

## PREFACE

Dedicated to all honest seekers of truth.

In many ways this book represents a personal journey which had vague beginnings in adolescence. It gathered momentum in mid life when I made a definite stand by repudiating my previous indoctrination and accepted the evidence of learning. But the journey did not stop there. It has been a growing experience continuously affecting my attitudes to society and greatly adding to my sense of personal dignity and happiness. I have been fortunate in the choice of my wife Elaine. For over twenty five years she has given unstinted support and practical help. Our time together has been an ongoing adventure of discovery and joy.

I must thank those who have given encouragement and suggestions to produce this book. They include family members and friends who have expressed keen interest and enthusiasm. I am particularly grateful to Sarah McCreedy for literary help and Allan dark who has given technical assistance. My thanks to authors and publishers who have given permission to quote from their works. I would like to thank the very many authors of fine books who have greatly assisted with valuable information. They have helped to liberate me from the mental and emotional prison in which I was raised. The result has been freedom and a greatly enhanced enjoyment of life.

Steve Cooper 1991

## **CONTENTS**

### Chapter One

#### **INTRODUCTION**

After forty years of following Christian belief and heavy engagement in Church activity, I finally rejected the whole notion of a god and became an atheist. The following is part of the evidence which led me to reject religion.

### Chapter Two

#### **HOW DID THE NOTION OF A GOD ARISE**

The theories examined are, Naturism, (Muller); Ancestor Cults, (Spencer); Totemism, (McLennan and Robinson); and Animism, (Tyler). World religions briefly compared are Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

### Chapter Three

#### **BELIEF OR SCIENCE**

Method of scientific enquiry contrasted with a belief system of faith in divine revelation.

### Chapter Four

#### **HEBREW LITERATURE AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

A critical examination of the Old Testament stories. The multifarious origins of the Hebrew Scriptures and translations;

Some ancient and modern myths; the story of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and the counting of the nation by Moses are viewed.

### Chapter Five

#### **THE NEW TESTAMENT**

A critical look at the first New Testament Gospel written, and translations from translations. Something is learned from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The crucifixion of Jesus is examined. Was Jesus guilty of sedition from a Roman point of view? Was the message of Jesus intended for the Jews only? The Sermon on the Mount and the influence of the Apostle Paul on Christianity is examined.

### Chapter Six

#### **WHO CREATED THE UNIVERSE**

Some expert opinion of astronomers and the notion of a divine creator is examined. The Biblical concept of a beginning and end of time and space is discussed and rejected.

### Chapter Seven

#### **ETHICS**

Ethics are presented as a social imperative regardless of religious belief. Ethics before Christ are viewed; those of Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Plato and ethics found in ancient Egyptian manuscripts. Also viewed are Hammurabi's laws, Socrates, Old and New Testament ethics and the development of moral law.

### Chapter Eight

#### **WOMEN DENIGRATED BY RELIGIOUS DOGMA**

The Hebrew law relating to women; the Apostle Paul's attitude toward women; eighteenth century British law and educational opportunities for women are all examined.

### Chapter Nine

#### **RELIGION AS A MEANS TO GAIN POWER**

The influence of Constantine on the Christian Church; the growth of the Church into an ecclesiastical world-wide empire;

the diffusion of Christianity in Britain and Church influence on society today are examined.

### Chapter Ten

#### **THE DEPENDENCY FACTOR IN THEISTIC RELIGIONS**

Monotheism is compared with polytheism. Religious dependency on forces other than the self is likened to pre-adolescent dependency.

Chapter Eleven

### **THE BRAIN AND SUPERNATURAL MANIFESTATIONS**

Part One:

Presents expert opinion of brain function, the bicameral mind, and how susceptible human beings are to hallucinations and imagined occurrences.

Part Two:

considers the ability of the brain to recall impressions; The effects of hallucination and the use of hypnotism.

Part Three:

Examines 'speaking in tongues', rebirthing, drugs, dreams, spiritualism and life after death. The origin of so called divine voices and visions is examined. These are related to the functioning of the bicameral mind.

Chapter Twelve

### **MAGIC**

Considers that magic was used to complement primitive science, and that the decline of magic is due to technology. Bible magic is compared with modern day magic.

Chapter Thirteen

### **SPIRIT OR SOUL AND A LITTLE BIT OF LUCK**

Spirit is described as a natural quality of human experience. The Biblical notion of an eternal soul is considered and rejected. The human need for a god is questioned. A story compares answers to prayer with Luck.

Chapter Fourteen

### **THE POWER OF THOUGHT**

The concept of a 'Hidden Observer' and hallucinations in hypnotism are discussed. Positive thought is believed to enhance life experience. Prayer is compared with self hypnosis. The notion of an independent god force and the fear of death is considered.

Chapter Fifteen

### **HUMANISM**

It is contrasted with the Biblical philosophy of retribution. Discussed are our inborn social qualities and potential; the need to be free from absolute dogma; the importance of self esteem and how to acquire it. Social behaviour is defined as people to people relationships.

Chapter Sixteen

### **CHOICES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Suggests that human beings can achieve personal success and greater cooperation within society, that social qualities naturally reside in us all from birth and that belief in a god is an impediment to human social experience.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

As I look back, it amazes me that in spite of nagging doubt I was able to hang on to the Christian religion for forty years. I never was able to understand that a supposed almighty god could allow the suffering of innocent people. The moral teaching of blame and divine judgment worried me. Even the humane teaching of Jesus Christ did not satisfy my enquiring mind. Increasingly I found my own sense of justice, fair play and compassion at variance with the Christian dogma.

My mother and father had been honest and loving parents who provided a warm and secure home for their two sons. They had devoted their lives and entire fortune to the preaching of the Christian message. Some of my earliest memories are of daily prayers and Bible reading and the constant procession of evangelists who passed through our home. You could say that I was nurtured on Bible stories and for years automatically accepted Christian concepts without serious question. I now realise that while at school I had begun timidly to question some of the philosophy. Increasingly I became uneasy with its so-called truth, especially in early manhood. Yet after marriage and children of my own, I threw myself back into the Christian community and church work. All the time I was endeavouring to quieten a growing inner sense of disunity. I was really trying to convince myself that the Bible was the word of god, while at the same time a deeper awareness of its unreality was trying to surface.

Finally the realisation burst upon me that I had lost all faith in god and the Christian dogma. I would have to withdraw from church association even if it cost me all my friends. The argument was between me and the god of the Bible I had thought was real. Just to slide quietly into a position of rejection of god was not enough. Somehow I needed to dramatise my decision by a physical and emotional act of defiance. I needed to be able to look back to a time and place when I finally rejected the Christian religion.

The house was quiet, my family was away at a function elsewhere, I was alone. Now was the time to express my total disillusionment with the Christian philosophy I had so sincerely sought to follow for so many years. As I took one of my Bibles into my hands, a mixture of adventurous expectation and relief pervaded me. Its pages were soiled by constant use, it was underlined and cross-referenced in many places. I knew my way about its pages. Over many years I had studied its contents, trying to blend it into a believable philosophy. Now I was going to dethrone it, to deny that it was an instrument of truth and a saving message for myself and mankind.

So I went into the garden to ceremoniously burn my Bible in an old incinerator. Tearing out handfuls of pages I vowed never again to be subjected to its narrow and contradictory doctrines. Mentally shaking my fist skywards, I challenged god (if there was such a being) to demonstrate himself. As I watched the flames destroy my Bible, I was rejecting god completely, together with all the fears, hopes and trappings of the Christian faith. Henceforth I would trust myself and my own innate sense of justice and personal worth.

Quietly I walked back to the house. A great weight had been lifted from my shoulders, the deep division within me was gone, I felt almost euphoric, free and clean, and I have continued to feel so ever since. I had decisively taken myself back from a god I now believe to be mythical. I had rejoined the human race and was free to live my own way in accordance with my own standards of justice and compassion. My narrow religion had taught that only the few who believed in Jesus would go to heaven, that all others were destined for divine judgement. I felt that I was no longer a different kind of person from my neighbours, every man and woman was my brother and sister.

A new sense of personal worth arose within me, I did not want a vicarious or imputed worth as presented in the Christian religion. I had burned my Bible saying "to hell with god, I am an honourable man, not because I must be, but because that is how I am within myself." I became a free person willing to accept the warmth and worth of my

own person and take responsibility for myself. I did not need or want a saviour or a faith which made me dependent on another, be it even a god.

Religion has had a powerful hold on society for thousands of years. Until a century or so ago, it was accepted almost without question by the vast majority of European people. But the winds of science, freedom and skepticism have swept our age. There still are however, large numbers of people who live in a wilderness zone, somewhere between religious belief and agnosticism. Many sincere and honourable people, who want the best out of life, find themselves bewildered and divided by the teachings of their religion and nagging doubts about its reality.

I wish to re-examine some of the research which led me to reject my religion. In the following pages we will find out how Christian dogma arose and compare the Bible with other philosophies and modern thought. I would like to show that real peace and satisfaction does not come second hand through an event that happened some two thousand years ago. The desire for justice, peace, social approval, fair play and an enjoyment of life is understood and accepted by almost all of us. We are all members of the human community and should express our full potential. We all have the ability to experience love, friendship, compassion and to strive for harmony, justice and peace. So let us enjoy the beauty of the world and our existence in it without the contrived and inhibiting influence of absolute dogma.

This thesis is written for open-minded persons who would like to look at some of the vast amount of evidence contradicting that which is promulgated by religious teachers. Truth can stand investigation, is strengthened and confirmed by enquiry. If truth cannot withstand scrutiny, it can no longer claim to be truth. In the final analysis, two opposing paradigms or concepts cannot both be totally right.

A scientist establishes a paradigm or model-concept then seeks to test it. If the concept cannot be disproved, it may in time become a law, otherwise it will be rejected. Our difficulty is that one cannot scientifically prove that a god exists. Equally, one cannot scientifically prove that he does not. Lack of proof of a god does not disprove his existence. It does, however, cause rationally minded people to seriously doubt his existence. As we carefully examine supposed acts of god, we find physical or rational explanations which make a mockery of the notion of divine intervention. Understanding the physical cause of a condition, tends to eliminate belief in a supernatural cause or intervention.

It seems to me that the question of the existence or non-existence of a god is dependent on a belief system and not on science. The notion of a god has been perpetuated by the passing down of myths and legends from generation to generation. Different cultures teach different myths and legends to their children. These stories usually comprise part of their belief system.

I do not intend to soften my criticism of religion but will be honest and state the matter forthrightly as I see it. I have no feelings of animosity toward people, no matter what their beliefs may be. We will look at some of the reasons behind the considerable growth of agnosticism and atheism among western intellectuals during the last hundred years. Why do I bother, and what gives me the right to attempt to support an atheistic point of view? There are two reasons, the first is that I suspect that most people have not had the time to really consider the evidence, both for and against religion. The second reason is that in Christianised societies, morals have been widely assumed to be a by-product of religion, as though god and Christian thought had a monopoly on ethical attitudes. I take issue with that idea and will show that ethics predated Christianity by thousands of years and are a matter of social concern. The focus will be on the ethics of human welfare and will show that they form an integral part of human nature and experience.

The notion of a supernatural being will be rejected. Ethical humanism is considered a realistic and worthy social objective which can be approached directly. It is not helped by the confusion and bigotry which accompanies religious doctrine. For this reason the last two chapters will discuss behaviour from a humanistic viewpoint.

The committed devotees of religion will not be receptive or interested in this point of

view. Each of them will have established his or her own fixed beliefs according to personal persuasion and background. There is no wish to disturb the believer in religion who is gaining comfort and strength from the faith. Religious belief is notoriously immune to rational argument. While the scientist will insist on critical examination of the assertions, most religious people have made up their minds on emotional grounds and passed a verdict before they have begun to look dispassionately at the evidence. It is hard to sever the umbilical cord of entrenched religious beliefs, no matter what brand of faith is adopted.

Many are turning again to mysticism. They understand the scientific explanations of the laws which govern apparent phenomena, but they are not ready emotionally to stand on their own feet as persons responsible for themselves. They are not ready to leave their mythological heavenly father to establish their own independence. They feel the need to have some all-powerful one, up there, who may be able to over-ride the disadvantages circumstances may place them in and to provide a hope of security in an afterlife.

Religion still has tremendous influence in the halls of power. The religionist would claim that it is an influence for good, and indeed that often cannot be denied. A great deal of social benefit has accrued from devout believers who have given selflessly of their time, love, and caring to millions of people in distress. This is not an attack on the integrity of genuine believers, no matter what their faith may be. We are questioning the fact or falseness of gods. It must also be remembered that a great deal of suffering, wars, injustice, bigotry and many kinds of intolerance can be laid at the door of religionists. Often their doctrinal beliefs have caused them to adopt violent measures in an unenlightened effort to impose their dogma on others.

All religions have promoted moral behaviour. Yet morals are not the exclusive domain of religion. It is a truism that no nation, group of people, or person has a monopoly of good or evil. We are all social creatures and as such have a basic interest in social and moral standards. The conflict between what is considered good and bad, and efforts to control it, date back to prehistory. We will compare some different religious viewpoints, and talk about the origin of traditional Christian belief and some of its history. We will look at the problem of suffering and the rewards of human integrity. In other words, we will discuss personal maturity, dignity and social responses as imperative and natural pursuits of human endeavour, devoid of any need for belief in a mythical god.

Some have argued that the record of the historical Jesus is largely the creation of imagination. It seems to me that the demand for exact proof is unreal. The important ideas are the humanistic concepts of compassion, justice, equality and caring which are supposed to have been taught by Jesus. I have no quarrel with these ideas, indeed they have always been a necessary part of humanity. The person of Jesus, historical or not, is incidental to these humanistic qualities.

All Biblical references are quoted from the King James of England authorised version. Each chapter has a central theme and can be read separately, yet together they supply the principal reasons which drove me to declare. To Hell With God.

## CHAPTER 2

### How did the Notion of a God Arise

Francis Bacon said, "Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted .... but to weigh and consider."

We talk about an "Act of God" when we do not understand the cause of the event or are unable to predict or prevent its happening. That kind of thinking has been described as creating a god of the spaces, filling up the empty spaces in our understanding with an image of a supreme father or being who controls and orders the universe. Each unexplained phenomenon was attributed to divine origin.

The Biblical heaven used to be envisaged as being in the sky (the heavens), until Galileo began to bring it within the orbit of human understanding. Slowly scientists have penetrated and are continuing to penetrate the mysteries of our earth and universe. Science is filling up the gaps in our understanding until the gods of the spaces have been drastically reduced.

We carry some image of our ideas pictorially. Even the idea of a void is a picture of the absence of anything, an empty space. I have asked many people who have stated their belief in the Biblical god, to put into words their image of him. To some he is a grandfather figure; after all their own father acknowledges him as "our father in heaven". To some, god is the supreme power to fear, someone looking for faults and who has to be appeased. To some he can be prevailed upon with difficulty to change his mind. I have not talked to anyone who has suggested that god has a sense of humour and could laugh at human mistakes. To most religious people, god seems to be a rather austere being who punishes those of whom he does not approve.

Dr. I.E. Pfeiffer records in his book "The Emergence of Man" how an archaeologist, Ralph Solecki of Columbia University, excavated an ancient burial site in a cave in the Zagros Mountains of Iraq. He hit bed rock at a depth of forty-five feet. Seven Neanderthal skeletons were found, three of them were the remains of people crushed to death.

"At least one of the individuals, a man with a badly crushed skull, was buried in the cave with special ceremony. One Spring day about 60,000 years ago members of his family went out into the hills, picked masses of wild flowers, and made a bed of them on the ground, a resting place for the deceased. Other flowers were probably laid on top of his grave; still others seem to have been woven together with the branches of a pine-like shrub to form a wreath. Traces of that offering endure in the form of fossil pollen collected from the burial site, the remains of the ancestors of present-day grape hyacinths, bachelor's buttons, hollyhocks and yellow-flowering groundsels.

These findings, the graves and the patterns around them, mark a great change in human evolution. Death and presumably life, had become something special. No comparable evidence appears in earlier records, and as far as we know, men and the ancestors of men had always died like other animals before Neanderthal times, being abandoned when they were too weak to keep up with the band or wandering off to wait alone for the end to come."

Were such occasions 60,000 years ago the beginnings of belief in a hereafter or were they the mere display of human affection for an honoured member or leader of the tribe? We may never know the answer for certain. We do know that as the centuries went by, humans increasingly placed, not only flowers, but food and utilitarian articles in the graves of the deceased. This is an indication that the living were seeking to provide the dead with useful things to assist them on their journey into the next world.

It is submitted that religion arose because of human desire to understand and explain the world about us, to fill the gaps in understanding and to allay fears of the unknown.

It originated in prehistory and over millennia has gathered myths and legends about it. Religion has also incorporated a great deal of sound folk wisdom which has become confused with religious moral teaching. We will discuss this more fully later and seek to show that ethics are a concern of sociology and the humanities. They stand on their own merit and are a basic human survival mechanism. Human ethics have very little to do with the appeasement of a god who is ready to punish disobedience. Indeed, the concept of a god is not a unifying social force but a divisive one, causing tension between believers and non-believers and between believers of different persuasions.

How did the idea of a superhuman being first arise? We shall never know, but there are several theories of interest. One explanation, involving the theory of Naturism was provided by Max Muller (1823-1900). Muller considered that the concept of god grew out of the personification of natural phenomena. Ancient people feared the phenomena they were unable to understand or control; fire, floods, earthquakes, or storms which decimated crops, uprooted trees and destroyed their livelihood. These forces were stronger than human beings; they were powerless to understand or do anything to control these forces. People wondered, was thunder the voice of an unseen superhuman being? So the ancients feared those forces and turned them into gods or goddesses of sun, rain, thunder, fire etc. They built myths and legends around these ideas and began to placate and worship their many gods in the hope of gaining favours or protection from the forces of nature. People created the idea of the gods, then attributed power to them. While the power of the gods and their representatives increased, the power of ordinary people decreased. The majority of human beings became emotionally dependent and subservient.

Another theory, suggested by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), is that the earliest form of religion was Ancestor Veneration. He suggested that when a powerful chief died, the people would wonder what had happened to his power. To witness the death of a revered person can often be an emotional moment of release or loss. The ancients hoped or feared that the dead leader could still perform good or evil. Another aspect of ancestor worship is the belief that humans have a spirit or soul. E.B. Tylor (1832-1917) called it Animism (Latin: anima - soul). He suggested that temporary loss of consciousness, dreams, fits and hallucinatory visions could cause ancient people to think that there was something in a human which existed apart from the physical body.

Yet another theory suggested by IF McLennen (1827-1881) and W. Robinson (1846-1894) was that Animalism or Totemism was the earliest form of religion. Totemism is rooted in the primitive sense of a deep affinity with creatures and things other than human. The theory was formed as a result of study of American Indians and Australian Aborigines. These people included animals, plants and inanimate things in their ancestral mythology and named their tribes accordingly.

When we talk of world religions, we use the criteria of numbers of adherents. It is not a value judgement, a case of one religion being better than another. The five major world religions in order of age are, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity and Islam. For our purpose we will include Judaism, not because of numbers of adherents but because of its importance in that it gave rise to both Christianity and Islam. We will briefly consider the non-Christian religions because they provide an interesting but different solution to the problems which Christianity seeks to address.

The beginning of Hinduism fades back into prehistory. Its most important sacred texts are the Upanishads, dated somewhere between the fifth and eighth centuries B.C. These provide the main source of the present-day theological thought of Hinduism. The Upanishads are written in Sanskrit, which is now a dead language.

The basis of Hinduism is the law of Karma and rebirth, a kind of automatic debit and credit system whereby the good and bad acts committed in life determine the ease or difficulty experienced in the next incarnation. Each person is considered responsible for his or her own state of being. The notion of original sin is not attributable to humanity as a whole, in the manner that Christian thought attributes the fall of Adam to all people. There is an awareness of good and bad, but not in the same communal sense.

For the Hindu, the universe has no absolute beginning or end. It is a cyclical concept, a notion of a wheel of life and death followed endlessly by rebirth into the next earthly life.

In polytheism there are both good and bad gods, or many superhuman agencies. In monotheism there is one god and one superhuman agency. In the law of Karma and rebirth, there is no superhuman agency. By living each life as perfectly as possible, the believer in Karma hopes finally to reach the state of rest. The doctrine of rebirth eliminates the need for a divine controller of human destiny and provides an explanation for suffering. Blame can be placed on the individual for his or her present state of suffering.

Buddhism appeared in India in the sixth century B.C. as a doctrine of noble living. Later it declined in India and became prominent in China and the Far Eastern countries. The philosophy of Buddha is summed up in the Four Noble Truths. The first states that life is permeated with suffering and dissatisfaction. Second, the origin of suffering lies in craving or grasping. Third, cessation of suffering is possible through the removal of craving. Fourth, the way to cessation of craving is the Noble Eightfold Path. The practical side of the Buddha's plan to heal the world of suffering is found in the Noble Eightfold Path. This is: right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right contemplation. Neither the Four Noble Truths nor the Eightfold Path mention a god or gods.

Similarly, Confucianism did not originate as a theistic religion but rather as an ethical code of social behaviour. Confucius (551-497 B.C.) provided a blueprint for ethical living. He reformed and systematised earlier Chinese tradition into a coherent social doctrine which has influenced millions of people for two and a half thousand years. His original teaching does not mention god or gods.

While both Buddhism and Confucianism are basically concerned with aspects of human behaviour and thought, a measure of Hindu religious philosophy has filtered through to them also. Each of these present-day world religions has become theistic over the centuries. They have acquired rituals and now expect human devotion and dependency.

In contrast to the Hindu cyclical notion of an endless turning wheel of life and rebirth, Judaeo-Christian and Judaeo-Islamic religions have a lineal concept of time. They envisage a perfect beginning of the world, followed by a troublesome, unsettled middle, where good and bad are in conflict and religion is offered as the remedy for all ills. Finally, they believe there is to be a return to perfection when the world will end and the millennium of divine rule and happiness will be ushered in.

The Christian and Jewish Bible tells how the world is said to have begun. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth .... and God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good" (Gen.Ch.I). Very quickly we are introduced to the unsettled middle stage, the fall of humankind. Since Adam took and ate that apple in the Garden of Eden in defiance of god, all persons are said to be tainted with original sin. Every person now experienced the withdrawal of a holy god who could not look on sin.

No longer could people be trusted. Law was introduced, but the conflict between good and bad continued. Religious sacrifice was demanded as a means of achieving reconciliation with a god who was said to be holy. Many hundreds of thousands of animals have been slain over the years, in the belief that an angry god can be appeased by the shedding of blood. When the Christian philosophy appeared, it contained the ancient Judaistic teaching that original sin occurred with Adam and that a blood sacrifice was demanded by god for the remission of sin. Christianity considered that all human beings were inherently sinful. The sacrifice of Jesus was considered by Christians to be the all-time bridge of access to god. Gail. 4:4 tells us that "In the fullness of time God sent forth his son .... to redeem them that were under the law".

Finally, the end of the world is prophesied and the millennium of perfect peace and order is to be ushered in. The Christians are promised, that they alone shall enjoy eternal harmony and rest in the divine presence. Believers in the Islamic faith are also told by their holy Koran that they will occupy exclusive heavenly gardens and the

favour of god.

It is interesting that the Christian religion has a great deal in common with the ancient Iranian polytheistic religion. The Iranians believed in opposing good and bad deities. The Christians have a good god and a bad devil or Satan. The Iranian god Mithra was believed to have been born from a rock. Jesus was believed to have been born of a virgin. Mithra became the defender and mediator between mankind and the higher deities. Jesus became the mediator between mankind and god the father.

Mithraism included a ritual of baptism, a sacred meal of bread and water, the concept of a blessed immortality for the followers of good, the divine judgment of the human soul in an afterlife and the personification of evil. The Christian faith embraces all of the above. Both religions comprise a dualism of a good god and an evil devil. It could be said that while one claims to be monotheistic and the other polytheistic, in essence both religions have the same philosophical foundation.

The Christian religion grew out of the Jewish religion and claimed the same god. It however, ended

up with a triune god or trinity of god the father, god the son and god the holy spirit. The final and complete rejection of polytheism was achieved as a result of the rise of Islam in the seventh century A.D. Islam spread much faster than any previous religion. The civilized world was ready for monotheism.

Each of the present day great religions has a different perception of the character of their gods or god and his relationship with a human person. One viewpoint cannot be considered better than another. Each belief is deeply engraved on the minds and hearts of its followers. We have all been influenced by the teaching of the community into which we happened to have been born. In the next chapter we will look at the difference between a belief system which has divine revelation as its authority and scientific investigation.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Belief or Science**

Belief need not always be subject to reason. Once the first principle or pivotal concept has been accepted, kindred beliefs allied to it can also be accepted without question. An example can be seen in the Islamic faith. Muslim devotees accept the holy Koran as the inerrant word of Allah. They do not question it at all. To them, Allah, as presented in the Koran, is a fact beyond question. They believe that the Koran comprises the last and all-embracing unalterable divine truth. Their god, as distinct from the Christian god, is not the object of supplication, but of worship. The cry heard several times every day from many thousands of minarets scattered around the world is "Allah hu ackbar, la Allah ill Allah, Mohammed rasoul Allah" (God is greater, there is no god except god, Mohammed is the prophet of god). No reason is given, just a bold statement of belief as an unquestionable fact. Once this is accepted the rest of the faith follows automatically. The name of Allah comes into daily and constant use by every Muslim. The thought of Allah permeates their every action. Islam is a religion with its own strong logic and ethical standards which obviously satisfy its followers. Muslims appear to be far more committed and trusting of their religion than most Christians. Perhaps that is why very few Muslims are converted to other religions.

Martin Luther, the first Protestant, is reputed to have said, "The way in which God appears to man, depends on that man's frame of mind, as you think and believe, so you have him. If in your heart you paint him merciful or angry ... that is how you will have him." (Quoted by Lloyd Geering in "Faith in the New Age"). Think carefully about this. If the character of god is determined by our imagination of him, then it is our imagination which has created him.

A very wise statement was made by Hans Reichenbach in "The Rise of Scientific Philosophy". He says "Logic can thrive only in an atmosphere of perfect freedom. He who enquires into the nature of knowledge should keep his eyes open and be willing to accept the result that cogent reasoning brings to light, it does not matter if the result contradicts his conception of what knowledge should be".

In this respect there is a profound difference between religious dogma and the attitude of science toward doubt and investigation. Science demands truth that can be demonstrated. It welcomes those who invalidate as well as those who validate its hypotheses. Science uses doubt as an aid to finding the truth. It is always ready to abandon a line of enquiry in the light of further information. Its purpose is to find the truth regardless of what that may be. New knowledge, as it is acquired, strengthens or diminishes previous research. So the process of replacing the deposed or less functional with more perfect knowledge is ever active.

Descartes (1596-1650) is regarded as the father of modern philosophy. He invented a method of systematic doubt which became a useful tool when seeking scientific answers. He determined to believe nothing until it was proved beyond doubt. Perhaps, he reasoned, what could appear to be real, could be an illusion created by a demon. It may be highly unlikely but one could be the victim of deception. Finally he decided that there was one thing that even a deceitful demon could not create an illusion for, and that was his own existence, for if he did not exist, no demon could deceive him. He then made the famous and often repeated statement, "I think, therefore I am".

Each of us is entitled to start from the same undeniable basis, I think therefore I am. It is possible that our beliefs are mistaken. What we now believe may be doubted in the future or we may come to see things from a different point of view. Our beliefs are therefore tentative or present-time philosophical conclusions rather than dogmatic statements for all time. Let us therefore give weight to a scientific

attitude that truth is a paradigm or model-concept subject to further knowledge and understanding.

This willingness to adapt can be seen on a practical level. By trial and error the Polynesians developed to perfection the science of bird traps, fishing nets and hooks, navigation systems and many other skills within the scope of the material available to them. The Eskimos developed the igloo, which was a scientifically perfect shelter using the materials obtainable. As more materials and knowledge became available, people have changed techniques to meet the new circumstances.

In marked contrast to science, religion is a belief system, usually accepted in childhood. Its origin is divine revelation passed down from spirits in a parcel or a series of parcels of fixed religious doctrine. Religions establish absolute dogma, and then seek to defend it. Some religions still prohibit books which could throw doubt on their doctrines. Such actions indicate a fear of change or perhaps arrogance, certainly not an open-minded desire to find truth.

In the past, the church has hounded and burned the doubters and their books. "That was ages ago", you will rightly say, "the church is tolerant and loving today and always interested in the truth." It is what is understood as "the truth" which concerns us. If believers equate "the truth" with divine revelation, then we are back to unsupported blind belief. As individuals, I am sure most present-day church members are honest. It is not individuals we seek to examine but the system of belief which is so different in character from an open scientific approach. We are seeking honestly to examine the belief system with the same open-mindedness we apply to scientific enquiry.

When Charles Darwin published "On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection" in 1859, all denominations of the Christian church united in condemning it as anti-Christian. Cardinals, bishops, pastors and lay-preachers thundered from pulpits and debating halls throughout the Christian world. The Bible said that god had created the heavens and the earth and all that was in them including mankind in six days. The Bible was the word of god, you could not believe in evolution and the Bible at the same time. Bishop Wilberforce in debating with Thomas Huxley resorted to sarcasm. He wanted to know if it was on his father's or mother's side that Huxley had descended from the ape.

But the spades of the archaeologists kept on digging up fossils which were much older than mankind and scientists increased in their understanding of our planet. They discovered irrefutable evidence that the flora and fauna had been developing over millions of years. Again churches slowly changed their position and gave up their fight for a literal interpretation of the Bible. Instead they now said that one could believe in evolution and be a Christian at the same time. In the light of advancing knowledge, the church has had to bend its beliefs or abandon scientific findings in favour of unsupported faith. Now and again one hears Christians declare that they want a faith and god which is changeless, something that can be trusted for all time and all circumstances. Islam offers that kind of unquestioning faith if you can accept the dogma. Surely, desires for changelessness spring from an emotional need for security, a dependency we talk about elsewhere. Change is, in fact, one of the principles of life.

Nearly all Christian churches have had to change, dilute and ameliorate their doctrines in the face of rationalism. The process of informed thought seems to move from interpreting the Bible as literal truth, to regarding it as symbolic truth. Some Christians begin to argue that indeed god created the world but the story in Genesis needs further understanding. They look at 2nd. Peter 3:6 which says "One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day." Then they look at the creation story where it says that god created the world in six days, and deduce that each creation day was a period of time but not one of twenty-four hours duration. Each day could have lasted many thousands of years. Having accepted that concept, they can now say that the Bible does not seek to tell us the method by which god created the world. By this kind of manipulation of

widely spaced texts, some arrive at a compromise, which allows them to accept the scientific idea of evolution and still hold on to the belief that god created the universe.

The next step away from literalism is to symbolise other difficult parts of the Bible. For instance, if there is a literal hell-fire in the next world, you would need to have something literal to burn. When the human body is dead and decayed, what is there to burn? So some conclude that hell-fire is a symbol for punishment and should not be taken literally. It is surprising how many portions of the Bible can be explained away as being symbolic without the believer giving up faith in a god.

According to Philo (30 B.C. to 40 A.D.), "All that the Scriptures (Old Testament) contains is true, and all truth is contained in them." By the time of Galileo it was becoming evident that all Scripture was not true, and not all truth was contained therein. Conflict between science and the Bible has continued and intensified in every passing decade. We can trace the decline of religious mysticism in the face of growing enlightenment which increasing knowledge and scientific investigation brings.

Finally, many like myself come after a long journey to accept the entire Bible as mythology and legend mixed with a measure of uncertain Jewish and Christian history and punctuated with some very good and ancient folk wisdom. Members of the Christian community are constantly seeking a solution to their inner uncertainty by moving toward the esoteric teachings of the eastern philosophers and charismatic churches, or piously leaning the other way toward uncritical fundamentalism. I have often thought that people are attracted to a particular church organization because of their emotional bias. Some feel comfortable with formal ritual, others crave a more stimulating environment where they can feel important and accepted into a special community.

Belief is mental or emotional persuasion, something we have very little control over. We believe something or we do not believe. Some of us have not made up our minds, and therefore do not yet believe. We are all victims of our belief. Only knowledge and education can change uncertainty into a different belief. Yet belief is a central demand of the New Testament. We are asked to believe without proof that there is a god, that Jesus is divine, that there is a heaven and a hell, and that humans will go to one or the other when they die. I do not find this kind of religious belief rational or see it providing anything of enduring value for the human race.

But scientific research is bringing enlightenment to humankind. Slowly the myths and superstitions of the ancient past are giving way to knowledge. More than that, we are beginning to understand the dynamics of the human animal. We are slowly coming out of the dark woods of ignorance; light is beginning to penetrate the trees. There still are many shadows but we see a widening path which promises to lead open-minded people to the bright sunshine of justice, peace and human dignity.

## Chapter 4

### Hebrew Literature and the Christian Faith

The Jewish nation was first called The Children of Israel, later Israel, then Hebrews and finally Jews. Any of these names used in the text refers to the same race of people. Comments about the Jewish faith should not be taken as anti-Jewish. My comments are in relation to what the Christian religion has taken out of the ancient Hebrew texts. The Old Testament was concerned with the welfare of the nation rather than life in a hereafter. Classically it did not even consider an afterlife. It was the Christian dogma which overly concerned itself with the notion of a heaven, hell and judgement in the nether world.

The most sacred text of the Jewish faith is the Torah. It states the laws and traditions of the Hebrew race. Together with other Jewish sacred texts it comprises about two-thirds of the Christian Bible known as the Old Testament. The Old Testament records a great deal of uncertain history, laws, traditions and myths of the Hebrew race. It predates the Christian era and is a collection of books written by various authors over some hundreds of years. The first Greek translation was made between the first and the third centuries B.C.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica tells us that it is certain that before the second century A.D. the various manuscripts of the Old Testament differed very materially from one another and that the official Hebrew text was probably fixed in the second century A.D., thereafter it was scrupulously preserved. Most of the Old Testament was brought together in its present form and finally given authority by a council of Jewish Rabbis in the year 90 A.D. None of the Biblical writings in their present form is older than the eighth century B.C. There are no original writings by Abraham, Moses, King David, or any of the early prophets. Indeed, most of them would not have known the art of writing.

By recording a written history of the Persian invasion of Greece the historian Herodotus (480-424 B.C.) came to be known as the father of historians. He was believed to be the first to record a written history. It is possible that the Jewish scribes preceded him by a hundred years, although their "history" included a great deal of mythology. Many Biblical scholars believe that the first books of the Bible were written or collated during the second exile of the Jews in Babylon in 586 to 538 B.C. The first five books of the Bible were not generally regarded by the Jewish nation as divine commandments until 444 B.C. (see Neh. Chapter 8.) The book of Psalms cannot have been completed until two centuries later. This did not mean that all the Psalms were newly written, since some earlier writings would have been included.

An obvious example of how later material has been included in the supposed writings of King David is found in the 137th Psalm, which without doubt refers to the time of exile. It could not have been written by King David who lived several hundred years earlier. It reads:

"By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

Nearly all the larger books, and some of the shorter, were not completed by a single author but by several. They were gradually expanded through additions and alterations by a succession of persons who used existing material and sometimes added their own ideas. The Old Testament is a conglomeration of Jewish myth and

history, some of which had been passed down orally, and some of which was written record. It had then been altered to suit the fancy of the manuscript holder. In his book "Mankind and Mother Earth" A.J. Toynbee makes this strong statement:

"Since the date at which the oldest books of the Old Testament were written, the Jews' religion has undergone changes that, cumulatively have been revolutionary, and the texts have been edited and re-edited to make them conform to the thesis that the changes have not been innovations but have been revisions of pristine faith and practice".

We should remember that there were no copyright laws in those days to protect authors and their works. Persons who inherited or otherwise acquired a manuscript were entitled to add or delete anything they wished from the work of the original author. This, in fact, is what happened. Philological scholars (those who make a special study of language) assure us that some of the books of the Bible have been subject to a number of alterations by various persons who have wanted to include their own ideas.

After the conquest by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. there was a dispersal of Jews from their homeland. Many were attracted to the city of Alexandria. The children grew up speaking Greek and not Hebrew. In 288 B.C. the Alexandrian Jews invited seventy learned scribes from Jerusalem to translate manuscripts of the Old Testament into Greek. This famous translation is called the Septuagint (literally seventy).

So we see that understanding the Old Testament is not as straight-forward as many of us were taught. It had a long, hazardous and capricious incubation. It seems that much of the material existed in scattered form but was finally selected and collated into the approved sacred texts, t have no intention of embarking on a summary-of the many-contradictions and doubtful statements found in the Bible.

I do propose, however, to discuss Bible statements which will illustrate the ease with which a myth can grow over hundreds of years and finally be accepted as historical fact. This is what happened with the various creation myths of many ancient societies. People sincerely believed their creation myths as facts of history. Scientist and explorer, Humboldt, once said "All religions offer three different things, a moral rule, (the same in all religions and very pure) a geological dream, and a myth or legend. The last element has assumed the greatest importance."

The Sumerians lived in the broad delta lands between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers, present day Iran. Sometimes they experienced serious flooding and over time had accumulated several myths to explain the reasons why the gods allowed this to happen. All of these stories pre-dated the Biblical account of Noah and the flood. A cuneiform tablet of forty lines discovered in 1955 tells this story. The gods decided to destroy the human race because people were too noisy and numerous. But the god Enki conspired to save a pious king so that sacrifices to the gods could continue. The king was told to build a vessel and to take into it "the seed of all living things". The flood lasted seven days, and the vessel finally came to rest on Mt. Nisir. To find out whether the flood had subsided enough, the king sent out a dove, a raven and a swallow. He later sacrificed to the gods. The Biblical story of the flood is almost identical to the much more ancient Sumerian myth recorded above. Names of gods and details are changed, but the essence of the myth is the same.

It is most evident that when the Jews were held captive in Babylon, the cultural centre of the world at that time, they gathered together and recorded their traditions and myths and adopted some new ones. The Hebrew religion did not grow out of a vacuum. It was intimately associated with the mythology of the

surrounding nations. The Hebrews adopted some of the creation myths and religious beliefs of the surrounding countries. The main difference was that by the first millennium B.C. they had accepted monotheism as a tenet of their national religion. That also was not an original idea. Monotheism was promoted by the Pharaoh Amenhotep in 1360 B.C. the nation of Israel took up the idea many years later.

The Hebrew story of the infant Moses being placed in a reed basket in the bulrushes on the river Nile and being found by the Egyptian princess is identical to the Babylonian mythical story of the mighty warrior Sargon who lived about 2500 B.C. ("Cradle of Civilization" by S.N.Kramer).

Much later still, the Jews were driven out of their homeland and scattered among other nations. The people were in danger of becoming lost as a separate race. We should not be surprised, therefore, if the Jewish rabbis were afraid for the nation's survival. What better way to prevent absorption into other races than to record their traditional history, and thereby emphasise the differences in religious belief by reaffirming faith in their own god, Yahweh. It would have been surprising if the Jews had not been influenced by the strong mythological elements found in the surrounding religions and incorporated some of them into their own written traditions.

When talking about the Mesopotamian written records Samuel Noah Kramer has this to say: -

"Cuneiform documents ranging in date from as early as 1700 down to about 1300 B.C. frequently mention a people called Habiru, a name closely identified with the Biblical word "Hebrew". According to these texts, the Hebrews were wanderers, nomads, even brigands and outlaws - men who sold their services as mercenaries to Babylonians and Assyrians, Hit-tites and Hurrians alike."

Let us now look at one of the most famous Bible stories, which has been celebrated by the Jewish people every year for thousands of years. I refer to the Exodus story, when Moses is said to have led the Hebrew nation out of slavery and the land of Egypt in about 1200 B.C.

Egypt occupies the southern portion of the fertile crescent which runs north through what is now Israel and spreads out into the broad reaches of Mesopotamia (modern Syria and Iraq). It was in this area between the Tigris and the Euphrates that people first began to record their activity by writing commercial records on soft clay tablets. Writing was accomplished with a wedged-shaped stylus and is known as cuneiform writing. The date was about 3,000 B.C. The idea of recording their achievements was quickly adopted by the rulers of Egypt. Egyptians chiseled their history on stone monuments and temples. They also made their records on papyrus (a paper made from the rushes which grow on the Nile swamp land; we acquired our word "paper" from the Egyptian word papyrus). Thousands of papyrus

scrolls have been discovered. Parchments called the "books of the dead" were placed in ceramic jars in the tombs of the dead. Their preservation over the centuries was possible because of the extremely dry climate.

The vast amount of Egyptian hieroglyphic writing was a complete mystery to scholars until the discovery of the Rosetta stone in August 1799. This ancient irregularly shaped piece of black basalt, 1,145 mm long and 735 mm wide, passed into British hands in 1801 and is now in the British Museum. It carries a single message in three languages. The top section gives a government decree in Egyptian hieroglyphics, the centre is in Demotic script. Both scripts were used for the Egyptian language. The bottom script is in ancient Greek. By first deciphering the more recent language, the others were finally understood. Success was largely due to the work of Thomas Young and Jean Francois Champollion. The difficult task took over twenty years to complete. The Rosetta stone was the key which opened up the vast wealth of Egyptian history.

Now Egyptologists had something they could really examine in detail. Egypt has the world's most thoroughly recorded ancient history, going back to about 2,500 B.C. The succession of royal pharaohs could now be accurately traced. They could read what the rulers thought about the victories and defeats of their armies. Scholars could now cross-reference the information with other events of historical interest. The written record covered the entire period of time of the Biblical account of the children of Israel's supposed sojourn in and exodus from Egypt.

Egypt was often the super power of the south. Its lands were ever watered by the unfailing Nile river. In the northern section of the fertile crescent, the Babylonian, Median, Assyrian and Hittite empires were also powerful and greedy for conquest. During the constant ebb and flow of power, armies from north and south marched relentlessly through the corridor land of Canaan (modern Israel). Canaan became a buffer state. The invading armies left behind coins and discarded pieces of trivia which archaeologists use to reconstruct evidence of the past.

With all the historical records available and able to be understood we would expect to find a great deal of supporting evidence for the Bible story of the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt. Amazing as it may seem, and despite massive archaeological research over many years, not one historical reference supporting the Biblical story of the exile has yet been found. There is no mention of a pharaoh's death by drowning or of his armies being engulfed in the sea; no mention that a national tragedy occurred when, as the Bible story states, every firstborn child in the land mysteriously died one morning; no mention of the escape of a very large tribe of slaves has been found. Indeed there is no proof at all that the exodus ever happened. There is, however, one mention of the name of Israel in the records. It reads "Israel is laid waste, his seed is not." Is it any wonder that there are scholars who doubt that a mass exodus ever occurred in the way the Bible describes?

According to the Bible in the first chapter of the book of Numbers, Moses counted the Children of Israel "on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt". He arrived at the astonishing number of 603,550 persons "twenty years old and upwards, all that were able to go forth to war". When we add women, children, the sick and old the inevitable conclusion must be that the number of 'the children of Israel' who escaped from Egypt, was well in excess of two million persons! Can you believe that such an exodus, with all the disruption of labour and economy it would cause, could go unnoticed in the recorded history of the Egyptian nation? We must also ask if one can rationally believe that a nation of over two million persons, together with their flocks of sheep and goats, could survive in a semi-desert for forty years. The amount of water and food to satisfy such a large community would have been stupendous.

Hebrew slaves would undoubtedly have been taken back to Egypt after military

action. Large groups of them could have been occupying selected residential areas. It is equally reasonable to assume that small groups, and occasionally larger groups, would succeed in escaping back to their homeland. We could suspect that escape attempts were a fairly common occurrence. Those stories told back in the homeland, perhaps exaggerated, could have caused a sensation among their own relatives but scarcely a ripple in Egypt, certainly not a news-worthy comment of sufficient importance for inclusion in Egyptian records. Perhaps this is how the myth of a nation's escape from Egypt grew until it became accepted as a grand historical occurrence built up to bolster and unify the Jewish nation.

S.G.E Brandon, at one time army chaplain and Professor of Comparative Religious Studies, University of Manchester, had this to say in his book "Religion in Ancient History".

"The dramatic story of Israel's escape under the inspired leadership of Moses from the Egyptian bondage appears as an episode....But this majestic narrative of the gradual achievement of Yahweh's promise has been shown by critical research of modern scholarship to be an artificial composition of many diverse traditions to which many writers contributed over a long period of time. Indeed in its completed form, such as we now have it, the story dates only from about 400 B.C."

In our own time and history, which is much more recent, we have collected a few myths of our own. We have the story of the shroud of Turin, venerated and believed by thousands to be the burial garment of Jesus, yet scientifically proven in 1988 to be of much later origin. The British story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table we now know is a legend of no authenticity. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, King Arthur was born in 516 A.D. and the legend about him relates to incidents which occurred six hundred years later. He is described as "a survival of pre-historic myth, a hero of romance and a fairy king". The legend of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table is an example of how fact and fiction can become interwoven into a believable story. Even the famous round table which now hangs in the great hall of Winchester Castle is thought to have been made in the thirteenth century.

I lived in Palestine (now Israel) for over six years and was dumbfounded on occasions to hear improvable claims stated as facts. A few examples are, the exact location in the river Jordan where Jesus is said to have been baptised; the supposed birthplace of Jesus; the supposed room used for the last supper. There are two tombs where Jesus is said to have been buried. There is no way of proving the authenticity of any of those places. Such claims are usually made for religious or commercial reasons. Many tourists accept statements by guides without question. Some even claim a religious experience while standing on the exact spot. On this wishful emotional plane of political, religious and romantic idealism, are born legends and myths, ready to be turned into believed facts.

Parables were very popular in the time of Jesus. They are time-honoured fictitious stories, told for purposes of theological or other instruction. A verbal picture to convey a message to illiterate people, such mythical stories could, over hundreds of years be confused with fact; the stories remembered, while the fictitious origins are forgotten. The greater the distance of time, the greater the likelihood that the myths and legends will be regarded as factual history.

We must conclude that the historical validity of the Old Testament is very suspect indeed. We cannot deny that a religion which involved worship of one god was founded about 1200 B.C. Its reliability however, as a divine message cannot be reasonably maintained. It follows that we must also recognise that the foundation of the New Testament is very shaky and suspect.

## CHAPTER 5

### The New Testament

The Jewish nation had a long history of being subjected to powerful foreign governments. Its people occupied a strip of land which was the corridor of communication and also a buffer state between much larger and more powerful nations to the north and south. As early as 720 B.C. the northern kingdom of Israel was overthrown by the Assyrian King Sargon II who carried a large proportion of the people captive into Mesopotamia. In 586 B.C. Jerusalem was destroyed and the people deported to Babylon by Nebucadnezzar. In 332 B.C. they submitted to Alexander the Great. In 320 B.C. they were subdued by the king of Egypt, and in 198 B.C. were taken by the king of Syria. There followed a period when they became free of foreign powers and were able to rule their own land under the leadership of the Maccabees. When Pompey came and captured Jerusalem for Rome in 63 B.C. it must have seemed that self government had hardly been established before yet another powerful foreign nation had subdued them and demanded taxes.

The Jewish nation continued to be rebellious while under Roman rule. All of Judea longed for the Messiah, promised by their prophets, who was to come and deliver the nation from all its enemies. Jesus was not the first to claim to be that Messiah, the others had been quickly put down by the Romans who would brook no such opposition. It is interesting that there is almost no reference to Jesus in historical records other than the New Testament, just the bare statement that a person called Jesus, was crucified by the Romans. The Roman historian Tacitus, writing in the early years of the second century about the persecution of the Christians by Nero, says

"Christus the founder of the name had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself."

No original manuscripts of the New Testament have survived. It is generally believed by Biblical scholars that the original documents were written in Greek or Aramaic about 50 to 100 A.D. The first portions were translated into Latin and Syrian about 150 A.D. The most famous translation into Latin is called the "Vulgate" and was completed by St. Jerome in 385 A.D. We can only speculate as to how accurately these early translations followed the original events. So we see firstly that there was a big gap between the time when Jesus was crucified and the first account of the story of Jesus was written, and secondly there was an even bigger gap between the original writings and our oldest translations.

Jesus did not leave any written record of his teaching. It now seems evident that neither did any of his disciples. The earliest records were written by Paul many years after the crucifixion of Jesus. Nor do we have Paul's original manuscripts. Paul had not known Jesus in the flesh and showed very little interest in the story of his life, except for his death and supposed resurrection. Janis Saunders in "Frontiers of Aquarius" tells us that Paul's writings occurred between 50 and 62 A.D. and the Gospels between 65 and 100 A.D. Lloyd Geering puts the writing of the Gospels as thirty five years or more after the death of Jesus. Whatever date you accept, the gap in time between the death of Jesus and the first recordings was considerable.

The New Testament scriptures were not recorded immediately. They were undesigned and unforeseen because the Jewish Christians were expecting the physical return of

Jesus as the reigning Messiah to occur at any moment. By the end of the second century the need for a sacred text was apparent, but not until the fourth century was it firmly set down. The full recognition of the Gospels and epistles was achieved because of the pressure of heretical movements. The texts were selected and given church authority in 367 A.D. and were finally ratified by Pope Gelasius at the end of the fifth century.

So the New Testament was written by second and third generation Christians well after the life and times of Jesus. The modern Biblical text has been translated from translations of still earlier translations. We can never know for certain how accurate the present-day recorded stories and teachings of Jesus are. There are four gospels, each purporting to give an accurate account of the life of Jesus, but they all differ and sometimes markedly so.

World-wide interest was drawn to the discovery, in 1947, of ancient Hebrew texts which had been deposited about the time of Jesus. An Arab lad had lost a goat and while searching for it, discovered a cave which contained several large cylindrical pots. He ran back to his camp and told an elder, who went to investigate. In the third pot they found something wrapped in old cloth which they took back to their camp. Underneath the cloth exterior they discovered a scroll of smooth brown leather which stretched from one end of their tent to the other. After an uncertain beginning, parts of the scroll came into the possession of Professor E.Y. Siikenik of the Hebrew University, who realised that they were parts of an ancient Hebrew manuscript, possibly from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

This raised the hopes and expectations of world Christendom for confirmation of the Biblical story of Jesus. As the years have gone by and the tremendous task of slowly piecing the manuscripts together has proceeded, Christians seem to have given up hope of any historical confirmation of their faith which now seems very unlikely to come from the scrolls. One thing the Dead Sea Scrolls have shown is the strength of sectarianism which existed among the Jews at the time of the Roman occupation and the persistent activity of the resistance fighters, known as Zealots, within the country.

From the discovery we learn that the religious sect of the Essenes had established a theological centre at a place called Qumran which bordered the Dead Sea. Final discovery showed that their library contained some 600 scrolls, including some copies of parts of the Old Testament which predated those from which the Bible had been translated.

At the time of Jesus, the Jewish nation was split by fanatical religious sects and political nationalism. No wonder the people were longing for the promised Messiah to come and deliver them from all their troubles. The Zealots fought a fierce battle against Rome, joined their forces with the Essenes, who hid their manuscripts in the caves, and died together with them in a mass suicide at Masada in 73 A.D.

The teaching of the Essenes has a strong similarity to that presented in the Gospels. In other words, much of the general philosophical teaching found in the Gospels was a repetition of the kind of teaching which predated and was current during the time of Jesus. It represented the philosophical teaching of the time.

Mark's gospel is believed to be the first gospel to have been written by a member of the Christian church which had been established in Rome. The Christian church in Rome was under considerable strain and understandably embarrassed by the fact that Jesus had been crucified by Pontius Pilate on a charge of sedition. Mark, a Christian, took on the responsibility of writing the story of Jesus. It is interesting that Mark

makes the political move of shifting the blame for the death of Jesus away from the Roman governor onto the Jewish priests. The other gospels, written later, take up and follow the same line of reasoning. S.G.F Brandon presents a convincing argument in "Religion in Ancient History".

But was Jesus guilty of sedition from the Roman point of view? A little while previous to his trial, he had ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey and "A very great multitude spread their garments in the way;...And the multitudes that went before and that followed, cried saying, Hosanna to the son of David;

blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord;

Hosanna in the highest" (Matt. 21:8-9). Jesus then went to the temple and proceeded to "cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers". Luke records that when Jesus came down from the Mount of Olives with the multitude, they began to cry out and say, "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord." It is certain that the Romans would have heard of such a public commotion and the claim of his kingship. All the gospels state that Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews and he replied "thou sayest it". Remember what the Romans wrote on the inscription placed over the crucifixion cross in Greek, Latin and Hebrew: "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS." Surely that was a message to the people that Rome would stand for no messiah purporting to be god's appointed ruler of the Jews.

The gospel of Luke was written about twenty years after Mark's record. He described one of Jesus' disciples, Simon, as "the Zealot" (Luke 6:15; also Acts 1:13). Now the Zealots were the extreme nationalistic party who were in constant revolt against foreign rulers. They are recorded at length in the various histories of the time including the Dead Sea Scrolls. In this connection it is interesting to note that Jesus' disciples sometimes carried swords. (Luke 22:36) records Jesus saying "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one,.... And they said. Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them. It is enough." Each of the four gospels record the arrest of Jesus and the use of a sword. "Then Simon Peter having a sword, drew it and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. And the servant's name was Malchus" (John 18:10).

Jesus was attracting large numbers of followers who referred to him as "the King who cometh in the name of the Lord". He and his disciples had organised a triumphant messianic entry into Jerusalem, then attacked the religious establishment at the temple which sought to pacify Rome. When arrested his disciples had swords and had used one in the heat of the moment. The Romans were not gentle with anyone who threatened their position of authority. And this was not the first time they had disposed of a would-be messiah or members of the Zealot organization. Roman justice could be immediate and ruthless. It is hard to believe that Pilate, who ordered the crucifixion of Jesus, "found no fault in him" and would have let him go free if the Jewish priests had not insisted on his death. Rather would they have considered Jesus to be another troublemaker who was stirring up the people, and who would be better out of the way.

If the Jews wanted to kill someone, they had no compunction in doing so by their traditional method of stoning. There is the story of the woman caught in adultery being stoned to death, and the story of Stephen being stoned to death which occurred after the crucifixion. Crucifixion was a Roman method of punishment not a Jewish one.

The growth of the international Christian Church is almost solely due to the apostle Paul. He was the first theologian and founding missionary of the Christian movement. All of the earliest Christians were devout orthodox Jews who continued to worship in the temple at Jerusalem. Paul had not forsaken the ancient Hebrew faith, or the god who demanded blood sacrifices. All he had really done was to form a new sect within the Hebrew faith. It could have remained just another Jewish sect of uncertain endurance if Paul had not broadened the concept to include the whole world. It was Paul who persuaded the leaders to allow believers of all races to join the Christian

movement. It was he who persuaded the elders that the Jewish national mark of circumcision should not be required for entry into the new sect. Indeed, Paul embarked on extensive tours, preaching to all who would listen. He established numerous churches in the Roman empire; one was even established in Rome itself.

The Christian dogma sprang from the Old Testament. It still threatened those who failed to believe, with punishment from god. Paul changed the Jewish Old Testament promises of a Messiah from a physical saviour and leader of the nation, to a spiritual saviour of all people. He pointed to the old Jewish religious tradition of sacrificing animals to their god for their sins and proclaimed that Jesus the Messiah was the "lamb of god which taketh away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).

Until Mark's gospel appeared, at the very least thirty five years after the crucifixion, the early Christians had no written record of the sayings of Jesus. They were therefore dependent on memory and word of mouth repetition of the stories. It is most likely that distortions and shades of meaning occurred at that time. Indeed it would be impossible to avoid errors. This could account for the different versions found in the four gospels. Whatever the facts of the life and sayings of Jesus might have been, he is conceived today as being the epitome of gentleness, forth rightness and compassion. He was concerned with human welfare and had a passion for children and the oppressed. These essential characteristics were greatly diminished in importance as a result of the Pauline doctrine. They were still further diminished under the structure of a hierarchical church which took root under Constantine the emperor of Rome (306-37 A.D.).

In his letters to the churches, Paul hardly mentions the personal life or sayings of Jesus. He is far more interested in his own theological doctrine that Jesus was the promised Messiah and the saviour of all the world. His doctrine was not humane in the sense that the teaching of Jesus was humane. He was concerned with the Jewish belief in the shedding of blood to pay for sins. Paul talks a great deal about redemption and the need to make atonement for sin by the shedding of blood. He changed the practical philosophy of Jesus to a theology of compulsory belief which really said, "believe as I say or you will be damned."

He also promised that the Messiah Jesus would soon come back again to rule the whole world in righteousness. It was the expected imminent return of Jesus which accounted for the big gap in time between the life of Jesus and the writing of the New Testament.

As a theologian, Paul provided the rationale and doctrine for the new faith. He claimed that Jesus fulfilled the meaning and purpose of the old Jewish sacred texts. In his eyes the animal sacrifices, down through the ages, were symbols of the sacrifice of Jesus "the son of god" who was crucified for the sins of the whole world. Paul's letters to his churches became a large portion of the New Testament and established the doctrine, organization and attitudes of its adherents for two thousand years. Even Paul's attitude to women has strongly influenced the Christian Church to this day. We will discuss the place assigned to women within the Judaeo-Christian religions later.

What an achievement for a tent-maker who suffered persistent poor health. Paul, a zealous orthodox and Hellenized Jew, was born a Roman citizen in the city of Tarsus. His native country teemed with esoteric philosophies and religious cults promising all kinds of religious benefits. In Athens, Paul even found an altar with the inscription, "to the unknown god". The world was ripe for new religions. The notion of polytheism was about to give way to monotheism.

I see Paul foremost as a fanatical orthodox Jew who was a theologian and a good organizer, and ruled his churches through his theology. His character never changed. I do not see him as a warm person overly concerned with human happiness or potential. By claiming to have the authority to speak on behalf of god, he and church leaders strengthened their power over people. They proceeded to dictate what everyone should think, believe and do.

We have seen that apart from the New Testament itself, there is almost a complete

lack of historical evidence of Jesus. No mention of him is made in the Dead Sea Scrolls; it is almost as if the Essenes had not heard of him. The written story of Jesus itself had a shaky and unorganised beginning and came down to the church by translations from translations. Perhaps the text itself will help us to determine whether it is indeed the word of a god.

The best known moral teaching of Jesus is found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5-7 and Luke 6 20-46). The other two gospels do not mention the Sermon on the Mount. Luke says it happened on a plain, Matthew on a mountain. The sermon starts with blessing the poor in spirit, those that mourn, the meek, the humble, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemaker and the persecuted. In Matt 5:16, it advocates good works and righteousness. In verse 22 it threatens judgement and hell-fire for a person who is angry with his brother. It says that a man who looks on a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart. Then the injunction "If your eye offend thee, pluck it out". People remember the positive but forget the negative teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. We are, however, advised to observe practices most of us could feel good about, not to swear by anything, to return good for evil, love our enemies, and avoid hypocrisy. What is known as the Lord's Prayer is part of the sermon. "Our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." If god is the omnipotent creator of all, why need we ask that his will be done on earth? We will have more to say about The Sermon on the Mount elsewhere.

Yes, there is kindly sentiment and good advice which we all appreciate, but does this have to be explained as evidence of divine origin? We will see that many other philosophers who lived before Jesus also advocated virtuous behaviour. They made no claim to represent god. From an ethical point of view the Christian doctrine provided no new ideas or new moral standards. Neither Matthew nor Luke tell us who heard or remembered the sermon. Both were writing many years after the death of Jesus. There is a sprinkling of folk wisdom such as "judge not that ye be not judged" and "let not the sun go down on your wrath". It would, however, have been remarkable if the current folk wisdom were not included. Folk wisdom is as old as humankind and represents our ability to understand and interpret the world about us and our role within it.

Was Jesus a racist? It is certainly reported that he said his message was for the Jews and not for the Gentiles. He even likened a Gentile woman to a dog. "And his disciples came to him saying. Send her away for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him saying. Lord, help me. But he answered and said. It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs. And she said. Truth, Lord; Yet the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from the master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (Matt 15:23-26).

In Matthew 10:5 we read "These twelve [his disciples] Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and unto any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go preach, saying, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Again in John 4:22 he is speaking to a Samaritan woman and says "Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews." It seems that Jesus did not see himself as the saviour of the whole world at all; but rather the promised Messiah who was to come to save Israel from her enemies. Here again, Paul's idea of a gospel for all people, seems to differ from that of Jesus himself.

Jesus said, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven." "Not all that say unto me Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven." "Every one who heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them I will liken him to a wise man." etc. etc. He seemed to be saying that right action would determine acceptance by god and wrong action would result in divine judgment. But Paul was saying that belief was the only determining factor. He tells us, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved." Paul changed the emphasis from

personal behaviour to belief in a dogma. What little we are told of the teaching of Jesus is humanistic and caring, while the doctrine of Paul is absolute dogma. It is the Pauline dogma which a great many church members have embraced and insisted is divine truth.

Let us briefly look at one of the important rituals of the Christian church. Central to the doctrine is the commemoration of the so-called last supper which Jesus observed before his crucifixion. This is called the holy sacrament and is celebrated by the Catholic and most other Christian churches. The New Testament tells us that during the last supper "Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples and said. Take eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying. Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt 26:26-28).

The Catholic interpretation of the above scripture is made clear in the statement of the Council of Trent as follows: "If any one shall say that in the holy sacrament of the eucharist there remains together with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the substance of the bread and wine and deny that wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into (his) body and the wine into (his) blood, the species only of the bread and wine remaining - which conversion the Catholic Church most fittingly call transubstantiation let him be anathema." (San. XIII. Can 2).

There is no difference in concept or emotional response between the Christian taking the sacrament and the uneducated heathen warrior who, in time past, ate the heart of his defeated but respected enemy so that he could acquire the courage and skill of his foe. The act comprises symbolic cannibalism and is typical of the thinking which prevailed in primitive religious philosophies. The ritualised appropriation of the suffering and death of Jesus to attain righteousness for the believer, is equal to the warrior attaining courage and skill by eating parts of his enemy. Similarly, there is little difference in aspirations or emotional involvement between ancient Egyptian priests or any other ancient religious order and the modern Christian. Each person is seeking to ensure immortality by union with a supposed eternal spirit or god. Strangely, each separate group seems intolerant of the philosophy of other groups.

Certainly the New Testament is a much warmer book than the Old Testament. But it still is obsessed with sin and seeking to find reconciliation with a god in the traditional Jewish way. The story of Jesus depends heavily on magical happenings called miracles. The word love appears about a hundred times in the New Testament, but so does the word evil, and sin appears about two hundred and fifty times. There is also a lot of mention of the need to fear god and threats of judgment for those who do not believe.

There are hundreds of interpretations of the New Testament ranging from absolute literalism to almost total symbolism. The doctrine of hell was one of the first to become unacceptable to many Christians. It was followed by disbelief in the virgin birth, the possibility of the return of Jesus, miracles and almost all New Testament teaching. The only thing which has survived in all interpretations of the Jesus story is belief in virtue, compassion, love, tenderness faith and justice. The actual teaching of the Bible has been replaced with a philosophy of good works. In varying degrees the people have moved away from the absolute dogma of the early church because reason and modern knowledge made nonsense of literal interpretations.

When we go back into history we find that virtue, compassion, love, faith and justice have been presented by philosophers of all ages, societies and religions. They are the same social qualities which made it possible for human beings to become a community. These qualities have always been part of human experience. The Christian dogma does not improve our basic social drives, indeed, it often contributes to anti-social discord. It is when these social qualities become less important that discord and anti-social behaviour develops within the home and the society.

The god of the New Testament is presented as the all-powerful, all-knowing, always present, all-seeing creator of the universe. He is said to be holy, the essence of truth and goodness, to be loving and the sustainer of all things. He dispenses mercy and judgement but cannot look upon sin and can only be approached through Jesus.

So we ask, why are we told to pray "Thy will be done on earth"? If it is done, why has god caused famines, earthquakes, disease and massive suffering? If it is not done, who is responsible, the devil? Then god cannot be both loving and all-powerful.

The Bible says, "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards." Did the god of the Bible create mankind knowing that so many would be destroyed by hunger and disease? If he is all-knowing, he cannot at the same time be full of goodness.

If god is always present, did he stand by and see the concentration camps during the war or the misery of famine victims the world has witnessed in recent years? If so, where is his mercy and justice? If he is all-seeing, how is it that he is so holy that he cannot look on sin or have sinners in his presence? How can god understand human beings and be a heavenly father to them unless they can approach him unconditionally. Why is it that he cannot forgive without demanding a price?

If god is truth, why did he tell Old Testament characters to deceive their enemies? Why has he not given us clear and indisputable evidence of his existence? If there is indeed a god as described in the Bible he must be a sadistic monster without a flicker of pity for the creatures of his own making. I am unable to accept a god who cannot forgive without demanding a price, who punishes for the evil others committed "to the third and fourth generation", and who allows mindless suffering to go on and on throughout our world. If there is an all-embracing spirit, a creative universal mind or whatever you like to call it, one thing is sure, it is NOT the god of the Bible. If indeed we saw an all-powerful and loving force for good operating in this world, there would be no need in the minds of people for a next world. This world would become a true heaven of beauty and love. How can you reconcile the unjust suffering of millions of people with an all-powerful, merciful god? Of course you cannot. The world is not controlled by a personal god or an impersonal universal mind who tries to help its inhabitants. On this world, all living matter destroys something in order to live, and in turn, finally becomes food or fertiliser for new living matter. It is an indisputable and self evident basic process of nature and I do not complain or find it unacceptable.

Modern humans cannot realistically place hope for peace and love on the ancient, unconfirmed and flimsy story of Jesus. It grew out of Hebrew mythology and fear of a judgemental god. We can, and from time to time do, change the ills and injustices of our society through the process of public opinion by enacting better laws. Our hope must be in the growing social consciousness of the international community.

## CHAPTER 6

### Who Created the Universe?

#### The English Bible and the Creation Myth

It has been said that one of the marvels of history was the rapidity and thoroughness with which the English adopted Christianity. The first translations of parts of the Bible into English appeared fifty years after Augustine landed in 597 A.D. The first complete Bible in English did not appear until almost a thousand years later in 1538. By 1604 King James was on the throne of England. He complained that he "could not see a Bible well translated into English". He proposed one uniform translation to be done by both Universities (Oxford and Cambridge). Fifty four of the best scholars and linguists of the day were chosen. The work took two years and nine months to complete and finally appeared in 1611 as the King James I Authorised Version. This version became the standard English Bible for nearly three hundred years. It contained both accurate and inaccurate translations and determined the religious thought and attitudes of all English-speaking people. To millions of people this translation became the "inspired word of god".

All attempts to amend the authorised version failed until 1870, when a new translation was begun. Several further translations have followed. The revised versions, while appealing to scholars, did not change public attitudes. Our language and culture continued to be profoundly influenced by the King James version of the Bible until recent times.

So let us look at the first sentence of this translation. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth". The first translators' error occurs in the fourth word god. The Hebrew text uses the word Elohiem; not El, singular, or Elah, dual, but Elo-hiem, plural. The correct translation should therefore read "In the beginning the GODS created the heaven and the earth." The word Elohiem appears seventy seven times in the first nine chapters of the Bible. But the translators were not consistent, in Gen. 1: 26 the translation correctly reads "let US make man in OUR own image and OUR likeness." Again in chapter 3:20, "man is become one of US." In Gen. 11:7. "Let US go down and confound their language."

Are you confused? You ought to be. Fifty four translators also appeared to be confused. Still, they were working under royal instructions "to follow the Bishop's Bible and as little alter as the truth of the original will permit". Do not forget that England had already been Christian for almost a thousand years. The concept of a single creator was thoroughly established. The story of the Garden of Eden was believed to be literal fact. To change this would have been catastrophic to the emotional life of the people and the clergy.

It is interesting to note that when Moses was instructed to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt he did not appear to know which god was commissioning him. "And Moses said unto god. Behold when I come unto the Children of Israel and shall say unto them, the god of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say unto me. What is his name? what shall I say unto them?" (Exodus 3:13.)

Going back much further, we can examine the origins of human beings according to the mythology of some ancient societies such as the Aborigines of Australia. Through their myths they related the advent of humanity to divine origins. The Greeks did the same, with some humour. Even the Bible tells us, "The sons of God came in unto the daughters of men and they bare children of them, the same became mighty men" (Gen. 6:4).

According to the creation myth of the Old Testament, people were created innocent and perfect. The story presents a god who is without fault, the antithesis of evil. Human beings were created in the "image and likeness" of the creator. Then a new factor arose in the Garden of Eden, when evil and the devil in the shape of a

serpent appeared to Adam and Eve. We may ask, where did evil and the devil come from? Did god also create evil and the devil? You may answer, "well no, there can be no evil in god, the devil was a fallen angel." Logic runs out about here. However, to the ancient Hebrews it would seem to explain the need for religion and give weight to the notion that human beings brought guilt, sin and suffering upon themselves. It provides a platform for the idea of redemption and a sacrificial system to appease an austere and righteous god. Before you can establish a concept of redemption you need to establish a doctrine of sin.

You could be excused for thinking that the gods of the creation myths were having a bit of fun by creating humans to counter their boredom, but you could not conceive of them as kindly beings. They teased their subjects with temptations and then called their natural response, a sin against god. I don't see any love; I see blame, punishment and viciousness. I see a god who claimed to create the world out of nothing, yet could not forgive without demanding the price of blood. The myth is also an attempt to explain the reason for the suffering, disease and death to which all people are subject. It helped to fill up the spaces in primitive human understanding. It formed the basis for the Hebrew concept that an angry god could be appeased by the sacrifice of animals. In contrast, let us consider what science has to say about our universe.

### Space and Time

The ancient Egyptians worshipped the sun god Ra. They built huge and elaborate temples in honour of their many gods. Large numbers of priests continuously served them, sacrificing animals in grand ritual ceremonies. The sun rose each morning to bring life and well-being to the earth and its creatures. They believed that each night, servants of Ra rowed the sun through the underworld, ready to re-appear next morning.

Three thousand years later, we know that our rather small planet is orbiting an average sized sun. Our sun is a fiery, luminous, gaseous mass nearly 150 million kilometres away, yet its rays bring light, warmth, and life to the earth. At night we look up and see thousands of other distant suns we call stars.

To give an idea of the stupendous distance and vastness of space, I will borrow and reconstitute, in my own words, an idea used by Isaac Asimov. It took our astronauts about three days to travel from planet earth to the moon. Light travels at 299,783 kilometers per second. That equals about 7 3/4 times around the earth in one second. To further gain an idea of the vastness of space, let us suppose that it will become possible for engineers to design new metals which will withstand tremendous tensions and fuel with greatly increased power, and methods to overcome increased inertia. And let us disregard other possibilities of speed and assume a steady traveling rate of one hundredth the speed of light. Astronauts could then reach the moon in less than two minutes instead of three days. At the same speed, a journey to our nearest star, Alpha Centauri, would take astronauts 430 years to get there and another 430 years to return.

But that is not all. Our sun is part of a cluster of many millions of stars which comprise a galaxy. Patrick Moore, in his book "A-Z of Astronomy", tells us that star systems [galaxies] are often made up of many thousands of millions of stars. Stephen Hawking, who holds Newton's chair as Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, Cambridge University, tells us: "we now know that our galaxy is only one of some hundred thousand million that can be seen using modern telescopes." Can you really grasp the magnitude of such numbers and distances?

So great is the vastness of space that the human mind tends to numb. We can only achieve a minute understanding of the meaning of infinite space. Yet reason tells us that there cannot be a boundary or edge to time or space. There must always be

something beyond the limits of our telescopes, and then something beyond that again. We cannot conceive of an enclosure without asking ourselves what is on the other side of the enclosure.

Astronomers tell us that the process of change in outer space goes on continuously. Stars have a life span over millions of years, and finally expend their energy and die. All living matter is like that. When any living thing dies, it decays and provides an energy source for new and totally different and separate expressions. The famous scientist Lord Rutherford who first split the atom suggested to us that atoms have an internal structure. Negatively charged electrons and positively charged protons in the nucleus cause the electrons to orbit the nucleus of the atom, just as the earth orbits the sun. The principle operating in the atom is the same as that seen in the vast universe.

The astronomer Edmond Halley in 1705 predicted the return approximately every seventy six years of the comet which bears his name. He also plotted and proved that stars are continually moving in space. There is a great deal of scientific evidence to show that astral bodies are gaining heat and losing heat, expanding, or contracting and even exploding. In other words, over thousands of millions of years, the stars are undergoing continuous change.

Time is a human invention. We have become obsessed with it. Scientists have dated our earth at 4.7 thousand million years old. We ask, what was before that? For how many thousands of millions of years was our solar system part of a vast astral dust cloud or some other accumulated energy before it came together to form its present mass? Time, like outer space, is immeasurable. There ever was and ever will be something preceding and following that which we humans call time.

John Boslough in his book "Stephen Hawking's Universe" tells us that the great physicist Albert Einstein reasoned that as light has energy it therefore has mass: he proved that mass and energy are interchangeable. Alexander Friedman the Russian mathematician suggested that all matter was concentrated in a single point now known as the singularity and that there was a Big Bang which created our universe. Boslough says "According to the most accepted version of the Big Bang [theory] today, all the material in the universe comprised an extremely hot compressed gas in a primordial fireball 10 to 15 billion years ago."

Stephen Hawking is considered by many to be the leading physicist of today. He told Boslough

"The problem with this approach is that general relativity, which was used to predict the singularity at the origin, is a purely classical theory, so there is nothing in general relativity to take into account the quantum behaviour of subatomic particles that were created in the Big Bang." Boslough goes on to say "While general relativity allows for a perfect point-like singularity at the beginning of time, quantum mechanics does not, for it prohibits defining at the same time the precise location, velocity and size of any single particle or singularity. Ultimately, quantum mechanics will have to be brought into play if we are to understand the workings of the infinitesimal universe at its very beginning. Only by reconciling the two seemingly irreconcilable areas of physics can theorists hope to find a unified field theory that will explain the workings of the entire universe."

A more recent theory has been put forward by Richard Gott of Princeton University. He suggests that like bubbles on a head of beer, an infinite number of universes were formed. So astrophysicists have not yet irrefutably determined the manner in which the earth was formed.

Some of the latest scientific thinking is expressed by Carl Sagan of Cornell University, New York. He has the following to say in his introduction to "A Brief History of Time" by Stephen W. Hawking:

"This is also a book about God—or perhaps about the absence of God. The word God fills these pages. Hawking embarks on a quest to answer Einstein's famous

question about whether God had any choice in creating the universe. Hawking is attempting, as he explicitly states, to understand the mind of God. And this makes all the more unexpected the conclusion of the effort, at least so far: a universe with no edge in space, no beginning or end in time, and nothing for a creator to do." Let me repeat that "a universe with no edge in space, no beginning or end in time, and nothing for a creator to do."

Hawking tells us that "Aristotle did not like the idea of a creation because it smacked too much of divine intervention."

Stupendous as it may seem, there can be no beginning or end. Whether it is stars or living matter on this earth, the same principle prevails in that the debris of past existence becomes the nucleus or nutriment for uniquely new experiences of existence. There are no boundaries or edges to space, no beginning or end of time.

If you say that a god must have created the countless millions of suns and all living things ("how else could they be there!"), you still have not found the beginning. You must now answer the question, who created the creator? Just pushing the question back one remove does not solve anything. It is impossible to find the first cause of the universe. Professor Hans Reichenbach explains in his book "The Rise of Scientific Philosophy" that,

"It has no meaning to ask what is the cause of the universe. All explanation must start with some matter of fact. Science can only push the matter of fact back to some place where it supplies a maximum of explanation."

### The Beginning of Life on this Planet

The problem that concerns most people is the suggestion that life can only come from previous life. If you accept the evolutionary theory (as almost all scientists do), you will understand the diverse development of present life from that which started millions of years ago. But how could the first living thing on earth spontaneously come into being?

Isaac Asimov tells us in his book "Extraterrestrial Civilizations" about Stanley Lloyd Miller's experiment in 1952.

"He tried to duplicate primordial conditions on earth.... He began with a closed and sterile mixture of water, ammonia, methane, and hydrogen, which represented a small and simple version of Earth's primordial atmosphere and ocean. He then used an electric discharge as an energy source, and that represented a tiny version of the sun.

He circulated the mixture past the discharge for a week and then analysed it. The originally colourless mixture had turned pink on the first day, and by the end of the week one sixth of the methane with which Miller had started had been converted into more complex molecules. Among those molecules were glycine and alanine, the two simplest of the amino acids that occur in proteins.

In the years after that key experiment, other similar experiments were conducted, with variations in starting materials and energy sources. Invariably, more complicated molecules, sometimes identical with those in living tissue, sometimes merely related to them, were found. An amazing variety of key molecules of living tissue were formed 'spontaneously' in this manner.... If this could be done in small volumes over very short periods of time, what could have been done in an entire ocean over a period of many millions of years?

It was also impressive that all the changes produced in the laboratory by the chance collisions of molecules and the chance absorption of energy (guided always by the known laws of nature) seemed to move always in the direction of life as we know it now. There seemed no important changes that pointed definitely in some different chemical direction.

That made it seem as though life were an inevitable product of high-probability varieties of chemical reactions, and that the formation of life on the primordial

Earth could not have been avoided."

Change occurs with everything, from the vast universe to the minutest particles. Inorganic matter over a great length of time is worn away and moved around, so that even the sand and minerals of earth are changed and compressed to form solid structures. As long as our sun gives light and warmth to the earth, all organic matter on it will decay to form nourishment for new expressions of life. The only thing which does not change is change itself.

Members of the human race seem to be compelled to search for some higher or greater force outside themselves. Why do we do this? We may assume that our ancient ancestors thought that some unseen power was interfering with the activities and expectations of their tribe. How else could they explain the sudden calamities and illness which seemed, from time to time, to be directed against them? To them it would appear to be the work of the spirit of a dead ancestor, or perhaps, a god was displeased. The human race, from the dawn of history would have found it easy to assume the presence of an unseen spirit. From this ancient superstition rituals would develop to counter those unknown and feared forces. Hence there would arise the practice of magic. First the fear and then the ritual in an attempt to manipulate or appease the object of the fear.

If we say that a god created the universe, we are then indeed resorting to a magical explanation. The Greek philosophers seemed to have no difficulty in accepting the idea of infinity. How much have we been influenced by the Judaeo-Christian religious teaching of a mythical creator who could judge human beings in an after-life and punish disobedience? History suggests that religious leaders have used the notion of a divine super-being to give themselves power over their followers. They do this by claiming the authority of a god and offering a mixture of fatherly comfort and parental discipline. We look at this idea more fully elsewhere.

"And the gods created the heaven and the earth." Sounds like the echo of an acceptable myth of early Mesopotamia altered to Hebrew thinking. In essence this is not much different from the Egyptian or Greek and Roman gods or the dream creation myths of Australian Aborigines. The Greeks made their gods in the image of humans; the Hebrews made humans in the image of the gods. Read as a creation myth, the first nine chapters of the Bible are charming. Read as a literal occurrence and a divine message, the stories become ridiculous in the extreme.

The concept of a god creator is a notion born in the ancient past in an effort by primitive people to explain the unknown. All primitive societies have attempted to explain the unknown by the use of mythological stories. Sickness, plagues and disease were thought to be the result of displeasing a god or dead ancestor and thereby receiving punishment.

Slowly, men and women of science are chipping away at ignorance so that we begin to know the structure of the universe and what causes plagues and how to control them. We no longer need myths to explain the causes of events. Knowledge is making a nonsense of the concept that there are acts of god.

## CHAPTER 7

### Ethics

#### Ethics Before Christ

There is an illusion in society that honesty and good behaviour must of necessity be qualities gained from religion. Repeatedly we hear calls for the teaching of religion to combat rising crime. While still a teenager I had an argument with my mother over this. She called truthfulness and honesty Christian ethics. I contended that they were good social behaviour and had nothing to do with religion. What would happen if I ceased being a Christian, would I lose all ethical convictions? Many, like my mother, confuse ethical standards with their religious beliefs.

I wish to contest the idea that religion is the author or indeed the chief propagator of ethical standards. Ethics, community cooperation, loyalties and trustworthiness are social imperatives which must have been developed in prehistoric times. Otherwise human beings could not have become a social community. I do not include sexual behaviour, which has different codes and standards from one society to another. On most occasions I have used the word ethics rather than morals because the word morals is too firmly associated with sexual behaviour in the minds of many people. Both words have a wider meaning and have to do with honourable human behaviour.

Trustworthiness, honesty, dependability, justice, loyalty and compassion are social lubricants and necessary ingredients in all human concourse and cooperation. The archaeologist Richard E. Leakey put it clearly in his book "Origins", he says,

"Above all else we human beings are social animals, emotionally we need to be part of a group, and intellectually we are equipped to understand and manipulate interaction with other people, whether parochially as in personal relations or politically."

For the early human race, social interaction would have been necessary for survival. Only by working with their fellows could emerging humanity have achieved the huge steps toward civilization. There must always have been mechanisms or codes of behaviour to resolve disagreements, or deal with family privileges, rights of possession and responsibilities. Indeed all social animals, including chimpanzees and wild dogs, have understood codes of behaviour. The prehistoric human animal would not have been an exception.

Perhaps the best known ethic is the golden rule spoken by Jesus: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matt. 7:12). Many believe that the golden rule is unique to Christianity and epitomises its teaching. The saying is by no means unique to Christianity. It is a piece of folk wisdom often repeated since it was first recorded in 600 B.C. The same sentiment was expressed by at least six other world philosophers who lived many years before Christ.

Zoroastrianism, the Persian national religion which still has a following in Northern India, taught, "Do not do unto others all that is not well for yourself." Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, was born in 551 BC. and died 72 years later. He taught the "wisdom of the ancients". He said, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others." Buddha, the sixth century B.C. founder of the very live oriental faith of today, taught "Hurt not others with that which pains yourself." Jainism, a religion similar to Buddhism founded in the sixth century B.C. preached "In happiness or

suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self." Plato, the Greek philosopher of the fourth century B.C. said "May I do to others as I would they should do unto me." Mahabharato, third century B.C. said "do naught to others which if done to thee would cause thee pain."

### Ethics in Ancient Texts Before Christ

The Sermon on the Mount is supposed to convey the essence of the teaching of Jesus. In it he says, "If any man will sue thee in the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh from thee and from him that would borrow from thee, turn not away" (Matt. 6:40-42). The same goodwill and generosity was expressed in ancient Egyptian manuscripts. "If a poor man owes you debts, divide them in three and give up two parts of them, you will find that such are the ways of life, to be praised as a friend of men is worth more than riches in store." The injunction to return good for evil was apparently popular in China

five hundred years before Christ. Someone asked Confucius, "How do you regard the principle of returning good for evil?" The master replied, "What then is to be returned for good? Rather should you return justice for injustice and good for good." I like the Confucian solution. It is rational and practical and yet retains the essential goodwill.

There are some excellent books on ancient religions which are highly recommended. A few are "Religions of the World" gen. editor Geoffrey Parrinder, "Religion in Ancient History" S.G.F. Brandon, "The Sayings of Confucius" Lionel Giles, "History of World Religions" Catherine Savage, "Comparative Religion, a History" Eric Sharpe, "The Religious Experiences of Mankind" Ninian

Smart. I am grateful for the information which they and other books supply.

The Greek historian Herodotus asserted that the Egyptians considered themselves the most ancient people on earth. Indeed no nation on earth has a better written ancient history. It stretches back almost to the dawn of the art of writing. Among the excavated texts are ethical precepts from different periods of Egyptian history. Some of the sayings are:

"Do right as long as you live on earth, comfort the weeping, offend not the widow, deprive not a man of his inheritance." "Do not be angry, it is good to be friendly." "The good conduct of a righteous man is more welcome than an ox sacrificed by a wrong doer." "A good man proves himself if he goes by that which is right, by so doing he will gather riches." "The courageous man who does not give in to his whims, will be master of himself and master of his

affairs" "Love your wife in your house-she is a field the tilling of which brings rewards to him who has her." "Goodly speech is rarer than turquoise, yet it may be found with the servant girl at the grindstone."

Egyptian religion from earliest times was obsessed with the idea of ensuring the well-being of its nobility in an after-life. Deceased Pharaohs and the court elite were embalmed and buried in tombs with written records of their personal achievements. One of interest to us, dated before 2000 B.C., is an inscription on the tomb of a famous Egyptian official, Harkhuf, who was an explorer of the Sudan. It reads "I gave bread to the hungry, clothes to the naked. I was one saying good things and repeating what was loved. Never did I say aught evil to a powerful one or against anybody. I desired that it might be well with me in the Great Gods presence. Never did I judge two brothers in such a way that a son was deprived of his paternal possessions." This

is the earliest certain association of a deity with moral behaviour.

Inscribed on the tomb of Nefer-sekhem is another claim of a court official. "I judge the cases of two partners until they are satisfied, I rescue the wretched from one who is more powerful than he. In so far as I am able, I give bread to the hungry, clothes to the naked. I brought the stranded man to land. I buried him who had no son. I made a boat for him who had no boat. I feared my father. I was gracious to my mother."

Spoken or tribal laws of behaviour have undoubtedly been in force since human beings first became social creatures. Ethical codes have been written into the laws of many countries hundreds of years B.C. Hammurabi was the king of Babylon from 1792 to 1750 B.C. He is most famous for the written legal code used throughout his kingdom. It is inscribed on a stone stela over two metres tall and now preserved in the Louvre in Paris. The top portion of one side in bas-relief, shows the king standing in an attitude of prayer before the seated sun god, Samash, the god of justice, and receiving laws for the kingdom.

The Hammurabi laws constituted a remarkable framework of social order and dealt, among other things, with the administration of justice in matters such as murder, adultery, false witness and offences against the person and property. The Encyclopaedia Britannica tells us, "The code has advanced far beyond tribal custom and recognises no blood feud, private retribution, or marriage by capture-There is a regular postal service. The position of women is free and dignified." What the Hammurabi code did, was to clarify social and individual rights. It established compensation and punishments for injustices

and thereby made possible a secure and orderly community.

The Hammurabi code predated the Ten Commandments by several hundred years and may well have been the inspiration for the famous Jewish laws. But even Hammurabi's law code was not the first written law. Part of a law code predating it by more than three hundred years has been found on a cuneiform tablet. Both the Assyrian and the Hittite nations had written laws by the 13th century B.C. That the Hebrew nation, many years later, had the written Moasic law of ten commandments was not surprising. What is significant is that they claim, like Hammurabi, that the law was given to them by their god.

Let us look at some of the great ethical philosophies which have strongly influenced world thinking. Taoism, which originated about the sixth century B.C. had this to say: "Only he that pities is truly able to be brave. Only he that is frugal is able to be profuse. Only he that refuses to be foremost in all things is truly able to become chief of all ministers." Taoism teaches that human beings should treasure love, moderation and humility above all things.

Zoroaster was the founder of the ancient Iranian national religion in the early sixth century B.C., or perhaps much earlier. (Scholars cannot agree on the most likely date). The religion was based on an old Iranian myth concerning good and evil. The god Yurvan desired a son. It transpired that twins were born, Ormazd, who was radiant and represented all that was good and beautiful, and Ahriman, who was dark and repulsive and represented all that was ugly and evil. "Now the two primal spirits who revealed themselves in vision as twins, are the better and the bad in thought and word and action. And between these two, the wise choose aright and the foolish not so. And when the twain spirits came together in the beginning, they established Life and Not Life. And at the last the worst existence shall be to the followers of the Lie. But the best thought to him that follows Right. Of these twain spirits, he that follows the Lie chooses the worst things. The holiest spirit chooses Right."

In the god Ahura, Zoroaster concentrated the whole of the divine character, the primeval spiritual being, the All-father who existed before the world began. He taught that there was a cosmic struggle between the supreme good spirit, Ormazd, and the

opposing evil spirit, Ahriman. He believed that by the confession of faith, by every good deed, word and thought, by continually keeping pure his body and his soul, man impairs the power of evil and strengthens the might of goodness. The essence of the one is truth and law, the essence of the other falsehood. His ethical code required his followers to ask themselves each evening, "In what have I failed? What good have I done? What have I done that I ought not to have done?".

Gautama Buddha was a son of a ruling Indian noble. At the age of 29 he gave up a life of luxury and sought peace through religious teaching. Unsatisfied with the orthodox religion of the day, he finally gained his own great enlightenment through quiet meditation. He concluded that the cause of suffering was craving and ignorance. He then discovered the eightfold path to its removal: right views, right intentions, right speech, right actions, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

Feeling compassion for all suffering humanity, he decided to devote his life to sharing his discovery. For the rest of his long life he became a wandering teacher. From his numerous followers he organized a community of monks to carry on after him. From this organization grew Buddhism, one of the greatest and most influential forces for peace; it has permeated the Orient for over two and a half thousand years.

Buddhism in its early stages was concerned with right living and mental attitudes. The emphasis of his teaching was directed towards relieving suffering in this life. As it was originally presented. Buddhism was not concerned with the manipulation of spirit beings, but with the manner of living in the here and now.

Confucius, born in China 12 years after Buddha was born in India, also taught a philosophy of ethical behaviour. He gave no teaching regarding life after death. His disciples said that "the master did not speak of the will of heaven". He repudiated belief in spirits as irrational and unnatural, but he did believe and teach that sincerity, goodwill, love and virtue are necessary for social and personal good.

Confucius championed and got inspiration from the older "Book of Songs" and "The Book of Documents" relating to the ideas of government of the Chou dynasty of the 11th century B.C. Confucius created concepts for a model kingship of justice and dignity. The word "Te" meant the magical force of virtue and personal prestige in an ethical sense. The word "Li" meant a code of honourable and just behaviour. Persons in power were encouraged to rule by the forces of dignity, justice, wisdom and example. The power that virtue exerts became the force of example which automatically converted good into an irresistible force. Brutal domination by force alone was considered the antithesis of "Te". Thus true statesmanship and the rule of force were opposites.

Confucius taught that unless family life was governed by "jen" (variously interpreted as love, goodness, loyalty, and courtesy) the family unit would break down. "Jen" became the greatest virtue and the epitome of all virtue. To him the basis of social order was the special love a person had for the family. Asked if there was one word which might act as a principle of conduct for all of life, he said "Maybe the word is consideration; do not to others what you would not desire them to do to you."

Some of Confucius' sayings are worthy of our attention. "A gentleman, in his dealings with the world, is prejudiced neither for nor against, he simply seeks accord with righteousness.... To apprehend what is righteous, and not to do it, is cowardice.... A gentleman puts righteousness above everything....if a common man possesses courage but lacks righteousness he will become a thief.... A noble character is never prepared to part with goodness.... When the "Way" prevails in your land, count it a disgrace to be needy and obscure. When the "Way" does not prevail, count it a disgrace to be rich and honoured.... All men are born good.... True goodness springs from a man's own heart.... Only he who has the spirit of goodness within him is really

able to love.... Virtue cannot live in solitude, neighbours are sure to grow up around it". Speaking of a virtuous person, he said, "He should be circumspect but truthful. He should have charity in his heart for all men.... Make conscientiousness and truth your guiding principle."

It was the ethical behaviour within the community which was Confucius' pervading concern. Love for others resulted in loyalty of considerable strength in family and social relationships.

Confucius ushered in the age of the Chinese philosophers which lasted from the 6th to the 3rd century B.C. The influence of his thinking and that of his disciples has profoundly affected Chinese thought for two and a half thousand years. One of Confucius' most important disciples, two hundred years later, was Mencius. He taught that all people were born good and that we became less than good through the pressures and evil to which we become subjected.

This is contrary to Christian thought, which teaches that we are innately evil and are "born in sin and shapen in iniquity", and can only be saved by belief in the sacrificial death of Jesus. Unfortunately we have been indoctrinated so heavily with negative Christian attitudes of innate sin and punishment that we have come to expect the worst from each other. We have not given nearly enough thought to the positive approach advocated by Confucius and many other philosophers.

We cannot leave out of this chapter the considerable contribution of the Greek philosophers. Socrates never wrote a book in his life, yet his teaching and search for knowledge sparked off an amazing burst of philosophical writing and thought such as the world has seldom seen. His influence through Plato, Aristotle and others, extended over hundreds of years of Greek history. Socrates' disciples recorded his sayings and their own words of wisdom, which continue to challenge us today.

When an old man, Socrates became the victim of religious intolerance and was condemned to death for denying the gods whom the city worshipped and for misleading the youth of the city. He could have escaped if he had used the plea his friends had arranged or had his sentence reduced if he had promised to give up his teaching. Here is part of his speech to the Athenians while he was waiting for death. "The thing to try for, my friends, is not to avoid death but to avoid unrighteousness for that runs faster than death. I am old and move slowly and a slower runner has overtaken me. My accusers are keen and quick and a faster runner which is unrighteousness has overtaken them. And now I go hence to my penalty of death; they go condemned by the truth to the penalty of having done a wicked thing."

Plato recorded the teaching of Socrates and blended in his own philosophy. Plato's main concern for people was that they should develop rational moral characters. He believed that if a human being knew what was absolutely good, that person would not be content with anything less. For Plato, all virtue was knowledge and all wrong doing was ignorance of virtue. To live morally and justly was to live in spiritual health. To live immorally and unjustly was to be spiritually diseased.

Aristotle was a student of Plato as Plato had been a student of Socrates. The Greek philosophers were desirous of finding the supreme good. The final analysis seems to be that the supreme good is achieved in a world in which all rational beings are happy and are worthy of happiness. Aristotle gave support to the older proverb that "all virtue is summed up in dealing justly". He talked about equality, courage, friendships, habits and happiness, also such basic human feelings as fear, anger, desire and flattery. The scope of his knowledge and his understanding of society were

tremendous. One of my favourite sayings of Aristotle is "It is only between those who are good and resemble one another in their goodness that friendship is perfect." What Aristotle is saying is that the best friendships occur in an atmosphere where there is no conflict on ethical issues. The philosophers we have looked at did not consider themselves to be messengers sent from god. They were stating what they believed to be noble human standards or ethics.

I have picked some examples out of history to show that the understanding of ethics has been live and well since long before Christ's time. Written and spoken philosophies of how best to live, go further and further back until lost in the mists of earliest tradition and prehistoric myth. In no way can the teachings of Jesus claim to be original or offer a better philosophy than had already been presented. Indeed, anything of value he did say about the ideal way of living was folk wisdom which had been collected and passed down throughout bygone ages. Of course, there is another side to early history which is full of injustice, cruelty, greed and the inhumanity of human to human. I see the emphasis that Christian philosophy places on the negative quality of human nature as a tremendous disadvantage in the development of social virtue and justice. I see righteousness, love, justice and harmony as part of our social nature. Indeed I would say that the desire for social accord is one of the innate human qualities which was mainly responsible for our development as social beings. That does not mean that we are innately virtuous to the exclusion of negative qualities.

### **Old Testament Ethics**

We cannot complete this study without looking at moral or ethical standards of study without looking at the moral or ethical standards of the Old Testament. This book is believed by millions to be the "Word of God". So we would expect it to be the epitome of moral wisdom and example. But is it? If the Bible were not claimed to be a sacred text, I would treat it differently. If it is indeed the voice of an almighty god, it should be able to stand up to intense scrutiny, far greater than anything I shall subject it to.

The most ethical laws found in the Old Testament are undoubtedly the ten commandments, which are as follows:

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
4. Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.
5. Honour thy father and thy mother.
6. Thou shalt not kill.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness.
10. Thou shalt not covet.

The first four commandments relate exclusively to religious observance. The fifth is an injunction to respect filial relationships, so that only five negative rules are established which could be called ethics and one of these has to do with sexual matters. No mention of the rights of persons, social justice, or many other ethical principles. May I suggest that the Christian obsession with sin and sexual immorality gains emphasis

from this and other Hebrew sacred texts. Let us have a brief look at the ethical behaviour displayed in the Old Testament.

The ten commandments in Exodus chapter 20 are followed by another three chapters giving further commentary on the laws and stating very harsh penalties for disobedience. For instance, a person who "smiteth" his father or mother, or even curses them, shall be put to death. If a man smites his servant, and the servant dies, he shall be punished. But if the servant should survive a day or two, he shall not be punished "for he is his money". This is a strange twist of law. Is it the profit angle or the relationship of master and slave which determines the justice? The law is basically one of retribution, as Exodus 20:23 shows. "If any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." The trouble with this law is that very soon, the blind would be leading the blind.

The Old Testament is full of brutal massacres of men, women and children which were accomplished "as the Lord God commanded". Much earlier on, their god made a promise to Israel: "I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come....! will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in thy land lest they make thee sin against me" (Exodus 23). Exactly what the Bible promised, did happen. The Israelites ruthlessly sought to annihilate the inhabitants of the lands they conquered making slaves of some of them and driving out and killing others. The sole purpose of the killing seems to be to defraud the owners of their land or to gain power over them.

Killing was almost a game for the Israelites. David wanted to marry Michal, the daughter of King Saul, "And Saul said, the king desireth not any dowry but a hundred foreskins of the Philistines to be avenged of the king's enemies....Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king's son in law". (1 Sam. 18:25-27).

The same Michal and David, by now King David, had the following experience. Michal looked out of a window and saw David dancing in public without clothes. "And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, 'How glorious was the King of Israel today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth him-self'....Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death." (2 Sam. 6:20-23). Do you think she deserved to be so punished by god for chiding her husband for exposing himself in public? Another person who was innocently trying to prevent an accident was punished for his trouble. "And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God" (2 Sam. 6:6-7).

The Bible records that a religious warrior, Jeph-thah, was fighting the Ammonites. To help him succeed, he made a vow to his god. If he won the battles, he would sacrifice as a burnt offering the first thing which came out of his house to greet him upon his return. He won overwhelmingly "with a very great slaughter". When he neared his house, who should come out to greet him but his daughter, his only child. Although he was greatly distressed, as a religious man he had no alternative, so he finally "did to her according to his vow which he had vowed" (Judges 11:30-39). In other words he killed his own daughter, whom he loved, and made an offering of her to his god, because of a religious vow. What sort of god is it that could effect such a reaction in his follower that he should feel compelled to fulfil such a vow.

I could tell many Old Testament stories of injustice, such as how King David made a

census of the people. Yahweh, his god, punished him by sending a plague which killed seventy thousand of his subjects, but it did not kill David! Who then was punished for David's error?

The Old Testament is full of brutality, sexual immorality and injustice. Can you imagine a god reputed to be caring for his people, perpetrating such viciousness through a religious philosophy? The Hebrew god of the Old Testament is no friend to his people, as history has shown. What I see over and over again throughout the Hebrew sacred text is a despotic god who is both angry and unjust. I see a god who rules by fear and wants to see blood and more blood. Please do not forget that Christianity is an offshoot of Judaism and also required the blood of Jesus to satisfy an angry god.

### **Christian Ethics**

The church always had difficulty with the variety of interpretations of doctrine within its ranks, but persecution from without had drawn the early Christians together as a vital force. When Constantine, the Roman Emperor, made Christianity a state religion in 323 A.D. the Church, for the first time, experienced a new kind of relationship with the people. It was no longer under a cloud of public disapproval. It had, however, scarcely begun to enjoy this new security, before violent doctrinal feuds broke out within the church.

The Nicene Creed, introduced in 325 A.D. was formulated to defend the "true faith" against doctrinal heresy. Growing up in the shadow of the Roman Empire, the Church itself became an empire and its pontiff the ecclesiastical emperor. When the Barbarians swept down from the north and fragmented the Roman Empire into small kingdoms, the spiritual empire of the universal church was left intact. From then on, we increasingly see the use of power to force the believers to follow the official doctrine. This is when the Dark Ages began to spread over Europe. It is generally believed that they began in the fourth century and continued for hundreds of years. We examine the influence of Constantine on Christianity in chapter nine.

Laws against heretics began to appear. The Church was given jurisdiction to ferret out anyone who expressed doubts of the official doctrine. Then began the cruel Inquisition, which spread throughout Europe with increasing viciousness. Thousands of honourable people suffered torture, life-long imprisonment or being burnt at the stake for disagreeing with church doctrine. Books were censored and burned. Persons making speeches were suspected of heresy and subject to prosecution. A professor of theology at Alcala, Mateo Pascual, expressed in a public lecture a doubt as to purgatory. He was imprisoned and all his goods were confiscated. Property confiscated was divided between the state and the church. No witness could refuse to give evidence under pain of being considered guilty of heresy. The torture of witnesses was left to the discretion of the inquisitors. Even in Scotland as late as 1696 an eighteen-year old medical student, Aikenhead, was hanged for heresy in Edinburgh.

The selling of indulgences, (remission of punishment for sin) became a means of exploiting the people and of gaining power over them. As late as 1936 I visited a church organization in Jerusalem which claimed to have in its garden the olive tree under which Jesus prayed before his crucifixion. For visiting the "holy place" I was given an olive leaf by a priest and told I could have two days indulgence. It is hard for us to believe, in these more enlightened times, the religious dogmatism, superstition and fear which over-shadowed the peoples of Europe for hundreds of years.

There has occurred the notion among many people that the essence of Christianity is love, good works and justice etc. as though each was indivisible from the Christian faith. If Christianity really was the champion of love and justice, it would not have tolerated or been associated with the injustice and cruelty of the dark ages or the fear

and intolerance generated by inflexible church dogma. Modern day Christians may well place great value on good social behaviour. Many of them may be notable examples of social attitudes of love, compassion, justice, goodwill and sincerity. Plato would call them virtuous persons, or Confucius would describe them as displaying the force of dignity, justice and example, or Jesus might say they were loving their neighbours. But this does not mean that religion and a concern for humanity are interdependent.

These are humanistic and social qualities, they are people to people relationships and as such are not religious qualities. They are different and separate from a relationship between a human and a supposed spirit identity or dogma. There is no reason why human beings cannot endeavour to engage in both relationships, but let us not confuse them as necessarily dependent the one on the other.

People to people relationships or social relationships which contribute to peace and justice are beneficial under any circumstances. Indeed, they are the necessary ingredient of community and social order. It is the second relationship of humans to a supposed god or external spirit which I find unreal and ultimately harmful to human benefit. They are not social but religious in character. Indeed history has shown that they are more often anti-social and divisive.

### **The Innate Character of Human Ethics**

All social animals, which includes human beings, have an awareness of their fellows and an instinct to co-operate. The very essence of survival, security and access to resources is based on co-operation. The sense of justice, fair play and compassion is a facet of character, a part of our social nature. We depend on it for social awareness. We have a basic untaught social drive which includes our ability to understand what our fellows are likely to feel or need under certain conditions. We say we "feel for him or her". Even small children rebel most strongly against what they consider to be unjust treatment. The real source of morality is the innate sense of justice and fair play which is one of the parts of our social nature and is found in various degrees, within every person. This is what makes us social beings. It is not the dictatorial doctrine of church or state, or even parental training, but the innate voice of our social being which influences us most strongly. Of course parental training can help to reinforce or diminish our natural sense of justice and compassion but the quality itself, is a basic part of our social nature. It speaks with equal authority to all people, black or white, educated or uneducated, religious or non-religious, rich or poor.

It was the same innate sense of justice, fair play and compassion which caused my great-grandfather to work with and support the Earl of Shaftesbury in his legislative fight to get The Factory Act 1847 passed to protect women and children from labour exploitation. The same awakening moral consciousness of justice, fair play and compassion instigated and supported the moves to abolish slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century. The first European power to abolish slavery was Denmark in 1792. England did so in 1833. But it was not finally achieved in America until as recently as the end of 1865. The Bible was used to support the idea of slavery.

I am not saying that the social imperative is the only innate quality we have. I am saying that it is an important in-built facet of our being which can be allowed to develop and strengthened or diminished by training. Law, which has been instigated and supported by human compassion and an innate sense of rightness, is the principal and effective means of social and moral reformation. This contention was demonstrated by the laws of Hammurabi and the philosophers we have looked at. Good law brings social order and security. History has shown that religion cannot claim very much credit for ethical betterment in our society. Rather, it is the in-built sense of justice and compassionate facets of our character which dictate moral law and behaviour, the people to people relationships.

## Recent Development of Moral Law

We do not have to look back very far in time to realise the enormous social gains achieved since the Renaissance. In America, the Declaration of Independence of 1776 declared the inalienable rights of people to equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. France followed in 1789, defining the rights of citizens to equality, liberty, the right to hold property, the sanctity of the person and resistance to oppression. In England, the emancipation of the people came through British law and education. The Second Great Reform Act was passed in England in 1867, the third in 1884. The Education Act was passed in 1870, which opened elementary schools to all children and the second Education Act was passed as late as 1904. That is less than a hundred years ago!

Emerging nations slowly began to shake off the ignorance and restrictions of the dark ages. Hand in hand with the industrial revolution and an increase in education, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the abolition of slavery; the outlawing of child labour; the introduction of a huge raft of industrial and commercial law protecting workers; the giving of the vote to women; the introduction of old age pensions; and many other humane laws. Some modern countries, like my own New Zealand, introduced social security systems which, in spite of limitations, ensure that no person needing medical care is deprived of the best hospital treatment, every child becomes a participant in the education system and no one need starve. Slowly nation after nation is providing better industrial and social law and facilities for its people.

The nations of the world are talking to each other as never before. They begin to join together to protect the environment and endangered species. They begin to talk of making the Antarctic into a world park. The United Nations Health Organization is doing a tremendous job, world wide. Education is increasing world literacy as never before. Communication and travel are creating an international community. It is not a perfect world by any means. We still have a long way to go. We still spend far too much on the machinery of war and not enough on education or social services. We have a growing problem of pollution. Crime is still a world problem which we have not yet learned to handle properly. There are -still millions of hungry and ill-housed people around the world. But let us not forget the advances we have made since the Renaissance. Advances which have arisen from the sense of freedom of expression, fair play, dignity and the conscience of ordinary men and women who have nudged the ethical senses of law makers. Today we have an increasing number of environmental movements such as the Green Movement, sweeping the world. They are founded by ordinary men and women who are expressing their concern for the preservation of our earth and its creatures. Such movements do not come from religious teaching. They come from the deep feelings of men and women regardless of religious belief. They are people to people awarenesses and are separate from a person to a god relationship.

Considering the time span, modern day social law has not made big enough advances since the written laws of King Hammurabi almost 3,800 years ago. The bigotry and intolerance of Judaeo-theistic religions which arose in the Middle East, unconsciously encouraged the growth of intolerance and the dark ages. They established a religious pseudo-morality. The fear of the Inquisitors and god drove the people to live narrow lives and to limit their ethics to religious dogma. Some issues that were plainly socially immoral or unethical, like slavery, the inequality of women, lack of justice, lack of personal liberty of belief, lack of freedom of thought, expression and rational speculation, were ignored or condemned by restrictive religious dogma. Normal ethical sensitivities have been inhibited by the fixed absolute dogma of religion.

Bear in mind a statement made by J. Bronowski author of the TV. series "The Ascent of Man" He said,

"Ancient and modern history alike have shown that once inquiry is forbidden in one field, it is discouraged in all. In no society. Eastern or Western, Chinese,

Roman, medieval or contemporary, have science and rational speculation long survived the imposition of absolute dogma, religious or social. If today we want to find relief from the uncertainties of a changing world in some cosy arbitrary doctrine, then we had better face the likelihood that tomorrow the Dark Ages will return."

Christian philosophy has not been the champion of ethical behaviour; it is still connected with power. It still carries the inhibiting narrowness of absolute dogma. The worship of a god Diminishes the potential of individual expectation and motives in the here and now. It has made many believe that we are innately bad and can do nothing of ourselves to

change these negative qualities without the help of a god.

Confucius told us that people despotically governed and kept in order by force may avoid infraction of the law, but they will lose their moral sense. People virtuously governed and kept in order by the inner law of self control will retain their moral sense and moreover become good. His teaching has, perhaps rightly, been stated to be absolutely the purest and least open to the charge of ulterior motives. Unlike Christianity or Islam, Confucius preached neither rewards nor punishment in a future life. As Plato said, to live morally and justly is to live in spiritual health; the opposite is spiritual disease. We still need laws to protect us from the inhumanity of human to human. We also need more research into human behaviour plus education and remedial help for our ethically diseased. We need to help them back to wholeness and develop those inner qualities Confucius talked about so long ago. Let us endeavour to create a better society, a better nation and a better world to live in.

## CHAPTER 8

### **Women Denigrated by Religious Dogma**

The personal and economic position of a woman in the Hebrew society depicted in the Old Testament is one of subjection and servitude. She was certainly not equal to men, but rather a chattel and a slave, first to her father and then to her husband. Her main functions as a married woman were to provide for her husband's wants and to bear his children. She had no legal power over him. The Old Testament declared, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16). The only powers she had were persuasion and deviousness. The Hebrew patriarchs could legally possess several wives, concubines and slaves. Prostitution itself was not forbidden, but usually confined to foreign women. Daughters of Israel were forbidden to become prostitutes, but no penalty was attached to disobedience.

The Old Testament is full of incidents where women have been abandoned, used without pity and generally not consulted. An example is the way Abraham, after being told to do so by his god, drove his own son, together with the concubine who conceived him, out into the desert with only some bread and a bottle of water. He did this because his wife Sarah had produced a son and did not want competition for the inheritance from a half brother (Gen. ch.21).

Bruno Bettelheim in his book "The Children of the Dream" tells us,

"Few religions have been as rejecting of womanhood as the Jewish one. It was a religion that viewed her very femininity as a curse, that condemned her to apartheid in its place of worship, that even forbade her to wear her own hair, and required her to shave it off at marriage".

The Old Testament declared that at childbirth a woman became unclean for thirty-three days if the child was a male but she would be unclean for sixty-six days if the child was a female (Lev.12:2-5). So the new mother was made unclean on giving birth to another human being, but twice as unclean on giving birth to a female child. The denigration of women started from the first day of their lives.

A menstruating Hebrew woman was declared unclean for seven days. Any thing she touched, any one who touched her, her bed or anything she sat upon, were declared unclean. When her menstruation was over, she had to take two turtles or two young pigeons to the priest for him to "make an atonement for her uncleanness" (Lev.15:19-33). Let me repeat that. The priest was to make an atonement for her uncleanness. It was as though she had been found guilty of a complicity against her god. But worse than that, guilty of being a woman.

Can you imagine the humiliation of this repeated experience? She is asked to make an atonement for her natural physical and reproductive processes as though they had defiled her in some way. Is it any wonder if she felt subdued and a lesser human being than her husband? The marvel is that some women rose above those demeaning religious practices and asserted themselves. What a cruel putdown the Old Testament laws placed on mothers and women in general.

The attitude of Christian dogma toward women seems to have been strongly influenced by ancient Hebrew attitudes and law. We must remember that all the first Christians continued to be orthodox Jews and worshipped in the Temple. The Jewish sacred text of the Old Testament was regarded by both the Jews and the Christians alike as the inspired word of god. The early Christians did not have the New Testament

until much later. Is it any wonder that the Christian attitude to women was also demeaning? The English Prayer Book of 1549 provided a rite for "The purification of women", a title obviously taken from the Jewish law for the purification of women after childbirth. Three years later it was changed to "Thanksgiving of women after child birth". The denigration of women is not unique to Christian societies. The important point is that it has occurred and been encouraged by the Christian religion which claimed to interpret the will of a just and loving god.

The Apostle Paul, an orthodox Jew and well versed in the Old Testament law, stated clearly: "The head of the woman is the man" (1 Cor.II:3). On two occasions he ordered that women were to keep silent in the church. If they wanted to know anything, they were to ask their husbands when they got home (1 Cor.I3:34-35). He says "let a woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man but to be in silence" (1 Tim.2:II-12). Paul stated very clearly "For a man...is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (1 Cor. 11:7-9). And again "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:22-24).

This anti-women attitude has come down from the ancient Jewish law to the Christian community and has continued until recent historical times. New Testament dogma credited women with eternal souls equal to men, but persistently denied them equality as living human beings. The dogma has refused to confer on them the most important human recognition of all, independent personal dignity. With a few exceptions, female intelligence has been despised and unacknowledged in almost all professional endeavours until well into the nineteenth century.

Nearly four thousand years ago, King Hammurabi of Babylon provided his subjects with a written law which assured the women of a free and dignified position in his kingdom. The Greek philosopher, Plato, thought women could become philosophers and admitted some to his academy. When the Judaeo-Christian religion became popular, the hope of any further recognition of women as equals of men was defeated by the absolute dogma of Jewish law as interpreted by Paul. The position and dignity of women continued to be anchored to quiescent domesticity and child-rearing duties.

Later there was opportunity for a Christian woman to become a nun, and much later a governess of children. The poor and lower-class women have always been low-paid servants of society. And that was about the most a woman could expect to achieve until about a hundred years ago. There have always been exceptions, of course, and a few women have left their mark on civilization. Women have greatly improved their position during the last hundred years, not because of religious dogma but in spite of it and to the extent that the dogma has been ignored.

The Norman conquest had made England a subjugated land, placed under an oppressive feudal law. Feudal attitudes percolated down through all levels of society to married women. Church law insisted that marriage was indissoluble. Within his home the ordinary husband had the legal rights of a feudal lord. Most of the married women had not even the right to the money they earned by their own labour within or outside the home.

Less than one hundred and fifty years ago, the religious marriage ceremony conducted in England asked the bride to say to her bridegroom "with all my earthly goods I thee

endow". She moreover had to promise to obey her husband. The husband had absolute legal power to dispose of the personal property and chattels of his wife which by marriage she had assigned to him.

By marriage she placed herself in a very dependent position. Outside the home, her power was very little better than that of a child. Under the most favourable system, the wife was scarcely as free as an unmarried woman. The most unfavourable alliance subjected her to the absolute authority of her husband. He even had the legal right to beat her. We are talking about laws governing marriage. In family relationships love and real devotion also prevailed on many occasions. In Britain, it was not until the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 that a wife could acquire, hold and dispose of any real and personal property in the same manner as a single woman. Even today, in the marriage ceremony, there is a lingering ritual to remind us of the powerlessness women experienced until recent times. The priest will ask "Who giveth this woman away?" Ritual still insists that the father can give his daughter away as though she was a chattel belonging to someone else other than herself. In America and Europe, marriage laws may have been worded differently but they followed much the same general pattern of a demeaning Judaeo-Christian attitude toward women.

Only in comparatively recent times have women emerged from the complex legal disabilities which have restricted them for many centuries. In Britain, three landmarks stand out: The Married Women's Property Act of 1882 referred to in the last paragraph; The Representation of the People Act 1918, allowed women parliamentary election; and the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919, opened many professional avenues to women which had been closed to them before.

Despite clerical opposition, a law was passed in England in 1880 providing secondary school education for girls. In the eighteenth century a number of books appeared calling for better treatment of women. An example is a book by Mary Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" (1792). The struggle for women to get an education has been much the same in Europe and America. University education was largely denied women until well into the nineteenth century.

In France, Napoleon wanted women who believe ... not women who reason. After the last world war, in spite of the great loss of men in battle, German women comprised only a quarter to a third of university students. In England as late as the year 1948-9, university women numbered only 20,005 while men numbered 80,996. In America in 1852 Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio, gave women equal opportunities with men "in the same studies and classes, and by the same instructors". The university of Michigan admitted women in 1870. And so the practice of including women in all professional endeavours increased. In America in 1900 there were 94 law schools with 151 women and 12,365 men students. By 1950, there were only 421 degrees in law won by women and 13,891 by men.

At last, the female half of our population is slowly, with many exceptions, becoming a full and equal partner with its male counterpart. Perhaps the transition would have been much faster if the Apostle Paul had not stated his personal prejudices against women. Women are often seen in the Old Testament as inferior to men and in need of control by both men and god. Perhaps the lot of women would have been a happier one if Christianity had not been an offshoot of a women-denigrating religion with ideas of uncleanness and the superiority of men.

Certainly the Christian dogma has not been helpful to women. Society has become more liberated from religious constraints since the Reformation and the cause and aspirations of women have been acknowledged. Absolute religious dogma could be regarded as one of the main causes which brought about the Dark Ages by restricting

freedom of thought and expression. There was a huge gap in time between the free-thinking Greek philosophers and the Renaissance. Only when it occurred were people able to think freely again without fear. If the philosophies of the Greeks had continued to develop instead of being impaired by the united power of hungry religious dogmatists and politicians, perhaps the world would have been a happier place. For too long, power-hungry men have been afraid of the challenge of the other half of our society.

A highly respected American psychologist, Dr. Erich Fromm, wrote a book entitled "The Fear of Freedom". In it he explains that freedom brings responsibility. Many are more comfortable living in a restricted environment where someone else makes all the decisions, rather than take responsibility for themselves. Many women continue to live in their own familiar and restricted family prison. They have not yet got used to the power and responsibility of freedom. But their numbers are rapidly decreasing. More and more modern women, particularly young women, are enjoying self determination. They are not less feminine, but they are more exciting to live with. The marriage relationship is changing from one of submissive support by the women to one of a partnership of equals. Mutual interests in addition to home and children are becoming important. Freedom brings trust, adventure, personal dignity and responsibility. It opens the door to self expression and confidence.

There is an exciting future for women. Napoleon can have his women who believe but do not reason. The modern man is going to find, in the future, that his woman partner does think, and instead of implicitly believing her husband, she will want to make an intelligent contribution to an equal relationship. She will live with her man, not because she is bound to him by a contract, but because she enjoys living with him, loving him and being loved by him.

## CHAPTER 9

### Religion as a Means to Gain Power

The reign of Constantine the Great (306-337), changed the whole aspect of the Roman Empire. His decision to build a new capital city for himself, Constantinople, changed the ancient centre of authority. Perhaps more importantly, he also made Christianity a state religion. The Christian community which had been tortured, robbed, and persecuted for two hundred years, suddenly found itself the recipient of the State's favours.

Constantine's father was one of four rulers of the Roman Empire. In 306 A.D. he died. The army immediately proclaimed Constantine ruler in the stead of his father and he was accepted as the junior emperor (Caesar) of the West.

But Constantine wanted much more than just part of the empire. He wanted the whole. War broke out with his rival Maxentius for possession of the Italian section. Before the battle, Constantine saw a cross of light superimposed upon the sun, whereupon he ordered the monogram, resembling the Christian sign, to be painted upon the soldiers shields and declared "by this conquer". He had decided to forsake the Roman gods and put his trust in the Christian god. By winning the battle he became the undisputed ruler of Rome and the western provinces. By 323 A.D. he had gained power over the rest of the empire and became sole ruler (Augustus) of the whole of the Roman empire.

From the time of his ascension to power, Constantine showed himself to be a friend of the Christians. He established a positive relationship with the Catholic Church and gave gratuities and grants of privileges to it. Later he fulfilled his commitment and made Christianity an official State religion. Constantine became very closely associated with the Christians, but he did not ask to be received into the church until he was on his deathbed. Alistair Kee, in his persuasive book "Constantine versus Christ", sets out to prove that Constantine became a mono-theist, but not a Christian until on his deathbed.

Having lost the need to be united against their former persecutors, the Christians soon became deeply divided on matters of doctrine. To deal with these so called heresies, and maintain peace in the empire, Constantine called the principal church leaders together to resolve their differences. He convened and presided over the "Council of Nicaea". At this gathering the doctrines of the church became clarified and were established as official dogma. This became known as the "Nicene Creed".

Constantine was determined to assert his authority in ecclesiastical matters as in all other things and exercise supreme control of religion throughout his empire. Now that the Catholic church was a state religion, it automatically came under state control. For four and a half centuries until 787 A.D. the emperor of the day, or his lay deputies, presided over each Church Council. Constantine's conviction was that he was the supreme ruler of the empire and vicar of god on earth. This attitude was continued by his successors. The Second Council gave the patriarch (Pope) the second place in the state after the emperor. It became essential for communications issued by the General Church Council to be signed by the emperor, not the Pope. The emperor was assigned such an important position in church affairs that a throne was placed next to the patriarch's and the emperor was able to perform functions in the church service. When investing a new patriarch, the emperor would say "This man is appointed Patriarch of Constantinople by the grace of god and by our Imperial authority, which stems from the grace of god."

Emperors in their capacity as heads of the church soon began to issue edicts dealing with theology on their own authority. The emperor was always able to manipulate the election of the patriarch and thereby control the church.

Not until after the conquest of Italy and the coronation of Charlemagne in 800 A.D. did reigning Popes find themselves outside the domination of the Roman emperor. After

Charlemagne, church leaders of the eastern empire, who were experiencing dissensions among themselves, could always appeal to the Pope in Rome, who was considered the highest authority in Christendom.

From then on, the Catholic Church became an ecclesiastical empire in its own right. It took over Roman secular organization and crowned its own Popes in a coronation ceremony. The Pope even borrowed the title of "Pontifex Maximus" from the Roman emperors and in time he became the 'imperator' (emperor) of the church. The church also took over some of the old pagan rituals and converted them into Christian occasions. Events in the life of Jesus were celebrated on the days which had formerly been pagan holidays. Bishops and priests became advisers to kings of many kingdoms and, because of their literary ability, had a hand in drafting the laws of the country. They were able to inject church dogma into state laws and thereby affect the culture of the people. For instance, they were able to influence the compulsory observances of holy days, the attitude to slavery up to two hundred years ago, the inferior position of women in society and many other untenable attitudes.

The "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" is a collection of some of the earliest recorded historical events in Britain. It states that "In the year 167 A.D. Eleutherius received the bishopric of Rome and held it with honour for fifteen years. To him Lucius, King of the Britons, sent men and asked for baptism and he at once sent it to him." Perhaps this was the first lord of a British kingdom to become a Christian. Christianity was mainly established in Britain through the baptism of kings. In turn the members of their courts tended to become Christians, followed by community leaders and finally the masses of the people. In 597 A.D. King Ethelbert, the most powerful ruler in England at the time, was converted to Christianity. He had married a Christian Frankish princess for whom a chapel had been built in Canterbury. This led to neighbouring kings and subordinate rulers of Essex and East Anglia being baptised. Edwin king of Northumbria and his people were baptised in 627 by Bishop Paulinus, the king of Wessex followed in 635, the future king of Mercia in 653 and the king of Sussex in 679. Within a century the whole of England was converted to Christianity. Religion almost always gained its power through, and in conjunction with, the ruling governments. Religious and secular power formed an alliance of mutual support each gaining power through the other.

So the Catholic church became a powerful hierarchy, an international ecclesiastical empire. To receive a divine blessing, kings and dignitaries had to obtain the services of the church as the representative of god. Ritual and power became inextricably associated with church approval. Kings enhanced the power of the church and the church enhanced the power of the kings, each adding to the prestige of the other. The notion of the divine right of kings was strengthened and the position of the church as the representative of god confirmed. The church and the rulers of the Christianised world became interwoven so that obedience to one implied obedience to the other.

Constantine's influence changed the emphasis of the church away from the humanistic teaching of Jesus to a structure of power and hierarchy. What became of the message Jesus is supposed to have given to the poor and oppressed? Jesus had said "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of god." Now the situation is reversed. Power has not only dominated the church hierarchy. You can see a tremendous bias to power in the conduct of most evangelists and missionaries down to lay-preachers. There is considerable ego satisfaction to be gained in the manipulation of other people.

The church continues to be involved in public ceremonies, often as a token acknowledgement of its status. The church became the authority in matters of marriage and divorce and many other social judgments. Even today, after all this time, Christians seek to impose their dogma on governments to influence political decisions relating to the continued observance of holy days, the sale of liquor, certain medical practices, contraception and in many other ways. We need to be able to look on these questions from a person to person or social point of view unclouded by ancient Hebrew law and religious prejudices. The important ideas and humanistic concepts of compassion, justice, equality and caring have become wrongly associated with

religious dogma. Ethics have always been a necessary part of our social structure and are not religious in that they always have functioned without religion. The story and person of Jesus, historical or not, is incidental to the humanistic concept and has no exclusive connection with justice and human compassion.

From the time of Constantine this unholy alliance of political and religious power increasingly restricted and inhibited the free thinking of the people. It was the demand that everyone physically submit to the absolute power of the state and mentally submit to the absolute dogma of the church which was so inhibiting. There was no room for free thought or innovation. Those restrictions were largely responsible for the intellectual darkness, known as the Dark Ages, which spread over Europe for hundreds of years.

Christian church organizations are still made up of power structures. In the Catholic church, the ladder of power has six or seven steps from the student priest to the Pope. Each is under the authority of the one above and, with some exceptions, each is willing to accept a greater position of power. The same hierarchy of power applies to most established churches. Some would claim that the seeking of power was foreign to them. Yet they are persistently trying to persuade others to join their church. Someone said "the trouble with proselytisers is that they leave no room for those who disagree with them." Only after the Renaissance were people liberated from religious and political absolute domination. The world slowly woke up and people were again permitted to express doubts.

History has shown that the Christian religion dampens, restricts and distorts the spontaneous social imperatives which are built into the nature of the human animal and seek to replace them with an intolerant dogma. Those social imperatives of cooperation, compassion and a sense of justice, need to be understood and allowed to mature as nature intended, without the distortions religious fears of a god and punishment that a supposed spirit world and an after-life create.

The world has recently protested at the restrictions placed by the Chinese government on students seeking free speech and democracy. Many of their leaders have been shot. The same absolute power was demonstrated in the Soviet Union under Stalin, in Germany under Hitler and in different ways and at different times by almost all state governments. Power can be a disease of politics and religion alike. The world needs freedom to reason clearly and to doubt and disagree without the brutality of force or negative religious dogma.

Let us have a new look at the non-violent and non-religious teaching of Confucius, who stated that rulers should rule by the force of personality, wisdom, example and justice. He considered that domination by power alone or brutal force, was the antithesis of the force of personal example. A large part of our society is inclined to give the force of personal example a minimal try before quickly resorting to absolute force.

I see a stirring, and an awakening of disgust in many people at the use of brutal force. Our society still has too many unhappy delinquent members who need thoughtful help. We are not yet fully sure of how to bring out the social and humane qualities which reside in the nature of all human beings. We do know that both social attitudes and brutal force can be learned and are likely to be passed down from generation to generation. We may have to wait for some time to see our society abandon so much force and predatory attitudes.

What we do need is more and deeper understanding of our fellow human beings, more research and clear thinking without the distortions of preconceived dogma. Many songs proclaim that the world needs more love. Perhaps that is right; we need more trust, love and understanding. We need to learn much better how to ensure that all our young children, and older ones too, can express themselves in a non-violent atmosphere devoid of fear. They need a place where love and intelligent caring will encourage the natural forces of compassion, justice and social order to mature. They need an opportunity to develop self esteem, personal dignity and honour. Then, they in their turn, can become people with personal prestige who, when the time comes, will govern by the force of personality, example, wisdom and justice.

## CHAPTER 10

### The Dependency Factor in Theistic Religions

The Spanish conquistadores arrived in the capital city of the Aztec empire, Mexico, in 1519. They found a well-structured society and an orderly government centred around a national religion involving constant human sacrifice. The purpose of this massive bloodshed was to appease the many Aztec gods. The state's continued prosperity, rain and harvest for the coming season were believed to be dependent on pleasing both the benevolent and malevolent gods. Here we see the sacrificial surrender of part of the community to unseen gods; a surrender of part of the nation in an effort to gain favour for the rest of the people.

There is a dependency factor, a deviant need to sacrifice, and an element of self-abnegation, running through all theistic religions. There is an inferred requirement that believers sacrifice part of themselves to their religious organization, philosophy and god. Because god cannot be observed, but nevertheless conceived as always present, ageless and powerful, he becomes a static object of uncertainty, hope or fear. It is therefore reasoned that the god must be appeased or influenced by prayer to assist in matters normally beyond the control of human endeavour.

We see this clearly in the Jewish religion in their fear of and devotion to Yahweh, their god. As a nation, their livelihood was dependent on animal husbandry. They therefore sacrificed sheep and goats as atonement for their sins. Any military reversal or disaster of a national or personal kind was blamed by their prophets on the nation's forgetfulness of Yahweh. The usual result was an increase in sacrifices and devotional commitment. The Jewish history, as recorded in their sacred texts, repeatedly refers to the appeasement of Yahweh by the sacrifice of animals.

The monotheistic Jewish religionists built up sacred rituals identical in purpose and parallel in practice to those of the polytheistic priests of the Aztec empire as found by the Spanish conquistadores in 1519. There is no real difference between them. A modern New Zealand Maori, Dun Mihaka, makes a similar statement in his book "Ki Te Whei-ao, Ki te ao-marama".

"For a period of time I declared myself a Christian convert. But that too proved to be a futile exercise ... I found that the monotheistic nature of Christianity and the traditional polytheism of my antecedents were different only in the timing of their historical emergence. But in so far as the reactionary feudal master-servant, father in heaven, complete obedience..., they were identical."

Christian doctrine broadly followed the same Judaistic concepts of an exacting god who demanded to be worshipped. The New Testament regards all people as innately sinful and in need of salvation. God, however, is now seen more as a father figure, responding to his followers. Underlying this gentler approach, is a demand that his precepts, as understood to be presented in the Old and New Testament, be obeyed.

The main difference between the Jewish faith and Christianity is that instead of an endless slaughter of sheep and goats, Jesus Christ became the sacrifice for all time and for all people. "Behold the lamb of god which taketh away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). More than any other sacred text, the New Testament is obsessed with sin and finding a way to avoid the rejection of an almighty god. He is said to cast all those who do not bow themselves before him into hell. You can equate the Biblical understanding of the word sin with disobeying the teachings of the Bible.

The sacrifice of Jesus does not relieve Christian disciples of the need to surrender part

of themselves, so that they may maintain the continued favour of their god. A subtle element of subjugation, self-denying humility and masochism becomes evident. Christians kneel to pray, bow their heads and give of their time and substance. Some churches require their followers to withhold association with 'non-believers'. Many refrain from eating certain foods. Some demand a set percentage of earnings to be given to their Church. All true Christian believers become subservient to their faith and accept its authority in the hope of personally gaining a blissfullife in a next world, a notion very similar to Islamic thinking.

Holy places, holy days, holy pilgrimages, holy acts and persons abound in all theistic religions. Each believer is pursuing his or her own masochistic faith of submission in the hope of pleasing the god or gods of the particular religion.

The question arises, why do human beings humble themselves in ritualised masochism? What is the other side of the coin? What benefit do they gain from dependency on the favours of a god spirit?

RL.Berger in his book "The Social Reality of Religion" makes a wise statement,

"Man cannot accept aloneness and he cannot accept meaninglessness, the masochistic surrender is an attempt to escape aloneness by absorption in an other, who is at the same time posited as the only absolute meaning."

I suggest that there is a double absorption, firstly into the friendly and usually exclusive community of fellow believers and secondly and of equal importance, into the believed favour and protection of the god spirit. The notion of a hereafter in a gentle heaven or future state of being, gives a goal and meaning to the actions and pursuits of the believer. Believers become interested in something outside their mundane earthly experience. They have a new purpose in life, to build up credit for themselves in the next world.

Dependency is central to all theistic religions. Each believer is seeking to gain an advantage by approaching god through faith in some sacrificial act or acts of self-abnegation. This will involve gifts of time and substance of many varieties. In an adult person such behaviour really constitutes a dependency neurosis.

The position of dependency on a god strongly resembles the experiences of the pre-adolescent child; a state of emotional seeking of comfort from a mother church and approval from a father god. This idea was first suggested by Sigmund Freud as a result of his analytical work. People spend approximately one quarter of their lives subject to the security and authority of their parents. There remains a conscious or unconscious craving for the same kind of pre-adolescent family comfort and security. It is now expected to be provided by a parent god. Hence the appeal of a belief in an almighty father god. If by chance the hoped for magical results of prayer occur, they are hailed as an answer by god to the request of his people. If they do not appear, the failure is excused in the same manner as an obedient child will accept that the parents know best. The punishing and rewarding god of the Jewish faith is still there.

The expectations of a religious person of benefit from a powerful superhuman force are very similar to the expectations of the shaman who seeks to manipulate the unseen forces of chance by ritualised magic. They strongly suggest a childhood mentality, a dependency on someone else to provide or approve. Surely human beings can now grow up. Many of us have passed the adolescent stage. It is time we took responsibility for ourselves. It is time we broke away from the mythological gods of our ancient past. We do not need to be kept in order by the belief system of punishment or reward. When we depend on something or someone outside ourselves, we revert to a childhood dependence which includes obedience. In other words we

take on a subservient position which is less than appropriate for a mature adult.

Peace which is dependent on belief in another person or religion is a dependent peace. Personal peace has its strength in self knowledge, self identity, sense of personal worth and positive personal regard. The centre of maturity is always found in self awareness, the inner knowledge that "I'm O.K." Shakespeare had it right when he said,

"This above all: to thine own self be true. And it must follow, as the night the day.  
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

## CHAPTER 11

### The Brain and Supernatural Manifestations

#### Part One

I have found a study of the structure and function of the brain to be a very fascinating subject. Information about the human brain found in this chapter has been largely gleaned from "Psychology a Dynamic Science", by Kurt Schlesinger and Philip M. Groves; "The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind", by Julian Jaynes; "Evolution of the Brain and Intelligence", by Harry J. Jerison; "Divided Consciousness", by Ernest R. Hilgard, and from lectures on the brain, given at Auckland University by Dr. G. Tunnell.

You may have wondered about the claims we hear of messages being received from deceased relatives; or of people who have visions and hear the voice of god. What about spiritual healing and many other apparent demonstrations of the supernatural? Hearing voices and seeing visions are supposed by many to be signs of insanity. There have been very many perfectly normal people who have heard voices.

It is certain that people of many cultures and religions hear voices which appear to come from an exact location outside their own body. Creators of new religions and prophets down through the centuries have recorded hearing voices which were thought to be the voice of a god. There is no doubt that these were sincere people of good standing. Dreams were also often thought to carry a divine message. The Bible is full of occasions when dreams, voices and visions were interpreted as divine instructions. Shamans or medicine men, or specialists in the sacred, from many countries go into trance in public. They believe that a trance is associated with a spirit or spirits. These people could not rightly be called followers of god in a Christian sense. Nor could they be regarded as mentally ill.

Is it true or merely wishful thinking that messages come from a god or some other supernatural source? Or is there a rational psychological or physical reason why so many people from many cultures, religions and various other backgrounds have these experiences?

Dr. Julian Jaynes of Princeton University, in his interesting book "The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind", tells us:

"Hallucinations must have some innate structure in the nervous system underlying them. We can see this clearly by studying the matter in those who have been profoundly deaf since birth or very early childhood. For even they can - somehow - experience auditory hallucinations."

Until comparatively recent times, science knew very little about the function of the human brain, and there is still much to learn. Gradually knowledge has increased until we now know the main functions of each hemisphere of the brain. Mapping of the brain commenced in 1861 when Dr. Paul Bro-ca located an area where speech is centred. Since then a great deal of information has been acquired from the study of the effects of the surgical removal of parts of the brain due to accident or disease. We know, for instance, that what we see with our eyes is processed in the occipital brain, which is located at the back of the head. If this area receives a heavy blow, or is removed by surgery, the patient may suffer partial or complete blindness.

In the late thirties Dr. Egaz Moniz established an operation procedure for which he

received the Nobel Prize in 1949. The operation was called prefrontal lobotomy and involves the cutting of certain nerve connections deep within the brain. The result is that patients become relieved of anxiety, delusions, phobias or epileptic fits, among other ills. There have been many thousands of people whose suffering has been relieved in this way. But there is a heavy price to pay. The personality of the patient is changed. Drs. W. Freeman and J. Watts had this to say: "It is becoming more and more plain that patients who undergo lobotomy must sacrifice some of the virtues, some of the driving force, some of the uplift, altruism, creative spirit, soul or whatever else one would like to call it." This operation has gone out of favour, drugs have taken its place.

In the late 1920s, Dr. W. Penfield discovered that when he applied a very weak electrical current through a wire to various parts of the brain, his patients heard voices, saw shapes and colours, involuntarily moved arms and legs, and could tell him what they saw. He also confirmed that most of the brain centres were duplicated, one on each side of the brain. Dr. Penfield confirmed that in right-handed people speech was located in the left temporal brain and usually not in the right. Because there are no pain receptors in the brain, local anesthetic is all the surgeon needs to use during the operation. Doctors can therefore ask questions and fully conscious patients can state exactly what they hear, see or feel. It is interesting that electrical stimulation of the appropriate region, near the posterior temporal lobe, often produces awareness of singing and music.

For the sake of clarity and for the purposes of this study, unless otherwise stated, we will refer to the speech or dominant hemisphere as being on the left side of the brain.

In describing how the brain physically transmits information received from our five senses, Sch-lesinger and Groves tell us that synapses are the functional contacts between separate neurons (nerve cells). The cells do not actually touch one another; they simply come very close to some part of another cell. When sufficient excitation has been produced, a transmission of information is achieved by means of small chemical packets. These are discharged and move across the small space between the cells to act on the next nerve cell. This is called an 'excitatory synaptic transmission'. They say,

"Each nerve cell in the nervous system is constantly receiving excitatory, inhibitory, or, more commonly, some combination of these synaptic effects. Thus each cell acts as an individual computer, combining and weighing excitatory and inhibitory action and determining when, and when not to fire an action potential. Given the complexity of individual nerve cells, and given that there are many billions of cells in our nervous systems, it would be impossible to build a computer that would do all the myriad operations that our brains are not only capable of carrying out but actually do carry out every minute".

There are three speech areas on the left side of the brain. In ascending order of importance they are: Supplementary motor area, Broca's area and Wernicke's area. The first has to do with articulation. The second, with articulation, vocabulary, inflection and grammar. The third area has to do with vocabulary, syntax, meaning and understanding speech. The removal of any one of these areas may result in a temporary or permanent loss of meaningful speech.

Julian Jaynes tells us that

"The neurological structure for language exists in the right hemisphere as well as the left. In a young child, a major lesion of Wernicke's area on the left hemisphere, or of the underlying thalamus which connects it to the brainstem, produces transfer of the whole speech mechanism to the right hemisphere. A very few ambidextrous people actually do have speech in both hemispheres. Thus the usually speechless right hemisphere can under certain conditions become a language hemisphere, just like the left."

Jaynes further tells us that both hemispheres understand language. If the speech areas on the left are anaesthetised, leaving only the right hemisphere working, the patient can still follow directions. He or she cannot speak but sometimes a person can sing. When the injection is on the right side, he or she can speak but cannot sing. A stroke patient who has had a haemorrhage on the left side of the cortex and cannot speak can still understand, and sometimes a person can sing.

To relieve severe distress, a number of epileptic patients have undergone an operation involving the severing of the corpus callosum (the bridge of over two million fibres which connects the right and left brain hemispheres). The result of this so-called split-brain operation demonstrates how the two hemispheres can function independently of each other. I have seen a film which showed a woman being tested some time after the operation. Her right side literally did not know what the left was doing. In a similar situation, Jaynes tells us,

"If two different figures are flashed simultaneously to the right and left visual field, as for example, a "dollar sign" on the left and a "question mark" on the right, and the subject is asked to draw what he saw, using the left hand out of sight under a screen, he draws a dollar sign. But asked what he has just drawn out of sight, he insists it is a question mark. In other words, the one hemisphere does not know what the other hemisphere has been doing."

Let us summarise some of the evidence.

1. Congenitally deaf persons have claimed to have heard voices. This shows that hearing need not involve the auditory channels.
2. Young children who have had the left hemisphere speech centre damaged, may transfer the whole speech mechanism to the right hemisphere. This shows that the neurological structure of language exists in both right and left hemispheres.
3. Sufficient excitation enables the brain cells to fire a transmission of information to other cells. This can be artificially achieved by the use of very low electric current. So we learn that patients can hear hallucinatory voices and see visions as a result of sufficient excitation.
4. Evidence from patients who have had the 'split brain' operation shows that the right and left hemispheres can operate as two independent units.
5. The fact that patients, who have lost the ability to speak, can understand speech is confirmed when the left hemisphere is anaesthetised or damaged, the right can still understand speech. This demonstrates the duality of the physical neurological capacity of the human brain.

Modern research has helped us to understand the mechanism of the brain whereby hallucinatory voices and visions may occur. The paradigm presented by Dr. Jaynes is that the bicameral mind (two hemispheres of the mind) was the source of the voices of the gods, that the voices originated in the right hemisphere and were passed over the anterior commissure or the corpus callosum to the left hemisphere of the brain. He says,

"I find that the only notion which provides even a working hypothesis about this matter is that of the bicameral mind, that the neurological structure responsible for these hallucinations is neurologically bound to the substrates for religious feelings and that is because the source of religion and of gods themselves is in the bicameral mind."

The above shows that the facility to hallucinate exists in the structure of the brain. I do not think it could be disputed that hallucinations do occur on occasions. It is reasonably concluded that the messages, supposedly being received from god or a deceased relative were in reality fabricated in the persons own mind and passed from one hemisphere to the other.

## Part Two

The ability of the brain to recall past impressions is demonstrated by Ian Wilson in his book "Mind Out of Time".

He says "What Penfield seems to have found surgically ..[is].. a sort of recording track of all past experiences which can be reactivated under certain conditions. The existence of this mechanism is independently attested by a number of peculiar case histories from medical journals. One example is that of a well-bred elderly English woman, who in the year 1902, having been saved by her physician Dr. Henry Freeborn from a near fatal bronchial attack, suddenly astounded him and the attendant nurse by beginning to declaim loudly in a language eventually identified by a visitor as perfect Hindustani. The woman seemed to be asking to go to the bazaar to buy sweets, and reciting complete Hindustani poems. When, after a week, she had sufficiently recovered from the delirium the woman was able to explain that while consciously she had no recollection of any Hindustani, and indeed had forgotten she had ever learned the language, she had spent the first three years of her life in India when she had been in the care of ayahs or nursemaids and had spoken nothing but Hindustani. During her delirium her recording track of this time, irretrievable to normal consciousness, seems somehow to have been reactivated."

Wilson goes on to tell us of a similar incident in 1970 recorded by the widely respected University of Chicago psychologist. Professor Erika Fromm. A twenty-six year old Californian man, Don, was hypnotically regressed to the age of three. He then spoke fluent Japanese for fifteen to twenty minutes. It transpired that as an American war measure, Don had been interned with his parents at a relocation centre for those of Japanese blood. At the camp, Japanese was the predominant language spoken. Later, after the hypnotic regression was over and the tape of his Japanese oration was played back to him, Don was unable to understand most of what he had said under hypnosis. Which goes to show how incredible the human brain is and that material can be locked away in the subconscious without our being aware of it.

### Hallucinations Among Primitive People

John Allegro in "Lost Gods" gives an excellent picture of emotional extravagances which can lead to hallucinatory trances.

"Primitive people in their religious festivals, set out to disorientate their minds by such methods of mass hypnosis as dancing to a point of exhaustion, monotonous repetition of words and phrases, rhythmic drumming or stamping, uncontrolled jerking, twisting or head shaking. They thereby induce in themselves, and their companions, a "hypnoid" or trance state in which the conscious mind is opened up to the "inspiration" or suggestion of its subconscious levels. At the same time, free reign is also given to suppressed emotions in a socially acceptable way, thus forestalling more dangerous explosions."

E.R. Hilgard in his book "Divided Consciousness" adds further light.

"Dreams and hallucinations are products of imagination in which memories are temporarily confused with external reality.....inter-pretred by the hallucinator as perceptions; a convenient way of describing them is, be-lieved-in imagination."

At the B.B.C. Television Studios in Bristol in 1976 an experiment was conducted to induce a volunteer to see a ghost of her own mental fabrication by the use of post-hypnotic suggestion. Ian Wilson tells the story:

"A volunteer - a housewife who was known to be a good hypnotic subject - was placed under hypnosis by a doctor. She was told that when she awakened she

would be taken to another place, where I Colin Wilson [brother of Ian] would approach her (followed by a television camera). As I spoke to her she would "see" the sinister figure of a seventeenth-century clergyman standing nearby; the man's appearance was described in detail. She was awakened and taken to the Bristol Docks, where I was waiting. As I walked toward her she smiled at me, then her eyes strayed across the water to an abandoned wharf. Her smile vanished and she asked me with amazement "Where did he go?" "Who?" "That man" She pointed to the dock and described the unpleasant, sallow-looking man dressed in old-fashioned clothes, who had been standing on the wharf then vanished. Even when the hypnotist explained that she had been responding to a suggestion made under hypnosis she was obviously only half convinced. Several times during the rest of the afternoon she tried to persuade us to admit that it had been a joke and she had seen a real man. She said there was nothing "ghostly" about him; he looked quite solid and normal.

The fascinating aspect of this particular experiment is that although the woman subject was given only verbal information about what she would see, quite unconsciously she invented a pictorial image so convincing that the conscious part of her not only failed to recognize it as her creation, but even when given a logical explanation she remained convinced that the ghost was real."

### **Part Three Glossolalia (speaking in tongues)**

Some Christian churches practice a euphoric ritual which they call 'speaking in tongues'. It is a trance-like phenomenon which has its authority in the New Testament, (Acts 2.) and is commented upon at length in Acts 14. It is known as the Pentecostal experience. Many churches celebrate the event on the 15th day after Easter. The Pentecostal Church takes its name from the New Testament story.

Worshippers usually experience the phenomena of 'speaking in tongues' as a result of listening to a charismatic religious leader. Not only may he or she encourage the experience, but the worshipper will be influenced by seeing others entering the trance. The trance state itself can include shaking, shivering and twisting, and is an emotional experience causing a temporarily altered state of consciousness. After the experience, the worshippers slowly return to full consciousness. They may feel themselves divinely inspired and credit every esoteric feeling and subconscious projection as a proof of contact with supernatural forces. They feel euphoria and are told and believe that they have been filled with the Holy Spirit. Some one else interprets the meaning of the 'tongues'. What to the casual listener sounds like rhythmic gibberish has been tape recorded and played to others of the same religion. The interpretations have been found to be totally inconsistent.

My experience suggests that there is a strong group hypnotic atmosphere created by the charismatic preacher and an equally strong and emotionally expectant congregation which joins in enthusiastically with loud and repeated "halleluiah!" and "praise the lord!". The stage is thereby surely set for an auditory and visual phenomenon which takes the form of a trance expressed by 'speaking in tongues'. It is interesting that glossolalia takes place only in groups and only in religious services.

The Apostle Paul claimed to speak in tongues and advocated its use. Let us have a look at his first hallucinatory experience on the road to Damascus. He had been a fanatical persecutor of the early Christian church. Carl Jung, the famous psychologist, tells us: "fanaticism exists chiefly in individuals who are compensating for secret doubt." In other words they are trying desperately, by placing the supposed truth of an absolute dogma ahead of personal experience, to convince themselves of the rightness of their actions or belief. Jung suggests that Paul had been struggling with a

growing internal disquiet and was unconsciously being convinced of the validity of the Christian faith. As a Jew, Paul was also looking for the promised Messiah. The Christian message would seem to him to be a possible fulfilment of that promise. We see Paul's deductive thinking ability later in his epistles. Undoubtedly this same mental agility was characteristic of him and would have influenced him at the time of his conversion. So the stage was set for the auditory phenomenon. There had been a period of unconscious incubation. He heard a voice saying, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest, it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:5). Perhaps that last Statement summed up his inner conflicts. Right there is an acknowledgment that he was suffering inner conflict or division; his doubts were likened to kicking against pricks. Paul fell to the ground where he experienced psychosomatic blindness. A blindness which could only be cured by the touch of a Christian hand. The experience could indicate an excitatory synaptic transmission setting the stage for an hallucination.

### **Rebirthing**

There is a fairly new kind of induced trance which has become popular and is known as re-birthing. There is even a song about rebirthing. It is not officially connected with religious movements. The participating person lies down comfortably and starts a certain regular pattern of deep breathing. After a short while the extremities may start to tingle and the mind loses all awareness of the surroundings. A person becomes fully occupied with the feeling and vision of the drama unfolding. One experiences what could be called a mental regression into an early time of life or the birth trauma. There is a letting go, a certain abandonment of control, a placing of trust and an intimacy of experience. What happens may be enjoyable, but not always; some unpleasant trauma can arise. After perhaps an hour or more, one awakens as from a sleep. To many, rebirthing is an adjustment to traumatic incidents of early life. Many claim benefit and go back again and again to reinforce the benefit.

### **Drugs**

Drugs also cause hallucinations. Schlesinger and Groves give a list of drugs which can cause the users to see and hear things. Addicts can escape into a vivid fantasy world which is seemingly real during the trance state. In many respects the process is similar to the visions and voices experienced by so-called spiritual people.

Like glossolalia and rebirthing, hallucinations due to drugs occur in particular circumstances and are consciously induced to gain the euphoric experience. Could it be that each of them is caused by the build up of "excitatory synaptic transmissions" across the anterior commissure from one hemisphere of the brain to the other, and that in the case of glossolalia, it is mistaken for a demonstration of the "holy spirit"? It does happen, as we have seen, during brain surgery. It can also happen under hypnosis, whether self induced or not.

### **Dreams**

Dreams used to be thought to convey a message from the nether world, the voice of dead relatives or a spirit or god. The psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung changed all that for educated people. They taught that dreams were a symbolic replay of the deep emotional state of the dreamer. Some dreams are pleasant, some are frightening, yet all images are part of ourselves. We give them form and expression. They are our creation. Freud called dreams, "the royal road to the unconscious". For instance, someone who repeatedly dreams of being chased may in fact be afraid of being caught out in some way in real life. I remember an occasion when my family

invited a thirty-year old single woman to spend a weekend with us at our seaside cottage. At breakfast the next morning she said "I had a vivid dream last night. I dreamed I was outside the cottage in the dark. The cottage was brightly lit, everyone was laughing and happy inside, and I was feeling very desperate because I couldn't find the door and I couldn't get in." The dream, of course, was expressing her deep anxiety, perhaps unexpressed in other ways, to experience family life and children. She wanted the companionship and warmth found in marriage.

I have included dreams in the study because they have been thought to be the vehicle of god's directions. Dreams can be very vivid. One finds oneself completely immersed in the situation, I am sure almost everyone has had dreams which have been tense enough to wake one up. Dreams are different from trances in that they are a constant part of our existence. We do not consciously initiate them and cannot control them; they just happen, yet they have something in common with the induced trance states we looked at. In all of them, mental awareness of sight and voice are involved. Jaynes tells us that "the right hemisphere is considered to be more creative, spatial and responsible for vivid imagery than the left." Could dream material be created in the right hemisphere of the brain from the storehouse of deep emotional material?

## **Comments**

There is ample proof that the human animal is capable of having dramatic auditory and visual experiences which appear to come from a place outside their person. In fact they occur completely within the individual's own brain structure. But to a devout person, this could be understood as the voice of god. A trance may take several forms of expression. It may appear suddenly, be purposefully induced or occur quietly without dramatics. But on each occasion, the stage has consciously or unconsciously already been set. Persons who have strong underlying guilt feelings may hear condemning voices. Hebrew prophets musing on the state of the nation and worried about military reverses would hear voices condemning the sinfulness of the people. Speaking in tongues occurs only in church company. The united ritual of the group together with the personal desire of the participating worshipper will be enough to trigger the euphoria. For some, the need to be part of a warm family of like minded-people could be the driving force.

In conversion, Paul needed a dramatic turnaround to give himself peace from his inner conflict. He also needed a convincing incident to persuade his former enemies that he had now changed sides. In keeping with his character, Paul became totally immersed in building a faith he had formerly sought to destroy.

The person undergoing rebirthing has already heard about the experience from others and been encouraged to participate in the hope of personal gain. Perhaps it is a desire to experience something intriguing. Who can tell what private reasons each person may have. Rebirthing is not usually a religiously motivated experience any more than is the taking of hallucinatory drugs. Yet something happens within the brain to cause an altered state of consciousness.

## **Hypnotism**

It all began with an Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer in the 18th century. He was eventually discredited by his peers and died in 1815. Mesmer believed he had discovered a healing power which was of occult origin. He called it animal magnetism. Later it was called Mesmerism until the middle of the 19th century when Dr. James Braid gave it the name of hypnotism. Hypnotism calls for co-operation and trust in the operator and obedience to his voice. The phenomenon differs from subject to subject according to the depth of the trance. Dr. Julian Jaynes tells us that the effects of hypnotism have changed over the years. Mesmer created physical responses of convulsive movements in his patients when curing them of hysteria. A few decades later, subjects began to speak and reply to questions. Some years further on, subjects

began to forget what had happened during the trance. When the mistaken theory of phrenology (character reading from the shape of the head) was popular, some subjects sank to their knees in prayer when the portion of their head supposedly responsible for veneration was pressed. Some time later the French psychiatrist Charcot induced three stages of trance: catalepsy, lethargy, and somnambulism.

Today there is a wide-spread practice of self hypnotism which does not involve a deep trance. My wife regularly uses self hypnosis before sitting a university examination. She says that it allows her to relax, concentrate and cut out extraneous noises. I was introduced to self hypnosis when sharing a room with an American friend. I left the room for less than a minute. When I came back he was not only in bed, he was fast asleep. He told me later that he learned to fall asleep immediately by the use of self hypnosis.

Changes over the years in the practice of hypnotism show that it does not produce a consistent response. It is affected by the belief and expectations of the subject and to an extent also by that of public concept. Suggestibility and belief constitute the central phenomena of hypnosis. The subject responds in conformity to the suggestions of the hypnotist. The subject can become psychologically deaf, blind, amnesic and anaesthetised. Indeed the control of pain can be achieved successfully by a professional operator or a person using self hypnosis.

### **The Rise of Spiritualism**

Attempts to communicate with spirits, including the spirits of departed ancestors, date back into prehistory. Such efforts are found in a great many primitive cultures. Examples are the Haitians and the North American Indians. In Europe during the middle ages, spirit mediums were called witches. They were severely persecuted so that the practice become virtually unknown until March 1848. Then, two sisters, Margaret and Kate Fox of Hydesville U.S.A. reported hearing rappings said to be the work of invisible spirits. The girls, aged 12 and 9 years old, claimed to have established communication with those spirits.

Despite considerable scepticism, lack of authentic evidence and even suggestions of deception, a wave of spiritualism swept around the world. The Fox sisters were examined in 1849 in an effort to find the truth. It was concluded that the sounds were created by the sisters manipulating their joints.

Lack of scientific evidence of the spirits did not deter the believers. The new religion provided something which many people longed for. It gave encouragement to those who wanted some evidence of life after death and comfort to those who wished to communicate with deceased relatives.

The Fox sisters devoted a great deal of their later lives to the practice of spirit mediumship in America and England. The truth of their experiences came out in 1888. Margaret made a public confession on the 21st of October at the New York Academy of Music, which was reported in the New York World the following day. She stated that her older sister Leah had persuaded them to commercialise their tricks of making clicking noises with their big toes and fingers. Kate also stated in print that "Spiritualism is a humbug from beginning to end. It is the greatest humbug of the century." Refer to "Divided Consciousness" Ernest R. Hilgard.

Spirit mediumship is perhaps the oldest religious practice in the world. The witches of old England, the medicine men and shamans of many races were all manipulators, in different ways, of what is believed to be the spirit world. In conformity to the law of averages, sometimes it seems to work, sometimes it does not. Like prayer, only the successes are remembered and then shouted from the house tops.

It seems to me that the present notion that god is the universal mind, universal energy, first principle or whatever else you wish to call it, got a great lift from the world-wide spiritualist movement. The idea constitutes a rejection of the Biblical understanding of god. The Bible's definition of god is of a person; the omnipotent, omnipresent creator of the universe who cannot look on sin; the god who demanded the worship of his creatures by the sacrifice of blood and later the death of Jesus.

The doctrine of the universal mind is nearer in outlook to witchcraft and spiritualism

than to Christianity. The notion suggests that we all are part of the "all spirit or energy" and can manipulate superior forces to serve our private desires. Such practices constitute another form of magic without the formal ritual of the witchdoctor.

## **Clairvoyance**

Clairvoyance has been defined as supernatural knowledge of events. There have been tests devised to prove the validity of the claims. Mostly these have been some form of card, dice or picture tests where the subject has been asked to read material being displayed in another room. Like telepathy, the results are unreliable from a scientific viewpoint. Clairvoyance is open to so many uncertainties. It is only proved in the mind of the believer and can play on a person's fascination with mysticism. Who does not enjoy watching a clever conjurer at work.

## **Paranormal Phenomena**

A Society for Psychical Research was formed in England in 1882 and was followed by a similar society in America in 1888. Other organisations appeared later in most European countries. In 1927, at the Duke University of America, Dr.J.B. Rhine established a parapsychological laboratory. Other universities followed. Between these organisations, a great deal of time and research has gone into investigating paranormal ideas and experiences, including the notion of life after death.

The leading physicist of Cambridge University, Professor Stephen Hawking investigated the extrasensory programme at Duke University in 1950. He concluded

"Whenever the experiments got results, the experimental technique was faulty. Whenever the experimental techniques were sound,-the results were no good".

Dr. Susan Blackmore is a Visiting Fellow of the Brain and Perception Laboratory of the University of Bristol Medical School. She obtained her Ph.D in parapsychology and taught the subject at the University of Surrey for ten years. She tells us in her interesting book "The Adventures of a Parapsychologist" published in 1986,

"One hundred years ago, Myers was asking essentially the same questions parapsychology is tackling now. The methods have changed, but the questions are just the same: Does information travel from one place to another independently of space and time? Can people communicate without using the recognized senses? And after one hundred years we still don't have answers to even these most preliminary questions. We haven't progressed at all. Parapsychology has a Stagnant research program.....So of course my research led to skepticism and even disbelief. I could sympathize with myself for becoming so aggressively disbelieving!"

## **Life after Life**

An early researcher. Sir Oliver Lodge, hoping to prove life after death, left a sealed package with the intention of communicating its contents to a medium after his death. The experiment was not a success.

After an in-depth study of this subject, in the final chapter of "Mind Out of Time", Wilson says,

"Long hours spent attending regressions and listening to recordings of them, persuades me to no more charitable view than that if there is any genuine past life material... it is so rare that I have yet to find an example that remains convincing once investigated in depth."

After all these years, no undeniable proof has appeared; nothing to prove beyond reasonable doubt that there is life after death. I have never heard of any undeniable evidence or even a reasonable theory to explain the process by which the essence of the belief or thinking of a person can be preserved or transferred to another existence after that person has died. There is plenty of wishful thinking and belief in a nether world. Millions of people spend time and tremendous effort in support of their hopes and faith in an after-life. But belief is not proof. Modern people need more than belief. We cannot afford to base our whole way of life on an unproven belief.

There has been more evidence of precognition and telepathy than of other paranormal experiences. But none of them has proved to be more than spasmodically and mildly successful; in other words, with little or no more than average chance results. No important contribution has been made to psychical research by the study of these phenomena. Humans have a great ability to believe in what they would like to be a reality. With hindsight, it is easy to believe that a chance happening was the result of a projected wish. By the chance of averages, sometimes we win and sometimes we lose. Every time we win, we can by the use of very little mental agility convince ourselves that the winning was the result of previous intention.

Haunted houses, poltergeists and flying objects: how and from where do they come, and what do they mean? One feature that seems to be common to nearly all poltergeist phenomena is the presence of young people between 12 and 20 years old. I do not know the significance of this. Like flying saucers, people believe in them or they do not. Most likely such belief will make very little difference to how they live their lives.

We need not be too negative about paranormal phenomena. After all, hypnosis was once thought to be a paranormal experience, but is now regarded as fitting into the scientific picture of the human realization. Some animals have abilities far outstripping human awareness. Some dogs can distinguish smells and retain the memory for something like seventy hours. Bats and dolphins have an in-built radar system to guide them: migratory birds and pigeons seem to have navigation abilities: snakes are super-sensitive to vibration. We ask ourselves, have modern people become so dependent on their deductive brains that they have lost some of their earlier instinctive senses? Are they developing new abilities which are only just beginning to appear? Or are both these ideas flights of imagination? There seems to me to be no absolute answer to these questions. Perhaps science will one day find an answer acceptable to thinking people. In the meantime we cannot afford to place weight or dependence on such uncertain foundations.

My copy of The Encyclopaedia Britannica has this to say:

"The more securely clairvoyance and telepathy are established as natural phenomena, the more difficult it is to produce a near decisive proof of human survival after death."

## Comments

In part one we saw how the bicameral mind can be a vehicle of hallucinatory experiences; seeing visions and hearing voices which arise within its own structure. The physiological machinery is there which makes the experience seem to occur. Under certain conditions, this may appear to the patient as an independent, other person, communicating with them. Part two showed how the subconscious memory can be activated and recall experiences of many years previous which have been totally forgotten by the conscious mind. We saw also that in hypnosis, persons can be induced to create new images within their own heads which appear totally convincing to them, but in fact are no more than imagination. In part three we talked about several hallucinatory experiences which have been taken as evidence of supernatural beings or life after death. All of these experiences are explained as occurring within the subject's own head. The phenomena are brought about by the subject's own belief and

expectation very similar to the effects of hypnosis. When talking about god, Martin Luther said: "As you think and believe so you have him."

The magic of the human brain is that it does have imagination, can conceive ideas, can play with probabilities and fantasies and can visualize structures of thought and matter. These are some of the ingredients which have contributed to the development of modern human beings. But we can also convincingly deceive ourselves when our emotional needs demand it.

Belief in an after-life is dependent on the notion that there is something eternal dwelling within each of us. The idea cuts right across the structural principle of the world we live in. There is nothing on this earth or in the universe which blossoms into being, that does not eventually change or destruct. We know that our thoughts and emotions are centred in our physical brain. How then can anything pertaining to thought or belief remain active after the body and brain are dead? How can we persist in the notion that human beings have an exemption from total death and that some part of them can have an eternal, conscious experience. How can we do this in the face of absolutely no scientific reason or proof?

Surely the notions of a god and an after-life are myths; unrealities which arose from the ancient fears of our progenitors and persist to this day in the form of religion. Discarding the god concept is a mental and emotional process which involves accepting personal responsibility for this life. Many will not feel strong enough to do this. If you can do it, you will find your own sense of person and your independence greatly strengthened.

## CHAPTER 12

### MAGIC

The Collins Dictionary defines magic as "The feigned art of influencing the course of nature or future events by occult means."

Hanging in the dining room of our home is a print of a painting by Hieronymus Bosch, who lived from 1462 to 1516. It is called "The Conjuror" and shows a group of people watching a conjuror do the ball and cup trick. Humans have always been intrigued by what appears to be magic. We are an inquisitive species who want to find a reason for everything. When our ancient forebears were not able to find a satisfying answer, they invented mythological stories to fill the gaps in their knowledge and magic to placate and manipulate supposed superior forces which they believed to be gods or the spirits of their dead ancestors. Perhaps this is how religious practices first began.

Primitive people did not possess the advantage of modern technology, but they were not stupid. Over time, and the intelligent use of trial and error, they discovered what was likely to bring the best return for their labour. So primitive people came to trust their own science in the manufacture of tools and equipment. But rough weather, currents and reefs are always liable to upset human plans. That is when they are likely to feel the need of something beyond their skill to bring luck; something to help them wrestle with the mysterious forces beyond their control or understanding and perhaps appease those mysterious forces.

Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) was an anthropologist who made an extensive study of magic among the native peoples of the Trobriand Islands and the Aborigines of Australia. He observed the islanders using great skill and care in the manufacture of their sailing craft and fishing equipment. He noted that fishing and trading magic were both very well developed.

Malinowski argued that the people must have possessed knowledge of a scientific character. The very achievement of the mastery of their environment demonstrated that primitive people were capable of exact observation and logical deductive reasoning. But however much scientific knowledge is acquired, it cannot fully eliminate the chance of droughts, floods or accidents occurring. It is in this neutral territory, beyond scientific knowledge, toward uncertainty and danger, that ritualised magic is sought to bring good luck and build confidence.

Malinowski tells us that magic is not associated with the manufacture of sailing craft, but only with the danger associated with their use. Nor is it associated with domestic activities such as the making of fire, weaving of baskets, digging of fields or collecting of shell fish within the reef. But as soon as there is a likelihood of risk associated with the activity, such as in deep sea fishing, magic comes into prominence.

In their creative endeavours, native people relied firstly on their scientific knowledge and experience and secondly on magic. Magic is never used as an alternative to science or a substitute for hard work. As Malinowski says.

"Magic is something which, over and above man's equipment and his force, helps him to master accident and to ensnare luck.... Magic is to be expected and generally to be found whenever man comes to an unbridgeable gap, a hiatus in his knowledge or in his powers of practical control, and yet has to continue in his pursuit."

When there are no further practical measures available to advance their cause, human beings will almost always appeal for some magic. It is a plea for help. With no tangible help at hand, they hope that perhaps some intangible force 'out there' can change their luck. So primitive people call in the witch doctor or shaman and Christians pray for a blessing on their endeavours or the boat they have skilfully built. If life is in danger, even those with a minimum of belief in a god may find themselves praying. In this way, magic fills an unbridgeable gap in the emotional need of modern people. It helps to fill that gap of despair with hope and renewed courage.

Even among Europeans, until recent times, there were charms for all manner of things; to increase the fertility of the land, to prevent blight, to prevent weeds growing, to keep rats away and even to protect against witchcraft. Charms were and are worn for good luck and safety by soldiers, sailors and children and even placed on horses and pets. There 'seems to be no end to the devices and superstitious acts performed in the hope of protecting persons and their property from harm. For primitive people, science and magic would seem to be complementary to each other, magic taking over where science left off.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century things began to change, for Europeans especially. People of science increasingly began to understand and explain that the universe was subject to immutable laws which could not be manipulated by any amount of magic. Magnetism, once thought to be an occult influence, can now be controlled and explained as the movement of particles. Plagues were not judgments of an angry god spirit but rather the result of poor hygiene. Thunder is the result of electrical storms, and so on. Increasingly scientific explanations have taken the mystery out of what was unknown and filled up the gaps in our knowledge.

Education of the ordinary person made it possible for the populace to understand the advances of knowledge. Improvements in transport and communication through newspapers and books made information and help more easily attainable. Fears of loss of property and the uncertainties of trade were reduced by the introduction of banking facilities and insurances of many kinds. Improvements in agricultural technology and soil fertilisers brought increased food production. Fire-fighting machinery, together with specially trained personnel, helped to reduce the need for protection from supposed supernatural sources. Together with many other improvements, science took the major elements of chance and risk out of the lives of many.

Magic may have declined in the educated world but by no means is it dead. We could list dozens of present-day superstitious beliefs and practices, such as a fear of starting a journey on a Friday the thirteenth. Modern people are still interested in magic although somewhat uncertain of it; perhaps a tongue in the cheek attitude. We saw demonstrations of belief in magic on a national scale after and during the world wars, when national days of prayer were called for. Both sides were appealing to the same god for victory over the other. Does not that parallel, in every respect, the appeal of the primitive person to magic? Perhaps we should ask to what extent religion itself arose as a result of the unbridgeable emotional gap humans face in times of extreme stress?

The Bible is full of dozens of stories, or myths, of magic. A few of them are as follows. The Red Sea was rolled back to allow the Children of Israel to pass over "and the Children of Israel went in the midst of the sea upon the dry ground and the waters were a wall unto them on the right hand and on the left" (Ex.14: 22). Moses witnessed that the bush "burned with fire and behold the bush was not consumed" (Ex.3: 2). Joshua commanded the sun to stand still "and the sun stood still in the midst of the heaven and hastened not to go down for about a whole day" (Josh. 10: 13). Shadrach and his two friends were cast into a burning fiery furnace, on the command of King Nebuchadnessar. The furnace was so fierce that those who cast them in were killed by the heat, yet even the hair on the heads of Shadrach and his friends was not singed (Dan. 3: 19-27).

Likewise the New Testament is full of myths or magic. Perhaps the most supernatural are the several stories of people being raised from the dead. Lazarus, dead four days, was commanded by Jesus to "come forth, and he that was dead, came forth bound hand and foot" (John 11:43-44). Water was turned to wine at a wedding feast (John 2:9). A servant of the high priest had his right ear cut off by Simon Peter, Jesus "touched his ear and healed him" (Luke 22:51). Jesus walks on the sea of Galilee (Matt. 14:29). The New Testament calls these supernatural happenings divine miracles. Others might call them imagined stories to enforce belief.

Modern Christians proclaim that their god is all powerful and can heal the sick but many of them finally end up in hospital for an operation. Some Christians refuse to receive transfusions on religious grounds and die because of that. Is their god heartless or is technical skill more powerful and merciful than their god? It is sometimes surprising how tenaciously normally intelligent people will hold onto a mystical belief in the face of reason. They can sometimes display an intensity of antagonism towards questions about their faith which they would not do in other circumstances. I suppose in that too, they resemble the followers of magic.

There seems today, to be a fashion to return to "spiritual" things: seances, tarot card readings, astrology, numerology, and many other ologies. The reasons are seldom the result of lack of scientific knowledge. On the whole, I do not see people using magic instead of technology any more than early people did. The various practices appear more as a diversion or a hobby or a fun thing, and are heeded with varying degrees of seriousness and even used as a means of livelihood by those who would profit thereby. Just as people spend money on lotteries, they will try magic or anything else, in the hope of getting something extra. Magic is used, as it always has been, as an addition to existing scientific knowledge, or as a last hope in emergency situations. Perhaps this is a characteristic of human beings which is rarely eliminated.

Does magic really help? Perhaps it does. Early people gained courage and confidence, thereby increasing their determination to continue physical effort. Perhaps prayer is just another form of magic, one of the ways of releasing helpful endorphins within the body which can give strength and purpose to the objective. Endorphins are a recent discovery. These biochemicals can flood the body and are responsible, for instance, for the "high" a runner gets during a race. D. and J. Beck, in their interesting book "The Pleasure Connection", have the following to say,

"Endorphins create euphoria and pain relief by acting as biochemical messengers, enhancing or diminishing our cells capability to communicate with one another, storing and sending information within our brains and throughout our bodies."

But these endorphins are internal and natural processes stimulated by a mental attitude and related exclusively to the individual person. The process does not involve an external god or a spirit.

Another way of achieving a similar result is by the use of hypnotism. I have a friend who is a professional hypnotist. He speaks of very many occasions when he has been thrilled to witness physical and emotional healing as a result of his work. Thinking and attitudes of all kinds, whether of religious origin or not, have a great bearing on our determination and tenacity in life. Could both magic and prayer be called self hypnosis by less direct means? They both have the quality of belief and expectation.

Where does a god come into all this? Perhaps not at all, except that genuine faith in mythical spirits, a god or oneself, can equally set in motion positive, helpful and natural forces within the believer's own body. The forces are internal, the result of belief and are not the work of a spirit force 'out there'. Under hypnosis, the subject believes the suggestions of the operator. That 'believed suggestion' is turned by the subject into action. The same process occurs under the influence of either religion or magic. The vehicle used is incidental to the process of genuine belief. Faith stimulates hope and expectation, thereby helping to bridge the unbridgeable gap or hiatus Malinowski talked about.

## CHAPTER 13

### **Spirit or Soul and A Little Bit of Luck**

#### **Spirit**

One is said to get into the spirit of the occasion, or show a good or bad spirit toward something. We speak of animation of spirit or lack of spirit. We talk of a spirited horse, dog, or a good spirit of co-operation. We can often see a lively spirit in young children. What we are talking about here is something which resides in varying measures in every person and animal. Some show tremendous spirit while others are poor in spirit. It is a matter of degree. Spirit affects the enthusiasm, energy and determination we apply to the art of living. Our personal spirit translates into all aspects of personal life. It affects our ability to resist disease, our loving experiences, our enjoyment of life and our relationship with those about us.

We see the spirit of determination in all avenues of top sportsmanship and business; that confidence in self, coupled with a strong will to win. It clings on, it fights back, it refuses to give in, it displays faith in the self and an assured successful outcome. Spirit and faith join hands to form a strong belief that the seemingly impossible is possible and will be achieved. That is not to say that the person is dominated by tension. Relaxation plays a large part in success.

The history of medicine is full of examples of miraculous recoveries from potentially fatal illness; of patients who hang on in spite of great odds and refuse to die or give up a full life. The will to live has infused the patient with a spirit of determination and faith, strong enough to overcome the physical disadvantages. Dr. Charles Mayo in his book which gives the story of the founding of the famous Mayo Clinic of America stated,

"I've seen patients, with little chance to survive, use gritty willpower to work a near miracle and pull themselves through a surgical ordeal. I also came to realise that when a person wants to die, he will die - and no amount of good surgery and postoperative nursing can stop him."

It could be said that the spirit enlivens faith and that all healing is the result of faith. Sydney Jou-rard in "The Transparent Self" comments,

"Being heard and touched by another who 'cares' seems to reinforce identity, mobilize spirit, and promote self-healing. Being the recipient of love from another, appears to be a highly inspiriting event. There have been many informal observations of people, previously limp, lackluster, dispirited people, who increased in zeal, muscle tone, integration of personality and resistance to illness, once they were told they were loved by some significant other person."

This pro-life spirit, which is found within the individual person, resides deeply within the psyche. It can be encouraged or discouraged from early childhood by the attitude of a guardian or teacher.

We physical human animals do flourish in harmony with the spirit within us. We respond to an atmosphere of freedom and self expression. We achieve our best when we are doing what we like to do most. When the spirit deep within each one of us is free of restraint, we can achieve the seemingly impossible.

#### **Soul**

We have been speaking of a spirit which is part of our whole being, an inseparable component of life. We are born with it and it dies with us. Very many good people believe in another kind of spirit which has nothing to do with the spirit we have been talking about. For them, there is a spirit, often called soul, which they say resides in all humans and only in humans, and does not die with the body. The spirit is supposed to live on in an afterlife and carry the essence of this life with it. The belief that an eternal spirit or soul resides in all human beings is the real basis of religious hope of an afterlife. Without this belief the Christian faith, with all its theology and ritual, becomes meaningless. That so called eternal soul is supposed to be rewarded or punished by god in the hereafter by condemnation to a heaven or a hell or perhaps returned to earth by reincarnation.

You can take the Bible literally, interpret it symbolically or any way you wish. The Biblical belief in a hereafter necessitates that the embodiment of this lifetime experience be somehow consciously carried forward into an afterlife, and the 'soul' of the dead person held responsible for the actions or religious faith of the past life. This constitutes a conscious continuation of the present life into an afterlife. To say that the essence of this life is carried forward unconsciously would destroy the religious purpose of an afterlife. Now we know that the conscious mind is established, activated and maintained within the cranium. The conscious self is unable to function without the physical structure in which it matured. It cannot meaningfully live outside the body as a separate identity. How, then, is it possible for the spark of life which gave birth to consciousness to continue to have any force after the death of the body? The brain together with all its contents of memories, belief, rational or irrational thinking must surely perish with the body. I have yet to hear a rational explanation of how it could be possible for the contents of a human brain or its beliefs, to have any meaning or function outside the human body.

If we possess an eternal soul, does it reside within the person and what is its relationship to the physical brain? Or does it reside as a separate identity? In which way or how is it separate or exempted from the death of the body? When did it first reside in man? Did it first appear in Cro Magnon man or Homo sapiens, or should we go back four or five hundred thousand years further to Homo erectus? In what way can the soul be preserved without a body? If the body, equipped with memory and feeling dies, how can a so called soul continue or experience reward or punishment for the attitudes or actions resulting from our thinking? What is the use of a heaven or hell, real or symbolic, if all memory and feeling die? Why is it that there is no irrefutable evidence of life after death? If you cannot give a reasonable answer to these questions I must conclude that your faith in an afterlife is without a firm foundation. Could it be that the reason is simply that there is no life after death?

The only way we can become aware of anything is through our five senses. If we had never been aware of sight, sound, touch, smell or taste, no experience or understanding could have reached our minds. We would not be conscious persons at all; our brain structure would not even have developed. Before birth, we experience through our mother and the placenta. After birth, we begin to accumulate experiences independently and react to other humans and the world about us. We build up a vast resource which is personal to each of us. We add experience to experience, situation to situation, learning to learning, until we establish a vast reserve of response and counter-response to any situation. The likely response we make to any event we are faced with, will come from that reservoir of knowledge or experience. The process goes on for all of life, adding to our understanding or attitude and modifying and changing that which we have already established. Like a computer, we build up, and build on something new, a vast field of resources from which we draw according to the demands of our logical and emotional needs. But we can only draw out of our computer that which has been recorded previously. The sum total of our accumulated experience and learning comprise the only resource we have.

Life is an expression of energy. Everything in the universe is an expression of energy. Each life is like a candle, lit at birth and extinguished at death. The energy one displays during a life is bound to that life and cannot have further activity once it has been extinguished. It is pointless to ask where the energy of the extinguished flame has gone when it is blown out. It just ceases to burn oxygen or exist as a flame. It is pointless to ask where has someone put it, where is it now?

The flame of life was started by parents and grew in the mother's body to become a unique and perfect child of two utterly unique and separate persons. It is impossible to recreate the same situation again. If it were possible to recreate the same physical body of a particular child, it would still be a different person because a different age and society would have contributed a different accumulation of resources. The child would grow up to be another unique person as each child in a family is unique.

There is no doubt that the physical brain is the storehouse of all our experiences, enculturation, understanding, attitudes, learning and beliefs. All these learning experiences function as a group, each influencing the other. Together with hereditary assets, they form the whole personality. Personal experience added to enculturation results in learning. In turn learning results in understanding; understanding results in attitude; attitude results in behaviour. Behaviour is the net result of all that has gone before. Utterly destroy the storehouse of the mind in death and the whole of its resources or accumulated contents must be destroyed with it. All that is left is the impression conveyed to the minds and memories of other persons.

### **Do We Need a God**

More importantly, I would like to know why a mature man or woman needs a hereafter or god. Are we arrogant enough to think that humankind has a different life force from all other animals? Nothing else lives forever; there is no proof of life beyond the grave. What makes us different except our arrogance or fear? In expressing a need for a god, are we not denigrating ourselves and distracting from the importance of our present existence? We are marvellously complete beings with tremendous resources. With our five senses we can communicate and experience the world and all that is in it. Is the adult person still in need of being controlled and encouraged by a father figure? Do we need someone outside ourselves to lean on? If there is a need for support, it can be provided in a practical manner by those of this earth who are willing to help. Perhaps what is really needed in those cases is a new infusion of the kind of spirit we talked about in the earlier part of this chapter, a revival of the sense of self worth, uniqueness, self trust and confidence.

A growing number of people today have a notion of a god which is very different from the personal god presented in the Bible. To them, god is the all spirit dwelling in all nature. Each one of us is said to be part of the universal spirit or mind, the all-embracing spirit or energy. Those good people usually seem to believe in the continuation of an individual spirit identity after death and in reincarnation. Their spirit world is very akin to the spirit world which filled the minds of primitive people. Benevolent and malevolent ancestor spirits were ever present to help or harass the living. Then there were the spirits of the forest and fire and many others to consider. So they move back in history to spirit mediums and magic which has no basis in scientific research or understanding. Human beings seem to be excited by the notion of magic and want to hang on to luck. For most people, emotion overrides reason. It would appear that many in our society are not yet ready to free themselves from the desire to be cured by magic.

The marvellous thing is that we are born as individuals and can achieve our own human and social potential. To do so we need to be free of the imposed negative influences of dependency. And we need to be free of the illusion that a next life is more important than this life. Dependency is a disease which inhibits the full development of our potential. The first and greatest opportunity is to accept re-

sponsibility for ourselves, then we can positively address our responsibility to the community.

### **Answer to Prayer or Just Luck**

You would think that the law of averages and statistical information would reduce the desire for and the hope of gain through luck or prayer. But no! there is something in us which is eternally willing to risk a little in the hope of gaining a great deal. Perhaps this is an attractive quality in human beings. It makes adventure so appealing to us all and is responsible for many of the great achievements of our age.

Belief in prayer is very similar to belief in good luck, as the following story will show. The only difference is the name we give it. It is presented with my adaptations and apologies to a Chinese philosopher I have been unable to trace.

There was an old man who lived with his son on a small farm. He had two friends. One believed in god and the other believed in luck. One day the old man's horses got out and disappeared. One of his friends came to him and said "God has taken your horses, you must pray", and he replied "How do you know that it was god?" His other friend came and said "It was bad luck to lose all your horses" and the old man replied "How do you know it was bad luck?" A few days later the horses returned with several other wild horses and his friends came to see him again. The religious one said "God has answered my prayers and returned your horses, you must thank god," and the old man replied, "How do you know it was god?" The second friend came and congratulated him on his stroke of very good luck. The old man said "How do you know it was luck?" With all those horses about, the son started riding and fell and broke his leg. Again the old man's friends came and the first said, "God is punishing your son for pursuing so much pleasure." And the old man said "How do you know it was god?" The second friend came to express his sympathy for the son's bad luck and the old man said "How do you know it was bad luck?" Shortly afterwards there was a war and the soldiers came and took away the horses, but because the old man's son had a broken leg, he did not have to go to war.

## CHAPTER 14

### The Power of Thought

There is real folk wisdom in the biblical statement, "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23.6). If we hold fear in our hearts, we will be more receptive to the things we fear. In a way we become mesmerised by our own fear. Our bodies respond in the direction of our thinking. Thus we lessen our ability to fight the thing we fear. On the other hand, when we believe enough in our own ability to overcome our difficulties, a physiological preparedness occurs within the body. We trigger an endorphin and biochemical response to assist the accomplishment of our thinking. Our bodies will respond in the direction of our positive attitude, our minds become concentrated and objective.

The mind is like the board of directors, drawing information from the subordinate managers. Some of these subordinate managers are habits, fears, hopes, prejudices and emotions, all ready to activate their special interests in the situation. Even before we become conscious of the reasons for our thoughts and actions, something has already been working within us out of sight. Daniel Goleman in "Vital Lies, Simple Truths" quotes an unpublished manuscript by Howard Shevrin. It says,

"We experience something 'popping' into consciousness, but a complex and unconscious process prepares that 'pop'.... Taken together, subliminal and attention studies show that our brains are humming with cognitive and emotional activity prior to consciousness."

So our thoughts and therefore actions spring from the storehouse of our accumulated experiences and emotional responses. Unconsciously we are analysing and selecting from our past knowledge and emotions to determine our present attitude or action.

Ernest Hilgard, a noted researcher of Stanford University tells of a classroom demonstration of hypnotically induced deafness. A volunteer was given the suggestion that he would be completely deaf to all sound. Loud noises, including the banging of pieces of wood together close to his head, were made without any response from the subject. One student asked whether "some part" of the subject might be aware of what was going on.

"The instructor....whispered softly to the student,... 'Although you are hypnotically deaf, perhaps there is some part of you that is hearing my voice and processing the information. If there is, I should like the index finger of your right hand to rise.'" While still hypnotised, the student asked if his hearing could be restored so that he could know why his finger spontaneously rose. The instructor restored his hearing and asked him what he could remember.

"I remember you telling me that I would be deaf-It was a little boring....when I felt my finger lift; that is what I want you to explain to me."

to me.

With the subject hypnotised again, the instructor then said,

'When I place my hand on your arm,...I can be in touch with that part of you....that could hear and know what was going on when you were hypnotically deaf-it will be able to answer me and tell me what it knows ....I shall say, 'Now you can remember everything.'....! am placing my hand on your arm.'

The following conversation ensued:

'...Does the part to whom I am now talking know more about what went on?'  
'Yes.'

'you made noises with some blocks behind my head. Members of the class asked me questions to which I did not respond. Then one of them asked if I might not really be hearing, and you told me to raise my finger if I did. This part of me responded by raising my finger.'

The instructor then lifted his hand from the arm. 'You said .... some part of me would talk to you. Did I talk?'

'...We speak of the concealed information as available to a 'hidden observer.'"  
(Quoted from "Divided Consciousness" by Ernest R. Hilgard. Copyright John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1977).

Hilgard shows that there is a deep hidden observer within us which is quietly observing information. The hidden observer is aware of that part of us which can become subject to hypnotic influences but the hypnotised part is unaware of the hidden observer. The hidden observer does not judge us or deal with pain or morals but quietly observes. It is not a separate identity but a facet of the whole person.

An excellent way to study the power of thought to control the body is to look at a person in hypnosis. During an hypnotic trance, subjects will believe implicitly in the operator and will not question their own ability to perform the suggested activity. Remember that suggestion and belief constitute the central phenomena of hypnosis. Normal body reactions to the awareness of our five senses can be overruled. By willingly accepting the suggestion of the hypnotist, somehow our normal inhibitory and logical mechanism is bypassed.

In "Wisdom, Madness and Folly" Dr. R. D. Laing gives us another illustration of altered consciousness.

"A professional hypnotist put me into a trance in front of several dozen people at a demonstration in his house. He asked me to choose a taste to taste. I chose a dry sherry. He gave me a dry sherry to savour, to roll around over and under my tongue and swallow at leisure. A very nice sherry. When I came out of trance, he invited me to try the sherry again. Its smell and taste were so repulsive that I could hardly get it past my lips. Yes, it was the same drink, the foulest-tasting harmless concoction he could get a pharmacist to make up.... The same hypnotist induced me to believe that I saw only six people in a room filled with over sixty."

We have shown how we can have hallucinatory perceptions about hearing, taste, smell and sight; four of our five senses. But the fifth is even more dramatic. Dr. Laing goes on to say,

"I could induce a blister in someone who believed I was burning him when I was not, and no tissue reaction when I was."

Not only was there an hallucinatory perception of the presence of a hot iron, the physiological response was that a blister appeared, although no actual burn was inflicted. And again, where there was a hot iron, and a blister could be expected, no physiological reaction occurred. Remember we said that suggestion and belief constituted the central phenomena of hypnosis. The power of the mind can even override the normal physical reactions of our bodies. This is a power we can use to reduce pain, stimulate healing within our own bodies and give us a positive happy life.

The late Dr. Leslie Weatherhead, the one-time leader of the Methodist Church, in his book "Psychology, Religion and Healing" gave a very similar report of personal experience. He tells us of a young woman he could easily put into an hypnotic state,

"Ethel could lie with her heels on one chair and her neck on another, without intermediate support, and on being told that her body was firm and unyielding, an adult could sit on her abdomen without her body yielding....Ethel's temperature could be put up as high as 104 degrees and brought down to 96 degrees by being told, under hypnosis, that these figures represented her temperature;

that her temperature was rising or falling, as the case might be. The figures were checked with clinical thermometers by medical men present. Her heart-beat could be accelerated or retarded and tested with a stethoscope. ...

Any part of her body could be made completely anaesthetic at a word, and needles, if driven into her in any area declared anaesthetic, produced no reaction at all. On being told that she had developed nettle-rash on her right knee, the area was soon covered with the familiar rash of urticaria, and most dramatic of all, when I touched her right knee with a pencil, telling her it was a red hot iron, and bound that part with a bandage and sealed it in the presence of medical witnesses, within twenty hours she developed a blister quite painless but puffed out with fluid. ....

Major operations have been performed by means of hypnotic anaesthesia. I myself have helped a dentist extract teeth from a patient who, for various reasons, was unable to take anaesthetic. Not only were the extractions painless, but haemorrhage was restricted by suggestion. There were no nauseating reactions afterwards, and one cannot help feeling that we have, in hypnosis, nature's own anaesthetic which possibly already operates in the animal world between cat and mouse, snake and bird, etc."

If the sensitivities of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing can so easily be manipulated, what other hypnotic influences are we subject to? What other kinds of influences can change our thinking into new directions? One wonders about the suggestive influence of advertising, seminars, preachers, television and even a smile on the face of one's wife or husband. We can see how easily one can be affected by the pressures of criticism or praise from another person. This applies especially to children. Do we all affect each other? Yes, in a mild hypnotically suggestive way, we do. We can also see the importance of self esteem. Positive or negative thinking can determine the happiness or unhappiness of our lives and affect health. The attitude of the mind can program the individual for success and happiness or failure and unhappiness.

You have probably heard how the Aborigines of Australia fear the bone-pointing ceremony. The fact is that an aboriginal person who believes in its power can die once he has been the victim of a bone-pointing occasion. The thought and fear alone are sufficient to make him fade away and die. There are incidents when doctors have been unable to reverse the process once it has begun.

Have we a hidden power to heal ourselves or at least relieve ourselves of pain by the use of relaxation and positive thinking? The answer must surely be yes. If we believe enough that we will be healed, the body will activate the biochemical or physiological machinery to assist in the process. I have a friend who was bitten in the face by a large dog. Her upper cheek and lower eyelid were torn. Her surgeon stitched up the wound using hypnosis as the only anaesthetic. Not only did our friend feel no pain, she healed quickly with no visible signs of the experience. There have been thousands of cases, my own included, where people have had dental work done using hypnosis as the only anaesthetic.

Surely this is faith healing, just as much as any performed by religious faith healers. Many Christians believe that healing is a proof of the existence of god. As we can show, healing is a natural function of the body and is assisted when enough belief and relaxation is applied. It has nothing to do with an outside spirit force. Both the hypnotist and the faith healer perform the same service in that they persuade their followers to believe in the process. The power does not come from an outside person

or god or vibration. The power is within each one of us and is touched off by our own thoughts, attitudes and beliefs. We do not need the mediumship of a god or an external force. The body has tremendous healing power if we will only trust it. I do not advocate abandoning medical assistance, trust in the healing power of our bodies should be used in conjunction with modern medical knowledge.

I cannot see any difficulty in the notion that my thoughts and emotional state can release hormones and endorphins and bring about relaxation helpful to my own healing process. In their book "The Pleasure Connection" D. and J. Beck comment,

"Consider the irony that while we search for external assistance, the biochemical potential for pleasure and happiness exists within the reality of Endorphins, and that this potential for euphoria and pain-freedom streams through our biochemical design....A negative consciousness, attitude, or perception might indeed hinder health or block the flow of health sustaining biochemicals, such as endorphins."

Our thoughts and attitudes can also be influenced by the actions of other people. Magnus Pyke in his book "There and Back" tells us of an interesting experiment with two groups of rats who were all cousins of comparable ages and sex. Each group was housed, fed and cared for separately but in exactly the same manner and conditions. There was only one difference between group A and group B. The girls looking after group A were told to show love and affection to their rodent patients. They were to talk to each rat, to fondle and stroke it. The result was that the rats in group A grew bigger than the rats in group B. So even small animals can derive physical benefit from human warmth and caring.

I can see, and have experienced, how love and caring can help to relieve the stresses in another person and thereby assist in their healing process. The Becks tell several well known stories of people suffering from terminal illness who have cured themselves by stimulating a positive personal belief in their own ability to overcome their disease.

About five years ago I read a book by a former athlete of Australia. He had developed bone cancer to the extent that his right leg had to be amputated in January 1975. By November the same year his cancer had reappeared on his chest. He shows photographs to prove his claim. By March his specialist thought he had only two more weeks to live. Ian Gawler gave the story of his fight and final victory over that dreaded disease in his book "How to Conquer Cancer". He says,

"The techniques talked about in this book have no religious loadings,...The techniques centre on appropriate diet, positive thinking, stress management and meditation - all in conjunction with suitable, specific therapies. By utilising all these means, the body's natural healing urge can be helped to restore itself."

When I read the book I wondered how real his cure had been. Was this just another story which had a sad and unheralded ending? Recently I happened to be watching the television when an interview took place with Ian Gawler himself. So I went to a lecture by him. It was fifteen years after he had lost his leg with bone cancer. I now saw a lean and obviously healthy man with an easy smile and relaxed manner. While he was ill and under the threat of an early death, the first question he asked himself was "Do I really want to get well?" The next question was "Do I want to take responsibility for my own condition?" You see his healing had to start with his own positive attitude and thinking. Ian Gawler's message is that the body will heal itself if given enough opportunity, care and attention.

Meditation or prayer is an exercise in mental self manipulation, akin to self hypnosis. It may encourage helpful positive thinking and expectation. But as with hypnosis, prayer cannot make an amputated leg grow again nor can it move an object from one position to another. The first thing to remember is that there are immutable laws of nature

such as gravity which cannot be directly cancelled by thought power alone nor can positive thinking create something new out of nothing. Many superstitious notions which contradict the laws of nature and distract from real living have been sustained by that kind of fanciful notion.

Many have a strong belief that healing thoughts can be transferred to another person without communication. So strong is their wish that they can gain a sense of validity from their own feelings. Others, including myself, do not think that it is possible that help can be given without direct communication or some other form of contact. But without doubt the knowledge of the love and caring of friends can stimulate positive thinking and attitudes within the sick. Healing power comes from within the person's own body by releasing helpful hormones and endorphins to assist the process in conjunction with modern medicine.

We are social beings and need the company of each other. We all enjoy the moral support and caring of our friends and benefit by the knowledge of their goodwill toward us. But physically, each of us is a separate identity, standing utterly alone, a self sustaining system, complete within oneself. Each of us is born as a unit and dies as a unit, and we bear our own actual physical and emotional pain. We also carry a great capacity for joy, optimism and fulfilment.

We have seen that what appeared to be supernatural or magic, was not the result of a god or spirit force. I am convinced that the power dwells within ourselves and is available for our enjoyment. The American psychologist, the late Willam James, once said that the average person uses only about one tenth of available mental capacity. There should be no question of our ability, we are capable of using this power by the exercise of positive thinking and attitudes, it can apply to every facet of our lives. Our bodies respond according to our own sincere belief and expectation.

Let us now look clearly at the concept of an independent god force. Is it possible that because of the ignorance and fears of our forbears, we have accepted and been taught a concept which is really no more than a figment of our own imagination? Perhaps we have assumed that we are powerless and in need of assistance from an outside spirit force. Perhaps many have been taught and believe in a god in the same way a small child believes in Father Christmas. Perhaps what was believed to be a demonstration of divine power is nothing more than the function of capricious natural forces. Perhaps it is we who have created a god and religious ritual to stimulate our faith, when all along, the power was within ourselves.

Without doubt our thoughts and attitudes largely determine the kind of life we experience. Positive attitudes bring positive results just as surely as negative attitudes bring negative results, stress and un-happiness. Our thoughts are a power source which we can use for our own betterment. This life belongs to you and me. We are equipped with our own power to live fully and happily in a straightforward manner without a neurotic dependency on an outside divine person or spirit force which is inevitably associated with the Christian doctrine. The marvellous thing is that we can change our negative thoughts to positive ones by an act of will, by simply deciding to do so.

## CHAPTER 15

### Humanism

Strictly speaking the following chapters are concerned with the behaviour of humans rather than the question of the existence or non-existence of a god. But we cannot discuss the notion of god and therefore religion, without looking at human behaviour. I wish to emphasise the difference between people to people relationships and a relationship between a person and a god. They are of course very different. The first is a social relationship in character and fact involving only humans. The second is a personal religious idea which need have no vital connection with anyone other than the worshipper.

In recent decades there has occurred the notion that the essence of Christianity is love, peace, justice and good works. Many believe that those qualities are dependent on religious faith. Those ethical concepts are people to people relationships, and are therefore social in quality, they are not people to god or belief relationships at all. There is of course no reason why a person cannot engage in the pursuit of both religious and social accord. The religious belief could even assist in doing so. So let us recognise that human beings are naturally social beings. We value the trust and integrity of fellow human beings most highly.

Our social nature is a very basic human quality, without which humankind could never have become a community. We give these qualities the name of humanism.

Humanism focuses on the instinctive qualities and relationships of human beings and not on mystical belief. It is known as the science of people and society. Humanism declares the potential of human beings; that they are complete within themselves and can achieve the highest excellence of their personal potential. Humanism would agree with Confucian philosophy that man is born innately good, and that he becomes less than good because of the pressure and evil environment to which he is subjected. The French philosopher Rousseau confirmed Confucian thinking when he said "Nature has made man happy and good but society depraves him and makes him miserable."

Important advances have been made during the last hundred years in understanding the nature of our own species. We have begun to examine the person as a whole entity and investigate the causes of human behaviour.

Humanism is not something newly dreamed up by philosophers. Buddha, Confucius, Plato, Jesus and many others throughout the ages have been humanists. Humanism has no fixed parameters. For our purpose, we will define it as an attitude of enlightened concern for the welfare of all human beings. The professor of psychology who was past president of the American Psychological Society, Dr. Abraham H. Maslow, had this to say in his book "Toward a Psychology of Being."

"I must confess that I have come to think of this humanist trend in psychology as a revolution in the truest, oldest sense of the word—.new ways of perceiving and thinking, new images of man and of society, new conceptions of ethics and of values, new directions in which to move....For any man of goodwill, any pro-life man, there is work to be done here, effective, virtuous, satisfying work which can give rich meaning to one's own life and to others."

Maslow paints a broad challenging picture which is being taken up by an increasing number of intelligent people of goodwill. Humanism covers a wide field; indeed, it is the study of human behaviour by humans and may rightly include our habitat

and environment.

Christianity views people as sinful, fallen creatures who will remain unworthy until they seek the help of a righteous god. The Bible presents a punishment and reward system of controlling human behaviour, sometimes called the stick and carrot method. It threatens punishment for disobedience and promises a reward in the next world for obedience. As a philosophy, the Christian religion has sought to herd human beings into a narrow compliance to an ancient myth. It makes demands but does not allow free growth. Jesus is supposed to have said "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). I would argue that these words are out of character, and are not the words of Jesus. They were recorded as being spoken by him after his crucifixion. Nevertheless, this absolute, unbending and limiting dogma runs right through the New Testament. There is no freedom or tolerance for genuine doubt or disagreement. The Christian message tries to use fear to persuade people to believe in its doctrine.

In contrast to the narrow Christian theology, humanism is able to look deeply into the causes and effects of human behaviour in a scientific way. It first recognises the social drives and needs of the human being. Indeed, a purely solitary human is almost a contradiction of terms. A basic human quality is our constant need for society; our conscious co-operation with other humans. This need I have called 'the social imperative', we all possess it in good measure.

The other side of our social imperative is our grinding self interest, which uses reciprocity as a means of self gain. We will digress for a while to look at self interest by including two or three pages from my previous book "Liberty to Live". It will illustrate how all of us are egocentric beings and never do anything for absolutely nothing.

"Let us ask why society complies with the universal law of reciprocity, what do we want from it? Could it be that the only reason we give is to receive something else in exchange. That none of us ever does anything for nothing.

This is a subject which sometimes stirs people up like few other ideas. We have been so indoctrinated with the idea of loving our fellow being but not ourselves, that we can feel very emotional toward the idea that there could be an ulterior motive behind our actions.

We do have innate drives relating to the survival of our species. One of these is to protect our personal dignity, another is a mother's response to her infant child. Even in these innate drives, there is a strong element of self interest. The following story shows what I mean but it also shows mother love in one of its truest and purest forms.

Years ago, before my boat builder introduced improved methods, he used to cast the lead keels for new boats in the factory yard. An old cast iron bath became a crucible and would be filled with ingots of lead. Around this he would stack and burn the offcuts of wood from the factory. Through a fitting in the bath he would run the molten lead into a prepared mould in the ground. There might be two or three tons of lead in the bath before it was released.

It was quite a spectacular occasion, the intense fire, the manipulation of the lead, the birth of a new keel. On this occasion the boatbuilder's wife and two small sons were watching the operation. Suddenly a large crack appeared in the old cast iron bath. Molten lead, like a river, flowed in two streams one each side and then completely surrounded one of their small sons.

Seeing what had happened, the mother ran through the molten lead to snatch the boy to safety, the result was very serious and painful burns to her own feet which required hospital care. A very brave and loving mother indeed she was. Did she think of herself? No! she thought of her child and only of him.

But she did not do it for nothing. She ran through that lead to save her child from suffering. To preserve her own love relationship with her son. She did not

think about it but she did have a self interest. She was preserving and protecting something very dear to herself.

I may ask myself, "why did my wife and I decide to share our lives?" Because we each wanted something from the other, including a home, companionship and acceptance. Why did you choose your husband; because you thought he would be a good provider for you and your children; because you could dominate him; because you needed someone to mother, or simply because he excited you and made you feel good, or one or more of many other reasons? One thing is certain, you did it for private gain of some kind; most likely some gain other than material, but personal gain nevertheless. Let us acknowledge that we are egocentric beings. We each think primarily of ourselves. There is always a reason why we do something. None of us ever does something for nothing."

Our need for social intercourse and our egocentrism could seem to be opposing qualities which could lead to social destruction. Indeed, without a measure of understanding, that can and does happen. When wars start, dialogue ceases. What ethical humanism seeks to do is to understand the needs of the individual and to suggest how our social imperative and our unique individual needs can co-operate to strengthen each other rather than create conflict.

Violence is a problem we need to look at. The use of violent force against persons and society is evident on all sides. We see powerful people subjugating the weak. People using others for personal advantage. We see violence being meted out to small children. War is community violence. Is all this violence and discord also a human imperative like our social imperative; something natural we cannot avoid?

The New Zealand Maori sought revenge (utu) for personal and tribal insults. They robbed their neighbouring tribes and fought hand to hand battles with their enemies. Another community, not far away on the Chatham Islands, people of the same Polynesian stock and similar language, had outlawed violent physical conflict. If violence is a human behavioural imperative, how could the Moriori have established a community where physical violence was outlawed? When they were invaded by a warlike tribe, they had no weapons of war and literally did not know how to defend themselves against their murderous cousins.

Violence is not a behavioural imperative in the same way that our social need is a human imperative. We are all capable of violence but we only use it when there is a hope of success or when there is an opportunity or advantage to do so. Violence is not an unavoidable necessity, we can control it. It is taught to us from early childhood as an easy alternative to reason. It is a breakdown of intelligent communication.

Violence is caused by a lack of enough respect for other human beings. The cure of disrespect of others is self respect. Self esteem tends to defuse the early training and desire for violence against others. We can find humanistic answers to our social problems.

### **Some Comments**

The Christian religion tells us not to be angry, lie, hate, or steal. In other words it tells us to repress the desire and then makes a threat of punishment if we do not obey. It does not deal with the problem. Humanism says that repressed emotion is harmful to us and may result in poor behaviour. It recognises that poor behaviour may be the result of a hidden emotional problem or lack of education or a deprivation. It calls for information by enquiring why one is angry, tells lies, hates or steals and then seeks to deal with the problem. It seeks to provide education or adjustments to cure the cause of the difficulty. It does not use fear or threaten a stick or offer a carrot of life in the next world. Given enough opportunity and understanding, we seldom need threats to make us decide. The most powerful and permanent decisions we make come from our own choices. We do not give of our

best effort when we are compelled to do something we have not chosen to do.

There is a profound difference between religious thought and humanism. The Christian religion needs fear to support its demands. Humanism suggests that given adequate opportunity healthy people prefer socially acceptable behaviour to anti-social behaviour. The Christian religion as presented in the Bible, focuses on death, self denial, sin and punishment in an after-world for evil deeds, all negative concepts. Humanism focuses on personal growth, self awareness, personal potential, dignity and self respect. Every person is equally a person of worth. Religion claims to offer rewards for the believer in the next life, humanism offers rewards in this life for both the self and society.

Some of the emotions which hinder acceptable behaviour are related to our egocentrism, our greed, jealousy or a desire to dominate, get even or gain power. These are also natural responses to situations. Running with these powerful feelings is a fear of being thought weak, stupid or afraid, or some other personal fear which we seldom like to share, even a fear of what the neighbours or our peers may think. This is where understanding and healing needs to take place. There is a deep need within each one of us which religion has taught us to ignore but which modern humanism and psychology emphasises. One of the most important needs is to learn self respect. Unless we can learn to love and respect ourselves, there is not much chance that we will be able to love or respect others in society.

We have seen how the ancient Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism viewed the continual struggle between good and evil and sought to encourage the former and discourage the latter. Confucius drew a comparison between the power of virtue and the power of absolute force. He regarded absolute force as the antithesis of the force of personal example, justice, wisdom and dignity. He preached the advantage of what we would now call a humanistic attitude toward individuals and society.

The problem of good and evil or the positive and negative sides of human nature is still with us. The Christian religion has certainly not cured the problem by imposing its absolute dogma of retribution for error. On the one side we have our natural social bias, which involves human contact, co-operation, compassion, an inner sense of justice, friendship and unity. On the other hand, there is a personal egocentric drive to be at least equal with our fellows in dignity, social standing and perhaps possessions. The poor and depressed may seem to tolerate a disparity of wealth and privilege; they have no option. It seems to me that when we are not accepted by society as persons of equal worth, our survival instincts can drive any one of us to anti-social acts in an attempt to redress the imbalance.

The religion of the Bible devalues life in this world in favour of the notion of a life after death. It tends not to acknowledge the innate social qualities found in all of us. Rather it tends to denigrate the natural human as a sinner in need of redemption by faith in, and dependency on a force outside the self. The limited and rigidly defined ethics as presented in the Bible tend to stifle our thoughts and feelings. If we restrict ourselves to measuring the worth of our experience by fixed notions of dogmatic religious thought, we limit our personal growth. If we disregard people to people relationships and our own in-built sense of rightness, and apply an outside dogma, we act as less than socialised human beings. We do damage to our psyche when we place the supposed truth of an absolute dogma ahead of human values and experience.

Perhaps that is one reason why so many people trust neither themselves nor any one else. We have been trained over hundreds of years by Christian dogma that everyone is bad and in need of salvation. We have discouraged the innate social qualities of candour, the sense of fair play and warm acceptance of our fellow beings. We use threat and force instead of understanding and persuasion. In other

words, our training tends to make us disregard our in-built spontaneous human response to our fellows and take the hard alternative of extreme self interest. Not only do we lock up our houses and cars, we lock up our emotions of warm human feelings.

Research shows that the great majority of our delinquents lost their way while they were still children. They never achieved self esteem, personal dignity and a sense of self worth. The building of these qualities, first in the individual and then in society, seems to me to provide at least one important answer to the problem of anti-social behaviour.

The human dilemma is a social issue found in the heart and mind of each person. Fortunately our personal problems can be solved by each one of us who is able to look deeply and honestly at himself or herself and make choices. You and I are each entitled to a full expression of life with dignity, honour and social acceptance, and we can gain this without loss to others. We shall talk about this next under the subtitle of "On Becoming a Person."

We have noted that we are each born with natural qualities of compassion and tenderness, a sense of justice and fair play. We all feel comfortable with harmony of sound and colour, beauty of scenery and friendship. We appreciate our ability to express ourselves in social activities, be it sport or other avenue. We like variety and adventure; we enjoy excitement, and we like loving and being loved. Together with our mental agility and social inclinations, we humans have incredible potential to enjoy life without resorting to anti-social behaviour. It is beneficial if we can recognise that each of us has these rich and varied qualities; that we are indeed persons of tremendous ability and worth. We all are certainly entitled to develop self esteem, self awareness and personal dignity which will enable us to achieve fully active and happy social relationships. When we acknowledge these qualities within ourselves, we will automatically recognise them in others.

The best and strongest qualities are those which spring from our own sense of dignity and the social imperatives with which we were born. What we can do is to learn to explore those qualities within ourselves. In the next few pages, we will look deeply at the self to see if together we can discover how we can get in touch with the real self.

### **On Becoming a Person**

Most of us are born with sound bodies and minds which remain sound for most of our lives. Yet many collect emotional attitudes, fears and anxieties which prevent a full and happy life. Let us look at what could be a serious blockage preventing us from being able to solve our problems. Let us see if we can understand and achieve harmony between the positive and negative sides of our nature. I have borrowed the title of this section from a book by one of America's most respected psychotherapists, the late Professor Carl Rogers. In it he says,

"Below the level of the problem situation about which the individual is complaining; behind the trouble with studies, with wife, or employer, or with his own uncontrollable or bizarre behaviour, or with his frightening feelings, - lies one central search. It seems to me that at bottom each person is asking "who am I. How can I get in touch with this real self underlying my surface behaviour, how can I become myself?"

The fact is that each one of us is a unique person, born of unique parents into a unique home environment. There actually is no other person in the world with the same genes, or the same life experience. Our responses to our own individual experiences have contributed to the persons we are. From the day of birth each of

us is entirely different from every other person on this earth! Each other person is also a unique person in his or her own right.

We know that we exist because our five senses of touch, smell, sight, hearing and taste enable us to be aware of ourselves and the world about us. Without these marvellous senses we could not be conscious persons. We can lose one or two of these senses and still be functioning conscious persons in our own right. Our five senses are the gateway to all of our experiences and understanding. In this we are all equal, rich or poor, female or male, black or white, big or little, there is no difference.

So what causes us to lose confidence in ourselves and lose touch with the real self underlying our behaviour? Obviously it must be our own thinking and attitudes gained from personal experiences since birth. The Australian aboriginal has something to teach us here. In pre-European times, when an aboriginal woman became pregnant, her child was understood to be a spirit child of the totem or sacred site near where it was conceived. This gave the child a birth right, equal with others, to the resources of the area. The tribes recognised and honoured that birthright. For all of life, child and adult, that person felt part of the locality and entitled to its resources. Each had a personal stake which established identity. It was a fact of being and belonging which was important and never questioned.

Our society, with all its advantages, fails to establish a personal identity in many of our children. Many seem to feel like a stranger in a foreign land, without rights or roots, strangers within their own society, insignificant among the human mass and with little sense of personal worth. They ask, as Rogers said, "how can I get in touch with the real self underlying my surface behaviour, how can I become myself?" My purpose in this section is to put into words, as clearly as I can, a way to restore a knowledge of personal identity, self worth and inner acceptance.

Our society has also been influenced, for many hundreds of years, by a religion with a limited and dogmatic doctrine which defames human character. The doctrine implies that we can only be controlled by punishment and rewards. So deeply rooted is this idea that many do not question it. But it is not true! The fact is that social beings are born with a dominant attraction to social intercourse, the social imperative we talked about earlier. We all like to be part of a community. We are all comfortable living in peace and harmony among our fellows. We all need each other. Sure, we rebel against injustice and indignities of all kinds. That is a natural response we make in an effort to preserve our personal dignity. Many others are deeply afraid of social disapproval.

Most of us became mesmerised from early childhood with negative indoctrination. We came to regard a large number of the human species as untrustworthy, scheming and dangerous. Our training suggested that we must continually improve our performance in order to remain competitive with our fellows. We often called it 'the rat race'. For many persons there is a continual threat of failure lurking in the background. In early life, we were often told that we were naughty, dirty, stupid or selfish. We became conditioned to esteeming ourselves as we thought others evaluated us. Instead of developing personal regard, many of us locked our thinking into personal disregard. Many become permanently mesmerised by repeated negative training.

The problem is that a person can be humiliated so often that one comes to think of oneself as less than worthy, perhaps stupid or lazy, or has many other self-denigrating thoughts. Then the tendency is to bring out an emotional whip and beat oneself again and again. No wonder we lose the zest for life and lack self confidence. But we are not stupid, we are intelligent and normal people. It is possible to reestablish the importance of our own personality again. Rogers calls

this "positive personal regard".

Most of us were fairly free and natural until we were about two or three years old. Some have retained their sense of self dignity, but others started and continue to take on the restrictions and pressures of convention. It is not easy to discontinue the bad religious and social habit of putting oneself down. Most people have had a great deal of practice since early childhood at self denigration.

We have looked at ourselves intellectually and decided that we are unique and equal persons, but it is not always easy to believe what our reasoning tells us. Somehow the intellectual statement misses the mark and does not touch our feelings. We can still feel ill at ease. Perhaps it is easier first to acknowledge that each person has an equal right to life. If we have equal right to life, then it follows that each of us is also a person of worth. Some of us may feel that we are only potentially persons of worth but that is not correct. The status of worth was given to us at birth, it is our birthright.

Please go back to Chapter 14 and read again about Dr. Hilgard's experiment at Stanford University. Hilgard demonstrated that there is a deep level of awareness within us which is quietly noticing the course of our experience. He called this the hidden observer. I believe we can become aware of the presence of the hidden observer without being hypnotised. We can explore our own inner feelings. When we do this, the new awareness can be a tremendous help in overcoming demoralising feelings. The hidden observer is that non-judgemental part of us that watches all the time. It quietly notices what is happening below the panics and screaming on the surface. When there has been a disruption and everyone is excited, we do not always notice the hidden observer. However, it is not unusual for people under stress to become aware of a deep peace and strength within themselves. It is the stress situation which is really the aggressor into the territory of our being. We can find quietness when we go below the screaming surface and find the hidden observer. A little practice will help us.

We are not divided into parts; the hidden observer is not a separate identity; it is ourselves, our real person. It is as if we are being imposed upon by the outside stressful situation we have been subjected to. That is the part which is not the real self. We feel the imposition as a pressure or convention placed upon us, with which we comply, but which we do not wish to own.

How shall we bridge the gap between our mental acceptance and our real feelings? Modern teaching tells us that we need to love ourselves before we can claim our birthright of equal membership in society. This is the hiatus or gap we need to come to grips with. Many will respond, "but how can I love myself". The answer is to give yourself credit and just commence enjoying the person you are! Live in the present, not in the past and you will increasingly find much to love about yourself. By nurturing the beautiful and good within us, we can learn to like and eventually love ourselves.

How can we escape or modify the past training? How can we free ourselves from locked in habits of negative thought?

Firstly we can acknowledge the origin of the offending training and that it did occur.

Secondly we can reject that training by condemning it as seriously damaging and inhibiting of human experience.

Thirdly we can set about creating a new image of ourselves and the development of feelings of personal self regard and worth. In other words re-establish contact with

our own social nature with which we were born.

Let us avoid placing limits on our thoughts. Let us get in touch with the real underlying human person we really are, acknowledging our social nature, the social imperative. Let us slowly get to know the real person without the veneer of surface compliance to the situation or anxiety. Let us start developing personal self regard by giving ourselves credit where we can. Take time and space for ourselves to enjoy our own humanity and environment. Commence making our own choices independently of other people. As we achieve this, we will find a sense of well being and new confidence coming into our lives, we will develop self esteem.

Basically we are all equally social animals who need and enjoy human touch and acceptance without conflict. We need stimulation and excitement but not at the expense of someone else. Conflict is a breakdown of communication, not an achievement. Many of us have become so enmeshed since childhood with a hierarchy of power and status that we can easily lose touch with humanity. Instead of enjoying the harmony and unity of nature and all human beings, we can, in our competitive anxiety to excel against others, cut ourselves off from the warm loving stream of life. We can become commercial units at the expense of tenderness and compassion.

It is as though we had been so busy with the notions of sin, guilt, blame and disciplining ourselves and others to conform to outside demands that we have lost touch with self trust and self esteem. We become afraid to trust our bodies, afraid to trust our minds, afraid to lose control. The result is that we lose touch with trusting and loving others. We can be in danger of dehumanising ourselves and becoming unfeeling human machines, not caring for others, cutting ourselves off from the very thing that makes us human, our social nature. It is that important! We isolate ourselves to our own detriment. The poet Alexander Pope said "True self love and social (love) are the same." Those who lose self love, lose the ability to love the society we live in. Our esteem of ourselves can programme us toward success and happiness.

A person may be very selfish and grasping, but selfishness should not be confused with self esteem. Selfishness demonstrates an inner emptiness or hunger which the person is trying desperately to fill. Self esteem is a force completely opposite to selfishness. It is a state, already filled with quiet satisfaction, inner contentment and sufficiency where there is no need to be grasping or displaying for attention. Out of the abundance and warmth that self esteem provides, we can easily and selflessly love others. It is only to the measure that we have filled our own lives with love that we can spill over with love to others. You and I are most important persons. We are social beings who benefit by having esteem for ourselves and those about us. Think about that.

## Chapter 16

### Choices and Opportunities

#### Life is not a dress rehearsal

One can take the attitude that each one of us is held captive by our psychological and temperamental make up; that we cannot escape from the mould in which we were cast; that we really have no choice at all, but must follow the direction of our training and temperament. While it is true that we are moulded in the past, and inclined to follow its directions, history, I suggest, proves that we do have choices, that individually we can bring about change. We are not compelled to follow established patterns. Education and social change can liberate us from convention. The American Pilgrim Fathers chose to leave Europe in 1620 to establish a community where they could live according to their own moral principles. Action followed their convictions and a new nation was established. The Wright brothers and others chose to spend their money and energies on building flying machines because they believed it was possible. Thereby they changed the travelling habits of millions of people and greatly improved world communications. Men and women of science everywhere have always chosen to trust their own reasoned conclusions and experiments to discover and elucidate the true nature of matter.

The fact that you chose to buy and read a book like this is a statement that you recognise that there may be another point of view about the existence of a god. Every day we give room to some ideas and let others pass by. We are continually choosing by saying yes or no to the passing parade of possibilities. There are very few things that we cannot change. Often we choose to put up with uncomfortable situations, but we do not have to do so. If we want to enough, we can change the situation. History is full of stories of men and women of action who set out and changed their world and society. The thrilling truth is that we can change our attitudes, thoughts and actions, but we must choose to do so ourselves; no one can do it for us. Personal development and emotional growth are within the grasp of each one of us if we want them enough.

We have suggested how the notion of a god, overlording the destiny of human beings, grew out of ignorance and fear. How religions developed from the idea that the gods required continual sacrifices to appease them and fend off their divine wrath. We have seen how religions built upon those ideas to create huge power structures of dogma, fears and fantasy which burdened the peoples of the world for thousands of years.

We have examined the authenticity and ethics of the Bible and found no evidence of divine origin. The Bible is unable to provide a better moral code than was already existing in the community at the time of its inception. It conveys the ethics and understanding of its own period of history. Modern philosophical, sociological and psychological research has opened out far deeper understanding of the causes and directions of human interaction than was possible two thousand years ago.

I cannot see any important difference between the power of belief in a god and self hypnosis. Each occurs within the believer's own mind and may appear to have superhuman power to motivate and stimulate reactions within the body.

There is a persistent idea in the minds of people that the teaching of Christianity is a doctrine of love and truth. As we have seen by looking carefully at the Bible and history, we can find nothing unique about its teaching. Love and truth have always been part of human experience, just as surely as have anger and greed. The roots of the Christian philosophy spring from the notion of retribution, the wicked punished and the righteous rewarded. When we equate love and righteousness with religion, we

confuse and deceive ourselves. History shows that religion has always been associated with bigotry, intolerance and physical and mental cruelty. When we break away from this narrow thinking of rewards and punishment we can begin to understand the causes of anti-social behaviour.

Human beings are not innately virtuous; but they are innately social beings and act socially toward their fellows without god or religion coming into the picture at all. We do not have to be persuaded to be human and social; these things come naturally to us when the malfunctioning parts of our personality are healed. Kari Marx said, "the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness." We can find true happiness through association in and with the society of which we are a part.

The things that mostly worried me about the Christian religion, were moral issues. I was never able to reconcile the idea of an almighty, just and caring god with the mindless and unjust suffering innocent victims experience. There is something seriously wrong with the notion of a righteous and loving god when whole communities can starve and die because of drought, earthquake or some other "act of god". I can see no reason at all for human beings to love or believe in a god who obviously does not love and care for all the creatures he is supposed to have created.

There is also something very false when we place religious dogma ahead of our own human social feelings and experiences. We become insensitive to the real essence of our humanity when we regard religious or any other absolute dogma as more important than person to person relationships.

Our species has devoted vast resources to building up gigantic structures of belief which have absolutely no scientific basis. There is no indisputable scientific proof of a spirit god or life after death. Yet millions of people pursue the notion in a manner similar to that of the primitives practising belief in magic. Most people believe in a god because they have been taught to think that he exists and have not had the opportunity or time to question that belief.

With our knowledge, and in our age, it is time we ceased chasing shadows and expectations of divine deliverance. It is time we really looked at all human races as people of equal importance and equal birthright. The power and resources are in our own hands to live individually a full and rewarding life in harmony with society and to contribute to the betterment of all peoples throughout the wide world.

We have noted how religion has denigrated mankind as unworthy and sinful beings but has failed to recognise their social worth or personal potential. Fortunately the ancient god of the Bible is becoming less audible. Science is filling up most of the spaces in our understanding previously occupied by the notion of a god. We no longer wonder who initiated the unexpected calamities which happen to us from time to time; instead we look to a lack of hygiene or some other physical cause. Occurrences which in the past, appeared to be the will of some capricious spirit force have now been explained by the laws of nature.

Powerful and far-reaching superstitious ideas about a supposed hereafter have come from Christian dogma and other religions. They have detracted from the independent responsibility of human beings to acknowledge their own worth in society and solve human discord by good law and ethical teaching.

Religion has suggested that the destiny of people is dependent on the will of a god or force other than themselves. Such religions bring into human relationships a distorting element that turns social humanistic values upside down by demeaning human worth. People have channelled a great deal of attention into the false premise of a god whom

they hope may be prevailed upon to solve human problems. They do this instead of being primarily concerned with human to human values, personal growth, social interaction and working for their own salvation in this life.

Religion has promoted a negative concept of human beings, emphasising all the failures it is subject to, such as jealousy and greed. It has been most concerned with an absolute dogma of a supposed controlling deity. Such a notion is totally without scientific proof and outside real human experience except in the imagination of religious devotees.

The Jewish religion grew out of the hazardous relationship the nation had with hostile neighbours and the myths of surrounding nations. Fear of being over-run centred their minds on tactics of survival. The adoption of an exclusive, national and supernatural god to protect them from their enemies was the equivalent of the magical forces used by the native Pacific Islanders and others which we talked about in the chapter on magic.

Christianity adopted the same notion of a saviour as did the ancient Hebrew religion. Instead of a Messiah for the nation, belief in Jesus is said to ensure peace in the next world. Throughout history, nations in distress have always produced Messiahs, either religious or political, in an effort to save the nation. In the mid 1930s, Hitler became the Messiah to the German nation. Churchill also became a Messiah to the British people. We could name nation after nation where a charismatic leader became the saviour of the people, or at least appeared to do so for a short time.

With the Christian concept of a divine saviour has come a whole string of dependent notions, which could fairly be defined in many people as dependency neuroses. They include the idea of the inadequacy of the human self, as a person of independent worth, able to control his or her own destiny. A modern Catholic priest, Felix Donnelly, who gained his doctorate in psychology and has specialised in counseling young people, had this to say in his book "Flames and Ether",

"Through human history, and certainly at the present time, the concept of the Deity has been used to deny individual humanity and to foster an unhealthy sense of personal un-worthiness and dependency."

The religious attack has been on the individual person's sense of self worth. Whereas modern research shows the value and need for self esteem, the Christian dogma denigrates the person as a sinner destined for damnation, unless he become the recipient of divine assistance. In trying to teach the need for salvation, religion has of necessity had to preach the sinfulness and unworthiness of mankind. But you cannot teach a precept without automatically creating an awareness of the opposite, as the following will illustrate.

My wife was educated in a school run by a restrictive order of nuns. She often remarked that in their concern for the purity and salvation of the girls, the nuns became obsessed with the opposite and in fact talked incessantly about sex, death and damnation. Sex was said to be the pathway to damnation. By attacking sexuality and calling it evil, they distorted the very basis of personal and family relationships and brought guilt and emotional suffering to their pupils.

The notion of a holy god and a sinful people found in religion has percolated throughout European communities right down to the individual. Our humanism has had to express itself in spite of dogmatic training which runs contrary to instincts. Religion has made us suspicious of our own worth, and we end up being suspicious of each other; each group being suspicious of the motives of every other group and each nation being suspicious of all other nations.

This attitude results in our regarding the world as a predatory environment. This is very evident in labour-management relationships. The adversarial system puts one side against the other; union versus management, capital versus labour, so that each endeavours to exploit the other. How much better it would be if they could adopt a win-win attitude and co-operate to achieve common goals for the good of all members of the establishment.

A natural outcome of suspicion is mistrust and ruthless competition, but the natural outcome of humanism is co-operation. Competition divides people into winners and losers, a few winners and many losers. Competition can leave shattered hopes and lives. On the other hand, co-operation implies a win-win situation where everyone benefits. The best business transactions result in both buyer and seller being pleased with the deal. We do not need to be ruthless predators. Co-operation can operate in the home, extend to the work place and the society in which we live. It provides for the needs of all participants.

I am not saying that religious dogma is the only damaging influence. What I am saying is that the premise of the Christian philosophy is damaging to human development. Christianity is an anti-life philosophy in that it teaches the superiority of life in the supposed next world. It assumes a person to a god or dogma relationship, at the expense of people to people relationships.

Instead of a person being able to say "I am a trustworthy person, therefore you are a trustworthy person", religion has taught many of us to say, "I am an unworthy and a sinful person". The corollary is that you also are an unworthy and sinful person. Fortunately, in recent times, we are slowly beginning to learn the real secret of inner harmony and success in personal and inter-personal relationships.

Our need, as the late Professor Carl Rogers taught, is for Personal Self Regard. This is the key to humanism and is the opposite to the idea of the un-worthiness taught by religion. Real self regard is a state of inner satisfaction where there is no emptiness or doubt. No one will tell you when you have reached that state, you will know within yourself.

The idea that one can gain the realisation of self worth through dependency on the love of a god or Jesus is a contradiction of terms. Dependency on a vicarious or deputed self worth is not self worth at all. Self worth is independent of the approval or opinion of someone else.

There is no doubt that the direction of the adult life is largely determined by the early life and experiences of the child. It is at our mother's breasts that our education begins. In spite of the many hurts and disappointments we suffer in life, there are persistent human qualities of tenderness, compassion, justice and a desire for social accord in varying degrees within each one of us.

It is as though the unfeeling religious dogma of rewards and punishment, demands of superstition and distrust, with all their attendant negative notions, have diminished but not destroyed the social imperatives of co-operation and love found (or at least potentially found) within us all.

It would be fine if all children could acquire self esteem early in life. We would begin to find that children would trust other children and the world would begin to change. But it is not as simple as that. It is usually only those parents who have self esteem themselves who will be likely to infuse self esteem into their children. We come down to the wise statement, "I can change the world by changing myself, I cannot change others." It is a matter of personally wanting change and doing something about it.

## Putting Thoughts into Actions

Religion can be a thing of the emotions touching deep senses of our being. True believers, whatever the doctrine followed, expect to gain peace of mind, a sense of rightness, comfort and assurance from their religion. They may look on god as a supreme father figure who will care for them in times of need. They feel submissive and sober in "the house of god". This makes it very hard for a person who has fully accepted the dogma to look dispassionately and honestly at religion.

Many may fear to investigate too deeply in case they place themselves outside the security they now feel and enjoy. My brother was invited to come with me to listen to a different point of view. He stated clearly that he did not want to have anything to do with another point of view if it could result in the loss of his Christian faith. He was not prepared to even consider testing the validity of his belief. In less than five years he was dead. I was very fond of my brother and have often thought that a change in his attitude and thinking could have added a new dimension to his life and perhaps affected his health.

I had intimate contact with many keen Bible students over forty years. I am convinced that honest enquiring Christians with few exceptions, are unable to fully resolve their doubts. I have heard them talk about 'wrestling with their faith.' They are compelled, as I was, to push the doubt away and resort to reaffirming what appears to be acceptable. It is not easy to break away from established associations and stand alone. The alternative as I see it is to live with divided emotions and restricted potential.

Many have been taught to carry a nebulous fear of loss should they not comply with their religious teaching about the supposed after-life. Some are looking for an insurance policy just in case the religion they have been taught turns out to be true. For two years I shared accommodation in Jerusalem with an Armenian lay-preacher who had been trained in the Baptist College in Beirut, Lebanon. He was born into a Christian family but due to certain circumstances had spent his early years with a devout Moslem family and was compelled to follow their practices. I knew him well as a committed Christian worker. During the sacred Moslem fast of Ramadan, I happened to go up to our room. Looking out on to the attached flat roof I was amazed to see my room mate facing toward Mecca and busily prostrating himself in a Moslem prayer. He was endeavouring to placate Allah just in case Islam turned out to be the true faith after all. I wonder how many Christians also follow church teaching as an insurance just in case religion and an after-life are real.

It is not always easy to accept the independence that rejection of god is bound to bring. Our emotions may be involved. It is like the cutting of the umbilical cord of a new born child, a severing of a formally supportive resource. In the case we are examining a severing of a supposed supportive resource of a god. It is vital for the child to have the cord cut so that it can become self sustaining and live an independent life of its own. Like the child we can only reach the full potential of our human experience by being free and independent.

The new child has the cord cut by others, a person struggling with doubt as to the existence of a god has to do the severing personally without outside help. Some of us, which certainly included myself, have put a great deal of time and money to support a religious belief. In the end we have to turn our backs on the past with all its memories. We must do this in order that we may step into a new and rewarding experience of an independent self sustaining life.

It is not easy to reject that which we formerly embraced, yet there is no logical or honest alternative. It certainly requires a personal decision to end inner conflict and to

open a new and honest chapter in one's life experience. For me the decision was followed by a tremendous sense of the shedding of unreality. It was as if I had been washed and cleansed of contamination. It was like putting down a weight I had carried for so long that I had become unaware of its presence until I experienced the lightness of being free from its burden.

Each individual who has the courage to make this decision will experience relief in a personal and perhaps different way, but relief is bound to occur. There is no reason why we cannot grow in human understanding and personal development. It is then that the rejected past with all its associations can become an asset to us and our knowledge and strength become of value to others.

One of our friends was spending the weekend with the family at our seaside cottage. It was situated a considerable distance from the services of a doctor. In the small hours of the morning our friend had a heart attack. I put him into the back of my motorcar and finally located the doctor who examined him and gave him an injection by the light of a handheld torch. The doctor quietly advised me to get him to a hospital, some eighty kilometres away, as quickly as possible and that he might not last the journey. When I got back to the car my friend said, "Steve - it looks like the end - well - no regrets - it's been a good life". I have never forgotten that remark spoken in the dark hours of a morning so long ago.

To me that was a marvellous statement by a man who did not fear death.

My friend's remark raises the question of why people fear death. Of course there are many reasons a person would want to hold on to life but we are talking about the fear of death. Is it the fear of an uncertain other life; the judgment of a god as taught by the Christian religion or just a fear of the unknown? Fear of the unknown would indicate a belief in a further existence. If we believe that death is the absolute end of human existence there could be nothing for a dying person to fear any more than we fear going to sleep at night.

All animals, which includes human beings, have a will to live and will fight to repel danger or harm. It is said that the will to live is the strongest drive we have. And why not? Life is full of opportunities that we may enjoy. The time may come, however, when it is apparent that life is drawing to a close. It is then that the fears of many may arise. Some of us, like my friend, may be able to say "No regrets, it's been a good life."

Let me remind you of two of the sayings of Confucius: "True goodness springs from a man's own heart." and "Virtue cannot live in solitude, neighbours are sure to grow up around it." Those of us who give expression to our natural human qualities of compassion, justice, love and goodwill will not be without friends. Like a spreading tree, love has many branches and each branch has smaller branches which carry green leaves and provide shade and comfort for other creatures.

If we have the courage to reject the religious notion of a god, we will find that we can accept that the world and its population, just is. We will then be free to eliminate religious confusion and directly pursue truth, peace, caring and social co-operation which go to build a just and equitable existence for all on this our beautiful planet. We do not need a god to implant noble and ethical standards of behaviour within us. We were born with a full complement of social assets. The opportunities are there for us to choose a self reliant and positive life-style characterised by full and happy relationships with our fellow social members. We can experience life in all its dimensions, but only if we choose to do so. Such a life will spring automatically from the strength of our inner security, peace and social awareness but most of all it will come from personal self regard. We only live once; let us live it well.

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