

SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

So many, so varied, and so outlandish are the religious ideas being proclaimed today that one is tempted to wonder where all these "new" ideas come from. And yet the more one examines them, the more one realizes that they are not new, but rather a restatement of the doubts and unbeliefs of the centuries. For example, much of our modern scepticism is mirrored in the statement made by the French philosopher, Auguste Comte, in 1822. He declared that all knowledge passed through three stages: (1) the theological or fictitious stage; (2) the metaphysical or abstract stage; (3) the scientific or positive stage.

Thoughtful Christians reject such a philosophy which says in effect that as belief in God and the church gradually ceases, belief in man and his powers at the same time increases, and devotion to human interests takes the place of Christianity. While it causes concern that men should preach in the name of religion such godless philosophies, it should not be surprising. Many centuries ago Paul warned against exchanging the vain ideas of men for the word of God when he said: 'Keep safe that which has been entrusted to you. Turn a deaf ear to empty and worldly chatter, and the contradictions of so-called 'knowledge,' for many who lay claim to it have shot far wide of the faith." 1 Timothy 6:20,21.

Without a doubt the primary cause of the confused religious scene is the rejection by many of the authority and reliability of the Scriptures. Despite what man might say to the contrary, the Bible is still our primary and most reliable source of knowledge of God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Bible is more revealing than tomorrow morning's newspaper, because it explains so many things to be found in that newspaper. Unscientific? When the curtain of history is pulled down and we see time in the light of eternity, we will be amazed at how accurately science fits in with the teachings of the Bible. Irrelevant? The Bible is relevant for all men in all times because it is the book that understands us! It is relevant for every day we live, because it speaks to the innermost recesses of our souls. It cuts like a scalpel, down to the place where truth is separated from error, hypocrisy from faith, and honesty from deception.

The Bible contains promises more valuable than anything the world has to offer. It brings hope in the midst of heartache and distress. It gives a glimpse into eternity while we are living in time. It gives stability in the midst of chaos, and certainty where otherwise there would be nothing but doubts.

At what personal peril we attempt to discredit the Scriptures. Without doubt we have come to the time when there "will be men who ... preserve the outward form of religion, but are a standing denial of its reality." Concerning all such, the Bible gives the warning, "Keep clear of men like these." 2 Timothy 3:5.

Doubt and faith do not grow on the same tree. The antidote for much of modern doubt is to be gained from a personal acceptance of and a fresh faith in God's word.

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His eyes scanned the burnt horizon, gazing over the scrubby landscape before coming to rest upon the blood-caked form of a near-naked man lying in the dust. It had been only a short time ago that the bloke, going down from Burketown to Cloncurry, had been set upon by a mob of layabouts in an old beat-up Holden. All his possessions had been stolen. Ants worked their way over trickles of his blood in sweat-stained crevices, while a lizard, with its ever-flitting tongue, watched.

The eyes, unseen, took it all in as a faint noise could be heard in the distance.

A campervan came bouncing along the rough track. The vehicle came to a dusty halt, and the driver, clad in Country Road shorts and shirt and a hat that didn't suit him, stepped out with his equally attired missus, to have a gander.

"Looks a bit dirty," said the tourist, as he brushed off his Doc Martins.

"Let's not interfere. I'm sure someone else will come along," said his missus as a spray from her apricot-scented perfume wafted lazily through the air, only to be vaporised the instant it touched the hot, baked earth.

"Besides, he has no clothes on, has he, dear?"

A cloud of red dust shot out from beneath the heavy vehicle as the pair left, seemingly in a desperate hurry to go some place important.

The eyes of the One hidden from sight took in the full picture.

The shadows of the scrubby bushes had not extended much farther when a man of the cloth happened along. With a deep frown on his tanned brow, he hesitated as he scouted his Land Rover around the ugly scene.

"Won't be able to stop", he thought to himself. "I don't want to be late for the fellowship lunch ... besides, I reckon he's ant-bait now, but I'll report it though, when I get to town".

In his haste to depart the scene, he covered the poor bloke in another layer of burnt dust.

The eyes still watched.

The echo of the padre's vehicle had long since drifted across the hazy plains when the distinct sounds of a horse making its way down the track became audible. The horse gave

a casual toss of its head to rid itself of some unseen insect, as the rider, an Aboriginal stockman, in a sweat-stained hat, slid out of the saddle. He bent over the sunburnt bloke, who now looked the worse for wear.

"Well, old clobber, I reckon you need a bit of a hand," he said to the bloke barely alive before him. He pulled down his swag and tossed it on the ground. No time for niceties now, his well-honed knife tore long strips from his sleeping sack. The lid of his water bottle made a grating sound as he opened it and the thread came in contact with grit caked onto it.

He tenderly splashed bore water onto the bloke's cut and bruised body, running it over his parched, cracked lips. With the bloke's body cleansed and bandaged, the stockman heaved him over the saddle of his bush horse and plodded off down the well-worn track.

The ants and the lizard watched as their presumed feast headed toward the horizon that was by now turning an even deeper hue of red.

He of the unseen Eyes followed along.

The lights of the pub twinkled in the distance as the stockman eased his horse down the slope.

"Should be some help here, old clobber," he said, as the aroma of good cooking invaded his senses. He tossed the reins over a railing and lowered the bloke onto his shoulder. The weight of his burden and the long day were starting to take their effect as he banged on the door with his pitted leather boot.

The padre and the tourist couple looked up in surprise from a table as the bloke's battered body was carried through the bar to the soft kindness of a springy bed. The stockman called for the Flying Doc.

He then pulled a rawhide pouch from his jacket and slipped some crumpled notes into the pub-owner's hand.

"This should cover for the bloke," he said as he added another note for pocket money. The night air caught his final words as he sauntered out to see his horse: "I'll drop in later to see how he got on."

And the Eyes of the unseen One shed tears. Some of sadness - some of joy.

Most will recognise this story as a modern Australian version of the Bible account of the "good samaritan". Which of the three passers by are we?

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