

# The Germ of Anarcho-Atheistic-Syndicalism Harbouring within Christianity

## *A Response to F. LeRon Shults*

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God is a construct of the imagination that relativizes our understanding of the world. The god you profess to worship is the god you are. Gun-God; homophobic-God; left-God; right-God; Trump-God; money-God – repeat to fade. Yet the banal platitude echoes: God is dead. God is not dead for he (yes, “he”) never was. Lest we forget Paul Tillich’s (1886–1965) oft repeated phrase that it is as atheistic to say that God exists as it is to say that he does not. God does not exist; nor is he dead. He is as alive as the imaginations of those who keep his image alive. God is not dead; he is a ghost, haunting the world that his followers have constructed in his name.

F. LeRon Shults is correct in his assertion, following Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995), that Christianity harbours the germ of a tranquil atheism – although what one means by tranquil is unclear. Is there such a thing as a tranquil atheism? No more or less than there is the possibility of a tranquil theism. What is tranquil about theism? It is nothing but anguish, a painful scar of nothingness activated as Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) once wrote.<sup>1</sup> Likewise the many atheisms are no different – nothingness activated. The atheisms at the core of Christianity, as Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) perhaps more adequately showed, are anything but tranquil.<sup>2</sup> They are tempestuous; its believers (yes,

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1. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, London 2002, 239.

2. Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, London 2009, 220.

“believers,” for there is no place of non-faith, just faith of different kinds) cut adrift in its open seas. For Bloch there is only one thing that believers of atheism have and that is the search for a handhold and the feeling that one may find it. It is this searching, this feeling, that is the antidote to the many disappointments of atheism. But this is no place for those who still walk the Damascus road believing that they might see a light and hear a voice. They, writes Bloch, need ready-cooked food from on high. Bloch knows; this is no tranquil atheism, it is less than being in the good safe hands of an imaginary father, but it is more than any prescribed (and therefore false) handhold can provide, and it has a far higher view of man. It is better, too, than any of those ready-made, pre-flavoured foods that only go to ruin one’s real appetite – the appetite for more. The question that Shults’s paper leaves me with is this: what might the (un)tranquil atheism harbouring within Christianity do? What might it actualize? As Marx would ask: how does it make philosophy material? Or Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1930–1992): how might it inscribe itself geophilosophically on the plane of immanence? I propose that one possibility for the actualization of an (un)tranquil atheism is itself harboured within Christianity and what I consider to be a more accurate reading of Shults’s misreading of 1 Cor. 11:17–32, namely the counter empire impulse of the pre-Constantinian Christian community – an anarcho-atheistic-syndicalism.

Shults’s reading of the text as the Christians’ “failure to detect the real presence of a judgmental supernatural agent who was returning soon” fails to recognize the germ of radical anarcho-atheistic-syndicalism present in the early anti-Caesar rituals of the early Christian community. “For when you are eating,” writes the author(s) of the text, “some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk.”<sup>3</sup> Amongst the many exclusive tables of the Roman Empire – only open to the rich and wealthy, and generally male – a new egalitarian table was to form the centre of the Christian community. This new table was to be a profound critique of the top-down, economic system of the Roman Empire that perpetuated social inequalities. Those who turned up early, to eat, drink, and consume, leaving nothing for those who were actually in need were bringing an ethical judgment upon themselves. At the core of this early Christian ritual was an immanent materiality – an ethical impulse for the least among them. The question then, for atheists, theists, and agnostics alike is this: amongst the many tables of late-integrated-capitalism and the multitude of inequalities that it perpetuates, what tables are we setting?

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3. 1 Cor. 11:21.

Our age needs a thought that strips away the intricate simulacra of clarity that infests modern philosophy and religious reflection. The clarion call is this: “wake up from your enlightenment coma; realize that the demon was Descartes all along.” For to think the thought pregnant with anarcho-atheistic-syndicalism is to stumble; not upwards; not in transcendent figments of wild other-worldly imagination – fairy tales; Unicorns and gods. To think like this (to act like this) is to stumble onto the surface, to fall over, and with dirt in our hands remember – we are always someone, saying something, about something, from somewhere. There is no thinking a thought outside of thinking itself. We are here, and here matters. Thinking must matter now or it does not matter at all. This is anarcho-atheistic-syndicalism, tranquil or not.

This is an immanent endeavour, its direction not toward a detached transcendent realm, constructed in the imaginations of those who lay claim to special insight or revelation; those content on partying like its 1399. The subject matter of this kind of thinking is now – it is here. Nothing can slip through the net of this enquiry. There is no gap between a sacred and secular realm. There are realms intricately folded into each other – a weaving together of possibility, promise, disappointment, and hope. This is what it means to think in the presence of an absence of a god who never was. To think like this is to realize that the surface of the ordinary world looks different in the context of unrestricted questioning. The hands of those who enquire like this are dirty. Their thinking is one that exploits the strategic de-racination of ordinariness, that begins in the middle of experience. This task does not begin and it does not end – it is and it insists. God is a construct of the imagination that relativizes our understanding of the world. May we walk the Damascus road and realize that there is no light and there is no voice, just the dust beneath our feet – a luminous immanence. ▲