

THE BIBLE AND VEGETARIANISM

BY

GEOFFREY L. RUDD

AND

WAS THE MASTER A VEGETARIAN

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REV. V.A. HOLMES- GORE

SIXPENCE

THE VEGETARIAN SOCIETY
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THE BIBLE AND VEGETARIANISM

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WE do not base Vegetarianism on the Bible, but it frequently happens at lectures that having presented the scientific, health and ethical aspects of vegetarianism, a member of the audience will jettison our arguments and sweep away humanitarian and compassionate considerations by quoting passages from the Bible which favour flesh-eating.

Our object is not to justify our way of life by recourse to the Bible, but to show that when Christians become so minded, they may find in their Scriptures a greater justification for vegetarianism than for flesh-eating.

At one time, not so very long ago, slavery, women and children working in coal-mines, capital punishment for petty thieving, public hangings and witch burning, cock fighting and bear baiting were accepted as being right. They are not condemned by the Bible but by a growing appreciation of Christian principles. Even the Church believed in torture and threat of execution as means towards conversion.

The duplicity of Abraham over Sarah, Jacob and Esau ; the thefts of Israel from the Egyptians ; the murders committed by Abraham in intention: by Moses and Jael, Jephtha and Elijah in fact; the polygamy of Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon ; the many wars and cruelties meted out to captured enemies and so on, might be quoted to justify such practices today, but why is it that what appeared right for one age is wrong for another? Surely, because we are evolving along more sensitive lines, and our understanding of moral values is growing.

The process is still going on, and we can suppose that many present-day practices will become distasteful to future generations — such things as obliterating mankind with explosives ; poisoning food with chemicals and, we would add, the slaughtering of innocent sentient creatures for food. For we already know that meat is not necessary for either health or long life.

So we see that even if some passages in the Bible do appear to justify slaughter, it is not a valid reason for remaining in a morally barbaric state of development. Dipsomaniacs can point out that Jesus drank wine ; if we wish to continue eating dead animals and perpetuate the beastliness of the slaughter-house we can cling to the authority of the Bible. There is a personal choice - we can be the last to let go of an evil habit, or we can be in the forefront of those pioneers who lead the way to better things. Remember the Suffragettes who saw that women were held in an unjustifiable position in life ; the Tolpuddle martyrs who believed that labourers had basic rights: the people who protested against and abolished slavery and child labour. All down the ages we find little groups of pioneers who saw the

next step and devoted their lives to the advancement of humanity ; the early Christians, including Christ Himself, took their lives in their hands to propagate a teaching of love and compassion, protesting against animal sacrifices and the oppression of Rome—they did not feel bound by ancient tradition, priestcraft, and the written word. We ourselves are in a similar position today. We can continue in the easy rut of tradition or we can begin to apply higher moral conceptions to everyday life.

The over-riding command of the Bible, of Christ and of Christianity, is to love God, and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Quotations against Flesh-eating

If the Bible only advocated flesh-eating there might be some slight justification for continuing the practice ; but this is far from the case. Vegetarianism is not only indicated but actually demanded—even with a literal word for word acceptance.

" Thou shalt not kill " may be said to apply to human beings, though it is not so qualified, and a recent change to " Thou shalt do no murder " makes its application more precise ; but other Divine commands are less equivocal: " Thou shalt not eat any blood," and in Leviticus (chap. iii, v. 17) it says: "It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings, that ye shall eat neither fat nor blood." This too is quite definite and further (chap. vii, v. 23): " Ye shall eat no fat, of ox, or sheep or goat. And the fat of that which dieth of itself, and the fat of that which is torn of beasts, may be used for any other service: but ye shall in no wise eat of it." In the same chapter it says: "For whosoever eateth the fat of the beast, of which men offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, even the soul that eateth it shall be cut off from his people. And ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings." There are many similar verses. Kosher killing, with ceremonial throat cutting and blood-letting if of ethical importance does not circumvent these instructions, for not all the blood of an animal can be drained from its arteries and the use of only the fore and hind quarters does not avoid the fat. Rather it seems clear that the ancient Jewish law-givers knew the dangers of eating animal fat and blood, and framed the laws with the thought that " If you must eat flesh foods then at least avoid these dangers."

Let us go back to Genesis. "And God said: let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed and fruit tree bearing fruit after its kind, wherein is the seed thereof upon the earth—and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree bearing fruit, wherein is the seed thereof, after its kind; and God saw that it was good. And God said: Behold I have given you every herb yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth and every tree in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed ; to you it shall be for meat, and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every "green herb for meat" (chap. i, verses 29, 30).

What could be more vegetarian? If we find contradictory passages we can only make our own moral choice for it is not unreasonable to suppose that the Scriptures were selected and edited so that the “weaker brethren” would be included in the Christian fold. Indeed, official Church histories admit that editing took place as late as the fourth century at the Council of Nicea, when the Roman Emperor Constantine accepted a form of Christianity which enabled him to continue traditional Roman life. Not that we suggest that vegetarianism was advocated before this time, but in modern times we have seen an example of a subtle change from "kill" to "murder," the latter in modern connotation applying only to human beings and not to slaughter in war time.

Emphasis on Vegetarian Food

In Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel i and ii, there are continuous references to food and the things suitable for food. They include: bread, unleavened bread with olive oil, pottage, milk and honey, manna, olives, fruit, fine flour, grapes, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, garlic coriander seed, pomegranates, figs, raisins, wheat, barley, corn, water, vinegar, wine, meal, beans, lentils and pulses.

When the children of Israel lusted after flesh—note the term “lusted—it was said that they should eat it for a whole month until it comes out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you (Num., chap. xi. verses 20 and 33). " While the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague."

The emphasis through all these Books is on vegetarian food—flesh-foods are mentioned with loathing. Riches and rewards are expressed in terms of milk and honey, not the pitiful parts and organs of dead animals. "Thy shoots are an orchard of pomegranates ; with precious fruits, henna with spikenard plants, spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes with all the chief spices " we find in the Song of Solomon—fruits, flowers, vines and nuts to illustrate the Divine bounty.

In Isaiah (chap. I, v. 11), " To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? Saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts ; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs, or of he goats . . . bring no more vain oblations ... your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth ; . . . and when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you, yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear ; your hands are full of blood." Perhaps not a dietetic condemnation but one against killing, nevertheless.

Isaiah's prophecy was that " the wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ... they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain." Not a far-fetched vision but a state of affairs which could be attained by the application of love and kindness. We all know of examples of cats and

dogs, foxes and squirrels and many other animals living together in complete harmony under the guardianship of animal lovers. There is no reason why, as our understanding of the purpose of life deepens and our sense of moral responsibility expands, Isaiah's vision will not come true.

In chap. lxvi, verse 3 it says: " He that killeth an ox is as he that slayeth a man ; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as he that breaketh a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as he that offereth swine's blood . . . yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations."

We also remember the story in Daniel where four princes of Israel were brought before Nebuchadnezzar, who appointed for them a daily portion of his meat and wine. But they refused to defile themselves with meat and wine and suggested that a test should be made by feeding them for ten days with pulses and water, comparing them with other youths fed on the king's meat and wine. "And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer, and they were fatter in flesh than all the youths which did eat of the king's meat," The value of a vegetarian diet was known even in those days. It can be stated that the Old Testament is predominantly inclined towards vegetarianism.

Early Christian Fathers

Many of the early Christian Fathers not only practiced and advocated vegetarianism on aesthetic and spiritual grounds but were extremely outspoken to their fellow Christians who hankered after the flesh-pots. This is what Tertullian had to say—" How unworthily do you press the example of Christ as having come eating and drinking into the service of your lusts! I think that He who pronounced not the full but the hungry and thirsty 'Blessed,' who professed His work to be the completion of His Father's Will, I think that He was wont to abstain, instructing them to labour for that 'Meat' which lasts to eternal life, and enjoining in their common prayers petition, not for rich and gross food, but for bread only "—by which it is seen that Tertullian was also faced with the problem of meat-eating. He was provoked to saying: " Your belly is your God, your liver is your temple, your paunch is your altar, the cook is your priest, and the fat steam is your Holy Spirit. The seasonings and the sauces are your chrisms and your eruptions are your prophesyings."

In the Clementine Homilies of the middle of the second century, founded on the preaching of St. Peter who was an intimate of the Master, we have: "The unnatural eating of flesh-meats is as polluting as the heathen worship of devils, with its sacrifices and its unpure feasts, through participation in which a man becomes a fellow-eater with devils." It is interesting to note here that all esoteric doctrines state quite emphatically that the use of flesh-food impairs the faculty of intuition and cuts the soul off from communion with spiritual spheres.

Clement of Alexandria, the finest philosopher of his time,

wrote: " Those who use the most frugal fare are the strongest, the healthiest and the noblest ... we must guard against those sorts of food which persuade us to eat when we are not hungry . . . For is there not, within a temperate simplicity, a wholesome variety of eatables—vegetables, roots, olives, herbs, milk, cheese, fruits and all kinds of dry food . . . those who bend around inflammatory tables, nourishing, their own diseases (the deleterious effect of meat-eating was known) are ruled by a most licentious disease which I shall venture to call the demon of the belly . . . happiness is found only in the practice of virtue. Accordingly the Apostle Matthew lived upon seeds and nuts, hard shelled fruits and vegetables, without the use of flesh."

Now in this quotation we again have a pointer to the habits of diet of those closest to Christ. It has been suggested (in the Clementine Homilies, xii, chap. 6) that Peter and Matthew were vegetarians. Hegesippus stated that James (the Lord's brother) was holy from his birth, drank no wine and ate no flesh—it is unlikely therefore that the rest of his family were meat-eaters. John the Baptist was an ascetic of the hermit type and lived on the simple fare of locust beans and wild honey.

It is controversial that the Master was a " Nazarene "—the name of a pre-Christian sect of Syrian Jews similar in some respects to the Essenes mentioned by Pliny and Epiphanius. The innermost orders of the Nazarenes and Essenes abstained from alcoholic drinks and flesh-meats. Since the Master is traditionally depicted as a Nazarene—with long hair, unshaven face and clothed in a single seamless garment; and since "Essene" means "bather" so that to be baptized implies initiation into the sect, His association with them in some way is indicated.

We also have the curious situation of Peter and James being attacked by Paul, who made disparaging attacks on those who abstained from flesh-foods (Romans xiv, 1-2; 1 Timothy iv, 1-5; Colossians ii, 16; ii, 20-21; 1 Cor. ix, 4).

Implications of Christianity

If we were to summarize Christ's teaching into a few words we should have Repent, believe, Love God with all our hearts ; love and compassion ; justice and charity. We are therefore, if we wish to become practising Christians, confronted with the task of interpreting these things into our daily lives. We must ask ourselves if the horrors of the slaughterhouse, trapping wild animals for fur and food, torturing defenceless animals in vivisection laboratories and many other abominations we inflict on the animal kingdom, are in keeping with love and compassion.

It may help us to understand many of the obviously allegorical stories in the Bible from Hebrew literature to know that they were largely influenced by Egyptian methods of presentation (Moses was brought up as a Royal Egyptian). They used symbols, glyphs and hieroglyphs. Animals were used to represent Gods and soul initiations—places to represent states

of spiritual unfoldment—and so on. All through the Bible we have the same kind of symbolism — the Lambs of God, the doves of peace, the four beasts in Ezekiel and Revelation ; even the four Gospels have their symbols: the Lion, the Ox, the Eagle, and the Angel-headed Man. Astrology too played a large part in the life of the people in those days ; every Royal Court had its astrologers and soothsayers, consequently the Ox (Taurus) and Fishes (Pisces) are frequently found as referring to the astrological age which people lived and may well have been used in a mystical and allegorical way.

But however we interpret the Biblical stories, one thing is certain ; the picture of a Son of God, Holy, Divinely compassionate with a knife in His hand, cutting the throats of life-loving creatures, is completely contradictory. " The letter is dead and killeth—but the Spirit alone hath and giveth life."

WAS THE MASTER A VEGETARIAN?

REV. V. A. HOLMES-GORE

THOSE who try to follow the vegetarian way of life are greatly hampered by the belief that the Master—known to the world as Jesus Christ—was a meat-eater. And vegetarians are even accused of setting themselves up to be better than He was. But no one who is convinced that vegetarianism is the only right way of life for a Christian can accept the idea that the founder of Christianity was an eater of meat or even of fish. Christians believe that the Master was greater than the Buddha, who regarded vegetarianism as an essential part of the pure life. It is therefore illogical for Christian vegetarians to assume the Master was content with a lower standard than Gautama.

Either the Master was a vegetarian or He was not the perfect example of humanity which He is claimed to be. For us there is no escape from this dilemma. We must therefore examine the reasons put forward for the view that the Master did eat meat and see how these can best be shown to be false.

All the evidence put forward comes from the four Gospels. It may be briefly summarised as follows: —

1. There are nineteen references to meat in the Gospels* and on more than one occasion the Master is represented as saying to the disciples, " Have ye any meat?" (John 21, 5; Luke 24, 41).

2. The Master and the disciples are supposed to have kept the Passover when they celebrated the Last Supper.

3. The Master is said to have eaten fish after His Resurrection. (Luke 24, 43).

*The nineteen references to meat are: *Broma*. Mark 7, 19; Luke 3, 11; 9, 13; Tohn 4, 34. *Brosimos*, Luke 24, 41. *Brosis*, John 4, 32; 6, 27, 55. *Prospugion*, John 21, 5. *Trophe*, Matthew 3, 4; 6, 25; 10, 10; 24, 45; Luke 12, 23; John 4, 8. *Phago*, Matthew 25, 35, 42; Luke 8, 55.

He is also represented as giving His disciples fish to eat (John 21, 9) and feeding the five thousand and four thousand on seven (or five) loaves and a few small fishes (Matt. 14, 17; 15, 36; Mark 6, 41; 8, 7; Luke 9, 13; John 6, 11).

And finally there are the two occasions on which He is said to have worked a miracle in order to help His disciples catch a huge quantity of fish (Luke 5, 6; John 21, 11).

Interpretation

Let us take the references to "meat" first. If we examine these nineteen references we shall see that none of them imply that the Master ate meat. Such sayings as " My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, "and" Labour not for the meat that perisheth" are clearly metaphorical, and in any case do not support meat eating.

But, even if some might seem to imply that He sanctioned flesh-eating, they do not, because all the Greek words translated meat mean merely food or nourishment. The words used are *Broma*—food (four times); *Brosimos*—that which may be eaten (once), *Brosis*—food or the act of eating (four times); *Prosphagion*—anything to eat (once); *Trophe*—nourishment (six times)- *Phago*—to eat (three times).

Thus He did not say, " Have ye any meat?" (John 21, 5), but "Have ye anything to eat?" And when the Gospels say that the disciples went away to buy meat (John 4, 8), it merely means food. So much for the references to meat.

[G.L.R.: It is interesting to note that the New English Bible gives the correct translation of these words.]

The Last Supper and the Passover

The difficulty of the Passover is far more serious. Tradition has for a long time assumed that the Last Supper was the Passover Meal, and this would imply that the Master and His disciples ate the Passover Lamb.

But recently scholars have come to see that the records are inconsistent, and that the only way of explaining the various references is to assume that the Last Supper was not the Passover Meal. The evidence is as follows:—

The Crucifixion took place on a Friday and the Last Supper on the Thursday evening. (The Jewish day began at 6 p.m. And therefore according to their reckoning the Last Supper and the Crucifixion were on the same day.)

Now the first three gospels state that the meal the Master ate with His disciples was the Passover Meal (Matt. 16, 17; Mark 16, 16; Luke 22, 13). St. John, on the other hand, states that the Last Supper was not the Passover, and that the Passover was on the Sabbath (John 19, 14, 31). In chapter 13, verses 1 to 4, he writes: " Now before the feast of the Passover Jesus knowing that His hour was come . . . riseth from supper and laid aside His garments; and He took a towel and girded Himself." Moreover John says, in chapter 19 (verse 14), that the Crucifixion took place

on the day of the preparation of the Passover (the day before the Passover) and in verse 31 of the same chapter he says the body of the Master was not permitted to remain on the Cross because "the day of that Sabbath was a high day," i.e., the Passover was on the Sabbath, and began at 6 p.m. on Friday after the Crucifixion was over.

This is perfectly consistent with John's statement in chapter 13 (verses 1 and 2) that the Last Supper took place before the Feast of the Passover, i.e., on the Thursday evening, and also with his statement that on Good Friday morning the members of the Sanhedrin refused to enter the Praetorium (or governor's residence) for fear they might defile themselves before eating the Passover (18, 28).

Thus John's account is perfectly reasonable and consistent, and flatly contradicts the claim of the first three Gospels that the Last Supper was the Passover Meal. Which are we to believe?

If we examine the first three Gospels carefully we shall see that even they contain evidence which supports John. Thus, Matthew 26, 5 represents the priests as saying that they would not kill Jesus during the Feast "lest a tumult arose among the people," i.e., not during the Passover (as John rightly says). Yet Matthew is so inconsistent that it puts both the Last Supper and Crucifixion on the day of the Passover. Again, it was not customary to hold trials and execute people on the first and holiest days of the Feast. Moreover, the Feast would not be called the Preparation as it is by Mark (15, 42), and Luke (23, 54).

Since the Passover was regarded as equivalent to the Sabbath it is unlikely that the people would carry weapons (Mark 14, 43, 47) or buy linen and spices for burial (Mark 15, 46; Luke 23, 56) if the Passover had already begun. Again, the haste with which the Master was laid in the tomb (Mark 15, 42-46) is consistent with the Jews' desire that His body should not be left on the Cross when the Feast had begun (i.e., Good Friday, 6 p.m.).

Another point which indicates that the Last Supper was not the Passover Meal is the absence of any mention of the lamb. As J. A. Gleizes says, "in substituting bread and wine for flesh and blood in the divine sacrifice," the Master "announced the new alliance between man and God, a true reconciliation with all His creatures." If the Master had been a meat-eater He would have mentioned the lamb, and not Bread, as the symbol of the Divine Passion in which the Lamb of God was slain for the sins of the world. And so everything indicates that the Last Supper was not the Passover, but was a fellowship meal which the Master had with His disciples.

It is significant that even such a pillar of orthodoxy as the late Bishop Gore says: "We will assume John is right when he corrects Mark as to the nature of the Last Supper. It was not the Paschal meal proper, but a supper observed as a farewell supper with His disciples. Nor do the accounts of the supper suggest the ceremonial of the Passover Meal" (A New Commentary on Holy Scripture, Part III, page 235).

Moreover, Dean Farrar, in his Commentary on St. Luke in the Cambridge Bible for Schools, says that it may be that the Last Supper "was not the actual Jewish Paschal meal, but one which was intended to supersede it by a Passover of far more divine significance " (page 325).

The Eating of Fish

And now we must examine the passages in which the Gospels represent the Master as eating fish or encouraging the eating or catching of fish.

In St. Luke 24, 41-44, we read that after His Resurrection the Master said to His disciples: "Have ye anything to eat? And they gave Him a piece of broiled fish. And He took it and did eat before them." It is perhaps significant that there is a doubt about the correct text of Luke 24, 42. The Authorised Version of the Bible follows certain manuscripts which say, "And they gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and of an honeycomb (a strange mixture of food) and He took it and did eat before them."

In John 21, 5-13, we have a somewhat similar action attributed to the Master after His Resurrection. He asked the disciples, Have ye aught to eat? And they answered Him, No." Then He told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, and they caught so many fish that they could not draw in the net for the multitude of them. And when they did manage to get the fish to land they found 153, and they cooked some of them and Jesus cometh and taketh the bread, and giveth them, and the fish likewise."

In the fifth chapter of Luke (verses 1-11), we have a different account of the miraculous draught of fishes, but here there is no mention of the Master or the disciples eating fish. It is significant that a number of critics have, for various reasons, doubted whether these stories refer to actual events. It is strange that the only occasion on which the Master is said to have eaten fish was after the Resurrection, and some have thought that the incidents were inserted by those who were anxious to show that He was not merely an apparition but had flesh and bones (Luke 24, 39).

It is, however, more satisfactory to take the stories in a mystical sense, as has been done by many. Indeed, John's version which says they caught 153 fish, is difficult to understand if it is taken literally; 153 is not at all a large number of fish—the actual Greek word means " little fish "—and anyone could easily drag them to land.

Moreover, the ancient authorities took the number 153 mystically, and made valiant but strange attempts to decipher its meaning. Thus Augustine of Hippo said it was an arithmetical progression from 1 to 17, 10 being the number of the Law and 7 the perfect number, and $10 + 7 = 17$. Others thought the number 153 represented the total species of fish known at that time. But the main point is that the story is mystical and not literal and therefore does not support the belief that the Master and the disciples were fish-eaters.

Some scholars regard John 21 as a late edition to the Gospel, and others

think that Luke's versions of the two incidents which John had joined together (the miraculous draught and the eating of the fish caught) are variant versions of the same stories.

Ethical Viewpoint

For those who believe that vegetarianism is the true way of life the ethical argument is stronger than any other. If we read in the Gospels that the Master did something unworthy of one who was perfectly compassionate we should know the Gospels to give a false picture of Him, and so when they represent Him as addicted to the cruel practice of eating fish we know they are false in this respect.

The stories of the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand have puzzled the scholars, who have attempted to give explanations of them most of which are far from satisfactory. Nor do the scholars reject them on moral, but on scientific grounds.

In the Gospel records there is one inconsistency in these accounts which throws doubt on their accuracy. The first three Gospels say that the feeding of the five thousand took place in the desert (Matt. 14, 13-21; Mark 6, 30-44; Luke 9, 10-17), but John says it took place on a mountain and that there was much grass in the place (John 6, 3, 10).

Mystical Interpretation

Some hold that the story really refers to a Eucharistic meal, and has been transformed into a "miracle" by the Evangelists, while others would interpret it mystically.

All Biblical students are familiar with the use of Bread as a symbol of Christ's Body or the Divine Substance, and we know that in the early Church the Fish was a Mystery term. The Greek word for Fish, I-CH-TH-U-S, is made up of the initial letters of the words **I**esous **C**hristos **T**heou **U**ios **S**oter, or Jesus Christ Son of God Saviour. It is found as a Christian symbol in the catacombs and was a kind of password or mystery term. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the term "Fish" is used in the Gospels in a mystical sense.

The mystical interpretation of Scripture was quite usual in the early Church, and Origen says that "while every passage of scripture has a spiritual meaning, many passages have no other meaning, but that there is often a spiritual meaning under a literal fiction." And Athanasius warns us that "were we to understand sacred writ according to the letter, we should fall into the most enormous blasphemies as by ascribing cruelty and falsehood to the Deity."

This is precisely what the non-mystical interpretation of the Gospels has done, for it asks us to believe that the Master, who came to preach a Gospel of love, was so inconsistent in His life that He ate the Creatures and encouraged others to do the same. To which the convinced vegetarian can only answer that if the Gospels teach such things then the sooner people stop taking them literally the better.

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