Christian Atheism

In the past, Seed has had occasion to complain of those professors of Christianity who, in their desire to be open-minded and tolerant, have been willing to define their religion in terms of almost anything (generally, a vague, liberal ethicism) except its distinctive doctrines. Perhaps the ultimate solution to their diffidence is to be found in a brief article by Dr. Alistair Kee entitled "Must a Christian believe in God?" which appeared in The Times on October 23, 1971. Dr. Kee's conclusion is that "those who believe that the nature of man and the goal of mankind are revealed definitively in what comes to expression in Jesus are by definition Christians even if belief in God is not possible for them". A notable conclusion.

Dr. Kee admits that there are difficulties (superficial ones) in this position—most obviously, the one raised by the tendency of Christian creeds to include some such disconcerting phrase as "I believe in God", and to outline with some precision the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity. Since the creeds are usually accepted as definitive statements about Christian belief, it is a trifle tricky to define as a Christian one who does not believe in God.

The answer of the author of this article is, 'oh, yes, of course, a few years ago it would have been senseless or contradictory to make such an assertion. But that is only because people used to think they believed in God. No, of course, they do not, so there is no contradiction in saying that a Christian need not believe in God'. If all this sounds a morsel mystifying, Dr. Kee has a rational explanation.

"How we conceive of the deepest truths of life," he says, "depends largely upon the culture in which we are raised." Thus, the culture of the Jews led them to expect a Messiah: when Jesus came, they naturally saw in him the Messiah. Now, of course, we no longer attach any significance to "the speculative titles of late Judaism"; our culture has conditioned us to accord the deepest meaning "to the great questions of the nature of man and the conditions of human fulfillment". Therefore, that is what Jesus represents to us. Presumably, by this line of reasoning, if our "culture" regarded basted and broiled pigs' knuckles as the most important thing in life and we were able to identify these "definitively in what comes to expression in Jesus", then we would all be "Christians".

I do not wish to be frivolous; however, the kind of temporizing represented by Dr. Kee's views invites derision. They (subtly?) annihilate the notion that ultimate, objective rectitude and power (our concept of "God") are revealed in the Incarnation, and make public opinion, or cultural values, the locus and standard of that rightness. If these opinions can then be "incarnated" or associated with Jesus, then we are "Christians": we make Jesus an empty vessel into which we pour our wishful thinking. "God", therefore, has no autonomy; "He" is generated in time and space by human attitudes, and is as mutable as the affections and minds of the multitudes. In this view, Jesus is whatever we want Him to be—we can make up our own religions.

Unless I am grievously in error, the point of Christianity is that the nature of reality is pre-established by God, and that (somehow) the revelation of God in the Incarnation ("Jesus Christ . . . is . . . God, of the Substance of the Father . . . and Man, of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world") allows imperfect men to become reconciled with that reality. And it seems to me that there is more than a quibble involved in stating that this is the same as replacing God by man and allowing him to imagine his own "reality".
Wrong Questions

The Prime Minister's attempts to explain why he believes the "free-market economy" has failed have merely muddled the matter—particularly in light of his concession that the alleged culprit hardly exists except as a myth. Notably absent from his statements was any suggestion that a causal link might hold between this "failure" and increasing government involvement in the economy, although their coincidence in time certainly makes this a reasonable hypothesis. However, it it be granted that a failure has occurred, before arguing about who or what has caused it, we shall do well to agree on what we mean by the term. For Mr. Trudeau the sense is clear: "The free enterprise system has shown that we reached a stage in our industrial and economic development where we can have high unemployment and high inflation at the same time."

It should not go unnoticed that, besides telling us wherein (in his view) the present system has miscarried, this remark carries with it the implication that the failure was not completely foreseen—that he waited upon the unfolding of events before drawing his condemnationary conclusions. How strangely tentative the Prime Minister has become. For years he exercised his intelligence upon the theory of the direction that economic forces give society, and now apparently we are to deduce that these endeavours all went for nought. Perhaps. But there remains the nagging improbability of the exact correspondence of his conclusions supposedly based on recent practical experience and those he was professing on theoretical grounds fifteen years ago. Is it excessive modesty that prevents him from pointing out his powers as a seer? His political stature could only be enhanced by public knowledge of the fact that he was aware even before he formally entered politics of the position our country would be in today. Providing, of course, that his recent observations actually prove valid.

However, this prescience business is not entirely convincing. After all, is prodigious reasoning or divining power really required to foresee that a steadily increasing ability to compound and diversify production with a diminishing amount of human effort will lead to "unemployment"? Or that setting prices in accordance

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Faith and Economics

For several reasons—perhaps the most important being the depreciation of the symbolism of their faith into granting or empty clichés by religious people themselves—religion has come to be associated with vague mysticism, unrealistic expectations, and mindless jiggery-pokery. At best, it tends to be related to warm but indistinctly defined ethical impulses and "common decency". However, religion is seldom invoked as a technique of dealing with the 'real' world—where scientific exactitude and political pragmatism are hastily elevated above "metaphysical" considerations. The implications of this paradox—that religion is relevant only to a conjunctural world—are significant: religious "truth" is useless truth. If this is the case, then religion is interesting (and not very) only as a species of fairy-tale. If, on the other hand, religion does tell us something about reality, then it ought to be given heed. This series of articles examines some of the realistic implications of religious belief in the area of economics and suggests the close relationship between faith and policy.

I: The Approach to Reality

To embark upon a discussion of matters so apparently divergent as "faith" and "economics" is perhaps to court derision. For, while "faith", as everyone knows, is fundamentally irrational and conjures up images of the simple-minded reverencing a "hypothetical deity", "economics" brings to mind visions of "cold, hard figures" and equally cold, cerebral men in steel-grey business suits, regarding each other with icy eyes. "Faith" connotes the fanciful; "economics", the resolutely real. And, in the words of Rudyard Kipling, "never the twain shall meet".

Nevertheless, there is a point at which "faith", insofar as it is "evidence", does suggest to us something that, though real, is not quite wholly realized. And there is a point at which "economics" transmutes to "Economics"—when simple "household management" becomes a "Mystery", and the men in steel-grey suits are transformed into vortaries of a "religion" that may have no relation at all to the facts of production, distribution, and consumption. At this point the normal connotations of "faith" and "economics" become an inversion of reality, and when "Economics" becomes a system of belief, we are perhaps justified in resorting to a humbler faith.

Science and Religion

This issue is crystallized, for example, in the contrasting views of religious "faith" and economic "science" adopted by Hugh Gaiteskell, socialist theoretician and former leader of the Labour Party in Britain, and engineer-economist C.H. Douglas. In his article "Four Monetary Heretics", Gaiteskell states a dogmatic position in which "religion" is characterized by "dogma" and "obscenity", and declares: "It is not only for his conviction but also for his methods that Major Douglas must be regarded as a religious rather than a scientific reformer". What is implied, of course, is that "science" has a valid relation to reality; "religion" does not, but is more akin to black magic, or superstition. Gaiteskell has a right to define his terms; however, his use of the words "scientific" and "religious" as antithetical—particularly with regard to Douglas—betrays a sorry understanding of either. Moreover, it betrays the limitations of his own system of belief: it is arguable that scientific dogmatism (especially in an age that is challenging facile empiricism) is no more valid than religious dogmatism—if by dogmatism is meant the assertion of principles without evidence. Douglas did himself in fact describe his own approach as "religious", but he was scrupulous to define what he meant by the term. Gaiteskell, by using the term "religious" in an unexamined way, displays not only intellectual carelessness, but also those characteristics of superstition—dogmatism and obscurity—which he attributes to Douglas.

Unlike Gaiteskell, who implies the unreality of religion, Douglas insists upon the relation of religion to reality:

In the sense that I am going to use it, and I think

I will be using it correctly, the word religion has to do with a conception of reality. It is the binding back either of action, or of policy...to reality. In so far as it means to bind back, to bring into close relation again, and in that sense I am going to use it, religion is any sort of doctrine which is based upon an attempt to relate action to some conception of reality.

What we believe about the nature of reality will determine our approach to that reality. If the conception of reality to which policy or action is related is incorrect, then, of course, "religion" will be false, or, heretical. Again unlike Gaitskell, who implies the absolute truth of his religion by calling it "science", Douglas admits the possibility of erroneous belief:

It does not necessarily mean...that your conception of reality is a correct one, but it does mean that you are postulating that there is something to which you refer as real, and you are basing your policy upon that reality.

In other words, every policy is based upon a philosophy, or conception of reality. Belief—or faith—is realized in policy, and the results of this policy are the fruits by which we can estimate the validity of the underlying "religion". Since the policy of the philosophy suggested by Douglas has never been fully or consistently realized, we cannot say that it is wrong: rather, we might suspect that it is right, since by definition it must reflect "the way things are". If, on the other hand, the economic "science" of Gaitskell represents "orthodoxy", then his belief must be seriously questioned in view of the palpable failure of the policies which stem from it.

The Canon

Before proceeding to a consideration of the violation of truth by what financial theorists and politicians are pleased to call "inevitable economic law", we ought perhaps to look more particularly at the kind of "religion" to which Douglas refers, in order to answer Gaitskell's allegations. Douglas makes the following explicit confession of faith:

Now it is my belief...that there is running through the nature of the Universe something that we call a "gospel". It is the thing which is referred to in the Gospel of St. John as the "word", the "Word". The engineer and the artist refer to it when they say they have got something "right", Other people mean the same thing when they talk about absolute truth, or reality.

He asserts his conviction that there is something "real"; he does not go on to prescribe what "reality" is, but suggests that it is recognizable when it is realized.

His faith is in an underlying reality that interlaces the very nature of things. From this, we may conclude of Douglas that he is an absolutist in religion: truth is not, for him, a matter of subjective relativism, or of the construction of models of how things "should" be. At the same time, however, he makes no dogmatic assertions about the nature of reality, except that it is real (a necessary assumption of any epistemology). And, he implies, what is real is right. But he eschews any temptation to make reality into a system, rather, it is something that unfolds itself to the careful searcher. This is the extent of Douglas's "dogmatism".

At this fundamental level, the issue of "faith" resolves itself into the question: "Is anything real?" Douglas is convinced that there is a reality. Gaitskell, to judge from his own conviction, appears similarly to be convinced that something is real, although he seems to have a somewhat different conception of reality. Examination suggests that Douglas's is the hollower faith, attending as it does upon discovery, while Gaitskell's implies not only that there is an absolute truth, but that that truth is somehow manifest in the assumptions upon which the economic system operates. This brings us to a consideration of religious "methods"—for which Douglas has also been criticized.

Discovery

Significantly, Douglas suggests, in his examples of the engineer and the artist, that this "canon" of which he speaks, this underlying principle of reality, is recognizable most readily in its incarnations. "The Word", it will be recalled, "became flesh". In this, he is adopting a religious position that may be described as Christian: the central fact of Christian faith is the incarnation of the Word. This principle of incarnation is universal, comprehending both natural and moral relationships. Richard Hooker, for example, declares the similarity of natural and moral rectitude.

3Ibid., 9.

(continued p. 6)
The assertion that, "Freedom of the press is a cornerstone of democracy," has been reduced through thoughtless repetition to the status of a meaningless bromide. We hear more about this 'freedom' than any other simply because the news media are its advocates, and they communicate with us on a daily basis. Yet the present obscurity of the significance of this high-flying proposition results in large part from evidence that their actions correspond less exactly with the interests of the public than the media would have us believe.

A question that will not be dispelled is whether certain events or viewpoints are, as a matter of concerted policy, prevented from receiving publicity. That this occurs in special circumstances (notably during time of war) is universally admitted—sometimes in the amusing form of the apologies of journalists and editors personally responsible for disseminating deceptions. However, every effort is made to convince us that, once such extraordinary situations pass, the media suddenly become models of disinterestedness and integrity. We are asked to credit that persons who have proven so serviceable as propagandists for falsehoods are instantly converted into irreproachable seekers after and defenders of the truth.

What little verisimilitude this scenario may possess is, moreover, shattered by the testimony of many persons who have direct experience of the perverse influences upon the content of the information media. Douglas Reed, G.K. Chesterton, and Malcolm Muggeridge come to mind—and this list could easily be extended.

The news and views we read in the press are necessarily filtered; and the public should be protected against the dangers inherent in this situation by knowledge of the categories of perspectives and issues that the editorial selve consistently keeps from reaching them. Only then will they be able to interpret for themselves the import of what they read and hear. It is better that people should be able to see that the "revelations" of a scandal like Watergate are as likely to be components of the very type of political chicanery they purportedly oppose as proofs of the virtues of contemporary journalism.

However, we need not go so far afield to study the kind of covert influence which bears upon the information we receive from the media. Consider, for example, the implications of a recent article in Content, "Canada's National News Media Magazine," concerning a shakeup at Southam news services. One of the changes involves the dismissal of Guy Demarino, a well-known Ottawa reporter, whose verbal reaction is recounted as follows: "They won't let me starve. I could say more but I could be blackballed across the country."

Apparently (from Mr. Demarino's standpoint at least) there is nothing untoward in the binding of his freedom to speak at the point where he comes under threat of "starving" and being "blackballed"—which naturally raises the question of what actions on his part render him susceptible to such penalties. Evidently, criticizing his immediate employer is one; thus, if the Southam organization does something reprehensible, no mention of the fact is likely to appear in the 14 major newspapers and various business publications under its control.

But does Mr. Demarino's philosophy encompass other dispensations from the obligation fully and accurately to inform the public? Given his timidity vis-a-vis Southam, what is he prepared to say about the institutions which can be thought of as his more remote employers—namely, the banks that create the financial credit he gets in his pay packet? That Southam and other large media agencies could never maintain their status in the face of the hostility of the banking system undoubtedly has a connection with their blacking out of all suggestions that this system has defects—except those made occasionally by its own spokesmen. Unfortunately, the latter want to steer any reforms in the direction of their own advantage rather than that of the community in general.

Indeed, the slogan "Freedom of the press" as used at present actually serves as an excuse for the enslavement of the members of the community, the idea being that as long as professionals are scrutinizing and commenting upon events the ordinary citizen needs no opportunity independently to inquire into or think about them. He can be riveted to daily drudgery, passively absorbing the semi-digested palaver, raving imaginings and outright misrepresentations dished out in the
newspapers and on radio and television. The monopoly of information available to the public complements the monopoly of credit, whose potent purpose is the creation of an ant-hill society.

"Freedom of the press" is an abstract concept without concrete expression so long as the persons actually engaged in writing and publishing are unfree; and—the tracts of Puritan economic theorists notwithstanding—living off a salary is practically synonymous with servitude. Just ask Mr. Dematino—preferably before he gets "reinstalled" and again feels the pressure to be more guarded in his pronouncements.

R.E.K.


War by Another Name

The allegedly irreversible interdependence of all nations is an increasingly sinister factor in a world of continuous and mounting international tensions. It is disquieting to realize that one's destiny may well rest in the hands of some lunatic tyrant or business buccaneer or ideological warmonger. The orchestrated rejection of "rationalism" following the Second World War has if anything led away from, rather than toward, the fraternity of all peoples. More and more, the economic and political links forged across national boundaries appear as a tangle of seaweed dragging down the drowning man instead of as lifelines transporting him to safety.

None of this is really surprising, since the basis of the modern theory of internationalism runs directly counter to common experience and common sense. This theory in effect holds that people who are not satisfied with what their local government is doing should resolve their problem by putting an "expert" (whose expertise likely lies in psychological manipulation and cultivating the 'right' connections more than in the field of the grievance) in charge of the situation. It does not matter if the expert speaks a different language, comes from a different culture, and has never set foot within 5,000 miles of the troubled community.

Of course, all this bizarre approach to political problems really guarantees is that "solutions" must be formulated as utopias rather than arrived at with the consent of those affected by them. In fact, one might say that World Government (the extension of international law backed by overwhelming military might) is the game plan for a world in which love, forgiveness, and all the finer expressions of human association have been bypassed; the concepts of democracy and the free and responsible individual have expired; and the only political precept is to insinuate oneself into the favor of the man wielding the bludgeon. We are reverting from the principles that inspired Magna Carta to those governing the headquarters of Attila the Hun.

One of the foremost rationalizations of this change has been bound up with the improvements of international commerce. Yet nowhere has the souring of the promises of internationalism been more evident than in this domain. Although trade with other nations is still touted as a panacea for all varieties of local economic distress, the fallacy of this proposition now lies exposed for all but the willfully blind to see.

R.E.K.

(continued next month)

"Faith", continued from p. 4

when he says: "Goodness in actions is like unto straightforward: wherefore that which is done well we term right". Righteousness and rightness are one, and they are recognizable similarly in their results, in their realizations. The consequences of this observation for a "religious" method are crucial: religious assertions are not prescriptive, but descriptive.

Moreover, not only does incarnation reveal truth, but it also is the method of realizing faith, of manifesting the evidence of things unseen. As a method, as an approach to reality, incarnation is the antithesis of what Gaitskell implies in his references to

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The Comfortable Apocalypse

Psychology textbooks define "rationalization" as the ascribing of one's actions or opinions to plausible (but false) causes which tend to exculpate or free one from unpleasant responsibility—or an unfavourable self-image.

We heard recently the woeful case of a man, engaged in the business of distributing literature for other persons and concerns, who refused to accept a job involving delivery of a brochure criticizing a politician and the policies with which he was associated. The businessman's plaint was that distributing the pamphlet could jeopardize a $40,000 contract that he had with someone else.

The prospective (now frustrated) client admonished the man that, if he was not willing to take a stand on important political issues, he stood to lose a great deal more than $40,000 in the long run. Scarcely dismayed, the businessman replied: "I believe that the end of the world is near, so it doesn't matter anyway."

At least, he will die with money in his pockets.

("Questions", continued from p. 2)

with the rule that "anything goes, but you must at least recover your costs" in a market that is intermittently surcharged with demand and continually swamped by unpaid costs carried over from previous production cycles must lead to "inflation"? That community leaders express surprise or disappointment at these results simply cannot go down—except as evidence of their stupidity or indifference regarding the public welfare.

But not everybody is a fool or a racketeer. Why, then, the debates, interchanges, confrontations, studies that are as futile as they are interminable? The difficulty in achieving improvement, despite the devotion of much good will to this end, lies in defects in the building blocks of our reasoning. We place faith in them, we think that we can draw valid conclusions from them, but too often they are false or illusory, causing our whole logical superstructure to collapse at the very point where we expect it to issue in success. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that merely by substituting the word "glut" for "plenty" an economist is able to upset our whole perception of reality. And answers to economic questions elude us because the very problems we set out to resolve are conceptually framed in terms of impossible contradictions. If liberation from the necessity to labour and the incessant accumulation of communal capital cannot be seen otherwise than as hindrances to human happiness, where can we direct our policies? We are effectively boxed in—and neither those who cry "forward!" nor those who cry "back" offer advice that can avail.

That our culture has abstracted itself so far from economic fact that it is no longer possible to distinguish an extension of opportunity from a social catastrophe is a prospect unpleasant to contemplate; but, given present circumstances, the verdict seems unavoidable.

R.E.K.

"CBC radio broadcast, December 28, 1975.

What ensued (under Hjalmar Schacht) was the resourceful application of a financial policy so hyper-orthodox that in 1939 the economist at the Bank for International Settlements, Per Jacobson, declared that Nazi finance was the most orthodox economic policy in Europe.

Gorham Munson, Aladdin's Lamp, 7