

BOOK REVIEW

Francis Burke Drohan, *Jesus Who?*, New York, Philosophical Library Inc., 1985, pp. 256, US \$ 24.25

This hard-hitting effort by Francis Drohan brings insights to bear upon the writings of both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible, conclusions that the very liberal biblical interpreter will rejoice to hear. At the same time it offers little comfort to the traditionalist who would simply like to overlook many of the scriptural inconsistencies the author is at pains to unearth. More Dionysian than Apollonian in his presentation, Drohan, a researcher in the humanities of history, hopes that his findings may make a significant difference in the understanding of the true origins of Christianity, although he thinks these same findings will have no great effect on Christian practices nor will they render the general Christian position insecure. It is readily admitted that any shift of emphasis in respect to the origins of Christianity as a religion could never serve to obliterate the kerygmatic gospel message preached openly by Jesus of Nazareth during his ministry in the early years of the first century A. D.

Ye'shua Bar Joseph, he who is known to us as Jesus, at approximately thirty years of age became an itinerant preacher, a moralist, a Jewish rabbi and a radical among the Pharisees of his day. His strict Essenic training and his subsequent teaching, which included the doctrine of forgiveness and personal salvation, was decidedly inimical to the high-ranking Jewry of his day and considered to be subversive by the Temple establishment.

As teacher and prophet he was eventually indicted and put to torture largely because of warnings of impending doom which he brought against his own people. As well, Jesus of Nazareth also has suffered due to the specious arguments attempting to convince the world of his divinity, making him the Son of God, the awaited Messiah and the Christ of the Gentile world. Yet the personage of Jesus, it is claimed, has formed the necessary but unintended bridge to the birth of a new and radical movement destined to become one of the great religions of the West, a movement that Jesus himself neither envisaged nor would have sanctioned and one that was perpetrated by men he never met. A new humanistic religion initially designed to find favour among the Gentile elite and commoner alike was made possible through the universal Christ connection instituted by one Saul of Tarsus, soon to become St. Paul the Apostle.

Drohan demolishes many of the shibboleths of religious utterance uncritically accepted by Christian believers over the centuries. For example, in New Testament times there existed no word, either in Hebrew or Greek, that had the same meaning we give to our word for church. "Moses" and also "Joshua" were Egyptian names. Moses spoke the language of the Egyptians rather than Hebrew and it was Moses and not Abram (Abraham) who was the true founder of Judaism. In fact the designation Hebrew is not of Jewish origin at all, but a distortion of the Egyptian "Habiru" signifying an inferior caste, exactly what the Jews were considered to be during their sojourn in Egypt. The so-called Mosaic law was not original with Moses, but was instead based upon the law of Hammurabi, king of Babylonia in the 18th century B. C. Psalm 104 of the Hebrew Old Testament is almost verbatim a hymn to Aton, the Egyptian sun god.

Jesus of Nazareth may have acted in the role of spiritual Messiah to his Jewish people, but scripture has never shown

that he aspired to be a *Christos* to or for the Gentiles, a mantle declaring for deity and the title claimed for him by St. Paul. Jesus was never recognized, much less accepted as the awaited Jewish Messiah in the royal Davidic tradition by his own people nor has he been to this day. Since there were not yet any Christian converts during the lifetime of Jesus, it could hardly be said that he was in any sense an awaited Christian Messiah either. It was the gospel writers themselves, it is alleged, more so than the events of the day about which they wrote, who were instrumental in bringing to fruition the prophecies from the Old Testament to which they made convenient reference. The Gospel writers were Gentiles who never witnessed the events to which they gave voice and and yet were obviously concerned to substantiate the claims of St. Paul in proclaiming the universal *Christos*, the man-god designed to serve the needs of the Gentile Greek and Roman world. Drohan believes that the Old Testament prophecies that have been claimed for Jesus have nothing whatever to do with the person Jesus who lived seven hundred years following their utterance. Specifically, Drohan gives an instance where the authors of Matthew, the first Gospel, take the prophecy concerning a Nazarite and write the word as Nazarene instead. The reader is thus led entirely astray, for the Nazarites were an ascetic cult first mentioned in the old Testament book of Numbers.

Jesus of Nazareth (or more accurately of Caperngum, since that was his chosen hometown) never referred to himself as the Christ in the Pauline sense and possibly never was conversant with the Greek term "Christos" or the Latin term "Christus", the literal Greek and Latin translations respectively for the Hebrew "Mashiah". The translated terms were made current by St Paul and his Gentile converts several years after the death of Jesus such that the *Christos* became a Gentile and not a

Jewish deity. Under the aegis of the translated term "Christos" and by virtue of what may be called the accident of semantical indeterminism, Paul was able nonetheless to claim a universal connotation for the term "Messiah" much wider indeed than the meaning originally intended for it in the original Hebrew scriptures. It may be said that St. Paul deified not so much the man Jesus as the Jewish title "Mashiah", a crown which Jesus never quite inherited.

The salient fact stands forth that even according to the prophecy of Isaiah, the Hebrew people, although promised a Messiah with a divine mission, were never, or never have been, promised a Deity which could replace Yahweh, the one and sole God they worshipped. Even if Jesus were the awaited Messiah and deserving of Hebrew Messiahship, he still would not be, and certainly could not be, raised to the status of a Deity among the Hebrews, a point that is either overlooked or ignored in the Christology that asks the world to accept the universal divinity of Jesus the Christ. Yet the Christos preached by St. Paul was and remains no less than a Deity ununiversalized for Jew and Gentile alike, a god-title which Paul associated with the name of Jesus without real justification for so doing beyond his own dynamic drive to evangelize the Gentile world in its need for a new religious conversion. St. Paul had borrowed the name of Jesus and his Essenic doctrine of salvation as symbols which could be employed in launching the new gospel message upon a Gentile world. Radical views attributed to Jesus concerning baptism, fasting, healing, repentance and judgement were possibly gained from Jesus' early association with the Essene ascetics who had their abode in caves alongside the Qumran wadis on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. Examination of Qumran pottery and recently discovered scrolls have already

revealed a great deal concerning the activities and beliefs of the Essenes, a monastic group that flourished from about 135 B.C. to 68 A.D.

After the death of Jesus his doctrines were promoted under the leadership of his brother James by a group that went by various names such as The Way, Zaddik Jews, Apocalyptic Jews or Jerusalem Jews. This Jewish sect regarded St. Paul, who made his headquarter at the Syrian town of Antioch, as an enemy and tried to kill him. To them the name of Christ was anathema and was certainly not recognized. The Christianity instigated by St. Paul strictly never had its beginnings in Jerusalem. It is worth noting that Jesus was arrested under charges of sedition against tradition by his own people, the Jews, who turned him over to their Roman masters for punishment by death in 33 A. D., and St. Paul himself was also later charged with sedition against Jewish tradition and given over to Roman officials to suffer death in Rome in or about 67 A. D.

St. Paul indeed assumed a great deal for the personage of Jesus, who understood and spoke Aramaic, a Hebrew dialect and who never subscribed to Christianity as it later came to be practised in the Gentile world. It was not the Jerusalem Jews, who never preached a resurrected Christ in the decades immediately following the ministry of Jesus who were the first Christians but St. Paul and his followers who, as self-appointed apostles, preached to the nations of the Mediterranean world. If it were not for the preachment of the Christ story under the imprimatur of Jesus as Messiah, the legend of Jesus and his gospel teaching would have ended at Jerusalem. It is St. Paul who is the founder, and perhaps the only founder, of Christianity as it has been subsequently taken up and taught to the western world since around 50 A. D. when Paul first wrote, fifteen years pre-
... 8

vious to the writing of any of the New Testament Gospels. It is St. Paul who is primarily responsible for Christianity in its liturgical form as we know it today. The ministry of St. Paul, amounting to an almost fanatical apostleship, elevated Jesus from practical obscurity in claiming for him a universal Messiahship and it was St. Paul who was the first to write the Easter story depicting Christ as risen Lord, resurrected from the dead. Jesus was deified as the alleged Messiah as a necessary link in support of claims made for the new Christianity which drew upon Gospel themes now to be made more available to a waiting world. Later Christianity, in attempting to meet the needs of the times at various points throughout the course of its long history, has glossed over many of these important details and tends to forget that Pauline Christianity was and has been heretical to established Judaism.

As an author Drohan is considerably given to conjecture, numerous instances of which may be found. His book is written certainly from a critical point of view, but it cannot go unnoticed that it is also penned in a more or less racy, uncomplimentary style. With obvious relish the author ferrets out the many discrepancies to be found in the scriptural writings that have come down to us. In the overall view we have a presentation which narrowly averts the serrated edges of cynicism and which for the most part lacks the reverence which a truly religious approach to various Bible themes might have warranted.

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BOOK RECEIVED

A Net Cast Wide : Investigation into Indian Thought in Memory of David Friedman; Ed. J. J. Lipner Grevatt and Grevatta. 9, Rectory Drive, New Castle upon Tyne NE 3 1XT. England : First published in Dec. 1986, £ 7-50 pp. X + 82.

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Anu Books, Shivaji Road. Meerut, First published in
March 1986. Rs. 75/- pp. XI + 136.

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CF2 4YD first published in October, 1986, £ 5-95, pp. 340.

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INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL QUARTERLY

Contributors to Volume XIV

Volume XIV, No. 1, January-March, 1987

Filita Bharucha and R. V. Kamat	:	Daviant Logics for Quantum Mechanics	1
David Kipp	:	Existentialism in Sartre's <i>Nausea</i>	27
Suman Khanna	:	Of Humility : A Study in Marcel and Gandhi	59
T. S. Rukmani	:	Patañjali's 'Prajñā' and Bhartṛhari's 'Pratibhā' : A Comparative Study	81
Bijan Biswas	:	<i>Pratyakṣa Pramā</i> in Advaita Vedānta	91

Volume XIV, No. 2, April-June, 1987

Binod Kumar Agarwala	:	Bentham's Principle of Utility	121
Galib A. Khan	:	Locke's Theory of Signification	135
Mercy Helen and Mihirvikash Chakravarty	:	The Concept of Metaphilo- sophy	141
Shankaran Nambiar	:	Can One Will One's Thoughts	149
Neelamani Sahu	:	Towards a Living Culture : A note on K. C. Bhattacha- rya's "Swaraj in Ideas"	159

Malati J. Shendge	:	Rationality as a Criterion for the Interpretation of <i>Rgveda</i>	181
Rajendré Prasad	:	Rationality, Rationalization and Justification	195
Raghunath Ghosh	:	A Problem Concerning Nyāya Theory of Nirvikalpa Pratyakṣa	209

Volume XIV, No. 3, July–September, 1987

Andreas Dorschel	:	What is it to Understand a Directive Speech Act ?	229
Gautam Biswas	:	Review of W. Dilthey's Concept of Understanding as a Method in Social Science	255
Meena A. Kelkar	:	Formulations of the Categorical Imperative	267
Neelam Puri	:	Concept of Alienation with Special Reference to the Thought of Karl Marx	279
Ranjan K. Ghosh	:	The Logic of our Talk About the Artist's Intention	287
Rakha Jhanji	:	The Role of Reason in Human Action	301
H. M. Joshi	:	Concept of Meaning	309
Ranjit Kumar Acharjee	:	Some Reflections on Social Progress	315

- P. K. Roy : Wittgenstein's Criterion for Determining the Logical Structure of an Elementary Proposition in the Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus 333

Volume XIV, No. 4, October-December, 1987

- Chhatrapati Singh : Deontic Logic and the Nature of Legal Reasoning 357
- James D. Sellmann : Free-will and Non-attachment in the *Bhagavadgītā* 375
- Jagat Narayan Misra : Śāṅkara : Some Logical Reflections 389
- Jagat Pal : Some Reflections on Universe and Null Classes 397
- Rita Gupta : Agent-causation and Event-Causation 409
- A. Raghu Ram Raju and S. A. Shaida : Popper's 'Closed Society' Reconsidered 431
- Indu Sarin : Phenomenological Inquiry into the Nature of Decision, Value and Personal Identity 447

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