

# 'Soul Food': taking a second look

Woe to the unlucky man who as a child is taught even as a portion of his creed what his grown reason must forswear.

-J.A. Froude

About three months ago I reviewed a collection of Ken Ripley's "Soul Food" columns in this space. At the time I was responding to what I felt, and feel, is the basic sincerity of Ripley's approach to religion. The one significant fault in "Soul Food," I wrote, was Ripley's tendency to palter with social issues: to make sweeping moral generalizations and then fail to drive home particulars. ("Whether," I reflected, "he ultimately

will go the way of Billy Graham, or opt for more active involvement in social issues, even at the cost of losing some of his readership, will be an interesting question to see answered.") But, in truth, the question of applications is merely subsidiary to a far more nagging one, but one which I felt it would be improper to enter upon in so cursory a review. This is the fact, as I read "Soul Food," of Ripley's fundamentalism.

In the most recent "Soul Food," for instance, Ripley "challenges" the reader to make an honest inquiry into Christianity: that is, into the Bible, which Ripley regards as the "only authoritative and definitive source of Christian belief."

Elsewhere, particularly in his discussions of the Bible's historicity, Ripley strongly implies that he reads, and means us to read, the Bible in a literal sense. In other words, for him—as for Billy Graham and most of the popular American preachers—the last three centuries of true religious inquiry, starting with Spinoza, may as well never have existed. This kind of fundamentalism, which I feel whenever I read "Soul Food," has ramifications far wider and deeper than I suspect Ripley is aware of. It would be presumptuous of me to call Billy Graham, for instance, anything less than a dedicated and earnest man. Considering his profession, we betide him if he is; but the same kind of fundamentalism I see incipient in Ripley has drained all nutriment from Graham's particular brand of soul food. It threatens to do the same thing to Ken Ripley—to make his message repetitive and irrelevant; a truism—and this I should not like to see.

In his March 13 column, Ripley reports that when he visited the Meher Baba center, he "was struck by the

comment of one girl who told me in all seriousness, 'Baba is not like Christianity. He is for love.'" Ripley, himself in all seriousness, then argues that Christianity also is for love, and so an end to the matter. Well, not quite. For if it were, it would leave Ripley in the awkward position of affirming that Baba and Christianity are merely equally satisfactory forms of the religion of love for mankind. Hence, the indirect but ever-present undertone of assertion that Christianity, with or without its temporal advantages, is simply the true faith, and Baba, a false one. And this conviction, as I said, is grounded on a fairly literal interpretation of the Bible.

A hundred years ago, in "God and the Bible," Matthew Arnold wrote, "The first Christians misunderstood Jesus and had the multitude's appetite for miracles, the multitude's inexact observation and boundless credulity. They it was who supplied the data which Christian theology took from them without question, and has ever since confidently built upon... data produced and admitted with a want of intellectual seriousness." He comments further that Protestantism "admits unreservedly one set of miraculous data and builds

everything on them, because they are written in a book which, it says, cannot err; and this is levity." It should be noted that Arnold was not writing in a vacuum. Neither was he polemicizing against religion. He was attempting to formulate a "new Christianity," and he called "God and the Bible" an "attempt conservative, and an attempt religious." It was both.

When Arnold wrote, there had already been close to two hundred years of Biblical scholarship. It was known, for instance, that there were at least four distinct sources, often inconsistent with one another, of the Pentateuch; it was known that in all probability none of the gospels ever saw Jesus personally—that, at most, one had; it was known that the appearance and growth of Christianity were phenomena completely explicable with reference to their historical milieu; and it was understood that primitive religions were not merely precursors of a true one, but that all were cognate growths. Today, through the Dead Sea Scrolls, we even have knowledge of a messiah manqué, so to speak; a "Righteous Teacher" nearly contemporary with Jesus, who was martyred and confidently proclaimed by his disciples as the savior, but who, in simplest terms, never caught on.

And yet, in 1971, we have Ken

Ripley—whom I know personally and respect for his honesty and intelligence—trapped in a strident defense of Biblical literalism. And all the while he fails to perceive the essential dichotomy in his teaching: that if we can have love without Christianity, then love cannot be made an argument for conversion to it; and that when he relegates social concerns to the vaguest possible language to avoid offending segments of his readership, he as much admits that you can have the religion without the love. Hence, too, the increasingly noticeable repetitiveness of "Soul Food," and my belief that Ripley must soon face the decision whether to shuck the old beliefs, which a scientific and socially aware generation is finding less and less relevant; approach his subject from the viewpoint of psychology, which is an implicit elevation of internal over external, practice over myth; or, like Billy Graham, embrace the Biblical fable and its believers wholeheartedly—them and their pretense of social responsibility.

It is an unenviable position, having to decide whether to take the world as science and the best of human reason have perceived it, or as one has been brought up to interpret it, according to the Good Book. Woe to the unlucky man...

## Campus calendar

The UNC Sailing Club will meet at 7:30, Wednesday night, March 17 in room 304, Woolen Gym. This is an important meeting so please come if you are interested in our activities.

The Christian Science Organization will meet at 7 p.m. in the Wesley Foundation. All are invited to come, listen, participate...

IUNC today: Mrs. Ruth Jones (929-3538). Meet today for "The Most Out Of The Hollywood Restaurant" at 3 p.m. in the Hollywood Restaurant, 411 W. Franklin St., "a get-together for all supports and sympathizers of the King's Royal Restaurant."

The History Student Association will hold a meeting for all interested persons on Wednesday, March 17 at 7:30 p.m. in room 112, Saunders Hall. New officers will be elected and the future of the Association will be discussed. All history majors are especially urged to attend.

Walk Against Hunger this Saturday, March 20. Pre-Walk meeting tonight at 7:30 in Great Hall, NOT Carroll Hall. Milwaukee Walk film, "Miles To Go," will be shown. A brief discussion is planned. Walk cards are available at the YM-YWCA and at the Walk table in the Student Union up to Friday. Cards will be available Saturday morning, 7-7:50, at the registration for Walk at the Institute of Govt. Building near Carmichael Gym, on South and Country Club Roads.

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**Crossword Puzzle**

Answer to Yesterday's Puzzle

ACROSS	7 Pronoun	38 Unit of Chinese currency	48 Transgress
1 Sink in middle	8 Obscure	26 Thick	49 New Deal agency (init.)
4 Scour	9 Tentative sketch	40 Partners	50 Ship channel
9 Obstruct	10 Ventilate	41 Sped	53 Sun god
12 Before	11 Witty remark	45 Foundation	
13 Respite	16 Seasoning	46 Weaken	
14 Spanish for "river"	18 Difficult	47 A state (abbr.)	
15 Criticizes adversely	20 Eskers		
17 Map	21 Prepare and serve food		
19 Nobleman	22 Place in line		
20 Man's name	24 Facial expression		
21 Man's name	25 Eyedro		
23 Classified	28 Ingredients		
27 Winglike	30 French article		
29 Girl's name	31 Sesame		
30 French article	32 Secretary of Defense		
31 Sesame	34 Bright star		
32 Secretary of Defense	35 Printer's measure		
34 Bright star	36 Warning device		
35 Printer's measure	37 Ornamental knobs		
36 Warning device	39 Recall		
37 Ornamental knobs	42 Toward shelter		
39 Recall	43 The sweetsop		
42 Toward shelter	44 Son of Adam		
43 The sweetsop	46 Mephistopheles		
44 Son of Adam	48 Ascending		
46 Mephistopheles	51 Beverage		
48 Ascending	52 Attempts		
51 Beverage	54 Period of time		
52 Attempts	55 Dance step		
54 Period of time	56 Famed jockey		
55 Dance step	57 Posed for portrait		
56 Famed jockey			
57 Posed for portrait			

DOWN

1 Dry, as wine
2 Exist
3 Army officer
4 Urge on
5 Girl's name
6 Regret

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