

2nd letter.

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Robben Island Gaol,
Robben Island.

12th April 1967.

Mr Benjamin Pogrund,
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JOHANNESBURG.

I am afraid I cannot tell you what furnishings I have in my quarters. It may be classified information for all I know. However, I am quite certain that I do not require any additions. Replacements, perhaps.

And the first replacement will be that of my medium-wave radio. It has a chronic defect of wiring, I believe. The volume recedes and returns at will. I have had it sent in twice, at least, for just that specific trouble but after a month or so the trouble is back. In the meantime, the instrument devours batteries. If you think such a replacement possible please let me know and I shall inquire whether there is any objection to your purchasing the set yourself, provided, of course, that it produces only South African programmes which I think is what a medium-wave FM set does. My knowledge of physics is very limited.

Thanks, in advance, for the auto-bridge that Ernie and Jill are sending. I am a card fan, but my tastes are plebeian.

My wife left me a packet, in January, after teaching me "Patience" - a non-proletarian game!

Thank you for the books. I received them all. Please don't bother to send the "Sunday Times" supplement. It is a "foreign" newspaper and foreign newspapers are forbidden, irrespective, I believe, of their contents.

Now for the main thesis. Let me assure you that my break with Christianity is fundamentally doctrinal. Even if everybody around me were to live a truly Christian life, I still would reject Christianity.

And after sober reflection, Benjie, I don't think you should be bewildered. After all, we are Christians because we were subjugated by Europeans, whose cultural religion Christianity is. If we had been subjugated by Turks we would be fanatical Mohammedans as are eighty million Africans on the continent. Similarly, if Indians had subjugated us we would be fanatical Hindus. There is nothing inevitable, therefore, in our being Christian.

In South Africa, hardly a quarter of our people are Christians, in spite of the fact that, as in Nigeria, it is those who professed Christianity who got the most lucrative jobs. They were the "good boys" - trustworthy, obedient and loyal. If you wish me to expatiate on this, please tell me and I'll gladly do so. But to return to the doctrinal aspect.

I agree with all you say about Bonhoeffer. In the early years of Hitler, he like many others, was impressed by the dramatic change that came over Germany. Many church leaders admired the appeal of Nazism "to the best in German youth. They pointed with approval at the way young people were being called out of the dance halls and the beer cellars into the open air. They applauded a movement that made so much of purity ... They saw that young Germans were learning again to be proud of being German."

Two days after Hitler's assumption of power Bonhoeffer spoke against the "leadership principle". But his sermon was academic. He did not seek a clash with Hitler. He was pushed into it. All this information and more you will get in his book: "No Rusty Swords". Bishop Stephen Neill, in assessing Bonhoeffer says: "To suffer demands courage; to suffer and to hold on, although the suffering seems meaningless, is the work of super^eman". It is not at the beginning, then, that his greatness lies but at the end, as with Churchill.

Now Bonhoeffer says Christians have made of God a deus ex machina, a God of the gaps, to explain whatever men's reason and experiment could not. And, of course, with the increase of scientific knowledge, God's sphere has decreased. What for centuries have been described as mysteries, known to God only, man has mastered, explained

and understood. Bonhoeffer says 20th Century man has come of age and God might want man to become independent of him.

Of Christianity he says it was not founded in a temple or by a priest. It was founded in a desert place. ~~Caesarea~~ ^{Caesarea}, Phillipi on the most unreliable of men - Simon Peter. But he doesn't define "God" nor does he question the "Christ" doctrine. It is the legalistic, tradition-encrusted Christianity that he rebels against.

Bishop John Robinson ⁱⁿ ~~on~~ his Honest to God goes further. He says there is no God "up there" (as in a three-storeyed universe); nor is there a God "out there" in outer space. God is not a "Daddy in the Sky", he says. O K, then who is God? "The depth of our Being", he says. But he, too, does not question the "Christ" doctrine. He questions traditional interpretations of Christianity.

Now I've been brought up in a home where to even think of questioning anything in the bible is scored up as a success for Satan. I've suppressed all questioning. "Believe!" I've told myself. And when I found these theological minds asking the questions I've always wanted to ask, I applied my intelligence and found that they, too, were skirting the problem. They feared their own conclusions.

Central to the Christian doctrine is acceptance of Jesus Christ alone as saviour of the world. No one who rejects Christ as his personal saviour can be saved. Now, whatever its origins, Christianity today is the religion of Europe. So to me, an African, this statement means that only Europeans, whose religion Christianity is, and those of other nations who are the "spiritual assimilados" of the Europeans qualify for salvation. I reject that.

In the light of present-day knowledge I cannot accept the story of the ascension.

And all that the critics of Robinson have said is that he has caricatured Christianity. Not one critic has refuted any point he has made. Christianity still has to say, unequivocally, in public:

- (a) Is God a being? An additional being[~] even if he is a Super-being?
- (b) When we say Jesus Christ is the son of God, what do we mean?
^o Mohammedans, of course, say God has no son. He is self-sufficient.
- (c) Do they believe in a geographical heaven from which Christ came and to which he returned?
- (d) Do they believe he physically ascended through the

atmosphere and stratosphere against the pull of gravity?

Do I believe in God? I don't know. Robinson quotes *Tillich* with approval as saying: "The name of this infinite and inexhaustible ground of history is God" and that belief in God is a matter of "what you take seriously without any reservation, of what for you is ultimate reality. How many "Gods" does such a definition not permit? So much for that.

But I told you, Benjie, that the books on Judaism did not come through. Only Buber's "Two Types of Faith" came in. However, I'll give you my honest opinion in a later letter.

Σ *?*
~~Finally, I meant all I said about Margie, whatever my private fears.~~

Love to Jenny and thanks for her greetings.

Yours affectionately,

Bob.

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