the Roman mob, and were subject to suspicion on the part of Roman officials. Therefore, the evangelist may well have had cogent reasons for not wishing to draw attention to the fact that Jesus had been arrested by Roman soldiers or mercenaries in the service of Rome; and this may have made him substitute the vague and colourless expression "a crowd with swords" for the more definite designation of his source—a source which still comes to the fore in the Johannine account. Jesus was arrested by Roman soldiers who were accompanied, probably as guides, by some Jewish policemen.

The Reason for the Arrest

None of the evangelists tells us in plain language the reason for the arrest. But Mark, Matthew, and Luke reproduce the gist of a conversation which Jesus is reported to have held with the people who came to arrest him: "You have come," Jesus complains, "with swords and batons to arrest me as a rebel. I stayed with you in the daytime [or daily] on the Temple Hill and I taught. You did not arrest me then."² The Greek word which the synoptic evangelists use (*leistees*) can be and usually is translated "robber" as well as "rebel". In the first century, however, this term was not exclusively used of bandits, but was applied to persons who in any of the Roman provinces resorted to armed resistance against Roman rule. In Roman eyes such people were bandits, robbers; in the people's estimate of themselves, they were patriots, perhaps guerrillas, partisans, freedom fighters. When Jesus, on the Mount of Olives, said to those who were taking him into custody, "You come with swords and batons to arrest me as a rebel. Was I not with you, teaching openly in the light of day?", he was defending himself by asserting his peaceful aims as a teacher. In Pilate's court, the charge was the same as that for which he had been arrested: he was accused of being "King of the Jews". And the cause for which he was sentenced to crucifixion was again the same, as the inscription on the cross confirms. Jesus was arrested by Roman troops as a Jewish rebel.

Examination and Trial

After his arrest, Jesus was brought to the house of the Jewish high-priest. All four Gospels agree on this. But why was he not immediately taken to the Jewish law court? Because it was night, and the court was closed. Then why was he not immediately taken to the Roman prison? Because a preliminary investigation was required for which the Romans used local officials, Jews, who, by reason of their knowledge of the local conditions and language, were better equipped to carry out any necessary inquiries. Up to the moment when Jesus arrived in the house of the high-priest, the four reports of the Gospels are more or less in agreement; from that moment on, they

differ profoundly in their accounts of the proceedings. According to John, Jesus was led to Annas, who interrogated him privately. There is no accusation, no witnesses are heard, no court assembles. It is a private conversation, or at the most a preliminary hearing. In the morning Jesus is sent, via Caiaphas, to the procurator Pontius Pilate. Thus, in John's account, no Jewish law court deals with the case. Yet at the very time at which John presents Jesus as conversing with Annas, Mark and Matthew arrange for him to be tried in a plenary session by the whole Sanhedrin. Mark does not mention the name of the presiding high-priest; Matthew gives his name as Caiaphas. The Sanhedrin meets at night in the high-priest's house—surprisingly, for this body, as the Parliament cum High Court of the Jewish nation, had a meeting place of its own, its proper Council Hall, and there exists no record besides the accounts of Mark and Matthew from which it might be guessed that it ever met in a high-priest's residence to hold its consultations; certainly not at night, and not on a feast day. Nevertheless, according to Mark and Matthew, Jesus is tried before an official session of the Council held in the high-priest's residence; witnesses are examined, their testimony is dismissed; Jesus is then closely interrogated by the presiding high-priest, convicted on his self-incriminatory reply—without corroboration—by all the assembled councillors, and sentenced to death for the crime of blasphemy.

Luke has nothing of that. No session of the Sanhedrin takes place at night. Jesus spends the rest of the night in the custody of the guards who had arrested him.

Early in the morning the Sanhedrin convenes—for the second time, according to Mark and Matthew; for the first time, according to Luke; John reports no session. From the Lucan wording it can be concluded that the morning session of the Sanhedrin was held in a locality other than the place where Jesus had been detained during the night. At their morning session the Jewish councillors decide to conduct Jesus to Pilate, to be tried by the Roman authority.

Disagreement of the Gospels

Here we are faced with a problem. If Jesus, as Mark and Matthew have it, was sentenced during an earlier session by the Sanhedrin, we would expect to find a reference to the verdict in the report of the Sanhedrin's second meeting. No word of it. As if they have forgotten that they themselves had sentenced Jesus for the crime of blasphemy, the Jewish magistrates hand Jesus over to Pilate for trial, on another charge—the charge, it turns out, on which he had been arrested in the first place! Pilate is not asked to confirm a sentence for blasphemy; he is not even told that Jesus has been tried and found guilty of such an offence; and he acts throughout as a magistrate who is presiding over the first stage of judicial proceedings, not as one who has been called to confirm a sentence passed by some other court of law. He hears the accusation, listens to the witnesses' depositions and demands to know whether Jesus had claimed to be the king of the Jews. The reply of Jesus, "You have said it", may be taken as an affirmation, though there are scholars who dispute this. In any case, it is not a direct reply.

All four Gospels agree that Jesus appeared before Pilate in the early morning. It must have been at a very early hour indeed, if the Marcan statement that Jesus was crucified at 9 a.m.³ is correct. For even if we leave out the amplification of the trial scenes in Luke and John, Mark himself places quite a few events between the examination of Jesus by Pilate and the execution: a protracted parley with the accusers, Pilate's indecision, the Barabbas episode.

(Continued on page 127)

The Vatican's Wealth

CENSORSHIP, the Vatican's wealth, and political jealousy are—according to the *Catholic Herald* (2/4/65)—the chief ingredients in the “boiling pot” in the current controversy involving the Holy See and Italy. But the row is mainly concerned with the Vatican's rights “as stipulated in its Concordat with the Italian government.” The *Herald* does not, significantly mention that “the Italian government” which signed the Concordat was that of Mussolini. The paper acknowledges, however, that many people are beginning to ask: “How powerful is the Catholic Church?”

In fact, deputies of the extreme Left Wing Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (PSIUP), formed by break-away members of the Socialist Party have introduced a motion in Parliament calling for a complete revision of the Concordat between the Vatican and the government.

This move which came after the banning of Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Representative* in Rome, has, the *Herald* says, been denounced as an attempt to cause friction in the coalition government, comprising Socialists, Christian Democrats and Republicans. And the paper indicates that the banning of the play, which attacks the late Pope Pius XII for not speaking out against Nazi persecution of the Jews, was justified under the Lateran Treaties of 1929—signed by Fascist Italy and the Vatican.

A statement in the Senate by the Socialist Party Whip, Signor Giusto Tolley, saying there was “no question, on the plane of political action, of a revision of the Concordat” may, however, have helped to cool this particular controversy for the time being.

The other “big sore point”, the *Catholic Herald* continues, has been the position of the Vatican in regard to taxes due—or not due—to the Italian state.

Under the Lateran Treaties, which recognised the Vatican's sovereignty, Italy acknowledged that the Holy See did not have to pay taxes to Italy.

In 1962, however, the Italian Parliament passed a law taxing profits made in stock transactions. This law imposed a 15 per cent withholding tax on share dividends which was later raised to 30 per cent. An amendment by the Christian Democrats which would have exempted Vatican shares from tax was opposed by the then Finance Minister, Signor Giuseppe Trabucchi, a Christian Democrat himself, and was dropped.

“A series of diplomatic exchanges between the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Cicognani, and the Italian government followed, and in the end the matter was quietly settled. Signor Mario Martinelli, the new Finance Minister in the all-Christian Democrat stop-gap Cabinet in 1963, sent a confidential circular to the Italian companies in which the Vatican held shares authorising them to pay dividends free of tax to the Vatican.” This circular has, the *Herald* admits, been a source of friction since the Socialists rejoined the coalition government—which is hardly surprising.

And now the whole subject has exploded in the row over the Lateran Treaties which the PSIUP is trying to have revised. Also contributing to the flare-up is the fact that another Bill has been proposed which seeks to ensure that the Holy See is not only exempt from taxation on dividends, but that it should be given a refund of certain taxes claimed in the past.

The Leftist Rome weekly, *l'Espresso*, recently claimed that this agreement would cost the Italian fiscal system about £23 million, but this figure has, the *Herald* says, been generally ridiculed.

Speculation has however been “rife once again” on the

extent of the Vatican's riches, and as to how big a shareholder it is on the Italian Stock Exchange.

There is no doubt that the money paid by the Italians to the Vatican under the Lateran Treaties, in compensation for its finally abandoning its rights over the Papal States, has been “wisely and rewardingly invested”. The payments in Italian banknotes and government bonds, were to a nominal value of about £19 million at that time.

Pope Pius XI set up a special body to invest this money throughout the world, and the capital's increase is “believed to have been spectacular”.

The Vatican is also a very large shareholder in Italy. Estimates of its exact holdings have been many and varied, but the *Catholic Herald* gives a “conservative one” that the Holy See controls between 7 and 10 per cent of the Italian economy. Among its interests in Italy are believed to be banks, a spaghetti factory, the Italian airlines, a big property company, public utility firms, and a film company.

Prince Giulio Pacelli, a nephew of the late Pius XII, is a director of the Banco di Roma, one of Italy's three “banks of national interest”, and of the Societa Italiana per il Gas, a public utility company. His brother, Prince Marcantonio, is chairman of the board of directors of the Pantanella Spaghetti Factory and a director of the Societa Generale Immobiliare, one of Italy's leading property companies.

Both these men hold several honorary posts in the Vatican, and their brother, Prince Carlo Pacelli, is Councillor-General of the Vatican City State.

Prince Marcantonio was also president of the LAI airlines, which merged in the 1950s with the Italian airlines Alitalia.

“Widely mentioned”, too, as Vatican-controlled is the Banco di Santo Spirito, set up in 1605 by Pope Paul V and transformed into a limited company in 1923. The president of the bank is Marquis Giovanni Battista Sacchetti, Quartermaster-General of the Apostolic Palaces. Also controlled by the Holy See is a Rome film company, San Paolo Film, which has been making religious films since the 1930s, mostly for children.

Outside Italy, the Vatican's investments represent about 90 per cent of its total holdings. These are generally channelled through Fribourg in Switzerland, and through New York under the sponsorship of Cardinal Spellman.

An article in the *Economist* (27/3/65) described the Vatican—“or rather the Pope, for his rule is absolute”—as far and away the world's biggest shareholder, with a portfolio of quoted securities totalling more than £2,000 million.

The Holy See is a particularly big landlord in the Rome area, said the *Economist*. “It owns whole blocks of houses and hundreds of flats, as well as big stretches of land on the outskirts of the city.” And these have been “highly valuable” in the building boom of recent years. The Vatican continues to build new blocks of flats and to let flats to its officials.

It also pointed out that this estimate takes no account of the Vatican's additional wealth, from land and real estate all over the world to the world's most valuable art collection.

TV NOTE

DAVID TRIBE, President of the National Secular Society will be appearing with Dr. Donald Soper in the independent television programme *The Sunday Break* on April 25th.

This Believing World

THE SUCCESS of most pop singers is notoriously short lived. They receive the acclamations of their followers for only a few years at most, and we note that one of them, Terry Dene—who was at one time earning £500 a week—suffered a nervous breakdown (*The People*, 28/3/65) and shortly afterwards discovered religion. He has given up smoking and drinking, and is now a “full time unpaid evangelist”.

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WHETHER he will be able to put over Jesus as well as he used to put over his pop songs remains to be seen. It was a member of the Mobile Evangelistic Crusade who met Terry, and asked him to accept Jesus as his saviour. Terry is now reputedly happier than he ever has been in his life, which just shows that even a pop singer can alter his life for Jesus's sake. In fact, as the *People* proclaims, “Pop Singer Terry has seen the Light”.

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ACCORDING to the Rev. Dr. John MacDonald, it is not necessary to have “spiritual” healers with their holy hands moved either by spirit doctors or by Jesus Christ, to be cured of incurable illnesses. The divine work can all, or nearly all, be done by “thoughts”, he tells us (*Sunday Express*, 21/3/65). “We project our blessing by thought—some would call it prayer—to sick people who cannot be helped by the medical profession”. It is all done “by the power of the mind, to make prayer more efficient, and combine this with faith in God”, Dr. MacDonald says. But naturally, if a patient died it would not be because of failure of the infallible treatment but because of the obvious lack of faith in God.

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THE *Daily Mail's* theologian, Miss Monica Furlong, has now written a book, *With Love to the Church*, and excerpts have been appearing in that journal. We are by no means sure what is actually meant by some of the extracts, but she is quite certain a lot of the “unhappy difficulties” shouldered by Christians “lies at the moment” in their “relations to the secular world”. This is no doubt quite true, for the “secular world” finds it very difficult to reconcile the religious beliefs of Christians—miracles, virgin births, angels, devils, salvation, to say nothing of such wonderful events as the resurrection and the ascension of the Son of God—with modern knowledge and experience. The “secular world” treats them as primitive stories. Perhaps even Miss Furlong does herself.

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BUT a letter to hearten the Christians appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* (29/3/65) from Hubert S. Box, Proctor in the Convocation of Canterbury, telling us that the Church has “consistently held” and taught among other things “that the incarnation was a personal intervention of the Creator . . . that Christ's virgin birth and bodily resurrection are as much facts of history as any other historical event”. And Mr. Box ought to know for he wasn't there.

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CASSANDRA of the *Daily Mirror* (29/3/65), appears to be almost as contemptuous of the Roman Church as any blatant Freethinker. He has discovered that it “is the world's greatest business and financial structure”, and also “the most secretive”. The Pope with his advisers “is the most powerful financier on earth”—and so on. In fact, all the papers seem suddenly to have discovered what Free-thinkers have been pointing out for years. There was even a report in the *Catholic Herald*, as we note on the previous page.



F. A. HORNIBROOK

Peter Cotes writes:—

Fred Hornibrook was a great original. A simple man who followed truth, sought out honesty, and symbolised integrity, Fred knew that love of people which comes from understanding simple feelings and sharing common likes and dislikes. In all the time I knew him, I don't think I can honestly remember him uttering one mean or spiteful word, or doing one unkind or even thoughtless action. He knew the mighty and the lowly—to him the mighty were occasionally less mighty, and the low were always less low. He disliked humbug, snobbery, and all forms of injustice, but his hates were never directed against people, only against things—injustice, bigotry, reaction and war. He enjoyed simplicity, and was the simplest of men; loving sport, companionship, and nature, friendship, walking, talking, and, for many years, cycling. With his passing everyone who crossed his path will feel a sense of personal loss. He was so alive in life, that death can never claim him wholly. He has left us a legacy, and those of us who knew him are enriched by the reward of having crossed his path.

A wide reader, with an amazing memory (he related once how he learned the three books of Euclid by heart as a boy) he had the warmest nature of any man alive. His wide and varied circle of friends and acquaintances will testify to his skill, kindness, and lovable personality. But what marked him out from the crowd—aside from that magnificent constitution and splendid physique, which enabled him to continue practising up until a month ago—was his amazing generosity in giving himself. No man ever thought less of money-making, or of doing things for material reward. He wanted people to enjoy life, and by spreading the gospel of good health, he was, more often than not, successful with all those who went to him for help.

I have heard him described as, “the richest, the poorest, and the happiest man alive”, and it is true to say that he was rich in experience and enjoyment of life, even though he might not have been blessed with great material possessions. Constantly cheerful (even during his last illness, which he doggedly fought with that wonderful physical resistance so much a testimony to his own teachings) his zest, enthusiasm, honesty of purpose, and gift of friendship were the most exhilarating things about him. Fred Hornibrook was indeed a man amongst men: impossible to replace, or to forget. To his dear wife, that kindred spirit, his fellow-worker, Nina, goes forth our love and sympathy at this time.

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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

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, April 18th, 6.45 p.m.: A. ALTOFT, "The Menace of Industrialised Farming".

Havering Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre), Tuesday, April 20th, 8 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE and a Roman Catholic priest debate "Co-existence".

The 59 Society (Kensington Public Library, Hornton Street, W.8), Thursday, April 22nd, 8 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE and FATHER T. CORBISHLEY, SJ, Debate, "There is no evidence for God".

Surbiton and Malden & Coombe and Kingston Branches NSS (The White Hart, Kingston Bridge, Hampton Wick), Friday, April 16th, 8 p.m.: A meeting.

Notes and News

WE feature this week—appropriately for Good Friday—the first part of a long article on "The Trial of Jesus" by Paul Winter, author of the book, *On the Trial of Jesus*, published by B. Blackwell & Co., Oxford (40s.). Not all our readers are likely to agree with Mr. Winter's interpretation of the events alleged to have taken place in Jerusalem some nineteen centuries ago, but none can deny his erudition and clarity of argument. "The Trial of Jesus" first appeared in the American Jewish magazine *Commentary* in September 1964 and is printed by kind permission of the Editor and of Mr. Winter. The article deserves the consideration of Freethinkers as a natural and rational treatment of its difficult subject matter.

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THE office of Cardinal Koenig, Archbishop of Vienna, had—we read in the *Catholic Herald* (2/4/65)—"refused to comment on reports that he is to head a new Vatican secretariat or agency for atheists and agnostics". But a Vatican spokesman announced that Pope Paul has decided to set up the new secretariat "to study why some people deny or doubt the existence of God, and to set about trying to establish a 'dialogue' with them." The establishment of such a secretariat would in no way affect the Church's condemnation of atheism but it would "reflect the Pope's concern with reaching the atheist and understanding him". Which is touching indeed.

CARDINAL KOENIG has, as the *Catholic Herald* noted, been an envoy of Pope Paul and Pope John XXIII in negotiations with the Communist regimes in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. He has to our knowledge instituted a "dialogue" magic word!) with Austrian Communists. And with the terms "atheist" and "Communist" being largely interchangeable in Catholic eyes, the Cardinal was obviously the natural choice to head the new body. On April 8th, it was duly announced that he had been appointed President of the Secretariat for Non-believers.

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MEANWHILE ecumenical "dialogue" is not proving altogether satisfactory—at least to the Protestants. "The trouble with most of ecumenism that we have seen to date is that it is one-way only," said *Church and State* (March 1965). And it gave several examples of the "steady infiltration" of American Protestant organisations by Catholic clergy, "without any analagous opening from the other side." This offered some basis for the "incredible suspicion that Catholic leadership penetrates Protestantism under the banner of ecumenism while rigidly keeping its own groups behind the walls of Catholic exclusiveness". But why "incredible"? *Church and State* should be the last to be surprised at such typical Roman Catholic tactics.

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IT IS often difficult "to determine where religion ends and disease begins", Dr. Leon Salzman told the Academy of Religion and Mental Health at its annual meeting in Washington (*Time*, 2/4/65). And, as Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at Georgetown (Roman Catholic) University medical school, Dr. Salzman should know. Jesuit philosopher and critic William F. Lynch added that neurotic religion frequently shows up among Roman Catholics as a denial of human feelings, a desire to find the will of God in every decision, and an unhealthy dependence on dogma as a means of obtaining absolute certainty. More evidence that "legalistically structured" religion can produce neurosis came, *Time* reported, from Dr. Klaus Thomas, founder of Berlin's Suicide Prevention Centre. About 40 per cent of 3,000 suicide-prone patients at the Centre suffered from "ecclesiogenic neurosis" arising from guilt feelings, especially about sex, induced by their religious training.

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ROBERT J. McALLISTER, a consultant psychiatrist, reported to the Academy that of 100 hospitalised Catholic priests at the Seton Institute, 77 had serious emotional problems as seminarians and 32 ultimately became alcoholics. A conflict between their desire for perfection and their basic needs and desires can drive men to leave the priesthood entirely, he said. "Suddenly their own humanity breaks through and they are gone."

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THE British and Foreign Bible Society is preparing to "flood the world with Christian books", its General Secretary, Dr. N. J. Cockburn said in St. Paul's Cathedral on April 4th at the end of the "Feed the Minds" week. Life in a highly industrialised and scientifically-orientated world required, said Dr. Cockburn, a new kind of Christian literature combining "the treasures of the past and the need for a contemporary approach". Practical books were called for, "both technical and scientific" which explained "to members of both agricultural and industrial communities how to live the Christian life in today's conditions".

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OUR contributor, Oswald Blakeston is at present exhibiting 3D and Seal paintings in the foyer of the Everyman Cinema, Hampstead, London, N.W.3. The exhibition will remain open until May 2nd.

Philosophy of Science—Some Facets

4—CHOOSING THE SIMPLEST THEORY

By DOUGLAS BRAMWELL

SUPPOSE that a physicist is investigating the relationships between the pressure and volume of a gas. For each value of the gas pressure he obtains a corresponding value for the volume. Plotting these values on a graph he discovers that a simple curve, defined by a simple mathematical equation, almost—but not quite—passes through all the plotted points. Nevertheless the physicist accepts the mathematical formula as the law of the gas and is content to assume that the points do not quite fit because his measurements of volume and pressure were not quite exact.

Why does the physicist draw this simple line and not a more "wavy" one passing exactly through all the points? Indeed, why go beyond the evidence at all; why not leave the results as a set of unconnected points?

The act of drawing the simple curve is habitual and intuitive; also, experience of similar cases has taught the experimenter that further checks will result in more points close to the curve. The curve, in fact, is a set of predictions for the results of future experiments.

All this is an example of a well established rule that if several theories equally well explain a set of facts, the simplest should be chosen.

It is not always clear, unfortunately, what constitutes simplicity. One definition is given in the famous Occam's Razor; "Entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily". In other words, if a set of facts can be explained by either of two theories, one of which contains three independent concepts and the other only two, then the latter should be chosen.

Recently however doubts have been expressed as to whether simplicity can be judged only on the number of concepts. It has been suggested that the relationships between concepts should also be taken into account. Thus, if a theory based on a few concepts explains certain facts only by setting up a complex array of relationships between the concepts, it may be justifiable to choose another theory with more concepts but simpler relationships.

In metaphysics, as in science, choice of theory may not be just a matter of counting concepts. Monists, both materialist and idealist varieties, have sheltered safely behind Occam's Razor. But now, if structure is to be taken into account, it may become valid to introduce other classes of entities into our philosophy—perhaps aesthetic and moral values that are independent of matter.

Is the Soul Immortal?

By TOM PRICE

IMMORTALITY is the hope of man. Those who have lived and built and bred children reason thus: "Surely death is not the end?"

"It would be so wasteful, so unjust, so prosaic. There must be life beyond the grave."

They fancy that their continued existence is of such great account in the "pattern" of the universe that immortality is nothing less than a right—or a privilege to be prayed for.

For them, any suggestion that the grave is the end of body and personality and ego is insufferable.

"Why," they say, "I'm so terrifically important that there is no question of not being immortal. Other things,

like flowers, snakes, ants and budgerigars, may very well die and rot and be forgotten, but I'm MAN—I think!"

And because they are sincerely convinced that immortality is an indisputable fact, it is not very hard for them to invent something to explain it in everyday terms.

This invention they call the soul.

And as it is obvious to all that the body, which is conceived in an egg, which grows to full virility, and then fades and dies, is not the vehicle of immortality, it follows that the soul is our only hope.

First, there has to be a soul. Second, that soul has to be immortal.

What is the soul? Is it personality? Personality can be changed by the stroke of the surgeon's knife.

Is it the "breath of life", the vital spark? Then it can be killed by a bullet.

No, there is no practical way of defining the soul, it is an immaterial thing that no one has ever felt, heard or seen.

It has a fascinating history, having been a principal part of the dogmas of primitive religions long before Christianity—illustrating the painful desire of suffering mankind to assure themselves that they will live for ever.

The evidence for existence of soul is flimsy enough; in the main, the rationalisation of man's intense desire to avoid the pain and oblivion of death.

But the evidence for immortality of the soul is flimsier.

This evidence is mostly to be found in the writings of the great religions. These highly emotional writings must be suspected by anyone wishing to approach matters in a calm, scientific way. In any case, they give no proof of the problem, merely making the statement that the soul exists, and is immortal.

Few can blame modern scientists for not being very interested in the subject.

In fact, in these days even the clergymen are not too sure of their ground and would rather discuss South African politics and the standards of the welfare state than that old-fashioned and rather phantasmagoric phantasm, the soul. Which, perhaps, is a healthy sign.

What God can do to an Eel

"EELS spawn in the Sargasso Sea," the priest said, "and then the Gulf Stream sweeps their spawn in great balls a mile wide and half a mile deep, and the whole lot get washed up the Severn by the Bore. There's a good deal of force in the Bore, you know; and sometimes you can hear the roar of the waters five miles away. They catch the baby eels in nets, and they're no bigger than threads with black eyes; but they're delicious fried alive in bacon fat. I'd say they're superior to whitebait."

"Now people will tell you that you can't keep a captured elver. The baby eel, they say, will always die if you try to rear him. But my father was a man of God and he said, 'These elvers will live'. He put them in a white enamel bowl in the sun. After a few days they'd tied themselves into knots."

"God did that to them?" I asked pointedly.

He shook his head sadly. "It's clear you've never been in the Polar Regions; but you must have heard of the effect on explorers of white light reflected from the snow? Well, our elvers had gone insane from the white light reflected from the enamel bowl. We only rescued one. But father prayed over him and kept him on the mantelpiece in a jar. He'd knock on the glass when he wanted to be fed a worm. You see how really wonderful God's ways are?"

OSWELL BLAKESTON

The Trial of Jesus

(Continued from page 122)

the clamour of the mob, the death sentence, the scourging and the mockery of Jesus, the journey to the place of execution outside Jerusalem. Such early preparedness on the governor's part to sit in judgment would have been impossible unless Pilate had prior knowledge that his presence was required in the court. The early hour tends to confirm the reliability of the Johannine report concerning the arrest of Jesus by military personnel under the command of a Roman officer.

The Judge

The evangelists—all four of them—describe Pilate as convinced of Jesus's innocence and anxious to acquit him. But instead of using his supreme authority as the highest judge and governor of the province, and simply passing a verdict of acquittal, Pilate offers to let Jesus go as an act of grace. The Gospels refer to a habit of Pilate, or a Jewish custom, of releasing a prisoner on the Passover; in accordance with this, Pilate asks the Jews whether he should release Jesus or another prisoner called Barabbas. Here the evangelists actually contradict themselves. On the one hand, they say that the Jewish citizens of Jerusalem were free to demand the release of *any one* prisoner; on the other hand, they report that Pilate limited the people's choice by offering them only the alternative of freeing Jesus or Barabbas. We read later on in the Gospels that Jesus was not crucified alone, but together with two other men. Hence when Jesus stood before Pilate there must have been at least two more accused or condemned men in the governor's custody. If the Jews of Jerusalem were free to demand the release of any prisoner, why should Pilate have limited them to Jesus or Barabbas? In actual fact no custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover season ever existed, either in Jewish or in Roman law. Barabbas, however, seems to have been a historical person, though "Barabbas" is only part of his name. There exist Gospel codices which give the name in full as *Jesus bar Abba*. If two persons, both called Jesus, had been arrested instead of one, the Roman magistrate might have asked which of the two was to be tried. In that case, endeavouring to present Pilate as being favourably disposed towards Jesus, the writer of the Gospel might have fashioned the Barabbas episode as we now have it in his book, making it appear that the governor was not asking about the identity of the accused, but rather offering one of the two for pardon: "Which one of the two shall I release, Jesus who is called Bar Abba or Jesus who is called Messiah?" Yet Pilate had no need to resort to a presumed paschal custom of granting amnesty; nor did he have any reason to leave the decision to the crowd. He was the judge. If he found Jesus to be guiltless, and the stubborn Jews insisted that Barabbas should be granted a pardon, all Pilate had to do was pronounce Jesus innocent and release him along with Barabbas. Nobody in Jerusalem—no high-priest nor any other Jew—could have prevented the imperial governor from setting Jesus free, if Pontius Pilate had been inclined to do so.

The evangelists, however, report that Pilate's kindly gesture to set Jesus free by an act of grace proved of no avail. The Jews prefer Barabbas. He is released, and the proceedings of the court come to an end.

If we wish to understand what lies behind this version of the story, we have to remind ourselves once again that Mark—the oldest Gospel, though the second in the Canon—was written in Rome at a time (around the year 70 of

the current era) when the small community of Christians living there was in constant danger of persecution. Already in the 40's, Christian missionary preaching had provoked the Emperor Claudius to expel all Jews from the capital city, those who believed that the Messiah had appeared and those who did not share such a belief (the Romans were as yet unable to distinguish between messianist Jews—that is, Christians—and other Jews), and in Nero's reign the persecution of the Christians took an even grimmer form. Since Mark was composed either at the end of Nero's reign or shortly afterwards, the evangelist had every reason to try to ingratiate himself and his co-religionists with the Romans. The fact that Jesus had been sentenced to the cross by Pilate—a death penalty which carried opprobrium in Roman eyes, as being reserved for the most heinous crimes, and for slaves and despised foreigners—could not be concealed. But the evangelist could portray Pilate as having been unwilling to pass a death sentence and as having recognised the innocence of the man whom Christians now worshipped. For this purpose Pilate had to be presented as acting under Jewish pressure against his own better conviction. The evangelist's tendency was not "anti-Semitic", as some might say; it was defensive and apologetic. He was concerned with promoting the fortunes of his little group, and was anxious to avoid suspicion and counter hostility on the part of the authorities. Accordingly, he presented the Roman authority of Jesus's own day, Pontius Pilate, as professing that he had found "no fault in this man". The writer of the Second Gospel and those who came after him never realised what results this shift in the responsibility for Jesus's crucifixion would have in future generations.

The Sentence

In this connection, it is instructive to look at how the various evangelists refer to the governor's final decision. Not one of them is prepared to state plainly that a sentence of death was passed on Jesus by the Roman magistrate. In Mark and Matthew we read that "Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified"—an oblique manner of reporting a judicial verdict. Luke and John are even more reticent. The former states that Pilate gave in to the demand of the Jews and allowed Jesus to be crucified, while the latter goes so far as to say that Pilate relinquished Jesus to the Jews who themselves took him away and crucified him. All the evangelists are at pains to avoid putting on record the passing of a death sentence by the Roman magistrate—but it remains a fact that crucifixion was a Roman punishment, not a Jewish one.

Jesus is crucified, according to Mark at nine o'clock in the morning, according to John in the later afternoon. Together with him two other prisoners are executed by crucifixion, of whose trial and sentencing the New Testament gives no information. But there is one small, perhaps significant, detail: the two men are designated as *leestai*, rebels—the same appellation which is applied to Jesus in the synoptists' account of his arrest. On Pilate's order, an inscription is attached to the cross stating the reason, the *causa*, or *aitia*, for pronouncing the death sentence. This inscription reads: "King of the Jews". In the tangled web of evangelical accounts of Jesus's trial, one point stands out with clarity: he was arrested as "a rebel", accused before Pilate as "King of the Jews", found guilty as such, and executed as such. None of the later accretions which in the Gospels overlay the original primitive account, and

none of the editorial modifications from the hands of successive evangelists, can hide or disguise the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was arrested, accused, tried, sentenced, and executed on a charge of insurrection against Roman rule in Judaea.

Judaea under Roman Rule

Christian scholars, Catholic and Protestant, generally do not dispute this. But many of them, the great majority perhaps, will say that the political accusation was a "trumped-up charge", invented by the Jewish authorities of the day who had found Jesus "worthy of death" for religious reasons but could not act on their own authority, because while the Sanhedrin had the right to pass sentences of death, it had no right to carry out such sentences. This argument is faulty. At the time when Judaea was under procuratorial rule, from the year 6 to the year 66, Jewish law courts *did* pass death sentences upon Jewish inhabitants of Israel, and *did* carry out such sentences on their own authority, without referring the cases to the Roman political administrator of the country.

There is evidence for this in the New Testament itself. The Acts of the Apostles (a book which has as its subject the growth of Christianity in the first three decades or so after Jesus's death) mentions several cases in which the Sanhedrin either intended to exercise its power to pass and carry out capital sentences, or actually did so. For example, there is the description⁴ of how Stephen, denounced for his preaching, was brought before the Jewish magistrates, led into the courthouse for his trial and, after being taken out again, was immediately carried off to his execution. He was executed in the Jewish manner, by stoning, in accordance with Jewish law as laid down in Deuteronomy.⁵

Certain exegetes explain away the execution of Stephen on the Sanhedrin's orders as an irregularity, an illegal act of lynching carried out by an excited mob. But these exegetes commit the error of concentrating primarily on the contents of the so-called "Speech of Stephen" to his judges⁶ instead of on the factual account of how Stephen was taken into the Sanhedrin's council hall and executed after he re-emerged. The author of the Acts of the Apostles was in a position to obtain factual information only concerning what happened before Stephen was taken to the courthouse and what happened after he left it. He had no minutes of the court proceedings, no information about what went on inside the council hall, and knew nothing of what Stephen might have said to his judges. The diatribe he attributes to Stephen is not a defence plea; it bears no connection with the case at all; and except for a few words at its ending it is not even "Christian" in content. It is a violent denunciation of the Temple ritual—and Jewish Christians took part in the Temple cult until the Temple was destroyed in the year 70—such as might possibly have originated among members of the pre-Christian Dead Sea Covenanters or a kindred Jewish group. The writer of the Acts could have found some transcript of a homily with an anti-cultic tenor, restyled and adapted it, and then used this material to amplify his meagre information and enliven the account of Stephen's trial.⁷

Once we recognise that what the Acts presents as Stephen's speech is in no way a transcript of the actual words Stephen said to his judges, we shall not fall into the error of contending that Stephen so enraged his audience by his speech that they seized him and carried him off to be stoned without awaiting the court's proper verdict. Stephen was not stoned by an excited mob. He was executed in pursuance of a legal sentence, legally passed by a court competent to try him.

Another reference to the Sanhedrin's power to pass and

carry out sentences of death is in Acts 5:27, 33, where it is reported that the Sanhedrin, when investigating the activities of some of Jesus's disciples, intended to sentence them to death and execute them. According to the Acts, the Jewish councillors were persuaded to abstain from carrying out this intention by Gamaliel's counsel of moderation.⁸

(To be concluded)

1. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XVIII 63, 64. Scholars are divided in their opinions on the authenticity of this passage. The text in our editions of the *Antiquities* certainly contains insertions which do not come from Josephus's own hand. The passage appears to have been tampered with by a Christian copyist, probably in the 3rd century. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for assuming that Josephus did relate the death of Jesus. When writing about James the Just (*Jewish Antiquities* XX 200), Josephus casually mentions that James was the brother of "Jesus who is called Christ". It thus seems that Josephus, before he referred to James, had already informed his readers about Jesus. Furthermore, the *testimonium* displays features which can scarcely be attributed to a Christian interpolator. Jesus is here called "a wise man", a designation not in keeping with 3rd-century Christian notions about who and what Jesus was. The immediately following words, "if it is permissible to call him a man", may have been added; they show that the copyist felt uneasy about an expression Josephus had used. The *testimonium* distinguishes between the roles which the Jews and which the Romans played in Jesus's trial. It refers to an indictment that was drawn up by Jewish nobles, yet states that the death sentence was passed by the Roman governor. It was not customary for Christians in the 3rd-century to make such fine distinctions; they flatly charged the Jews with responsibility for everything—arrest, trial, sentencing, and crucifixion. Ultimately, the adherents of Jesus are in the *testimonium* called "the tribe of Christians", a phrase not used of Christians by people who were Christians themselves, but credible in the mouth of a first-century Jew who was steeped in the Old Testament and would be accustomed to describing internal divisions within the body politic of the Jewish nation by the word "tribe".
2. Mark 14:48, 49; Matthew 26:25; Luke 22:52, 53.
3. Mark 15:25.
4. Acts 6:12-7:59.
5. Acts 7:58b; compare Deuteronomy 17:25-27.
6. Acts 7:2-53, 56.
7. Compare my remarks in the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, Vol. 82, 1961, columns 790-792.
8. Acts 5:34-40.

CORRESPONDENCE

MARXISTS AND ASSASSINATION

Mr. F. A. Ridley, the master of subterfuge and confusion, accuses me in his article "The Ethics of Assassination" of confusion regarding the role of the individual in history. I repeat, the confusion is all on his side.

I noticed in his article he did not mention the brutal assassination of Leon Trotsky. One wonders why.

Perhaps he would like to create the impression that the Marxists' hands are clean regarding assassination.

It is certainly well known that for Marxists, by an incredible perversion of language, a crime can be "objectively" meritorious—meaning, within the context of the class-struggle, or more simply, if it is useful to the Party.

R. SMITH

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