Chapter – IV

The Influence of the Bible on the Plays of Christopher Fry

The enterprise
Is exploration into god.

- *A Sleep of Prisoners*

While Fry accepts the presence of man’s sense of fear and isolation in an incomprehensible world, his basic and stronger belief is in the omnipresence of God. This world according to Fry, is

A world in which we are poised on the edge of eternity,. A world which has deeps and shadows of mystery in which god is anything but a sleeping partner. (232-233)

It is true that at moments man is convinced that he is the victim of a cosmic joke and suffers anguish at the cruelty of callous fate. But Fry’s conviction is that man’s moral task is not to turn his back upon the visible universe, but to turn toward it, and relate himself to it. (65) Fry believes that God is an active partner in man’s journey through life, and faith in God’s benevolence helps man to relate himself to life. In his affirmation of the loving God, Fry’s viewpoint is the exact opposite of Nietzsche’s which denies God and holds that no one is accountable for existence to God. Fry explains in a subtle serio- comic way that each man is accountable for existing, that he is the result of a special design and that he can strive towards god by “nearness of approach” (11). Fry affirms God’s existence and believes that man can redeem the world only by his accountability to God. This then is belief in the Bible, the word of God.

Fry holds the view that only when man’s mind takes hold of the fact of his responsibility to God Almighty, he takes on earnestly the moral duties of life. (73) The characters depicted are not all saints or men of perfection. Fry portrays the ordinary man,
the believer and the saint. They are then, not paragons of virtue, even as real men are not. He merely shows that perseverance and response to the mystery of life from deep within the self is a means of comprehending in a human way the unfathomable ways of god. Thus he seeks to make manifest that though we cannot comprehend the nature of the Infinite we know the new strength that come into a life when the human will is brought into harmony with the divine will The Bible manifests God in His power and love. In his plays, Fry deals with the omnipotence of God but puts greater emphasis on His compassion. He depicts the God of love of the New Testament. Fry’s view is a Christian one but inclusive of persuasions of world religions.

Fry is convinced that doing the will of God opens the eyes of the understanding, and helps man in his evolutionary progress towards the higher plane. In this sense Fry’s vision embodies a union of man with God and man with the whole of humanity. Fry’s underlying postulate is the twin commandment of loving God and one’s is a recurring design in Fry’s plays. The plays make explicit the undeniable fact that.

The all-round life cannot be separated from the earth, nor from god. It lives in the world, but is not of the world... it has to do with every interest of men; it soars up perpetually to do with heaven. (112)

Benedict Nightingale observes that “Fry’s view always is that reality is charged with a wonder we too often fail to perceive.” (238) Thus the kindly chaplain in The Lady’s Not for Burning voices what Fry wants to convey.

… everything astonishes me, Myself most of all. When I think of myself I can scarcely believe my senses. (TLNFB156)
Being alive to this wonder is what makes for life. But in the process Fry does not
egate the presence of evil. In a note written in 1944 he acknowledges the existence of
good and evil as “the ice-cold water of the problem of good and evil, “12 into which man
has to plunge. Even when man is incomprehensibly drawn towards evil, Fry affirms that
grace awaits to direct erring man. Fry therefore asserts,

God, creator of the world, whose ever present power sustains in being each
infinitesimal entity, whose all-seeing providence is concerned with the minutiae of our
day-to-day experience no less than with the great sweep of human history, is the one
abiding inexhaustible Fact. (49)

This unavoidable ‘Fact’ is what Fry confirms time and again in his plays. In this
process the Bible has had its influence on him. Some of the plays he has been
commissioned to write are for festivals and therefore deal with relevant Biblical themes.
Even so, his treatment is original and the theme or incident is no stereotype. He subtly
renders the subject relevant to man’s life and experience, not in the past alone but for all
time making it clear that belief in the Biblical account of God and in the Bible as the
word of God is relevant always. Through his plays he asserts that man’s belief in a
power or Mystery beyond his own ken gives him a haven from the anguish of existential
alienation which he has faced and continues to face in modern times.

In The Firstborn Fry portrays God as omnipotent working His will among the
Israelites to win freedom for them, while he subdues the Egyptians. Here he is seen as
God who is aware of the minutiae of everyday experience as well as the one who shapes
the destiny of a people. Moses, the chosen leader of the Jews, feels this, and is the
spokesman of his race. Moses’ growth is “a movement towards maturity” (50) and he is
the first among the Jews to grasp the will of God even as the others struggle to do so. Fry
presents the Jewish race as one.

Who felt the constant pressure of the religious and ethical ideals deriving from
their faith in the Lord, whom they dare not picture, whose very name was too sacred, for
utterance. (46-47)

This is the Old Testament concept of God, Yahweh, whose ways defy all
description and who is fiercely protective of the Jews. His might results in their freedom.

The theme of the play is the Exodus, an archetypal image of the movement from
bondage to freedom. This incident recorded in 1200 BC is still relevant today as it
reflects man’s movement away from a drugged death-like existence to abundant life.

Fry’s treatment of this theme brings it close to twentieth century man as he brings to life
the apathy, bewilderment, grudging activity as well as the responsive enthusiasm of the
different individuals he portrays. Most powerful and thought provoking is Moses’ initial
eagerness, his puzzlement at times when he is caught in the conflict of loyalty to his race
and obedience to God, as well as anguish when Rameses dies.

Fry traces the incidents that lead up to the Exodus and makes use of chapters 5 to
12 of Exodus. The play commences with Moses’ re-entry into the lives of Egypt’s
Pharoah Seti, his sister Anath, and son and daughter Rameses and Teusret, Moses’ early
life at the palace is encapsulated in Anath’s nostalgia-ridden account of Moses. Moses’
entry with Aaron, to request Seti for Jewish freedom begins the conflict. Moses has to
still all his affections for Egypt and Anath in his endeavour, a difficult process for one
who has experienced love and affection through Anath. Moses and Aaron present Seti
with the statistics of Israelite labourers dead. The Pharaoh remains unmoved. As they leave, Anath intuitively predicts increased trouble.

Against the Biblical framework Fry endows his characters with flesh and blood and the ancient conflict is enacted anew, through the dialogues and actions of the main characters. Another feature of *The Firstborn* is that Fry has, with unmatched empathy, portrayed the Jew’s initial unwillingness to move towards change and faith. For this purpose he has introduced incidents into the original framework but without deviating from the Biblical account. One such instance is seen in Act I Sc III when Moses’ visit to Miriam’s tent is dealt with the detail. Miriam accords him a grudging welcome. His return spells only trouble for her and she is hurt that his interest is in the dead Israelites and not in his living sister. When he makes clear his intention of freeing the Jews, she declares him a danger-maker. With a deftness at portrayal of human emotions Fry shows what irks Miriam. Her jealousy finds expression in her statement. “A king’s daughter/Swallowed him and spat out this outlaw.” (TF 74). Miriam’s over-protectiveness towards her son, Shendi, as well as her reluctance to face change are clearly conveyed. She says:

We have A way of living. We have the habit. Well? It becomes a kind of pleasantness. (TF 75)

Her apathy is the result of constant suppression under Egyptian rule and the belief that the Jewish race has a “wildfowl” quality of blood which tempts sportsmen. These convictions combine in her to bring forth her comment. “We’ve no more spirit to support a God” (TF 76). Herein is voiced the recurring conflict and fear of the Israelites that
Yahweh has deserted them. This is offset by Moses’ conviction, “We have a God who will support the spirit/And shall be found’. (TF 76).

The next incident by which Fry renders Biblical narration a drama of human relationships is the imagined account of Rameses’ encounter with Moses, whom he hero-worships, in Miriam’s tent. Rameses’ pathetic attempt to let bygones be bygones and to unite the estranged Moses and Seti is seen in his desire to have Moses accept the generalship that his father offers. Moses has a deep affection for Rameses but it is tinged with sorrow as he knows that Egypt and Israel will have to go in different ways.

Egypt and Israel both in me together. How would that be managed? I should wolf myself to keep myself nourished. (TF 78)

At this point Shendi is brought in, in the throes of terror as he fears capture by the Egyptian overseers, for striking. But Rameses saves him. Aaron is convinced that Rameses can help the Israelites but Moses will have none of it. He relies entirely on God’s guidance, not on palace manoeuvring and says.

Somewhere, not beyond our scope, is a power Participating but unharnesses, waiting To be led towards us. Good has a singular strength Not known to evil, and I, an ambitious heart Needing interpretation. But not through Rameses, Never through Rameses I will not use him: (TF 85-86)

These words convey that Moses places his trust in God and is ready to be an instrument in the working of the Divine Will. He is convinced that Good will triumph.

But his resolve not to use Rameses is an instance of dramatic irony for it is through God’s use of Rameses that Moses’ temporary estrangement from God occurs later in the play.
In the third scene of Act I, is described the mood of merriment in the palace at Rameses’ oncoming wedding with Phipa of Syria. Into this atmosphere of gaiety comes Moses with the body of a dead Israelite boy. When Seti refuses to listen to Moses, he declares.

Deny life to itself and life will harness and ride you To its purpose. My people shall become themselves, By reason of their own god who speaks within them. (TF 95)

When Moses reiterates that he is born to this action there is thunder. At this point Moses’ reaction is that God does hear the human call, yet Moses has not really understood his role nor God’s, completely.

Am I given the power To do what I am? What says the infinite eavesdropper. (TF 96)

At the beginning of the next act, Fry starts with the Biblical account of the changing of the waters of the Nile into blood as given in Exodus. (20) Though this is not enacted the phenomenon is explained when Miriam are unwilling to believe Moses’ part in it. Meanwhile Shendi returns with the news that he is made an officer and has to fight the Libyans. When Moses declares that he must refuse the commission, Shendi’s outburst is the voice of his grudge against Moses.

The rest of us can keep Against the ground, and lose the whole demand world Because Moses prefers it. (TF 103)

Aaron wants Moses to meet seti and speak to him. Anath enters to persuade Moses to stop destroying Egypt. Though nothing of her mediation is mentioned in the Bible, Fry gives it credence by hinting at Pharohi’s manipulation of Anath to soften Moses’ attitude, and yet not yield to Moses’ demands.
The plagues as seen in Chapters 8 to 10 Exodus are shown as having overtaken Egypt. This is not enacted on stage. Anath narrates the devastation in Egypt caused by the plagues, in her admonishing of Seti. Anath becomes the voice of the Egyptians reeling under the burden of a great sorrow. The tragedy that strikes Egypt is evident as she accuses Seti of Egypt’s pain. Fry keeps to the order of the different plagues and Anath tells of the first seven—“a plague of frogs”, “disease swept all the cattle”, the nation becomes “loathsome with boils”, the cold hard hail rains down and “the curse of the locusts” descends of Egypt as seven times in succession Sethi promises to free the Israelites and breaks his promise. Fry introduces an altercation between Seti and Rameses, the former adamant in his desire to use Moses to defeat the Libyans, the latter eager to set the Hebrews free, after Egypt’s torment under the plagues. But news of Shendi’s disloyalty to his own people drives Rameses closer to his father in a resolution not to rebel. As Moses returns to ask for liberty, the eighth plague of darkness hides the sun in Egypt.

In the first scene of the final act the Jewish race waits eagerly for God’s will to work at Passover. Fry bases this scene on Exodus(27-29) The narration gains dramatic quality in Fry’s hands as he visualizes the trembling hope of the Jews, Aaron’s bewilderment at Moses’ orders and Miriam’s conflicting loyalty to her race and to her son. God’s promise to the Hebrews is expressed by Aaron.

We have splashed the blood three times over the doorways That is quite inexplicable. It is drying in the night air, At this moment, while I speak. What happens, I ask myself, when it is dry? It means our freedom. He has told me so. Tonight we’re to go free. (TF 123)
Though Miriam still thinks that Moses is mad, Aaron’s belief in him is stronger as her had seen Moses awakening each man to a new awareness. At this juncture Shendi enters to take his mother away with him to reap the rewards of his new life. But Moses returns and tells them to be ready for a journey. Shendi rebels and blames Moses for their plight. But this is the time when Moses ‘belief in God’s will is at its strongest for he says.

The sound of god. . It comes, after all, it comes. It made The crucial interchange of earth with everlasting: (TF 126).

His conviction is firm as he adds: It comes. And by the welding of what loved me and what harmed me, I have been brought to that stature which has heard. Tonight at midnight. God will unfasten the hawk of death from his Grave wrist, to let it rake our world, Descend and obliterate the firstborn of Egypt. (TF126-127)

Moses’ joy at God’s power blinds him to that which strikes him with stupendous force only when Aaron remarks that Pharaoh should feel fear in his heart. Moses realizes that Rameses too will die. Filled with shock he exclaims.

Do you see the ambush I have blundered into? I heard god, as though hearing were understanding. But he kept his hands hidden form me. He spoke, And while he spoke he pointed Aaron, he pointed At Rameses, and I couldn’t see (TF 128).

His anguish is marked in his words. “God is putting me back with the assasins.” (TF 128). As Moses rushes to the palace Fry presents Shendi’s struggle between being an Egyptian and returning to the Jewish fold. Even as he tears away his Egyptian uniform claiming he is a Jew, he believes death will strike him. Instead he is left with life which he regards as death from the beginning.
Moses enters the palace just when Rameses learns that Seti plans to hand over the kingdom to him. Moses’ breathless announcement that they must rally to give Rameses life is not understood by the others. Moses cries out helplessly.

In life’s name, what are we? Five worlds of separation? Or can we be five fingers to close into a hand to strike this death clean away from us? Has none of use the life to keep him living? (TF 137)

To Moses God is now a foe, a wrestler with whom he has to grapple for Rameses’ life. As he struggles his anger mounts.

Good has turned against itself and become its own enemy… What must we say To be free of the bewildering mesh of God? … Rameses, There’s no more of me than this. This is all: I have followed a light into blindness. (TF 139)

Even while Teusret cries out that love can save Rameses with Phipa’s arrival, Rameses dies according to God’s decree that Egypt’s firstborn will die. As Seti and Anath regard Moses in an infinite sorrow, Moses’ depth of desolation and estrangement from God is seen.

Anath- Egypt, why was it I that had to be disaster to yours? I do not know why the necessity of God should feed on grief, . . . the blame could impale me forever; I could be so sick of heart that who asked for my life should have it; or I could see Man’s life go forward only by guilt and guilt. (TF 140).

But Moses breaks free from the darkness of existential anguish and the question of ‘why’ for he says.

The wilderness has wisdom. And what does eternity bear witness to KF not at last to hope? (TF 140)
God gives his followers the strength to endure. Moses is able to say to the despair- ridden Anath. We must each find our separate meaning in the persuasion of our days until we meet in the meaning of the world. Until that time. (TF 141)

Thus against the background of the Exodus Fry presents the turmoils and anxiety of the Jews and their reluctant and at times half-hearted attempt, to strive towards liberty. At their head is Moses the chosen leader who faces greater conflicts, questioned by his own race, shaken at times by the strange ways of god and struck with sorrow at Rameses’ death. But Moses emerges from this estrangement from God due to his sense of commitment and belief in God’s will being the best plan for man. Richard Schacht notes that the Hebrew Bible has a succession of imposing figures who are alienated. He names Moses as one of the outstanding individuals who remain a stranger among his own people. But Moses is able to reconcile himself to the working of Providence because his belief is that life has to go on even if all things seem most baffling or apparently shocking. (39) Moses undergoes a painful experience. There are moments when God seems an antagonist.

But this is part of the evolutionary process from estrangement to acceptance. “Religion is the transition from God the Void to God the Enemy, and from God the Enemy to God the Companion.” (31) Thus Fry depicts Moses undergoing these stages before his final acceptance of and complete belief in God’s ways.

Erich Fromm observes that “man’s striving for freedom, dignity, solidarity and truth is one of the strongest motivations of historical change.” (345) Fry shows in The Firstborn a race striving for liberty and dignity. Though it is based on the bible it is homologous to the situation and experience of various races through human history. But
Fry seeks to assert that even as man strives for growth, he must submit his will to the Divine will despite momentary experiences of prostration. Fry endeavours to evince that.

What we call the ‘will of God’s is the movement of His Love and wisdom, ordering and governing all free and necessary agents, moving movers and causing causes, driving drives and ruling those who rule, so that even those who resist Him carry out His will without realizing that they are going so. (70)

It is this truth that Fry shows in his version of the Exodus, which is charged with life and the mysterious ways of God. While doing so, he keeps close to the Biblical narrative, imaginatively introducing dramatic situations like the confrontations in Miriam’s tent, Shendi’s struggle, Anath’s pleas and anguish, Teusret’s childlike reactions, Seti’s arrogance, Rameses’ eagerness for life and Moses’ heart-felt remorse. Fry succeeds in conveying the feelings of the tortured Jews as well as of the ruling Egyptians in prosperity and adversity. Ultimately the fate of nations lies in the hands of a Greater Power. Man can react in two ways to visible reality, cursing it as the degenerate daughter of an insane father or accepting it as a mystery. (37) The Bible teaches man to accept life as a mystery and place faith in divine providence. Fry advises the same, believing than man must move in accordance with the mysterious will of God if he is to break the bonds of existential alienation.

In *A Sleep of Prisoners* Fry is concerned with war and what man has made of himself through war. This play also stresses on love for God and all mankind. Fry reiterates that love for all men will rid the world of war. Agape is the means to a better world. The play shows strong Biblical influence. The four prisoners’ dreams are hinged together by relevant Biblical echoes which contribute to the overall theme, which Fry
presents as progress or the “growth of vision.” He emphasizes on the twin commandment of loving God and loving the neighbour as oneself. The play establishes beyond question an opposite answer to Cain’s negative rhetorical question, “Am I my brother’s keeper” by affirming that man is responsible for others and that he is indeed his brother’s keeper. It also demonstrates that.

Peace demands the most heroic labour and the most difficult sacrifice. It demands greater heroism than war. It demands greater fidelity to the truth and a much more perfect purity of conscience. The Christian fight for peace is not to be confused with defeatism. (44)

Many existentialists of today consider that life has to be lived constantly on the verge of disintegration. (105) This may be largely due to hostility among nations, war and the consequent trauma. There has been a startling increase in stockpiles of nuclear, chemical and conventional weapons and the constant acquisition of deadly weapons holds the threat of devastation of the earth. (180) The fact of war is unavoidable but it is created by man. Fry opines that the solution lies in man himself. This is not sentimental cheerfulness nor facile optimism. Fry believes as Pope John XXIII did that that god made man to seek and achieve peace with His help and to become a free spiritual being in spite of confusion and evil. (183-184) What is necessary therefore is the simple and all embracing love of man. Whether men like it or not, they are bound to one another as a unit. (8) This is affirmed by Adams, mankind’s spokesman in A Sleep of Prisoners:

“There’s no loosening, since men with men/Are like the knotted sea.” (ASOP 39).

Written in 1949 the play has great meaning as Fry writes with experience of war victims and their attitude to life. Through the vehicle of dreams he asks men to awaken
to truths of good and evil, of self-realization and exploration into god. Fry, a preacher’s son, has a deep sense of faith and makes use of Biblical events as parallels in the sleeping experience of each prisoner.

Four prisoners Privates David king, Peter Able, Tim Meadows and Corporal Joe Adams are imprisoned by the Germans in a church which is a converted prison camp. The prisoners experience frustration and desolation in captivity. David king experiences intense anger and alienation. Peter’s passivity towards the Germans heightens these feelings. Peter reads from the book of Chronicles, from an English Bible discovered in the Church. He conducts an impromptu sermon which infuriates David causing him to almost strangle Peter. Adams and Meadows rescue Peter. David presented. Through the dream of each man Fry dramatizes a progressive vision of the future, of what man requires to be and do if the human race is to survive. Fry states that man must loosen his grip on the baubles of the earth and be self-sacrificing in humanity’s interests. (51) Fry chooses incidents from the Old testament as a backdrop to the real life situation of David’s attempt on Peter’s life. The dreams depict each man’s inner reality. Significantly, Biblical names are given to the characters. David king is inspired by king David. Peter Able, a combination of St. Peter and Abel signifies patience and endurance. Joe Adams symbolizes Adam the first man and Tim Meadows first name is a diminutive of Timothy meaning “man of god”. The play exposes Biblical truths of good and evil and the need for peace and brotherhood. It is a pacifist play and takes on the nature of a morality play, as it illuminates or makes visible the invisible truths of time and the universe. (8)
The incidents are triggered off by Peter’s initial reading of the Bible. Peter reads aloud with causal interest verses fifty-two of I Chronicles. Though David wants him to stop he continues with the first three verses of the third chapter of the same book. By then David’s annoyance mounts and he counters with his version of the Old Testament incident of Absalom being caught by his hair in a tree. “You know what Absalom/ Said to the tree? You’re getting in my hair”. (ASOP 10) Peter does not act as David wants him to. He acknowledges that life is a mystery despite the war. In an equable mood he remarks that he was perhaps meant to be a bishop. He launches on a sermon meant for all and undeterred by David’s anger finds release in his attempted murder of Peter. He is forced to let go as the others rush to the rescue. Peter’s reaction is as passive as his nature. “I never remember/I ought to be fighting until I’m practically dead.” (ASOP 12) Fry presents two types of men who react differently to the situation in which they find themselves. David’s urge is to hurt his enemies and he cannot regard them as fellowmen. Peter on the other hand regards them all as “dearly beloved brothers” even as he says in his mock sermon, and understands himself to be “absent fisted” (ASOP 12).

Fry next presents the dreams. The real-life incident is filtered through three consciousness’s and reintegrated in a common experience in the fourth dream. Each man’s inner reaction is thus externalised by means of the dreams. Each man’s inner reaction is thus externalised by means of the dreams. In these dreams Biblical events become parallels in the reaction of each man to the real life incident. The use of Biblical scenes arises naturally and justifiably from the setting of the action, which is the church as well as from each of them having heard Peter’s reading of the Biblical verses.
Private Tim Meadow’s dream is the first and Fry uses, parallel from Genesis 4. Meadows sees himself as God confronting Adam, who is represented by Adams, and who grieves that earth is no longer as it was created by god. David appears as Cain and Peter as Abel in Meadows’ subconscious mind. Cain (David) smears his arms with beet juice, symbolic of the murder he is about to commit. The argument between Cain and Abel if man will be destroyed or prosper, has to be put before god and Cain resolves that it should be decided by a game of dice. When Abel wins, this is a parallel to God’s displeasure with Cain’s offering. Cain (David) resolves that Abel must die: “get out of time, will you, get out of time,” (ASOP 22) Adams realizes he is unable to help, thrown back by an unknown power and he suffers agony as he witnesses the murder of one son by another. The dream becomes a near repetition of the real life incident, but to Meadows, Adams who had rescued Peter, becomes Adam the sinner who is lost and unable to help mankind. Cain’s (David) feeling of uneasiness is similar to that of the Biblical Cain. “‘You trouble me. You are dead.’ (ASOP 23) As in the Bible, he retorts on being questioned by God about Abel: “How would I know? Am I/His Keeper?” (ASOP 24) Remorse follows when he realizes that all the crying is his and he is marked as a fugitive. Cain (David) sees God as out to destroy him.

The two-faced beater makes me fly, Fair game poor game, damned game For god and all man-hunters. (ASOP 25)

Thus Fry conveys the message that man has committed sin in killing his brother, explicitly seen in Cain’s murder of Abel and continuously witnessed by modern man, who in the name of national defence and war, kills his brother. Thus man’s estrangement from God is due to sin. Sin can only be vanquished by love. Simultaneously violence
will be destroyed. Fry makes the observation that god gave the earth to man, not to use it to kill his brother. (53) Man’s concern should be not merely his own salvation but the saving of others as well.

Fry makes abundant use of Chapter 4 of Genesis, to convey effectively man’s mutual responsibility. Many lines of his verse have a Biblical cadence or echo. The phraseology is close to that of the Bible. In the incident where Cain (David) kills Abel (Peter) Cain is asked. “Cain where is /Your brother?” (ASOP 24) He answers “Hoe should I know? Am I/His keeper?” (ASO 24) This is similar to Genesis 4.9, “And the Lord said unto Cain where is Abel thy brother”. And he said, “I know not: Am I my brother’s Keeper”. (9) Similarly Fry’s use of the words “Cain I hear Your brother’s blood/Crying to me from the ground” (ASOP 24) is related to the Biblical “… the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.” (10) Closensess to Biblical phraseology is seen in God’s (Tim’s) words to Cain (David) “And nowhere Cain, nowhere/ Escape the fear of what men fear in you.” (ASOP 25) and in “My word is Bring him in alive. Can you feel it carved on your body.” (ASOY 25) The parallels are taken from Genesis 4:12 and 4:15 which are “… a fugitive and a vagabond shall thou be in the earth” (12) and “And the Lord set a mark upon Cain lest my finding him shall kill him.” (15) Man suffers sorrows for the sin of disobedience, as given in Genesis. (17) Thus Tim Meadows’ inner reality tells him that man is continually committing sin as he kills his brethren.

David’s dream emerges next. Adam’s chance remark in wakefulness to David calling him King David results in his dream being a parallel of the Biblical king David and his rebellious son Absalom. Fry makes use of this incident from II Samuel 18. In
David’s dream, David sees himself as King David, Peter as Absalom and Adams surprisingly as Joab the Killer, though in the real-life situation Adams had rescued Peter. When King David’s general Joab tells him that Absalom is the mischief-maker inciting his enemies, King David realizes that he faces a nightmare. Absalom’s answer is, “your enemies are friends of mine.” (ASOP 28) this is a parallel to Peter’s attitude towards his enemies in real life. Absalom (Peter) delivers a sermon blaming the king.

What is A little evil here and there between friends? Shake hands on it. Shake hands, shake hands Have a cigarette, and make yourselves at home.

(ASOP 28)

This recalls Peter’s mock sermon. David in wakefulness feels that Petter needs to become a soldier. This is reflected in King David’s (David’s) words to Joab. “Make him fit/for conflict, as the stars and stage are.” (ASOP 29) The Biblical Absalom’s partiality for his enemies is conveyed by the dream Absalom (Peter) through his words. “They’re not bad fellows, once you get to know them” (ASOP 31) As in the Bible, king David (David) counters with orders to Joab to kill Absalom. The Bible records that Absalom is caught in an oak tree and killed by Joab’s darts. In Fry’s version the dream- Absalom (Peter) clings to the pulpit and is cut down by Joab (Adams) with a tommy-gun. King David’s anguish as well as to the real parallel to the Biblical King David’s anguish as well to the real- life David’s sense of uneasiness after the attempted murder Peter. Through these enactments Fry related how man is directly or indirectly responsible for the murder of his own kind. That evil is an inevitable fact in man’s life largely due to his sin is also made manifest.
The third dream is Peter’s. This has Genesis 27 for its framework. Peter’s inner reality shows his reaction to David’s attempted killing. In his dream he sees himself as Isaac, David as his father Abraham, Adams as the Angel of God and Tim as the Donkey Man. In the dream Isaac (Peter) is summoned by Abraham (David) to the mountain. As he follows his father innocently, Issac’s love of life is stressed upon. “There’s so much to see./Ah, peace on earth, I’m a boy for the sights.” (ASOP 36). Abraham’s (David’s) plea to harden his heart for sacrifice is also depicted.

Here Is the stone where we have to sacrifice. Make my heart like it.

(ASOP 37)

Issac’s (Peter) question. “Where is the creature that has to die?” (ASOP 37) is reminiscent of the Biblical”, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” But Fry introduces the difference in Isaac’s (Peter) zest for life.

Are you going to kill me? No Father! I’ve come only a short way into life And I can see great distance waiting. The free and evening air Swans from hill to hill. Surely there’s no need for us to be The prisoners of the dark? Smile, father. Let me go. (ASOP 38) But the Angel of God (Adams) prevents the sacrifice as he says. Hold your arm There are new instructions, the knife can drop Harmless and shining. (ASOP 39)

This is a Biblical cadence of the angel’s command”… lay not thine hand upon the lad.” Though the incident is a reflection on the fact that man can have but should not possess, it goes to greater depths when Adams says, while Abraham (David) unties the cords.

But never all there’s no loosening, since men with men Are like the knotted sea. (ASOP 39)
Mankind is one family. The sleeping Peter’s visualization of the ride on the donkey led by Tim could be a sequel to his subconscious reaction to seeing himself as a sacrificial lamb which is replaced by a ram. He perhaps correlates it to Christ the Lamb’s ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, after which was performed the ultimate sacrifice for all mankind. To Peter whose nature places trust in all men, his inner reality is aware of God’s presence in the world and His working through various means to prevent the large scale sacrifice of men and lives in needless wars.

The fourth dream which begins as Adams’ dream merges into a common experience of the four prisoners who as Fry says seem the share “for a few moments of the night, their sleeping men as shoals of fish, longing for land but finding none. With a touch of despair, he says.

How long can you drift over our se, and not give up the ghost of hope? (ASOP 43) He adds, But land, your land an mine, is nowhere yet. How can a man learn navigation when there’s no rudder? (ASOP 44)

These questions bear an answer in that Fry says that men need hope and faith. The three men Adams, Peter and David see themselves as prisoners marching but reaching nowhere. Throughout Peter shows himself different as he is satisfied at the wonder of being alive. David’s reaction is that of rebellion in captivity, not wanting a share in other men’s sins. Adam reaction is philosophic, searching for a meaning in existence. The experience of the men merges naturally into a parallel of the three men condemned to fire, as seen in Shedrac, Meshac and Abednego in Daniel 3. This is foreshadowed in the dream Peter’s rendering of Nebuchadnezzar’s egoism, in nursery rhyme form.
Nebuchadnezzar, hitting the news, Made every poor soul lick his shoes. When the shoes began to wear Nebuchadnezzar feel back on prayer. (ASOP 45-46) He proceeds with what he terms the second lesson three blind mice of Gotham Shadrac, Meshac and Abednego further explains how goodness is forever and a virtue that cannot be tarnished.

Good has no fear: Good is itself, what ever comes. It grows, and makes, and bravely Persuades, beyond all tilt of wrong. stronger than anger, wiser than strategy. enough to subdue cities and men if we believe it with a long courage of truth (ASOP 54)

What takes place is thus the conviction in the goodness of God, and the human heart and of hope. The human heart can go to the lengths of God. Dark and cold we may be, but this . . . the enterprise is exploration into god.

This belief is arrived at before the men are summoned to a state of wakefulness and return to rest in a tranquil spirit.

The Biblical narration of Shadrac, Meshac and Abednego depicts the intervention of God to save His believers, from the fire. Fry conveys the powerful message through the parallel, that in this war-torn world, the crucified Christ waits patiently for mankind to turn to Him, to learn of love and grace through charity to his bretheren who are made in the image and likeness of God. This recalls Christ’s words “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (10). Fry says that the play affirms love and the goodness in human nature and the last dream experience portrays.... the three men who had been concerned in difference now walking the same fiery furnace together; and the fourth figure, walking with them and keeping them from destruction, the human being with all his powers of hope, trust, love and relentless will for good.
Fry adds “The play could not end in a glorious trumpeting, or event the indication of victory- we have too far to travel for that but certainly in hope.” (3)

Commenting on the play Dr. s.Subrahmanya Sarma notes that the use of the Biblical parables is”… a means to comment on the roles of good and evil in human life. A close analysis of the dreams stresses this theme, how good slowly and unobtrusively wins over evil.” (30) Taken as a whole the play affirms that good comes from the higher power or God Himself. Man does not always realize that God waits for him with total love. Thus God and Good are one. As Iris Murdoch puts it, “God is an object of love which uniquely excludes doubt and relativism.” (63) But modern man does not feel the need for God, convinced as he is, of his own powers. Robert Kreyche points out, “ … the problem of modern society is less one of a “banishment of god” than it is a sort of “drifting away” from God, a simple failure to see the relevance of God in one’s personal life. … “Man’s view that God is irrelevant in his life is best exemplified through David King whose desolation is so intense that he attempts to kill his friend. For him each German individual has to be destroyed. His estrangement is heightened when Peter does not think like him but regards war as evil and has compassion for friend and enemy. The solution is pacifism yet in modern times in the name of peace man has learnt to take weapons of destruction and kill with ruthless, monstrous efficiency. (15) Man has an almost unavoidable urge to ear which is “towards a supreme assertion of identity at the cost of mutual destruction.” (24) This can be countered by “moral thoughtfulness”. (27) Fry calls for faith which is man’s way of discerning and committing himself to centres of value and power that exert ordering force in his life. Man is obligated at once to God and men, loving both not with a nebulous sentimentality but with that total commitment
which issues in devotion to God and practical services to men. Hope can come to man in his surrender to God, which is not a slavish act but the “recognition and acknowledgement of the very fact of his existence.” (143)

Robert W. Corrigan points out that all great religious drama in ancient and recent times, such as the plays of Eliot and Fry, presents a backdrop of religion belief which enhances the meaning of the play. William H. Beyer feels that A Sleep of Prisoners falls to satisfy as a religious play.

... because the scenes, dream after dream, are acted one a single sustained level derived by moving from one Biblical climax to another with little interlacing of basic relationships and sound motivation to stimulate emotion and spirited communion. (27-28)

But a deep study of the play proves that this is otherwise. In the first two dreams the fact of evil being present in the world is established. This evil is a result of man’s sin in spite of God’s loving kindness. In the third and fourth dreams, god’s intervention to halt man’s self- destruction is seen. Endurance, patience, charity towards men as well as surrender to god are the criteria for a better world. Fry clearly establishes that evil, violence, hatred and destruction can be rendered impotent at the altar of love for god and service to mankind.

In The Boy with a Cart Fry asserts that God is working partner in man’s life. Love of God and faith in the working of Divine Will bring triumph of life. Fry demonstrates this through the powerful symbols of root and sky. They stand for earth and heaven, for man and god. Firmly rooted in the life on earth, man can still look to the heavens and unite his soul with God. Fry relates the life-story of Cuthman, Saint of Sussex in the play. The life of a saint, if dramatized in the modern age, must touch,
probe, test and illuminate questions of modern relevance. In Fry’s hands it is no longer just a dreary repetition of a dead legend but the presentation of the life of a man of god, which imparts a vital message to twentieth century man. Fry has portrayed Cuthman as one who is close to life and reality. The journey of his life is recorded with “sincerity and beauty” (30) and is reminiscent of Everyman’s journey to his final union with god. Cuthman has Job’s perseverance and faith.

*The Boy with a Cart* has qualities of morality play. Human life in sequential action is presented. Cuthman’s life unfolds as a journey, the end of which is his union with God. Miracles occur and the final scene demonstrates that Good will always triumph. As in the miracle plays, the life of a saint is depicted. The objective is thus participation, both psychologically and emotionally by the audience. Fry succeeds in this by the use of a chorus, as in Greek drama, as well as adaptation of the language used, to suit the modern time.

George Kernodle proposes that religious plays can be placed in three categories. The first dramatizes Biblical events in the idiom and psychology of the present day, the second seeks an exaltation in method as well as subject by the fusion of modern poetry and stage techniques with the method of miracle plays and the third dramatizes a contemporary religious problem. (113) Fry combines all three, for a saint’s life is shown with Biblical cadences and echoes in incident and phraseology. The verse is rendered part of the twentieth century conversational use of language and the theme is that of faith. Fry takes up for treatment a little known saint who traveled as a “mendicant hermit” and built a church at Steyning. He shows how an ordinary man reaches extraordinary heights through faith. In the twentieth century when man questions God’s existence, he needs to
be shown that much can be wrought through faith, and that man can indeed discern much
through it. As the chorus says,

Who shall question then why we lean our bicycle against a hedge and go into the
house of god? Who shall question that coming out from our doorways we have discerned
a little, we have known more than the gossip that comes to us over our gates. (BWAC 7-
8)

Initially the people of South England speak of the closeness of god and man:
“with god we work shoulder to shoulder” and “the working together/ of man and God
like root and sky. “ (BWAC 7-8) Even before sorrows come to him cuthman has implicit
faith in god. He believes that God will guard his sheep in his absence for faith fills him.

I was as empty as a vacant barn It might have been because my stomach was
empty That I was suddenly filled with faith –Suddenly parceled with faith like a little
wain In a good hay-season. (BWAC 10)

The shocking news of his father’s sudden death astounds him. he believes his
father is alive at home and fearing to see his loss, says “ up here my father waits for me at
home/And God sits with the sheep.” (BWAC 11). This recalls the Biblical image of God
as shepherd as seen in “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the
sheep,” (11) as well as of “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” (1) Cuthman
believes that his father will be there to tell him stories, as usual … of Jesus. So he will
talk tonight, Clenching his hands against Gethsemane Opening his hands to feel the
Ascension… (BWAC 11).

Cuthman faces a crises of faith
What have I done? Did I steal God away From my father to guard my sheep?
How can I keep Pace with a pain that comes in my head so fast?
What sin brought in the strain, the ominous knock the gaping seam?

Even as he asks God for more faith, the people of South England ask Is god still in the air now that the sun is down? … Can faith for long elude Prevailing fever?

Cuthman’s answer is in having more faith.

Let me at last be faithful In perception, and in action that is born of perception, even as I have been faithful In the green recklessness of little knowledge. (BWAC 14)

When two neighbours Matt and Tibb arrive with the news that Cuthman’s mother is sick and the house sold, Cuthman resolves to bring back the sheep to his mother. He is now filled with a new resolution to face reality. Fry makes use of the chorus once again to comment on this growth in Cuthman.

Out of this, out of the first incision of mortality on mortality, there comes The genuflexion, and the partition of pain between man and god, there grows the mutual action, the perspective to vision. (BWAC 16).

This brings to mind the pain death can cause man, the bowing down to sorrow and the realization that only god can lessen his pain. This results in the act of faith when man strives to be united with God.

On a deeper level it signifies the crucifixion. Christ became man and was crucified by man. With His Resurrection man realized His Godhead. There is the need to understand the significance of the Incarnation and of the fact that God became man in order that man might be saved and that he may strive to divinity. St. Athanasius remarks that God became man in order that man might become divine and this suggests the community of spirit between God and man.
Cuthman readily puts up with the curiosity and then the indifference of his neighbours as his cart. His determination is to leave the village with respect and establish himself elsewhere. He is ready to suffer and this is evinced by the words of the chorus.

… jarring muscle and aching Back crunch the fading country into Dust. Stone over stone, over the trundling Mile, they stumble and trudge: (BWAC 21).

There is simple faith and trust in Cuthman that speaks of his true love for God. Through his trials he grows stronger, with a religious temper that is simple, contented in dimness and believing in God’s will. The chorus establishes Cuthman’s growing faith. “Stone over stone, Cuthman has spoken out/ His faith to his mother.” (BWAC) when his mother voices momentary fears, his rejoinder is, “God is there/God is waiting with us.” (TBAC 22). Belief in the strength of prayer is seen when he notes, “I was praying while I worked at the cart.” (BWAC 20). Cuthman continues his journey, mind and body guided by the spiritual fortification of prayer. The incident of the mowers mocking Cuthman’s mother at her fall and being punished by untimely rain shows the hand of God protecting the faithful. Cuthman suffers all with “gladness and courage”. The miracles show that god is a part of human experience, just as much as the suffering is. God first tests the believer with all kinds of torments and demands that he freely exposes himself to them and then he has the gift of miracles. This is seen in the sudden downpour, Cuthman’s power over the hostile Alfred and demiwulf and the sudden whirlwind that carries their mother away. Cuthman’s charisma and fixed purpose soon win him friends at steyning. It is his sanctity that gives him the power of winning their belief in his resolve.

Determination built on faith enables him to envision a church at Steying: “Let there be a church.” (BEAC 35). This echoes the Biblical lines “And God said let there to thwart
him, his faith remains unshaken and rock-like. When they refuse to return the oxen he declares.

There’s one thing that I’ll not see any man destroy, there’s one fire in me that no man shall put out. I am dangerous as I stand over the foundations of the church. (BWAC 38)

This recalls the Biblical verse, where Christ’s disciples after having witnessed Him drive out the sellers and money changers in the temple, remember that it is written of Christ that “zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” (17) It is also reminiscent of Christ’s words to His parents when they discover him asking questions to the temple elders.” … wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (49)

That God rewards the faithful is seen in the happiness of Cuthman’s mother as she settles in her life. But Cuthman’s trials are not over. He faces the prospect of failure as the king-post of the church refuses to stay in position. But this is a prelude to the greatest miracle of all, as Cuthman himself rushes to inform the villagers that he has had a Divine Visitation. He had been confronted with desolation.

I was alone by the unattended pillar, Mourning the bereaved air that lay so quiet Between walls. . . . And when I prayed my voice slid to the ground like a crashed pediment. There was demolition written over the walls, and dogs rummaged in the foundations, And picnic parties laughed on a heap of stone. (BWAC 44)

He then describes the arrival of the stranger. But gradually I was aware of some one in the doorway and turned my eyes that way and saw Carved out of the sunlight a man who stood watching me, so still that there was not
other such stillness anywhere on the earth, so still that the air seemed to leap at his side. (BWAC 44-45)

The closeness of god in man’s life is established recalling the words of Psalm 127, “Unless the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it.” Cuthman recalls his meeting with Christ, in wonder and ecstasy:

… He came towards me, and the sun Flooded its bank and flowed across the shadow.

He asked me why I stood alone. His voice hovered on memory with open wings and drew itself up from a chine of silence as though it had longtime lain in a vein of gold. I told him: It is the king-post He stretched his hand upon it. At his touch It lifted to its place. There was no sound. I cried out, and I cried at last ‘who are you?’ I heard him say ‘I was a carpenter’… (BWAC 45).

This is a moment of ephiphany where the verse takes wings and soars in keeping with the exalted moment when eternity intervenes in time. The mystery of life, the revelation of God and the union of man with God are re-affirmed through the words: “Death and life were knotted in one strength/ Indivisible as root and sky.” (BWAC 45).

The words of Christ “I was a carpenter… “ (BWAC 45) recalls to mind the verse in St. Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the households of god, and are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. (19-20)

Fry combines the Biblical truths of Christ being the chief corner stone of the church and how He helped Joseph in his profession as a Carpenter. Thus Christ the
Divine Carpenter builds the church with Cuthman and in doing so builds cuthman himself as the latter had earlier said.

The church And I shall be built together; and together Find our significance.

(BWAC 28) Fry demonstrates that “God’s own son lives and dies as man in our midst in order that we may become co-heirs with him of eternal life.” He also confirms the doctrine of the Incarnation as revealed in the hypostatic union. That god is light is also made clear through the lines “He came towards me, and the sun/Flooded its bank and flowed across the shadow” (BWAC 44) as well as the earlier lines “Carved out of the sunlight a man who stood/ Watching me …” (BWAC 44). These lines echo verses of the Bible such as “I am come a light into the world”. (46) and “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” () The peace that man longs for can be given only by god and this is also evinced in the final scene of the Divine Visitation. This reiterates the words of the Bible “My peace I give unto you.” Thus Fry’s call is to twentieth century man to realize even as the chorus realizes,

But the hand still leads the earth to drink at the sky, and still the messenger rides into the city of leaves under the gradual fires of September; the spring shall hear, the winter shall be wise to warning ofaconite and freezing lily, And all shall watch the augur of a star and learn their stillness from a stiller heaven.  (BWAC 45).

Man’s union with God is inevitable for religion is a “divine enterprise in which god calls man to His side.” Carlo Carretto observes that, We could say that god created a world that was unfinished. He intended to invite man to co-operate with Him in His work of completing creation: man could become god associate in realizing the divine plan, in making the divine will effective. (74)
Cuthman works towards the divine Plan and is helped finally by God in person. In the process of moving to fulfil God’s end, Cuthman grows increasingly in self-knowledge and his secret is that it is god’s own strength that comes to him. (244) Like St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Cuthman’s ambitions are not for himself but “only for the glory of God and the good estate of the Church.” (185) Cuthman lives in simple obedience and walks in love and patience. Thus he profits daily in spirit and finds the favour of God. Cuthman’s life is thus the will of god working on earth. As Leo Trese says “Every saint is a miracle of God’s creative power, of God’s transforming grace.” Cuthman, like St. Vincent de Paul gives himself into God’s hand and his watchword is “in god’s good who takes the first step.” (350) Born among men, he differs from the rank and file of men in that he dedicates himself to the life of the spirit. Saints are men who are perhaps more aware of the mystery of life and the unfathomable ways of providence than those who question the meaning of faith. The saints are “impregnators of the world, vivifiers and animators of potentialities of goodness which but for them would lie forever dormant.” (350)

Firmly rooted in the world of reality, aware of its mystery, cithman strives towards the Divine. What he has to contend with are different from those faced by Thomas Becket or Joan of Arc. Eliot shows Becket’s temptations of the glitter and wealth of the palace, a luxurious life, the chancellorship and martyrdom. Shaw’s Joan faces skepticism, hostility and mockery from high and low. Cuthman’s problems are those of an ordinary man which call for the knotting of nerves and physical strength. He strides through the play, no plaster saint on a pedestal but a living man who touches heaven through faith, and more accessible and universal for his reason.
Fry is greatly influenced by the Bible in portraying Cuthman’s life and conveying the message of faith. His play illuminates the truths of life as Scripture does. He aims at depicting “the eternal generation and Incarnation of the word, the pattern of human life, and the union of the soul with God.” (89) He demonstrates convincingly that man’s life is complete only with god’s presence.

_Thor with Angels_ is a religious play that centres on the conversion of Cymen the Jute chief, to Christianity. In the play, Fry recounts how the god of love and compassion triumphs over superstition, and belief in the gods of anger. Love becomes the creative force that replaces fear and anger.

The characters in the play closely resemble certain characters from the Bible. Cymen undergoes an experience similar to that of St. Paul before his conversion to Christianity. Hoel, the captive Briton, recalls vague memories of being a Christian and he symbolically represents the crucified Christ. Merlin the Magician, who lived in king Arthur’s time, reappears as one who predicts the coming of Christianity to England and in his role he resembles the Old Testament prophets. The dramatist’s emphasis here is on the words “Be lost/ And then be found” (TWA 80), which is again a Biblical phrase. Throughout the play the need to die to oneself and to be born anew in Christ, is stressed on.

Fry utilizes the historical fact of St. Augustine’s arrival in England and the spread of Christianity to emphasise on the need for forgiveness, mercy and compassion. In doing so the dramatist re-affirms the message of the Bible, of the God of the New Testament being the God of Love and Mercy. Fry’s belief is that man should awaken from a state of lethargy and
learn to live life with love for all, making no distinctions of race, creed or colour. The
belief in the God of love heralds a new life or hope, forgiveness, mercy and compassion.
The play probes into a deeper level of thought. Though it records Christianity’s victory
over paganism in Britain it also deals with the fragmentation of an individual who
undergoes a shattering experience before he is made whole again by the new-found faith
in a loving and compassionate Being. The title *Thor, with Angels* is symbolic as it marks
the transition from belief in Thor, the God of Thunder signifying paganism, to
acceptance of the through angels who are “the emanations of God, offshoots of deity”.

(108)

Erich From observes that modern man has become like an automaton
concentrating on maximum profit in his life. Caught in the world of commercialization
man moves further and further way from faith and God. Fry presents a dictum whereby
man can find himself. Faith, forgiveness, mercy and compassion are ways a better life.
The ‘awakening’ of Cymen, his conflict and final commitment are symbolic of what must
take place in the life of modern man. This is evinced in the movement from the world of
Thor, the darker passions of anger and revenge, to the world of Angels, who bring the
good news of help, peace, hope and love to mankind from God. Carlo Carretto points out
that the twentieth century lack of faith can be attributed to the totally baseless, mistaken
and dangerous interpretation that God is passive, silent and leaves man to manage on his
own. (62)

Cymen’s predicament before conversion is akin to the conditions of twentieth
century man. Man prefers not to be awakened to the need to account to God for his life.
But as Swami Chinmayananda puts it. “The necessity for Religion, the urge for spiritual
perfection, the call from the depths within ourselves, is experienced only by man, and even here, it is not felt by all man.” (5) It remains for man to realize and be alive to the call from the depths within himself. Fry points out that God waits to help man to this self-realization and commitment. The obstacle to this is man-made for the notions of God framed by men are not God himself. Thus “… men who are cruel and bloodthirsty conceive of a bloodthirsty God, because they can only love their own highest ideal.” Man’s belief in a vengeful God is a self-projection of his own imperfect nature. Man began a new cult of self-belief which stated that God becomes terrible if he is not loved in return. He therefore decided to relegate religion as a piece of antiquity not relevant to the needs of the so-called progressive man. The sense of existential anguish and meaninglessness of life that prevails in the modern age is the natural outcome of the failure to realize that a greater power does guide and control man’s life. Fry believes that man is bound to God. He asserts that life is an enormous miracle and the world is poised on the edge of eternity and god is man’s partner. On belief in God Fry says: “… it seemed that where my imagination failed God began. It was where space in some way entered into everyday life that. He seemed close and conversable.” (255) With this sense of the mystery of life Fry explicates the experience of reintegration through faith in Cymen. Cymen’s conversion makes him aware of life in a new sense. Division, guilt, inferiority and unhappiness are replaced by superiority and happiness, regeneration and grace. Fry’s indebtedness to the Bible is evident in the similarities to Biblical accounts, images and phraseology.
Cymen’s conversion is similar to St. Paul’s. The parallel to Saul’s being struck blind by a flash of lightning from heaven is seen where Quichelm describes how Cymen broke his sword in battle.

He swore it broke against a staggering light- and stood roaring, Swaying in a sweat of wax, bestraddle over the fallen Briton. And then, as though The beast which had bragged in his brain had leapt away, became himself again, Only in a fury with the light which broke his sword. (TWA 60)

Scripture records And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven… And he feel to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Cymen hears no voice but the light that blinds him makes him incapable of acting as he wishes. He undergoes a conflict. This mysterious force that controls him makes him act contrary to his warlike self. He resolves before his family that he will get back into the goods’ favour. Setting his foot on the fallen Hoel’s neck, he proceeds to drink a toast to Thor and Woden, only to have his words reduced to “Let us love one another.” (TWA 70). Unknown to Cymen this is the commandment of the new faith. This echoes one another; as I have loved you.” (34) and “These things I command Thessalonians holds the same message: “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you for ye yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” (9) While Cymen is thus caught in turmoil his family members seek to protect themselves from the embarrassment he brings them. Only Martina his daughter has sympathy for Hoel. While the family discuss Hoel and Christianity, Hoel confesses he has almost forgotten all his language. He has a vague memory of God. “I only know/That god was both father and son and a
brooding dove” (TWA 75). This recalls the Christian belief in the Trinity of God who is the Father, Jesus Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit. The pagan hostility to Christianity is voiced by Martina who observes.

We have a Christian queen, though we try to keep it Dark, and in one of our prayers to the gods we say Give us our daily bread and forgive us our queen (TWA 75). Her words are resonant of lines from the Lord’s prayer. “Give us this day our daily bread and gorgive us our sins”. When Hoel confesses that the Britons are scattered, Merlin predicts the return of Christianity to Britain. “Be lost and then be found” (TWA 80). This recalls the parable of the prodigal son whose father rejoices at his return: “for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” Also similar are the words of the father to the resentful son. “. . . for this they brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.” (32) Merlin contrasts the strength of the Christian faith and the meaning of the crucifixion with the indifference of the pagan gods.

All indifferent. Much more so your gods who live without the world, who never feel As the world feels in springtime the stab of the spear and the spurt of golden blood, Winter’s wound – in the side, the place where life begins. (TWA 83).

Fry packs a wealth of meaning in this passage which contains the essence of the Christian faith. Here “the stab of the spear/ And the spurt of golden blood” refers to the piercing of His side by a soldier after Christ’s crucifixion. St. John records this in his Gospel. “But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water”. (34) This signifies the shedding of Christ’s blood for the salvation
of the world. “Winter’s wound- in –the-side” refers to the crucifixion and death of Christ but paradoxically it is “the place where life begins” in that there is resurrection and thus salvation for man. “Springtime” also echoes the Resurrection and redemption of man. Merlin’s words strengthen this idea: “Death is what conquers the killer, not the killed” (TWA 83). This echoes the Biblical verses.

O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Merlin also refers to being drawn away from life by “The vinegar of death” (TWA 84). This signifies Christ’s death, but assumes the quality of rebirth, even as Christ was resurrected. The Gospel of St. John recounts.

… and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, it is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. (29-30)

Merlin recalls King Arthur’s rule when men and women “broke the holy bread in the love of God” (TWA 84). This signifies the communion symbolic of Christ having sacrificed His body for man’s redemption. Speaking nostalgically about the Christian land Merlin notes. There It was, and old Joseph’s faithful staff Breaking into scarlet bud in the falling snow (TWA 84). This recalls God’s promise to the Jews regarding the twelve tribes and their increase as well as of Aaron’s rod. And on the morrow Moses went into the tent of the testimony and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds, and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds. (8)
It also symbolizes the blossoming of faith, that comes through the Resurrection. When Hoel swears that he has nothing against Cymen and only wants life, Merlin remarks. Having a death in him, too: That death by drowning in the river of his baptism From which he rose a dripping Christian child…

(TWA 85).

This signifies the rebirth or renewal that comes with the new faith, as Christ preached, “verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” St. Paul also emphasizes “know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death.” (3)

Even as Prisoner Hoel rushes to defend his captors’ sheep from wolves and Clodesuida’s wonder-struck description of his fight, Merlin observes “Like a shepherd/With a lion” (TWA 90) Appropriately, Fry brings in a parallel from the Old Testament, where David saves the sheep from the lion.

And David said unto Saul, thy servant kept his father’s sheep and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock. And I went after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth, and when he rose against me. I caught him by his beard and smote and slew him. Clodesuida’s description is very similar.

… with a grip Under the blood and froth of the jaws, he shook And choked the howling out of its fangs And forced it to a carcase. (TWA 90)

When the messenger from Ethelbert’s court arrives with a summons, cymen intuitively understands that he has been called by the one God. Thus he says,

I go to know I go to dare my arm into the thicket To know what lifts its head there, whether rose Or tiger, or tiger and rose together. (TWA 97).
Aware that there is a gentleness in this new faith that beckons to him he equates it to a rose and this is reminiscent of the song of Solomon where God is lovingly addressed as the Rose of Sharon.

Merlin speaks of the evolution of the world and of man and part of this again has a Biblical cadence. The gods reformed according to the shape According of the shape that was a word, According to Thy word. (TWA 102).

Resembles the words of Mary on being told by God’s messenger that she is to bear a child. “Behind the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word”. (38) Fry believes that the destiny of the world and of man is shaped by God.

In the final stage of the play Hoel is tied to a tree and Tadfrid, Quichelm and Osmer seek to kill him when Cymen is away. This serves as a re-enactment of the crucifixion. While Martina calls out to her father, Hoel’s call is to the father, the God whom he recalls.

Martina: Father! Father! Hoel : Son and the brooding dove call him again. (TWA 106).

While it establishes God’s power as seen in the Trinity it also carries the echo of Christ’s crucifixion as seen in the Gospels, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” as well as “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I comment my spirit: and having said this, he have up the ghost.” which resembles Hoel’s words.

Death, be to me like a hand that shades My eyes, helping me to see Into the light. Through this re-enactment, Hoel comes closer to God from whom circumstances have distanced him.
When Cymen returns he has understood the significance of the cross and maintains that man need not be a sacrifice, for the ultimate sacrifice has been made by the son of God.

And never again need we sacrifice, on and on And on, greedy of the gods’ goodwill But always uncertain, for sacrifice can only perfectly be made by god To god in the body of God with man, on a tree set up at the four crossing roads of earth, heaven, time and eternity which meet upon that cross. (TWA 108).

This reiterates the doctrine of the salvation of man through Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross and recalls the words “For I desired mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offering,” as well as “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.”

When Cymen sees Hoel he regrets that he is a victim of hate and says that man has to learn to live in love. Once again he confirms the salvation of man.

The sacrifice of God was brought about By the blind anger of men, and yet god made Their blindness their own saving and lonely flesh Welcome to creation. (TWA 109).

These words emphasise the need for the virtues of forgiveness, mercy and compassion. Fry believes that man in the present day fears to put these into practice as he is more concerned with selfish ends.

Cymen’s anguish before conversion and acceptance of the new faith is akin to the sense of bleakness and meaninglessness of men who experience existential anguish. Cymen’s existential alienation is evident when he sees the gods as beings deaf of human misery.
Boding gods, Who broad in the universe consume our days Like food and crunch us, good and bad. Like bones. (TWA 93).

Sacrifice is useless, as it is merely done in despair and desperation. Cymen’s cry is from the depths of despair within his self, as it declares “You make us to be the eternal alien/ In our own world.” (TWA 94). After he breaks the altar stones he longs at least for punishment for his sacrilegious act. Cymen’s condition is that of an exile from his homeland, without hope of a promised and to come. Cymen faces what is termed dukkha in Indian philosophy. It is then that the messenger arrives with the summons from Ethlbert. Fry shows that the individual has to face a tortuous “dark night of the soul” before the light comes. Light does come and with it prayer, which is a two-way relationship with the Reality beyond oneself. Cymen’s pursuit of God is spurred by God himself. (11) The strange incomprehensible power that controls Cymen turns out to be love. Cymen is urged to follow the call of this new feeling. With conversion he steps into eusebia, the reverence that becomes aware of God’s presence. This is the first step to pistis, fidelity to god and agape, love for all men. Cymen is ready to keep the covenant, which embraces all of human life and which “renews and redeems the whole life and ultimately the world in its totality.” (5)

Thus Fry demonstrates that the restlessness of the human heart can find its rest in God. The void brought by existential anguish can be filled with the hope of a new life with the grasping of faith. With appropriate Biblical references Fry succeeds in showing that the Christian faith asks man to be born again to a new awareness in life.

*A Phoenix Too Frequent* is a secular play with a difference in that is has a deeper meaning at the level of Christian religious belief. Anniah Gowda points out that “it is
customary to look for two levels of meaning in Fry’s plays – the story and the deeper meaning.” (288) K.S. Misra confirms this when he notes that Fry blends.

Entertainment with edification, making the comic spirit a companion of tragedy or a serious moral play, or giving a light-hearted, even grotesque, expression to ideas and feelings of spiritual import.

Though a light-hearted comedy, the play exposes a Biblical truth. In it, Fry calls for love to be practiced. He stresses on the spirit and not the letter of the law. Love gives life and triumphs over death. This is symbolized in the title. The phoenix is a symbol of resurrection. It is “essentially a sun-bird, and was a symbol both of the rising sun and of the dead sun god Osiris from whom it sprang and to whom it was sacred.” Fry deals with death and resurrection in the play as seen in Dynamene’s and Tegeus’ lives and connects them aptly with the death and resurrection of Christ. The title of the play is part of the epigraph, which is taken from the Roman epigrammatist Marcus Valerius Martialis believed to have lived from A.D. 43 to 104. “To whom conferr’d a peacock’s indecent/ A squirrel’s harsh, a phoenix too frequent.” (7) These words signify that, that which is freely given becomes too familiar and is not valued sufficiently. Life given is not often seen as a gift. Due to excessive grief or existential anguish, life is regarded with contempt and there is the accompanying death wish. These words also describe the change and resurrection in the lives of Dynamene and Tegeus. The religious note is that “On the level of Religious Myth, Phoenix is a comic analogue for the Christian pattern of atonement and resurrection.” (4-5) The triumph of love and a symbolic resurrection of love and life over death are experienced by Dynamene and Tegeus. Though it has the potential of a tragedy it ends as a comedy due to the dominant image of resurrection.
The action begins at a tomb. There are six bodies hanging on trees. The idea of death is evoked early in the play. But Christian symbolism is strong. A little later in the play Tegeus strikes up a conversation with Doto and explains that the bodies hang.

On trees Five plane trees and a holly. The holly –berries Are just reddening.

(APTF 17).

The plane tree often features in Christianity. Milton mentions this tree being found in Eden. The holly tree refers to the tree used as a cross on which Christ was crucified. This is confirmed by Fry himself in a letter to Dr. Varshney where he notes that it is “The holly tree of the crucifixion”. (165) Stanley Wiersma notes that the strong visual image of a tomb and crosses together immediately alerts the audience to expect A Phoenix Too Frequent to be symbolically Christian in context. Resurrection is also hinted at through the image of the phoenix and the tree. The Shrewsbury Book shows the phoenix sitting on the upper branches of the Dry tree. The Dry tree symbolizes death and the phoenix resurrection. The significance of the Mass and communion is also suggested when Tegeus offers wine and bread to Dynamene. The importance of the giving of Christ’s body through crucifixion and the consequent resurrection for man’s redemption finds an analogy in the dead body of Virilius taking the place of the lost dead body, hence delivering the lovers from death, unto a new life. The play inevitably ends as a comedy for the pattern of the mass which “begins in adversity and ends in peace.” is clear. The sanctity of erotic love is suggested in that it must rise from the physical plane to reach the sacred level where one finds union in God.

Throughout the play the characters speak in words reminiscent of Biblical sayings. Doto comments on Dynamene’s fidelity to Virilius and speaks of life being” …
full of miracles and mysteries like/One man made for one woman…” (APTF 10). Here Fry establishes the fact of the sacredness of the marriage vow and the Christian idea of the oneness of man and wife. “And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.” Doto also notes cheerfully that “Death’s a new interest in life” (APTF 10). These words emphasise that at the point of death, the value of life is realized. It also re-affirms what takes place at the end of the play. The ‘death’ of Virilius gives new life to the lovers. It could also be a symbolic reference to the Christian belief in eternal life after death. Tegeus also speaks of death as vivifying. “Death is a kind of love./Not anything I can explain.” (APTF 14). This shows Tegeus’ admiration for Dynemene’s resolution to die for the love of Virilius. In the Christian context it signifies Christ’s absolute love for man which led to His willing death on the cross. Tegeus later refers to the hanged men on “Five plane trees and a holly” (APTF 17), and the holly berries are reddening. (APTF 17). This symbolizes Christ’s blood being shed on the cross for man’s salvation for “the holly tree is a common Christian symbol of the cross, its red berries construed as drops of Christ’s blood.” (294) The immediate action that follows is tegeus’ offering of wine to Doto and then to Dynamene when she wakes up. The wine is symbolic of the blood of Christ and new life. Despite her initial reluctance Dynamene accepts the wine. This is a forerunner to her final acceptance of Tegeus’ love. This image of ‘giving the blood’ through wine is completed when Dynamene refers to Tegeus as Chromis.

I shall call you Chromis. It has a breadlike sound I think of you as a crisp loaf. (APTF 28).
This recalls the Gospel verses “For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world” and “… Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger and he that believeth in me shall never thirst.” They recall Christ’s words, “I am that bread of life.” (48)

James Woodfield notes that a parallel can be traced between Tegeus who becomes Tegeus Chromis and the Christ figure (6-7). According to him Tegeus represents “the corded god” on the bowl which holds the wine, a bowl made by Tegeus himself.

The corded god, tied also by the rays of the sun, and the astonished ship erupting into vines and vine leaves, inverted pyramids of grapes, the uplifted hands of the men (the raiders) And here the headlong sea, itself almost Venturing into leaves and tendrils, and Proteus with his beard braiding the wind, and this Held by other hands is a drowned sailor- (APTF 23).

The corded god is Tegeus himself who is to offer new life to Dynamene. The words recall Christ’s words “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” This analogy is significant in the light of Thomas Merton’s statement on the Passion of Christ and the baptism into a new life.

Baptism engrafts us into the mystical Vine which is the body of Christ, and makes us live in His life and ripen like grapes on the trellis of His Cross.

This describes the miracles of new life and It is the Passion of Christ, stretching out its tendrils into my life in order to bring rich clusters of grapes, making my soul dizzy with the wine of Christ’s love and pouring that wine as strong as fire upon the whole world. (96)
This demonstrates Christ’s all-embracing love for man which pours forth as agape. Secular love moves from the earthly level to the heavenly level. Through this means Fry upholds life. He states that the way to the Absolute is not through denial of life but thorough commitment to a new love which involves the total selflessness of Tegeus and Dynamene. Love is thus seen as a divine force.

This is reminiscent of Christ’s words, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.” When Tegeus finally confesses his love, Dynamene is chary of giving up her love for the dead Virilius and struck by the impropriety of a new love. She tries to convince herself that love is in Hades but has conflicts. The last vestiges of doubt disappear in the face of Tegeus’ reiteration of his confession. The lovers admit that they cannot live without each other. When Tegeus recalls that he is on guard duty he checks on the bodies. He returns aghast, as one body has been carried away. Convinced that love has brought nothing but doom, he decides that man is docile to fate. He explains to Dynamene that their love will not live as he has to die, after the court martial. His desperate resolve is to die by his own hand. He recalls the letter of the law.

We have no change. It’s determined In section six, paragraph three, of the Regulations That has more power than love. (APTF 48).

This echoes St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, “for the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Thus love can triumph over death. Regarding the Christian symbolism in the play, Fry writes.
Yes, St. Paul was in my mind. The law and the spirit. “The wages of sin are death”. (in “the regulations”) the return to life out of death. The holly tree of the crucifixion, etc.

Fry thus emphasizes on the spirit of the law. It recalls verses of the same chapter. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin? But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested being witnessed by the law and the prophets.

But Dynamene is able to convince Tegeus that love can win. She asserts that love is everything. “Chromis, love is the only discipline/And we’re the disciples of love. I hold you to that.” (APTF 48). Dynamene speaks of love as a total giving of oneself even as Christ gave himself. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” When Tegeus reacts with horror at replacing the lost body with Virilius’ body’ Dynamene points out.

How little you can understand. I loved His life not his death. And now we can give his death The power of life. (APTF 49).

Now the Christ image shifts to Virilius who by his death re-affirms life for Tegeus as well as Dynamene. The Biblical verses that can be recalled are “I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly,” (10) and appropriately “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” Stanley Wiersma believes that the death and resurrection of Christ are figured in Virilius’ death and Chromis’ resurrection. Virilius and Chromis are complementary symbols for Christ as seen in the communion image where Dynamene first drinks to Virilius’ memory, then
gives Tegeus the new name Chromis which has a breadlike sound, and Doto finally
drinks to both the masters. Fry firmly believes that secular love is the path to sacred
love. While the ascetic has his way to the Absolute the secular man can reach God too if
he is prepared to let earthly love be a stepping-stone to a higher love.

Fry’s use of symbolic names is significant. Dynamene is derived from Diana, the
goddess of the Hunt and of Chastity. More significantly the root word “dyna” signifies
“power”. Once filled with love Dynamene reflects ‘power’ to live and give life to
Tegeus. “Tegeus” means cover. It signifies the artificial cover of his shyness and
escapism through which the genuine colour of his personality emerges. (299) Dynamene
names him Chromis derived from “Chrome” or “colour”. Into the dull grey ‘on the verge
of death’ life of Dynamene, Tegeus- Chromis gives ‘colour’ through love and awakens
her to life. To Tegeus for whom the world had begun to be “mildew, verdigris, rust and
woodrot” (APTF 18), Dynamene’s fidelity is inspiration for love. For Dynamene whose
‘near death’ world can harbour only.

Natural symbols of mortality, the jabbing, funeral, sleek- With-Omen raven, the
death-watch beetle which mocks time. (APTF 22).

Love is a stupendous creative force which revives her. This love asserts itself to
vivity Tegeus, prostrated at the thought of death due to neglected duty. Both Dynamene
and TEgeus undergo an awareness of the meaninglessness of life and of being pawns in
the hands of fate. But they awaken to new life through selfless love. The need for love is
satisfied by the total giving of oneself to another in surrender. (144) This, then, is the
Absolute love that will enable man to overcome existential estrangement. Even while
dealing with the “human dilemma” Fry bids the audience remember the words of Thomas a Kempis.

A wondrous thing, worthy of faith, and surpassing man’s understanding, that Thou my Lord God, True God and Man, art contained wholly under the form of a little Bread and wine, and without being consumed art eaten by him that receiveth thee.

As William Barclay puts it “The offer of Christ is life in time and life in eternity” and Fry makes his audience aware of it through the play.

*The Dark is Light Enough* expresses Fry’s belief, *amor vincit omnia*, love conquers all. The Christian faith rests on love which is bestowed in its divine dimension or charity. (133) This highest form of love is *agape*, the complete giving of oneself to another or others. This is extolled by St. Paul. The play proves that love has endurance, does not vaunt itself, thinks no evil, is selfless, hopeful and never fails. The theme makes manifest that love is the solution to the problem of alienation or isolation. This is portrayed through Countess Rosmarin Ostenburg whose self lessness pursues the egoistic Richard Gettner and changes his life.

The Countess’ love is Christ- like and she can be compared to the Christ- figure. The sufferings of her life are borne with love. Her death is a crucifixion in that she gives her everything as she dies so that another’s life is changed. A new Gettner who believes in man’s goodness is resurrected. Gettner is thus symbolic of makind redeemed. Countess Rosmarin chooses to live up to a life of extraordinary quality that is the narrow way. She asks for nothing in return. The life of love that she lives is what is advocated in the Bible. Her faith in man’s goodness arises from her love. Thus she fulfils the law by loving god through love of all men who are humanity ennobled by the incarnation.
The Countess moves towards God in her unconscious striving in the pursuit of Good. (141) Her fullness of life is seen in her service to others. (28) In the context of Indian religious philosophy the Countess is a Karma yogi who does good because it is in her nature to do so as she feels and knows that it is good. Thus she gives, never cares to receive or ask anything in return and hence eludes misery. Her friends and admirers liken her to a deity. Her actions justify this. Rescuing the deserter Gettner after a dangerous ride in the snow, she treats him with compassion and refuses to judge or condemn him. She even forgives his earlier ill-treatment of Gelda. When Colonel Janik seeks Gettner, she is unperturbed. Her similarity to the Christ figure is strengthened when Gettner shamelessly pleads, “Lie, lie! O Christ, lie for me!” (TDLE 100). Though this is an exclamation, it is appropriate as, to Gettner shamelessly pleads, “Life, lie! O Christ, lie for me!” (TDLE 100). Though this is an exclamation, it is appropriate as, to Gettner who can see no good in the world, the Countess is ‘too good’ and thus like Christ. His instincts tell him that she will not be untruthful. Her respect for individual lives is unmatched. When Colonel Janik says that he has to take Peter hostage if Gettner is not handed over to him, she remains undeterred and counters with:

You put me very near the hard heart of the world, Colonel, where bad and good eat at the same table no man is mine to give you. (TDLE 98).

She loves all men and is able to include the soldiers in the circle of her love. Janik thanks her for the shelter she gives to his tired men. When he questions her as to why she should champion Gettner she answers.

Life has a hope of him Or he would never have lived. … Richard lives In his own right, Colonel, not in yours Or mine (TDLE 118).
Justifying her defence of him to Gelda, she makes clear her faith in man’s inherent goodness.

I knew Richard was not brute and no Pursuer of evil but more like one enraged because he thought that good rejected him (TDLE 120).

Even when Gettner puts all their lives in danger by revealing his presence to Janik, the Countess is undisturbed. Her greatest trial comes when Gettner shoots Stefan. She needs assurance that Stefan is living but Gettner speaks only to relinquish all responsibility. She says then “Then say Stefan is dead. Say to me/I’ve killed Stefan” (TDLE 137). While the guards make to capture Gettner, the Countess’ gesture is truly magnanimous for she says.

Then do not injure Mine I mean my son. I ask you Not to make him the cause of punishment, Not to make his wound a death, Not to turn his challenge into a judgement. (TDLE 138).

She adds that they should pray for her son for “you are the life you pray for.” (TDLE 138). At this pint in her life when a life so precious to her is in danger she is still able to forgive and love, even as set out in the Bible.

But I say that they should pray for her son for “you are the life you pray for.” (TDLE 138). At this point in her life when a life so precious to her is in danger she is still able to forgive and love, even as set out in the Bible.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you. (44)
The Countess’ attitude to Janik when he seeks refuge is again a repetition of the welcome she offered Gettner earlier. The Austrian army pursues the disbanded Hungarian troops but the Countess’ compassion is for all.

When Gettner is drawn back to her despite himself and his cynicism, with the hope that the love that she bears him will make her consent to his marrying her, she offers him an explanation. Her words reveal the selfless nature of her love and its noble quality.

“Our destination is fixed:/We’re elected into love” (TDLE 163). There is a Biblical echo in these words. It recalls that Christ the son was elected into love by God the Father, to die for mankind. Thus the analogy of the Christ figure is reinforced. The Countess loves goodness and is willing to suffer for the triumph of Good. In this she resembles a saint in that it is direct love for Christ that makes the saint want to suffer along with Christ. In the anguish that she suffers when Stefan is injured, she is again likened to the Christ figure. The parallel is seen in that Gettner injures almost fatally the loved one of a person who has loved him so selflessly. Gettner’s betrayal is like that of Judas and here he resembles the Judas figure.

The change in Gettner occurs in the last scene. Rosmarin’s death is seen as a crucifixion where even unto the end she is able to call forth the goodness in man. She refuses to even suggest or think that Gettner could have hastened her way to death. Thus her victory lies in her death for it is here that Gettner proves her belief in his goodness when he declares,

This isn’t how I meant that you should love me: … Very well, very well. Be with me. (TDLE 166)
He is ready to face the army that waits impatiently to enter. He is no longer an escapist nor does he blame anyone. The change in him is thus envisaged through this action. Thus the Countess practices Christ’s love which pours itself out upon all that suffer limitelessly. (48) She lives the truly Christian life which is

Not to depress a man by branding him as a lost and helpless sinner, but rather to uplift him by summoning him to be what he has got it in him to be. The Christian way is not to fling a man’s humiliating past in his face, but to set before him the splendour of his potential future. (134)

This is practiced by Gelda and Peter. Gelda evinces a sincere desire to save Gettner, though he has caused her unhappiness. Peter’s strength is seen in his willingness to be a hostage in Gettner’s place, as well as in his compassionate understanding of the Hungarian and Austrian problems. Fry’s call for humanity is seen in Peter’s words.

I was afraid They’d lose the liberties they were beginning to gain Lately, not that we should lose the humanity We took of God two thousand years ago. (TDLE 43).

Thus the measure of a man’s service to the world is the fulcrum of his own life. In the countess’ life love gushes forth. Though she moves among people undemandingly hers is a felt presence. In her backing a man against eternity, Belmann remarks that the man can never remain mortal. This is exactly what happens to Gettner. The qualities of light and colour are associated with her. The butterfly described in the epigraph to the play describes the countess. She herself prefers to leave life with a series of returns like a night light. For her, “to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (21) She is the epitome of agape living with charity as the fulcrum of her life, as enjoined by St. Paul. Fry thus believes that Christ-like love can draw out the best in mankind for it leads to truth and good and
collects light from nature and heaven to rule over day and night yet dividing light from darkness. (138)

In *The Lady’s Not for Burning*, Fry’s seasonal comedy of spring, he calls for love, understanding among men and the observance of the spirit of the law. He shows that good and evil exist side by side but emphasizes that evil is the absence of good. Further, grace is not denied to those whose impulse is towards the base instincts. The protagonist Thomas Mendip desires to die as he cannot endure man’s callousness. The heroine Jennet Jourdemayne faces death condemned by a superstitious townspeople. But love and rationalism triumph over evil and the darkness of blind superstition. Love is seen as a creative fire which kindles hope, while evil and irrationality are symbolized by destructive fire.

To emphasize on the value and sanctity of life Fry uses Biblical allusions adapting them into the language of the characters. Often a comic or grotesque adaptation is present but the underlying serious intention is not lost. Even while Mendip remains strong in his purpose of wanting to be hanged, he acknowledges that despite his discontent and incapability, God has looked after him. “I’m a black and frosted resebud whom the good God/Has preserved since last October.” (TLNFB 120). Despite his awareness of the uselessness of life as man lives, he does not experience a sense of alienation from God. He is conscious that man does not measure up to the magnificence of the universe. Alizon Eliot also is aware of the mystery of life and the universe. Her convent life influence is evident in her exclamation at spring’s beauty.

Out there, in the sparkling air, the sun and the rain Clash together like the cymbals cashing when David did his dance. (TLNFB 120).
This recalls the Biblical words “And David danced before the Lord with all his might” and “David leaping and dancing before the Lord.” When Richard discloses that he is an orphan, Alizon reminds him that he should not take pride in not knowing his parents, as pride is one of the deadly sins. Asizon’s total belief in God is seen when she describes her new found love in Richard. “Our Father/God moved many lives to show you to me” (TLNFB 192) Her faith follows Christ’s words “when ye pray, say Our Father which art in heaven….” Simple faith and trust open the doors to awareness of the wonder of God’s ways.

Envy, covetousness and lust are epitomized in Humphrey and Nicholas Devize. Nicholas covets Alizon who is betrothed to Humphrey. After Humphrey’s fall, in their fight Nicholas triumphantly declares to Alizon “I’ve won you from him. I’ve destroyed my brother.” (TLNFB 123). This recalls Cain’s slaying of Abel. There is little love lost between the brothers for Nicholas says.

Humphrey went hurtling Like Lcifer into the daffodils when Babyoon fell there wasn’t better thump. (TLNFB 127).

Humphrey is likened to Satan who fell from heaven like lightining. Babylon’s fall due to evil as mentioned in Revelation is also hinted at.

When Mendip suggests to Margaret Devize that she should feel sad for the witch who he imagined is a sobbing old woman, Margaret impatiently says.

At the moment, as you know, I’m trying hard to be patient with my sons you really mustn’t expect me to be Christian In two directions at once. (TLNFB 129)

Margaret forgets the two-fold commandment of Christ which is to love God with all one’s heart and to love one’s neighbour as oneself. Like most twentieth century man
and women Margaret is unaware that love for God and neighbour go together, not in two
different directions. This attitude is seen in Tyson also. He would rather not be disturbed
by Mendip. Tyson dismisses Mendes’s urgent request for death as the madness of a man
who wishes to draw attention to himself. However, Tyson is able to pray to his Maker
in the same breath.

Almighty God more precise than a clockmaker; Grant us all a steady pendulum.

While Mendip describes how he had killed a pig-man he says.

So I pulped him first and knocked him into the river and held him under my foot
Until he was safely in Abram’s bosom. (TLNEB 135)

This recalls the beggar’s death in the Gospel of St. Luke. “... the beggar died
and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.” Mendip also declares to Jennet
that the world is confusion.

Bedlam, ma’am, and the battlefield Uncle Adam died on. He was shot To bits
with the core of an apple which some fool of a serpent in the artillery Had shoved into
god’s cannon. (TLNFB 141).

Using startling imagery that comes naturally to a soldier, Fry conveys through
Mendip the belief that original sin exists due to disobedience and man’s present condition
or existential anguish is the result of sin, begun with Eve’s eating of the forbidden fruit.

(6)

Mendip’s language is marked by Biblical expressions. Speaking of the glorious
universe he says the spheres churn to produce music.
And on beyond, Profound with thunder of oceanic power, Like the morose dynamics of our dumb friend Jehovah. (TLNFB 148).

This is a cynical yet teasing reference to God. Mendip’s reference to the “last Trump” is of the Day of Judgement, a reminder by Fry that the virtues of love, compassion and mercy are necessary if man is to find a way out of the morass that he has created through sin and thoughtlessness.

The Chaplain with his simplicity and innate goodness communicates Fry’s ideas of life and heaven. Enraptured by God’s creation he notes “When I think of myself/I can scarcely believe my senses.” (TLNFB 156). He points out the cause of Mendip’s apparently strange desire to die. “… he might be wooed/From his aptitude for death by being happier.” (TLNFB 157) Tyson, Tappercoom and Humphrey have no scruples in eaves-dropping on Mendip and Jennet, to prove that Jennet is a witch. The prophet Isaiah.” (TLNFB 163). This echoes the old testament verse “and the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken.” (3) These officials misunderstand Jennet and Mendip as they are blinded by prejudice and superstition and so arrest Jennet. In contrast the Chaplain’s tenderness is laudable. In a house where irrationality reigns supreme, he is one of the first to be drawn to Jennet’s natural goodness. He weeps to think of her impending death.

No, it’s right and it’s just that I should be cast down I’ve treated her with an abomination That maketh desolate:- The worlds, the words are from Daniel- (TLNFB 188)
The Chaplain uses the prophecy from the Book of Daniel which states that only the wise will understand God’s ways. He also asserts the mystery and miracle of life through his dream.

I was dreaming I stood on Jacob’s ladder, waiting for the Gates to open. I was surprised but not put out. Nothing is altogether what we suppose it to be. (TLNFB 153)

The Chaplain alludes to Jacob’s dream “And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top it reached to heaven and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” The Chaplain hints at life’s mystery and of the inevitable need of the union of the earthly with the heavenly.

While Margaret Davize describes the mob’s excitement at the prospect of Jennet’s death, she notes that its indignation mounts as Psalm 141 is repeated. This is Fry’s ironic reference to the mob itself, for parts of the Psalm asks for deliverance from the evil and violent whose tongues are like the serpent, as well as that the evil be cast into the fire while the poor, afflicted and righteous are saved. The mob is blind to the evil in itself which clamours for the death of a so-called witch. The words “preserve me from the violent man” are especially significant for it is the townspeople who are violent. Their condemnation of Jennet arises out of imagination or irrational fear. They believe Jennet is in league with the Devil and deserves death by fire. Appropriately enough, though they believe that they are the afflicted, it is Jennet who is afflicted and God’s way of love is proved when she is declared innocent.

Thomas’ declaration that he has been defeated by Jennet, in his struggle against the power of love, comes when Jennet faints at his proposed violence against the Chaplain.
How is she, Richard? Oh, the delicate mistiming of women! She has carefully Snapped in half my jawbone of an ass. (TLNFB 176).

This is again an apt Biblical comparison coming from one who is resolved to fight against the world. Samson kills a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass, in the Biblical narrative

And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. And Samson said, with the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.

Whereas Samson succeeds in killing his enemies Mendip characteristically remarks that he has been rendered powerless by Jennet. Fry uses this to declare that melancholy, rebelliousness and self contempt can be burnt away by the flame of love.

Jennet in spite of her avowed belief in facts, does use language evocative of religious belief. It will be enough If your spare me a spider, and when it spins I’II see And a fly caught on the seventh. (TLNFB 184).

Jennet makes a reference to the Biblical account of the creation of the world. “And the evig and the morning were the sixth day.” (31) Again when she refers to tyson’s uneasiness in her presence at the dinner she observes. I rustle with his momoies. I,. The little heretic as he thinks, the all unhallows eve to his poor adam; (TLNFB 185).

This refers to Eve’s tempting of Adam with the apple and Adam’s succumbing. Jennet discerns that Tyson is moved to weaken his resolve to condemn her to death. There is also a pun on all hallows ever or Halloween by the words “Unhallows Eve.”

In some cases, Fry combines earthy humour with Biblical allusions, even giving them a touch of the ludicrous. But it never degenerates into irreligiosity. Margaret is put
out by the sudden upheaval of her plans for the dinner to celebrate Alizon’s arrival, caused by mendip’s arrival and Jennet’s presence. Thus she says that no company could think of coming through the fury of the crowd, “Except the glorious company of the Apostles,/ And we haven’t enough glasses for all that numner”: (TLNFB 155). Her reaction to a phenomenon as wonderful as the apostles coming to dinner is only to think of the dozen glasses necessary to serve them. The trick of combining a hallowed subject with the mundane is part of Fry’s method in commenting on the nature of human life and individual reactions. Even the drunken Skipps quotes the Bible with a difference. Summoned before the Mayor he says.

Peace on earth and good tall women And give us our trespassers as trespassers will be prosecuted for us. (TLNFB 208).

Which is a garbled version of two verses from the Bible “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” which speaks of the peace of Christmas and “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” which is the Lord’s prayer. Skipps seeks to show that he is a Christian and baptized “wiv holy weeping and washing of teeth” (TLNFB 207) which is his muddled version of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” He even roars “As it was in the beginning./Ever and ever, amen, al-leluia” (TLNFB 209), resonant of the words of the ‘Angelus’ and the doxology, “As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen”. At the end of the play Mendip seeks a blessing: “And God have mercy on our souls”. (TLNFB 212). Fry thus hints that the “Soul ‘senses’ God as its final end and supreme happiness.” (80)
In the play Fry maintains that life is precious. Despite the weakness of the flesh the spirit can help men to soar to great heights. He believes that love is an effective instrument in this endeavour. He also asserts that rituals become stereotyped and meaningless when the spirit that governs them is forgotten. According to Fry evil is “the deficiency of some good which ought to be present.” (43) The presence of sins like lust, covetoushess and envy leave one in darkness but if the soul hearkenes and leaves the cocoon of darkness, there is grace. Through the comic element, yet with effective use of Biblical cadences interwoven in the dialogue, Fry presents a thought-provoking play which predicts that the destructive flame of base passions can be countered only by the creative flame of love that has its source in Godhead. What D.D. Raphael says of Arthur Miller’s Crucible may be said of Fry’s play.

He [the spectator] would see an explanation of the nature of human goodness and human evil, of how evil grows from things like envy and sexual frustration, aided by socially conditioned attitudes such as bigotry and superstition. He would see how the spread of this evil can bring calumny and death to innocent and even to saintly people. (103-104)

The play also has universal import as it seeks to give an answer to man’s existential anguish through the practice of love and compassion.

The summer comedy A Yard of Sun had a different title when originally conceived by Fry. In a letter to Dr. Varshney Fry says .

It’s title is HEAT OF THE DAY (see St. Matthew “the burden and heat of the day”) It’s underlying theme is men’s efforts to reach a goal [The scene is an Italian house called Palazzo del Traguardo goal], to unify, and to make life overcome death. (165)
In a subsequent letter he adds that the play has a new title *A Yard of Sun*. The play gets its title from a stretch of street in Siena. It affirms that in spite of the realities of life and the bitter experiences of war, man can start afresh. Fry points out that the blinding elements of fear, hatred, suspicion and desire for revenge can only be wiped out by acceptance, understanding and selfless love. From the darkness of fear, suspicion and hatred, the characters work towards a goal, striving to do their best and accept life’s gains and losses in a spirit of humorous resignation.

Robert W. Corrigan commenting on the purgatorial theatre of Ugo Beti, says, “Betti’s plays affirm both man’s need to struggle with real alternatives and his capacity to do so.” The same applies to Fry’s plays. In contending that man can survive, Fry uses many of the truths and beliefs from Christianity. The play is rich with Biblical references. The theme of the play is suggested as Fry himself says from the Gospel of St. Matthew, “these last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.” The “burden and heat of the day” is related to the characters’ condition. The burden of ear has left its mark on the Brunos and Scapars. The heat refers to the lack of water due to the failure of the municipal system caused by the storm. Symbolically the phrase alludes to the feelings of guilt, uncertainty and hostility lurking in the characters’ minds. These are dispelled only by understanding, faith, love and compassion. Significantly the focus of the play is the Palio, “a re-horse race around Piazza del Campo pitting the city’s neighbourhood or contrade” Fittingly the coveted prize is a religious banner. The Palio stands as a witness to the fact that the society of Siena strives to reach to out to a new future. Fry uses the Palio, a tradition that dates back to the seventeenth century in order to show that “The echoes by chich a
society seeks to determine to reach, the logic and authority of its own voice, come from
the rear.” (3) The values of the past which man has relinquished for selfish purposes,
must be brought back in Fry’s firm conviction. It is faith and religion that provide man
with the tools to shape for himself a new and meaningful life. This idea pervades the
play and again Fry draws on the Bible for many of the views set forth.

With the Palio as the main event in their lives it is only natural that many
references are made to the Virgin Mary. Thus Luidi’s exclamation of surprise is “Mother
of God!” (AYOS 35) to Ana-Clara that the Palio is a time of excitement and rivalry
“with the mother of God as carnival queen”. (AYOS 32). When Ana-Clara decides to
speak out and declares that Edmondo’s methods of blackmailing Alfio to stay out of the
recease ethically wrong, Edmondo demands.

Since when Have your taken over the role of mother-goddess And the bleeding
heart? This is a new game. (AYOS 88)

The image of the Lady of Seven Dolours is appropriate in this context as it
signifies Ana-Clara’s compassion as well as the grief that the individuals have suffered
through war. Luigi’s hope for a new world is signified in his words which appreciate the
gift of a new day: “I stood at the window, like Adam/ looking out on the first garden.”
(AYOA 5). This is a reference to God’s gift to Adam in the Bible “And the Lord planted
a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.” (8) Roberto
on the other hand is cynical and his doubts and suspicions about the new inmates find
expression in his words. “The children of Mammon come back for their broken toys/The
first of the swarm.” (AYOS 8). Roberto resents the rich who had caused so much harm
to the poor and desolate and who had remained unaffected by war, to return after it and
resume their easy life. There is marked gloom in his speech and a hidden anger at the injustice in the world. The lines are reminiscent of the Biblical phrase “children of darkness.” When Luigi takes away the barrel of water with Angelino’s approval Roberto’s resentment is registered in an outpouring with Biblical echoes.

That’s it now Cheat me of my birthright, give your blessing To the hairless-chested junior. (AYOS 27-28)

Roberto recalls Jacob deceitfully obtaining Isaac’s blessing. (30) Roberto’s resentment is given full expression when he hits Luigi, angered by the immediate circumstances as well as his harboured suspicions.

Edmondo’s money and ability to control lives and plan the future earns him the name of providence. He even gets the best rider Cambriccio for the neighbourhood. When he comes to stay at the Palazzo he asks for the keys jocularly “Now, where are the keys of the kingdom, daddo?” (AYOS 45). Noting the size, he adds: “What a size, eh? /St. Peter must have a religious connotation referring to St. Peter who was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Cesare Scapare also refers to the keys to the kingdom in a more serious tone. Reunited with Giosetta and Grazia, he notes that after war, love has to heal the wounds. Hence his wistful words, “With such treasure stored up for me in a daughter/ and her mother, I want the key to their kingdom.” (AYOS 100). This recalls the Biblical verse “for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” That God is creator of all things and man has to wait patiently for the unraveling of life’s mysteries is clear in Angelino’s statement, when a long-distance call does not come through. “Even the creator/Took a week over us” (AYOS 69). This alludes to God’s creation of the earth “And God saw everything that he had made and behold; it was good. And on the evening
and the morning were the sixth day.” (32) As well “And he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.” Fry assures us that at the root of the Christian life lies belief in the invisible. War brings with it the “breakdown of the human spirit in the face of an orderless world.” (95) The characters undergo turmoil and agony and are constrained in their relationships with each other till awareness and compassion allow them to be free and unsuspecting. Fry also points out that lack of faith today is an expression of deep confusion and despair. Man can fight this if he has confidence in himself and will harness the values of the past to plot out a meaningful future. Fry advocates Aggionamento which “does not mean preparing to assume the risks of an ill defined and threatenting future, but recovering the security and power of the glorious past.” (94) Fry is also convinced of the essential humanity of man, for no matter how ruined a man or his world seems, no matter how terrible his despair as long as he continues to be a man, his very humanity tells him that life has a meaning. (11) This is Cesare’s call to Roberto, “Purify us,” (AYOA 104). Fry believes that in spite of the baptism of fire that man undergoes, sorrow, shock and despair are all part of life shaping man to a fuller individual whose resilience assures him that life is worth living.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are the themes of the seasonal comedy of autumn Venus Observed. The Duke realizes that Rosabel truly loves him and Perpetua can love only Edgar. He harbours no anger against anyone and waits for Rosabel’s release. Fry makes the observation that human fallibility is part of life but that it can also be overcome, if man desires to better himself. Though the theme is not obviously religious, Biblical phrases and images are used.
At the crucial point of the eclipse the Duke describes the shadow falling on the sun.

Observe how sol Salome Almost hidden by the head of the Baptist moon Dances her last few steps of fire (VO 165).

This refers to Salome’s desire for John the Baptist and recalls the verse “But when Herod’s birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before him and pleased him” as well as “his head was brought in a charger and given to the damsel and she brought it to her mother.” The Duke’s words are suggestive of Rosabel’s strong love for him as well as of the fire that Rosabel is to start, unknown to him. The Duke makes another reference to a fire and once again in language which has a Biblical cadence. Refering to the arrows used in their practice of archery he observes to Perpetua

They’ II arch the more Adoring what you do, feathering their staffs and shooting until doomsday’s Parthian shot. (VO 187).

The reference is to the final shafts of judgement day.

Edgar also speaks with Biblical connotations. Explaining his dream of horses he says “their flanks are smoking/Like Abel’s fire to heaven.” (VO 203) thus referring to Abel’s sacrifice to God which pleased Him. This is relevant as Perpetua has accepted the Duke’s invitation to the observatory and Edgar wishes to offer his love. While star-gazing Perpetua refers to their eternal nature.

I’m looking at the same star that shone alone in the wake of Noah’s Drifting ark as soon as the rain was over. (ASOP 208)

Perpetua recalls the drifting of Noah’s ark at the ceasing of rain. When Perpetua and the Duke are caught in the fire, Reddleman rescuing them, exclaims.
And, by the blistering Of the blessed St. Laurence and the blessed St. Vincent Shadrac, Meshac, Abednego, and all The sainted salamanders, I’ve got me nerve again (VO 221).

This allusion is appropriate as it recalls the Biblical narrative where Shadrac, Meshac and Abednego were cast into the fire and yet were saved due to their faith. References to fire recur in the play and here it is a fire which brings self-realization to the Duke as well as courage to Perpetua to confess her true love for Edgar.

Even a small accident between Hilda’s and Jessie’s car is referred to in language that has Biblical overtones. Hilda explains that both the cars entered the gates together and Jessie concludes “Our wings aren’t what they were/As Lucifer said after his long day’s fall.” (VO 239). Though used as a witty statement it recalls Satan’s fall into hell. The idea of salvation is also mentioned through Reddleman who remarks.

Didn’t God make sinners of you and trap you here for the decent purposes of putting me back In the way of salvation. (VO 222)

The play is marked with the mellowness of autumn. The Duke’s resolve to marry Rosabel and bear their spirit up shows a quiet resignation. In Venus Observed Fry show” a kindly and affectionate treatment of human fallibility.”

As the title of Fry’s history play Curtmantle suggests, the accent is on the king. Henry II the first king of the Plantagenet line was nicknamed ‘Curtmantle’ for the characteristic short cloak that he wore. Henry’s relationships and conflict with Thomas Becket as well as with Eleanor of Aquitaine are clearly brought out in Fry’s play. Fry himself points out that he seeks to show “a progression towards a portrait of Henry.”
Though Fry touches on the themes of sainthood and martyrdom, the need for loyalty, filial devotion as well as the danger of power, his main concern is with the portrayal of Henry and the theme of law, especially the interplay of different laws. Despite it being a history play, Fry succeeds in establishing that man-made laws are transitory. Even if the laws do remain, the maker of earthly law must in the end answer the supreme Lawmaker.

Fry makes very little use of Biblical phrases in this play but these are apt. Becket and Henry are seen as adversaries after Becket gives up the chancellorship. As a man of God Becket is pious and gives the church it’s due. Henry is seen as one who has little respect for the church or clergy. When Becket rejects the chancellorship and at the same time conveys his love and obedience to the king, Henry is furious. He rails at the messenger.

He made you bring me a damned lie! Watch out, you pious little fellow, how much of your heart you give to faith. We’ve hanged God once, to fulfill the scriptures. So now tell me what reasons God still has to keep the strain of treachery so active in us. (C 206).

Henry suggests that with the crucifixion, man should have relinquished all sings of treachery. Though making a reference to the greatest sacrifice, he fails to understand that Becket regards fidelity to God and the kingdom of Heaven as supreme. Henry’s obsession with the secular laws blinds him to nobler values. Later care should not be worldly, Henry in disappointment and cynicism remarks.

Contend against me like an opposite see that the spiritual power is powerful in the spirit.
Indeed, go on, be smitten with a great light And relieve us all of a load of darkness. (C 210)

Henry fails to comprehend Becket’s desire for a strong and reliable clergy, free of earthly desires. Thus he mocks Becket, refusing to accept that the clergy has to remain a beacon in the surrounding darkness. This recalls St. Peter’s words.

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; where unto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star rise in your hearts.

In the next confrontation when Becket refuses to sign the Clarendon Codes which he sees as a threat to the will of God, and the laws and dignity of the church, Henry takes him to task, declaring that the will of God is man-made and it were better if man were merely sensible. Becket remains unshaken in his belief and declares that God has a plan.

In the avalanche of snow the star-figure of the flake is there unchanged. It was out of a whirlwind that God answered Job. (C 219).

This refers to the end of Job’s trials as God gave him an answer, out of the whirlwind. Becket seeks to prove that it is God’s will and law which will prevail and not man’s. When the priests declare that they will obey Henry in all things except in their order, Henry roars with rage and determines to punish them by whipping. He shouts.

The man who gets in the way Is of no more consequence than a skull Kicked about by oafs in a field, And that’s what he will come to. Jesus whipped! (C220).

Significantly these words can be taken in two senses. Due to the use of an exclamation mark, the word “whipped” can be taken both in the active and passive voice, giving two different Biblical contexts. Seen in the light Henry’s attitude to the clergy he
declares that even Christ whipped those who desecrated the temple and similarly he is justified in doing so. Taken in the passive form and the churchmen’s point of view, the clergy’s desire to maintain the purity of the church laws and subservience only to Providential will, show them in the position of Christ who was whipped for his adherence to Divine Truth.

In Act III, after Becket’s assassination, Henry is shown under going penance barefoot and in a pilgrim’s robe. The stage directions show that the monks are singing Psalm 119. Through this means Fry shows that Henry has to be brought to an awareness of his action. It is apt that a king who rides rough-shod over others to establish the secular law be reminded of greater laws of love and fidelity for the first part of the Psalm reads.

Blessed are the undefiled in the way that walk in the law of the lord. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies and seek hi with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity, they walk in his ways: Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. … my ways were directed to keep Thy Statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all they commandments. I will praise thee with uprightness of heart when I shall have learned they righteous judgements (4)

But Henry forgets later that it is God’s commandments which are the righteous law. He seeks to bring his sons and Eleanor under him by force, forgetting all familial affection in his bid to make secure England’s secular laws.

He has to face defeat even at the hands of his son Richard. Richard declares that his father is well versed in many tricks.
He can use the quick swerve, the double back, The dive for home, better than any ball player. But only Lucifer knew how to fall and then come back into a kingdom. My father is only Demon by descent… (C 268-269)

There is a Biblical echo in this statement as seen in the Gospel of St. Luck, which tells of Satan’s fall to hell. Richard declares that his father will not regain his kingdom unlike Lucifer who has his followers in Hell his kingdom and seeks to disrupt the ways of god.

Henry’s life at the end is a sad one, for all his sons, except the illegitimate Roger desert him. The last straw, that alienates the people from him, is the fire at Le Mans and the dead king no longer has anyone’s respect. One of the refugees fleeing from the town remarks.

I’m thinking, we’re had nothing from him yet, and he’s lost us everything we had in this burning city. This dead fellow owes us a bit of justice. (C 276).

Ironically the king who strove so hard to give justice meets with such an end as the refugees, his own people, strip his body and make away with valuables. Fry maintains that “Those who rule are called to love and serve. (19) Henry forgets the statues of heaven in his pursuit for secular laws. George Richmond Grose notes that.

Henry forms an ideal- the establishing of temporal laws in England that would stand rock firm forever. But in the process of doing so he rejects the greater qualities of service through love and humility. His adherence to the law blinds him to the everlasting difference between right and wrong. In trying to secure a future based on laws for his country, he fails to discover the will and way of god among men.
Though Fry says that “No single play could contain more than a splash from the brew,” (173) Curtmantle presents with great clarity that a man’s desire for order and justice at the cost of love and compassion will only result in his own destruction. It is inevitable that man’s will must submit to the Divine will.

From a study of Fry’s plays it can be proved that he is greatly indebted to the Bible. Many of the themes are directly from the Bible, the language has a Biblical cadence and the turns of phrase are frequently those of the Bible. K.S. Misra observes

A perusal of Fry’s plays can easily convince a reader that they have a serious purpose, which is conveyed sometimes directly and solemnly, but often also lightly and indirectly. Fry is fully aware of the jarring contradictions inherent in the world as well as in the life of man, which however do not blur his sense of wonder and mystery marking the creation and the enveloping universe. (302-303)

Ugo Betti notes that at a time when large areas of disbelief or indifference seem to spread in individual souls and in the world at large, religion and the theatre have assumed a new importance in many consciences. (44) Fry is one dramatist who believes that the theatre can convey the mystery of life and this he does in his plays. Mystery is behind the reality of man’s life. In *The Firstborn* he establishes that all power belongs to God who will take care of His people. *A Sleep of Prisoners* is a call to men to love one another and witness the Kingdom of God on earth. In *The Boy with a Cart* God’s compassion and partnership with man in life is made manifest. *Thor, with Angles* is a plea for men to reject vengeance and anger and be born into a life of compassion and love. *A Phoenix Too Frequent* deals with man’s urgent need to live, and a full life is one in which the secular may be harnessed to lead man to the eternal. The need to live a truly
Christian life and to be a light in a darkned world is advocated in *The Dark is Light Enough*. In *The Lady’s Not for Burning* Fry calls for compassion and love which can chase away the ugly fears of irrationalism. *Venus Observed* admits man’s fallibility but maintains that self-realization can ennoble him. In *A Yard of Sun* Fry asserts that man’s humanity will prevail over his weaknesses and errors, while *Curtmantle* teaches the lessons of history that rulers must submit to be ruled by providence.

It is noticeable that Fry believes that faith, charity and love as enjoined by Christianity as well as other similar forms of thought are the way out of man’s self-made trap of existential anguish. His whole-hearted conviction is that.

As men and women struggle with evil and suffering, God does not leave them wholly in the dark, but seeks instead to shed light on their situation and give them guidance and loving support. (52)

D.D. Raphael also points out that … The religion of the Bible is inimical to Tragedy, first because it is optimistic and trusts that evil is always a necessary means to a greater good, and secondly because it abases man before the sublimity of God. (51)

In Fry’s plays evil is the absence of good and man’s will has to submit to that of Providence. Fry firmly believes that participation in the wonder of life and the making of commitments are vital for man to realize the significance of his life on earth, and reject the meaninglessness of existence. Northrop Frye notes.

The prophetic writer is not just any good or even great writer, but the elect writer, whose dedication to his craft has extended to a dedication of himself as a prophet to God, and whose dedication has been accepted. (78-79)
Though Fry has been accused of a facile optimism it can be stated from a study of his plays that he is a Christian writer who is dedicated to his craft as well as to voicing his belief in the guidance of God in man’s life.