Bibliographies/archival inventories

A secondary religious bibliography of Bertrand Russell

by Stefan Andersson

IN GENERAL AGREEMENT with previous secondary bibliographies in *Russell*, I have compiled a secondary religious bibliography of Bertrand Russell. In introducing it I shall say something about the problems connected with its compilation, the principles of selection, and finally a few words about the general picture one gets of what has been written about Russell and religion between 1901 and 1987.

There is one problem in this context that has to be faced, and that is what is meant by "religion" as opposed to "ethics", "morals", "politics", etc. Russell used the word in several different ways. In his first book, *German Social Democracy* (1896), he describes social democracy as a religion.² In a letter to Alys he describes her as "my Life, my Joy, my Religion",³ and to Lady Ottoline he writes, "how utterly, reverently, and religiously I love you." In his "Reply to Criticisms" he distinguishes between three different aspects of religion and ends by saying that he has found many people unsatisfactory without some form

¹ K. Blackwell, "A Secondary Political Bibliography of Russell", Russell, no. 33-34 (Spring-Summer 1979): 39-44; David Harley and Carl Spadoni, "A Secondary Educational Bibliography of Russell", Russell, n.s. 2, no. 1 (Summer 1982): 59-68; and K. Blackwell, "A Secondary Bibliography of Russell's "The Essence of Religion", Russell, n.s. 1 (Winter 1981-82): 143-6.

² London: Longmans, Green, 1896, pp. 1, 7.

³ Letter dated 15 Sept. 1894.

⁴ Letter #306, c. Jan. 1912, original in Morrell papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

of personal religion.⁵ A close reading of his writings reveals that he was not consistent in his usage of the word "religion" and its different grammatical forms. It is difficult to say what distinction Russell made between "mystical" and "religious". This is one side of the problem. Another is to decide the relationship between his religious views and his ideas concerning ethics, politics and education; are the latter derived from his religious views, or are they independent of each other? Perhaps one can associate his religious, ethical, and political views with his logical and epistemological ideas or vice versa? There are many questions one can ask in this context, and different answers will create different-looking primary and secondary bibliographies. Since this bibliography is a byproduct of my doctoral research on Russell's philosophy of life and his critique of religion, I am aware of the temptation of seeing traces of his religious views in almost all of his writings. The question concerning the internal relations among his ideas is a complicated one, and I cannot discuss it here. However, in order to give the user of this bibliography an idea as to which of Russell's writings I consider as central, here is the list of issues that I consider as being religiously relevant: the essence of religion, mysticism, the existence of God, the major beliefs of Christianity, immortality, free will, the meaning of life, the reality of good and evil, and questions concerning ethical behaviour.

In my research I have, apart from books and chapters in books, found more than 200 articles and reviews in the Blackwell-Ruja Bibliography where Russell discusses these issues. The next question is: which ones are most important? The answer to this question will be of help in deciding, e.g., which book reviews ought to be candidates for the secondary bibliography. Here is my list of his most important writings on religiously relevant topics: A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz (1900), Philosophical Essays (1910), "The Essence of Religion" and The Problems of Philosophy (1912), Principles of Social Reconstruction (1916), Mysticism and Logic (1918), What I Believe (1925), "Why I Am Not a Christian" (1927), Marriage and Morals (1929), The Conquest of Happiness and Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization? (1930), The Scientific Outlook (1931), Religion and Science (1935), "My Religious Reminiscences" (1938), "My Mental Development" and "Reply to Criticisms" (1944), A History of Western Philosophy (1945), "The Existence of God" (a discussion between Russell and Father Copleston) (1948), New Hopes for a Changing World (1951), "What Is an Agnostic?" (1953), "Do Science and Religion Conflict?" and Human Society in Ethics and Politics (1954), Why I Am Not a Christian (1957), My Philosophical Development (1959), Bertrand Russell Speaks His Mind (1960), and The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, Vols. I and II (1967-68). Some important essays, e.g. "The Free Man's Worship" from 1903 and "Mysticism and Logic" from 1914, were reprinted as part of books. That is why they are not listed here.

The establishment of a primary religious bibliography of Russell's writing is fraught with problems, and the compilation of a secondary religious bibliography can easily turn into something worse than what Sisyphus had to face—if one wants to be pedantic, ambitious and consistent, that is. I do not know of any sure path to the establishment of a complete secondary religious bibliography of Russell, so I have had to settle for a compromise.

The 209 separate items in this secondary bibliography can be divided into five major categories: (1) PH.D. and master's theses, (2) journal articles, (3) books or parts of books, (4) reviews of Russell's writings, and (5) entries in dictionaries and encyclopedias.

The first and second categories are the easiest to get information about by searching as many indexes as possible. I have consulted all the major indexes in the area of philosophy, religion and theology, but several of the items I found purely by chance during my research on Russell and religion. The principle of selection has been to include all items that discuss Russell and religion beyond a passing mention. The third category is problematic in two ways: first of all, it is rather arbitrary which books one finds which discuss Russell and religion since there must be hundreds of them; secondly, one has to decide if a certain book is worth listing. My principle has been to include those books in which Russell's views on religion are given a critical examination. The fourth category is also problematic, because there is a lot of information to be found in the Bertrand Russell Archives-several boxes of book reviews, lists of book reviews compiled by Harry Ruja and the Archivist, and other sources of information. In order to keep the secondary bibliography within reasonable limits, I have included only the best of the newspaper reviews. The fifth category consists of items collected during my explorations of different libraries' reference departments,

During the research for this bibliography, I have come to the conclusion that probably more has been written about Russell's religious views than about any of his other views. This is, after all, perhaps not such a surprise, since besides sex and money, religion is one of the issues that concern us mortals more than any other subject. I have often read that Russell's so-called "popular" books on religion, education,

⁵ The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell, ed. P.A. Schilpp (Evanston: Northwestern U., 1944), p. 726.

politics, etc., are less important than his contributions to mathematical logic and philosophy. Apart from the problem as to how one can exactly measure the importance, I am very sceptical about such a view. I think that Einstein's contributions to physics are more important than anything else he wrote or did, but with Russell it is another matter. What Russell did in mathematical logic was neither as original nor as important as what Einstein did in physics, if such a comparison makes any sense. Einstein's theories were important in the development of nuclear energy and nuclear bombs—a development which, on the whole, has had more bad effects than good. Russell's theories in mathematical logic have not, so far as I know, killed anyone, and on the other hand he has done a lot to encourage peace on earth. His critique of religion is of importance in this context because differing religious views have often been pointed out as causes of conflicts and wars. If Russell's writings on religion and politics have convinced anyone that differing religious and political views are not a good reason for us killing one other, then his popular books are certainly as important as his technical ones. Moore, Whitehead, Peirce, Wittgenstein and other philosophers might possibly all be more interesting and original as philosophers, but in my opinion no other philosopher has been as important as Bertrand Russell when it comes to the philosophical analysis of problems that concern all of us, and the way people in general have reacted to his popular books is a testimony of this influence. This perhaps cannot be strictly proven; it simply "shows" itself.

What general information concerning the writings on Russell and religion can one get from this secondary bibliography? First of all, approximately 95 percent of the items listed were written in English and published either in England or the United States. This is no surprise. On the other hand, one does also find items written by authors from France, Germany, India, Denmark, Sweden and several other countries. However, this bibliography does not reflect the great interest that Russell's ideas have attracted in countries like India, Japan and China. Several of Russell's popular books have been translated into more than fifteen different languages, so the proportion of items not written in English is probably much bigger in reality than this bibliography indicates. One general conclusion is that Russell's ideas on religion have reached and provoked reactions in almost all parts of the world.

Of everything that Russell said about religion, there are two essays and one lecture that seem to have attracted more attention than the rest of his writings. These are "A Free Man's Worship", "The Essence of Religion", and the lecture "Why I Am Not a Christian". These three documents all reflect different attitudes towards religion. In the first one Russell gives a rather dark description of man's place in the universe, and there is nothing that any religion can do about it; we will all die sooner or later, and there is no reason to hope for anything beyond the grave. The best one can do is to adopt a stoic attitude towards all the necessary suffering and enjoy life as long as possible. In the second essay he ascribes to religion a much more positive role, and although nothing specific comes out of it, he at least sounds very "religious".6 In his speech from 1927 he ridicules organized forms of religion and offers a rather superficial criticism in a mocking manner. When this speech was republished thirty years later with a number of his other writings on religion, religion had ceased to be a personal issue for him compared to earlier parts of his life when he really seems to have longed for some kind of religious comfort. As late as 1931, when he started to write his autobiography, he says that even his love for those who were closest to him was a way of suppressing his "vain search for God". Russell seems to have made a special case for what he called "personal religion", which he not only tolerated but even encouraged. But he was not particularly anxious to advertize this distinction when there were priests and bishops around or when he was invited to give a lecture to some atheistic organization. As he got older, he seems to have become more tolerant towards the intolerant, but a sure way of irritating him was to accuse him of being a Christian in disguise.7 These "accusations" were not totally unwarranted. In 1950 he declared: "The root of the matter ... is love, Christian love, or compassion."8 What exactly did he mean? Would Hindu or Muslim love have been equal alternatives? Or even plain love and common decency?

Considering the fact that Russell lived to be almost 100 and that during these years he not only changed his views on religion, but also was not very particular about giving an exact description of his views, it is understandable that Russell has been ordained with so many different titles—"atheist", "agnostic", "mystic", "religious atheist", etc. These different interpretations of Russell's religious position are reflected in the titles listed in this bibliography.

There are some interesting articles written about Russell and religion before he was generally recognized as a debunker of religion. After that

⁶ Even Russell's fellow freethinker Joseph McCabe remarks, in his otherwise negligible entry on him in A Rationalist Encyclopaedia (London: Watts, 1948), that in this essay "he accepted God as a sort of world-soul" (p. 513).

⁷ See "Bertrand Russell on the Afterlife", The Humanist, 28, no. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1968):

⁸ The Impact of Science on Society (London: Allen and Unwin, 1952), p. 114.

his commentators can be divided into three different groups: those who see nothing good in what Russell has to say about religion, those who see nothing but good in it, and those who try to give him a fair trial. Several of the most interesting things written about Russell and religion have been published in this journal by people who have done research at the Bertrand Russell Archives. A majority of them concentrate on the early Russell and on the years which were dominated by his relationship with Lady Ottoline. I do not consider his views on religion, as he expressed them in his letters to her, as being representative of his mature position. It was one phase in the development of his thinking in the same way as "Why I Am Not a Christian" is an example of another phase. What remains to be done is to examine the development of his religious thinking, both from a philosophical and a psychological point of view, and give a description of what can be considered as his final and mature view on religion.

Unfortunately, I have not been able to present this bibliography with all information completely supplied, but in those few cases where I have left a question mark, the item should be possible to identify anyway. Additions to this bibliography will be gratefully accepted c/o the Russell Archives. The items that were new to the Archives have mostly been acquired for its supporting library of books and articles.9

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⁹ I would like to thank the staff at the Lund University Library for their assistance in ordering many of the items in this bibliography; Sheila Turcon at the Russell Archives for her help; archivist Dr. Kenneth Blackwell who has encouraged my work, supplied me with valuable information, and given important advice concerning the final form of this bibliography, which has turned it into something much more useful and reliable than it otherwise would have been; the Centre for Computing in the Humanities at the Robarts Library, Toronto, for letting me use its facilities; and last but not least, The Swedish Institute and The Craaford Foundation for financial support.

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