



IS RELIGION A CRUTCH FOR THE WEAK?

—by Peter Hammond

Some religions may be a crutch - certainly atheism is a crutch. However Christianity is no crutch and many Christians throughout history could hardly be classified as weaklings. It takes courage, integrity, boldness and honesty to stand for Christ.

Humanist and atheist, Bertrand Russell, wrote in his book 'Why I am Not a Christian' that: "Man is the product of... accidental connections of atoms...no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thoughts and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave...The whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruin...Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation

of unyielding despair can the souls' habitation henceforth be safely built."

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Christianity is borne from adversity

Russell believed that man is an accident of the cosmos, formed by chance and chaos, directionless in life, and in the end, nothing but food for worms. Russell maintained that religion is

simply a crutch for weak people, who cannot bear to face up to reality. Some religions may be a crutch. Certainly atheism is a crutch. However Christianity is no crutch and many Christians throughout history could hardly be classified as weaklings.

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The courage of Polycarp

When Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, was arrested and brought before the Roman consul, he was told..."Do this, old man, just curse Christ, and I will set you free."

Polycarp responded: "86 years I have served my Christ, and He has never done me any wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King

who has saved me?" "I have wild beasts" threatened the pro-consul. "Bring them" Polycarp replied. "If you despise the wild beasts I will have you burned," warned the consul.

"You threaten me with a fire that burns for but an hour, and then is extinguished. But you know nothing of the fire of eternal judgement which will never be extinguished. Bring what you will."

As Polycarp was led into the arena he was heard to pray: "Lord God, Father of our Blessed Saviour, I thank Thee that I have been deemed worthy to...die for Thee and Thy cause."

Steadfast unto death

Perpetua was a Christian noblewoman living in North Africa. In AD 202 when Perpetua was a 22 year old mother, she was arrested for being a Christian. When her pagan father visited and pleaded with her to deny that she was a Christian, Perpetua responded that it was impossible that she be: "called anything other than what I am, a Christian."

When the governor ordered Perpetua to worship the emperor, her response was decisive: "I will not!"

"Are you a Christian then?" "Yes I am!" Perpetua's determined response brought immediate condemnation. She was condemned to be thrown to the wild beasts and to die in the arena. Perpetua and her fellow Christians entered the stadium singing psalms in such a joyful demeanour, that the crowd demanded that they be scourged first. This was done.

Testimonies of courage

As the mob screamed abuse, Perpetua was heard to say clearly: "You have condemned us, but God will condemn you." Perpetua encouraged the other Christians: "You must all standfast in the faith and not be weakened by what we have gone through."

Witnesses in the stands described Perpetua in the arena as "young and beautiful", "a pure and modest Christian

lady", "with shining countenance and calm step, as the beloved of God, putting down everyone's stare by her own intense gaze."

Her example of Christian resolve and courage, choosing to suffer and die with a clear conscience rather than deny her Saviour, inspired generations of Roman Christians to stand firm in the face of relentless persecution. In time even the emperor was converted to Christianity.

Similarly, Lady Jane Grey refused to forsake

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her faith and was beheaded by her cousin 'Bloody Mary'. None of these Christians could have been classified as weaklings. Their faith was hardly any crutch to avoid reality!

Millions of Christians, over virtually 20 centuries, have endured false testimonies, unjust arrests, summary trials, floggings, beatings, imprisonment, stonings, burnings, crucifixions and

beheadings for refusing to deny their Faith.

One can hardly accuse people like Dr David Livingstone (who courageously pioneered missions, walking across the continent of Africa, confronting slave traders and setting captives free) of being "a weakling", nor can one suggest that his faith was "a crutch"!

Who is really escaping reality?

However, it is in fact the atheists who are seek-

ing to escape from reality. Atheism is actually a crutch for the immoral. Bertrand Russell lived an absolutely outrageously immoral life. His scandalous immorality and serial adulteries make it quite clear that he chose to create an alternate 'reality' in order to stifle his conscience.

The great philosopher Emmanuel Kant observed: life without an afterlife would be like a »