

The Freethinker

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THE HEADING forms both title and subject-matter of a very informative article in *Czechoslovak Life*, an English periodical nowadays published in Prague. The Church in question is the Roman Catholic Church which since, and as a result of, the Thirty Years War in the 17th century, has now again become the dominant Czech Church, a position from which the Protestant Hussites had at one time displaced it. The article under discussion consists of a series of questions and answers between a representative of the above journal and a high official of the Czech Catholic Church, Monsignor Edward Oliva. As will be seen, it is mainly factual in content. The mutual relations of Church and State in Czechoslovakia

are of particular interest, not only because of that country's stormy religious history, but because Czechoslovakia is today perhaps the most industrially and culturally advanced of the Peoples' Democracies which succeeded the old, still semi-feudal regimes of Eastern Europe after the Liberation in 1945. Along with its neighbour, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia nowadays represents the most advanced non-Russian society under Socialist rule.

Religion East of the Iron Curtain

Even today, very little appears to be known in the West about the actual conditions which exist in the vast socialist bloc, containing something like a thousand million people—40% or so of the human species. This is the more regrettable since it appears to be now reasonably certain that barring an "act of God" (such as a nuclear war, *vide* His Grace of Canterbury), Socialist society in the East has come to stay, even though, like everything else under the sun, it is subject to the laws of evolutionary change. At least, the present writer, for one, returned last year from a visit to the East with that conviction firmly planted in his mind. I did not actually visit Czechoslovakia, though I looked across the border into it. Accordingly, whatever one's political opinions may be, facts are stubborn things and the current attitude must be regarded as a very important sociological fact in our contemporary world. Actually, there appear to be several stages in this current relationship. In the Soviet Union, for example, Church and State appear to be completely separate. The old Secularist slogan—"The free Church in the free State" appears to be completely embodied in the Soviet Constitution adopted after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. In the Peoples' Democracies, however, the separation is by no means complete and, according to what I was able to observe personally, this situation appears to exist not only in Czechoslovakia but in the German Democratic Republic, and probably in Hungary and the Balkans also. (China and Poland appear to be rather special cases, about which more exact information would be welcome.)

Church and State in Czechoslovakia

The following facts, culled from the interview with the Czech ecclesiastic, Mgr. Oliva, apply mainly to the

Catholic Church as the major religious body still existing in the Czech Republic, but *mutatis mutandis*, probably, applies equally to the Protestant and Jewish minorities in the Republic. We summarise briefly the principal points which emerged. The current Church-State relationship in the Czech Republic is governed by a law passed in 1949. Under the provisions of this law, "The State does not concern itself with questions governing dogma, liturgy, or Church law. The Church is completely at liberty to settle its own affairs in the spirit of universal ecclesiastical regulations." Further on we learn that "the priests are employees of the Church, but their stipends are paid by the State." Mgr. Oliva added this revealing

comment at this juncture: "Stipends vary according to rank and length of service, but all are sufficiently large to meet all of their needs, so that, as was the case in the past, they no longer have to experience want." Priests retain their rights as Czech citizens to participation in social services such as free medical care and normal old-age pensions. Unlike the U.S.S.R. (or U.S.A.), religious education can be given in State schools, but only on a voluntary basis and at the request of the child's parents. Regarding Church property, we learn that "the State shall contribute towards the repair and upkeep of churches, vicarages, and other Church buildings, as well as to ritual requirements when the Church is short of funds for this purpose. In 1956 the State spent 23 million crowns on Church repairs, 26 millions in 1957, and for this year the Budget figure is 27 million 700 thousand." (This is presumably for the Roman Catholic Church alone, whilst separate provision is made for the Protestant and Jewish minorities? In East Germany, which is mainly Protestant, the Lutheran Church is the main beneficiary from State grants.) Theological seminaries and charitable institutions are also aided; in the former case, "the students receive State scholarships on the same terms and to the same value as in all other educational institutions of university level." Mgr. Oliva assured the representative of *Czechoslovak Life* that the Catholic clergy took their full part as citizens in the current struggles against Fascism and for international peace. He did not, unfortunately, add the interesting information as to how these last-named activities are regarded at the Vatican.

Communism and Religion

[The following is based on information given to me by the Professors of the Franz Mehring Institute in Leipzig, last year.] The above selective facts give what might appear at first sight to be a picture of State-Church relationships not very different from those existing in many Western countries. But such a summary conclusion would be rather misleading. One must never lose sight of the distinction which prevails universally on the farther side of the Iron Curtain between the State constitutions and Communist-Marxist-Leninist (no longer Stalinist) ideology. Whilst the former vary in accordance with local conditions—and conse-

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The Church under Socialism

By F. A. RIDLEY

quently from country to country and time to time—the latter remains constant, in its fundamental teachings at any rate. Communism is an ideology, a philosophical theory as well as a political practice, which is dialectical materialist, and logically excludes religion and the supernatural. These points are common to all Communists; are consistently taught by all the Marxist masters (including what is sometimes termed the Communist Trinity, Marx, Engels and Lenin); and form part of the long-term policy of every Communist party, including, presumably, the Czech. Accordingly, from the standpoint of the Communist parties (the real “power behind the thrones”—or rather republics!) in the East, any concessions to religion, or

official recognition afforded it, can only be temporary and provisional, a fact which the worldly-wise Vatican has long ago grasped and which explains its present vehement hatred of Communism. In all Communist lands, a dual power exists, the State and the Party, and no member of the Party can be a Christian (or a theist) in Russia, or presumably anywhere else, since Marxist-Leninism professes to be a *universal* philosophy. To apprehend accurately the complex problems presented by religion in a socialist dispensation, one must, I suggest, take into account not only the short-term legal facts narrated by the Czech journal, but also the long-term, essentially atheistic and anti-religious philosophy.

Life in a Portugese Village

[From *A Visit to Beira Baixa*, by Virginia de Castro.

Translated by Nan Flanagan.]

A RICKETY OLD TRAIN which wound all round the coast, stopping at every station, filling the air with the shrill screams of its whistle, eventually landed us in a typical village of the north of Portugal. As we entered the village we saw the women up to their waists in water, picking the rice, while they sang their plaintive songs. Their wages were the equivalent of 3s. per day, so it, too, was “bitter rice.” Great chestnut and olive trees, heavy with fruit, grew all round; vines hung in festoons from the roofs of the hovels, without chimneys and built of rough, unplastered stone. The poverty and misery of the inhabitants was evident in the appearance of the women, with dirty faces and tangled hair, spinning at their doors; in the ragged children with their swollen stomachs, too hungry to play; and the hordes of cringing beggars pushing their leprous limbs in one’s face. The presbytery and the homes of the local gentry stood out in all their splendour. The church, built in oriental style, with the bell in an arch over the door and the bell-rope hanging down the middle of the front door, had an ugly, stunted appearance. Inside, spread all round the altars, were images of Christ, the Holy Ghost and the saints. The Christ in one church protected women in childbirth, in another He kept the blight from the potatoes. I heard the following conversation between two women from different villages:

“It was the Christ of our chapel who cured my husband of paralysis.”

“He should have appealed to the Christ of our parish, who would have cured him much quicker.”

“But the Christ of your parish wouldn’t have helped him as he doesn’t belong to His part of the country.”

God is considered revengeful and deals out meet punishments if Church dues are not punctually paid and votive candles not lighted in his honour, but his wrath can be warded off with presents of money to the priest. The rude Catholicism is composed of a strong mixture of paganism and Arab traditions: from it arises a strange sense of morality. Knowing there is no justice in the courts, the people take the law into their own hands and even murder without scruple or remorse. There is a terrible fatalism with regard to the future, which is considered to be entirely in the hands of God. One day, a crowd, among which were the victim’s two sons and the priest, stood round the well watching an unfortunate who had fallen in, struggling for his life, while not one of them made an attempt to help him. “It was his destiny and had to be lived out,” they said. When he sank for the last time, they went off to pray for his soul. Tales of the visitations and misdeeds of the devil abound, rumours of miracles spring up every day.

Today, most of the villagers are in deep mourning for a friend or relation who went to Brazil. The man’s departure was accompanied by funeral lamentations; children from the orphanage, run by the Sisters of Charity, were hired out at so much a head to weep mournfully; some of these children hadn’t yet reached the age of five. All are watched and censured except the priest and the gentry; it is looked on as a mortal sin to judge them. The gentry are the owners of the land all round; they work with the priest in keeping the people down. A good 80 per cent. of the people of the villages are illiterate. Such is Portuguese village life today.

From Nigeria

NIGERIA has three administrative regions—North, East and West. Before the advent of Christianity the North and West were predominantly Mohammedan in character. The East was largely Deist, composed of idolators who worshipped their idols but believed in the existence of an all-powerful God.

To the present day, says my Nigerian informant, Mr. Nwoye Oduche of Enugu, Christianity has no meaning to the Northerners (population 18 millions), who know no religion other than the Moslem.

In the West, from a seven million population, Christianity can claim only an infinitesimal proportion as adherents, the vast majority again being Moslem.

In the East Christians now claim about a sixth of the nine million population as adherents, the majority upholding the traditional Deism of the area. Among the Christians the Roman Catholics number four times as many followers as the rest of Christian sects put together. This superiority, asserts Nwoye Oduche, has been gained by the “usual tricks of conversion”—threats of hell-fire for unbelievers and the erection of fine buildings for schools, churches, dormitories and seminaries. Impressive buildings are a good bait for simple converts. Convent girls are also sent to the various towns and villages to collect the more gullible and unsophisticated and bring them to the R.C. Church. The R.C.s are constantly causing trouble to the government (with perpetual demands for fresh concessions) and to other religious sects. Of a total population in the region of 34 million, there are only about 70 known rationalists, and these are distributed over an extensive area, and the formation of a group is impracticable. Nevertheless, it is from small groups that large ones grow, and there is the nucleus of half a dozen freethinkers in Enugu; lone wolves who perhaps may form a “pack.”

DAVE SHIPPER.

“Creation’s Amazing Architect”

By H. CUTNER

THIS IS THE TITLE of one of a number of books kindly lent me by my friend Tom Mosley, some as Fundamentalist as if they were written last century at the behest of the then all-believing Protestants before Darwin bowled them out with his *Origin of Species*. My only reason for noticing them at all is that their authors have reputable degrees—M.A., Ph.D. and so on—yet they know so little of modern Biblical criticism that they can write reams of sheer nonsense to prove how right the Bible is in everything.

Let me deal with the one the title of which is the heading of this article. It is written by Walter J. Beasley, F.R.G.S., who is the President of the Australian Institute of Archaeology, and published by Marshall, Morgan and Scott at 8s. 6d., and it is packed with a great deal of information about the Universe, our own Earth, and Science in general. All this is put in to support Mr. Beasley’s claim that the two records of the Origin of the Universe—the one found in the first chapter of Genesis, and the other “far more detailed”, Mr. Beasley contends, due to the wonderful discoveries of geologists during the past 150 years or so. And he adds:

If the Sacred Record can be shown to be in harmony with the independently ascertained facts of modern scientific research, then surely such an anticipation by about 3,500 years must constitute a tremendous challenge to the people of this scientific age. Again, when we correlate these two records, surely it demonstrates that the Author of the sacred record is the Author of the rocks and their fossil evidence.

The observant reader will notice how the words “Sacred Record” are in capital letters in one place and not in the other; and he may also notice that Mr. Beasley would never agree that Moses was its “Author.” All orthodox Jews and Christians have always claimed that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, though they never give us any proof; but I gladly admit that Mr. Beasley’s “Author” is supposed to have inspired Moses—whatever that means, for I do not know.

Mr. Beasley, however, stresses that, though all English Christians have been forced more or less to accept the Authorised Version as God’s Precious Word—Precious because every word, comma, and dot are literally true—he himself will have little of it. “The English translations used did not do justice,” he sadly moans, “to the language in which they were written”; and he objects most strongly to the way “theologians interpreted these narratives by the aid of Babylonian stories of creation. . . .” We get the impression that Mr. Beasley knows Hebrew so thoroughly that there is nothing easier than to show how absolutely right was the “Author” of the first chapter of Genesis in recording the story of “Creation,” and how wrong were those theologians who were obliged to come to the conclusion that it was all beautiful poetry and nothing more.

To be quite fair to Mr. Beasley, I propose to put side by side the verses of Genesis in his own words, and the conclusions of modern Science as he sees it; we can then easily see if they do or do not agree. It is a pity that I cannot give the two-page illustration he gives.

1st Day. Genesis. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (v. 1.) “The earth was unformed and empty” (v. 2). This is marked No. 1. And it is all true because from geology we get “No known fossils.”

For No. 2, Genesis is dropped, and we are sent to Job 38, verses 4-11, to prove how Job anticipated geology which tells of “Water covering the face of the Globe.” In Job there is nothing about the “Globe” but about the

“foundations of the earth” with God asking Job, “who laid the corner stone thereof” when “the morning stars sang together” and the “sons of God shouted for joy.” Poor Job was also asked by God “who shut up the sea with doors?” Looked upon as poetry, no one need quarrel with what is in Job—but when we are definitely told that Job says something upholding modern geology, and he does *not*, we can see how marvellously reliable is Mr. Beasley.

No. 3 is Genesis. “Darkness was upon the face of the (roaring) deep” with geology telling us of “immense quantities of vapour enshrouding the Earth” and “raining continually—Darkness.” Notice how Mr. Beasley adds the word “roaring” to “deep” and equates the verse with immense “quantities of vapour” about which Genesis says nothing at all. Anyone can add anything to the “Sacred Record” in this way and with true Christians, thus “get away with it.”

For No. 4 we get from Genesis, “The spirit of God was continually brooding over the face of the waters” (v. 2), and to prove how this completely substantiates geology we are told “Fossils rare,” “Marine life only (Algæ),” “No fossils of terrestrial life known,” and that it was the “glacial period.” And to prove it still more strongly, we get from Genesis, “God said, Let there be light” (v. 3). How Mr. Beasley proves that on the first day of Creation (numbered No. 5) when God said, “Let there be light” this statement proves “marine life only (Algæ)” is one of those mysteries beyond me. Yet there it is. Each of his statements is clearly marked with a number so that it is just impossible to make a mistake.

It is amusing also to find how he makes “brooding over the face of the waters” *literal* proof that this was the “era of invertebrates.” that is, “marine life only.” The A.V., of course, gives not “brooding” but “God moved,” and this gave us 455 species “now identified in Lower Cambrian.” Why not 450,000 species? You can add anything in this way to the “Sacred Record.” And get away with it sometimes.

Mr. Beasley then hastily (I think) leaves out two most devastating verses as far as geology is concerned. They are, “And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.” Where are these holy words in the “Sacred Record” substantiated in the more prosaic records of geology? How does geology show us the wondrous picture of God separating “light” from “darkness”? Alas, here Mr. Beasley felt retreat was the better part of valour, so he turns at once to the Second Day with is No. 6—“God said, let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters. Let it divide the waters (clouds) from the waters (oceans)” (v. 6). The word in the A.V. is “firmament,” but Mr. Beasley prefers “expanse or atmosphere”—you can take your choice. As pretty nearly the meaning of all the Hebrew words in the first chapter of Genesis have to be *guessed*, for there is simply no unanimity even among the so-called Hebrew scholars as to what the words really mean, we need not be surprised that this verse six indicates the creation of “insects” (air-breathing) as well as “amphibia (water and land air-breathing animals)”. It is all so divinely simple.

(To be continued)

This Believing World

The Rev. Leslie Weatherhead is a thorough believer in reincarnation, and has written a book about it with cases in proof exactly as Spiritualists bring proof for the existence of spooks. For example, we are told that Sir William Hamilton, the famous philosopher, had mastered thirteen languages before he was thirteen, including Persian, which he could write fluently. Unless he had been a Persian in a former life, how could he possibly have written Persian?

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The only way in which we could possibly admit that Hamilton had "mastered" thirteen languages would have been if he could have translated a play of Shakespeare into them all or, say, the *Pickwick Papers*. To "master" a language means literally to master it, and we doubt very much if Hamilton had more than a mere smattering of his thirteen. But why do people who declare that they had lived on earth before rarely proclaim that they were slaves or the lowest of workers? Why are they nearly always "noble," a prince or a priest? Mrs. Annie Besant claimed that she was "reincarnated" several times—we think she once declared that in one of her former lives she had been Jesus Christ.

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But what is the evidence for reincarnation? Dr. Weatherhead admits there is *none*. You have to add together some "strange pieces of evidence" and then you will believe in it. In fact, just as he believes in Christianity. It is all a matter of *faith*—what appears tremendous evidence to him looks to some of us sheer credulity and superstition. And there are few sillier superstitions than reincarnation.

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In a recent number of "The Recorder" a correspondent enthusiastically advocates an "antidote" to the kind of Sunday Press he does not like—the antidote of Christianity which, he adds, is attracting more and more people to the various Churches. But to keep these going, there must be "sacrificial giving." The S.P.G., for instance, needs £50,000, the S.P.C.K., £40,000, the Church Army, £37,000, and the C.M.S., £20,000. Well, we hope all equally enthusiastic Christians will pay out more than generously to keep these pious concerns going. Just think what happiness such generosity will cause in Heaven, to say nothing of the various Societies. We have always felt that all Christians should be only too pleased to bear as many financial burdens for Jesu's sake as they possibly can.

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A striking example of what Christianity can do was recorded recently in the *Sunday Pictorial*. A Mr. and Mrs. Cook managed to save a Mr. Jim Jones from such notorious sins as betting and drinking, and bring him to Christ through the Salvation Army. They all three sang "hymns happily at Brighton Congress Hall" only a few weeks ago; but some days later, Mrs. Cook, leaving her husband and two young children, disappeared with Mr. Jones, and they have not been heard of since. And the moral? Alas, we are forced to leave it to the Salvation Army to explain. Only through Christ Jesus can we be saved . . .!

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THE Pope seems to be giving a good deal of thought to the living conditions of nuns. Having many times urged them, singularly unsuccessfully, to modernise their dress, he has now tried from another direction to overcome their "obstinate resistance" to change. The contemplative life, he said, "does not essentially consist in the outward profession of a religious discipline" and he deplored that some nuns, "alas, almost die of hunger, of poverty, of privation." Pius XII, it seems, is no believer in the "living death," and

he invited the brides of Christ to give themselves to work so that they may procure for themselves the means to live and not, as a first resort, to think of depending on the bounty and help of others. The Holy Father even referred to the harmful effects that total seclusion might have on certain temperaments. It remains to be seen what effect his words will have on the 100,000 or so nuns living in strict seclusion, but it is a sign of the times that the Pope should express them. "Semper edem" isn't really a very satisfactory motto in the twentieth century.

FOR NEWCOMERS

Christian Arguments

Starting as a small despised sect, Christianity has become a world influence. Only a truly divine creed could have had this history.

On the contrary, the spread of the Christian religion was accomplished in the most worldly and discreditable manner. It was first put on the map by that arch-murderer the Roman Emperor Constantine, possibly because he was persuaded that it had the power to wash away his crimes, which included the killing of his father-in-law (310 A.D.), his sister's husband (314), his nephew (319), his wife (320), his former friend (321), his sister's husband (325) and—the year after he had adopted Christianity as the official religion at the Council of Nicaea—he had his own son put to death in 326. Evidently his conversion to Christianity had not changed his character.

The way in which Christianity subsequently advanced is the story of the most blatant fraud and heinous persecution. Gibbon records that after the conversion of Constantine "the cities which signalled a forward zeal by the voluntary destruction of their temples were distinguished by municipal privileges and rewarded with popular donations." (*Rome*, vol. 111.) These measures were backed up by persecutions exceeding in cruelty those to which the early Christians had been subjected. Towards the end of the fourth century the Emperor Theodosius, at the persuasion of the ecclesiastics who governed his conscience, promulgated "at least 15 severe edicts against the heretics" (*op. cit.* vol. IV). For the next thousand years or more Europe was seldom in any given year without a war of some kind in which religious beliefs played some part, and often a major part.

In its early stages Christianity was running neck and neck with Mithraism for supremacy, and only political power decided the outcome. A condition of Christianity's survival, moreover, was that its leaders shrewdly incorporated many pagan myths and practices to make it more palatable for possible converts.

Unlike Christianity and Mohammedanism, Buddhism spread far more rapidly, and this without the persecutions and religious wars which accounted for the progress of the other two great religions. However, the spread of a belief is not a proof of its truth; consider the many millions of people who today give credence to astrology, yet who but the ignorant or unbalanced would seriously maintain that the date of one's birth, in relation to heavenly bodies, can facilitate predictions about that person! G. H. TAYLOR

NEXT WEEK

WHAT GOOD IS RELIGION?

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY and CORINA.
- Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. F. HAMILTON, E. MILLS and J. W. BARKER.
- London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.
- London (Tower Hill).—Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and WOOD.
- Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Every Wednesday, 1 p.m.; every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Various speakers.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. (Mansfield Market Place).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

Notes and News

"WHEN your salary goes up, do you increase the amount you set aside for God?" If not, and you live in Catford, Kent, you are likely to get a reprimand from the vicar of St. Lawrence's Church, the Rev. Gerald E. Hudson. We don't talk much about money, he says in his church magazine, but he is shocked to find that nearly 100 people, all wage earners, who would "wish to be considered" members of St. Lawrence's had not subscribed to the Duty Fund, "the family purse," which was inaugurated when collections at services were abolished. Mr. Hudson's irritation is understandable. What can he do? Re-institute collections at services? Attendances are probably falling. Certainly the parish is constantly losing subscribers as people move elsewhere. His immediate move will be a personal letter to those who do not contribute to church funds at the half-year. So beware, you defaulters!

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THE Irish Roman Catholic *Standard* (8/8/58) gives some details of the prosecution of a cinema distributing company in Rome for "offending public morals by putting up immodest posters advertising the movies 'Zarak' and 'Mademoiselle Striptease.'" Some details but, unfortunately, not enough. Three representatives of the company were found guilty and the court fined them "about £6 as a

token fine." It would be interesting to know what this means. Whether, for example, the court couldn't avoid a verdict of guilty but disliked the nature of the complaint (by a Guglielmo De Santis) and made the fine as low as possible. However, Italian Catholic circles seemed pleased with the result and the Vatican paper *L'Osservatore Romano* said it "places precise limits on what is dared in the name of freedom of the press," which we should have thought extremely difficult. As the Catholic Action daily, *Il Quotidiano*, saw it, the decision should make film producers aware "of the risks and harm which the lack of a self-imposed censorship can engender." As we see it, the harms resulting from a self-imposed censorship far outweigh those due to a lack of it.

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ALTHOUGH one of our ex-Roman Catholic readers tells us in a letter that his candid opinion of the "True Church" is "completely unprintable", he provides a number of interesting, and printable, comments also. He does not think that the intelligent members of the clergy "believe it all themselves": a view that is shared by a Roman Catholic writer, Mr. Bernard Wall (*Report on the Vatican*) and ourselves. Particularly interesting is our reader's discovery that among his friends of schooldays, 50% have fallen away from the faith. He rightly calls this cheering news.

The Passing Show

The Parisian Cardinal Feltin, writing in the French Catholic daily, *La Croix*, states that there are only 500,000 practising Christians in his diocese, which has a 5,000,000 population. The percentage of R.C.s practising was 15.75 (18% in Paris, 12.5% in the suburbs). Schoolchildren and students formed 38% of those who go to mass, so that from the Catholic point of view the recent survey did not present a very encouraging picture.

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A recently published book, *Psychiatry and Catholicism* (by J. H. Vanderveldt, O.F.M., and R. P. Odenwald, M.D.) tells of a questionnaire which tried to determine whether people in mental distress "prefer nowadays to consult the doctor rather than the clergyman." Of those who answered 57% Protestants and 25% Catholics preferred a doctor, 8% Protestants and 58% Catholics preferred a priest.

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In view of the alarm recently expressed by the German R.C. hierarchy at the large number of Catholics lost to the faith by mixed marriages, it is interesting to study government statistics now released in Bonn. These disclose that 63% of 1955 marriages involving an R.C. were mixed (civil register included)! It is consequently easy to understand the fears of the bishops.

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An R.C. White Father, recently returned from Africa, states that of every ten Africans converted from paganism, seven become Moslems and only three Christians. However, three-quarters of the world total of conversions to Catholicism took place in Africa. Fides (the Mission News Agency) reports 24 million R.C.'s in Africa (out of 224 million population).

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The 1958 Australian Catholic Directory states that Australia's R.C. population now tops the two million mark, a gain of 205,000 on the 1957 figure of 1,800,000. The New Zealand figure rises by 4,000 to 268,000 (population approximately 2½ million).

Servetus

By LESLIE HANGER

ARAGON in the year 1509 felt only the backwash of the Reformation then rending most of Europe, yet it was from this old Spanish kingdom that there emerged one of the greatest figures of the Reformation. I cannot say the most famous, for Michael Servetus was not a leader who founded a Church or led armies into battle, but his work has greater significance today than that of his opponents who persecuted him.

Trained for the Church, Servetus was temperamentally quite suited to a celibate and cloistered life, save for an unprompted desire to think his own religion out for himself. Abandoning the Church for the law, he had the amazing good fortune to be chosen as private secretary to no less a person than Quiritana, confessor to the Emperor Charles V, in which capacity he was present at the Emperor's coronation at Bologna. There he saw the Pope borne aloft, with the mob kneeling in the dust adoring him and scrambling to kiss his shoe, and even the Emperor himself, with his whole army abasing themselves before his Holiness. The independent-minded Servetus found the sight nauseating and repulsive, the dogmatic metaphysical subtleties of the schoolmen and the pomp, power, tyranny and greed of the priests being a startling contrast to the humble life and simple morality depicted in the Gospels.

From this, the duties of Servetus took him to the momentous Diet of Augsburg, where he witnessed Protestantism established as an integral part, not only of the religious, but also of the political, system of Europe. Though Luther himself was not present he must have seen and spoken with several leaders of the Reformation, and though impressed, he did not allow his mind to be overwhelmed, for he said: "For my own part I neither agree nor disagree with either Catholic or Reformer. Both of them seem to me to have something of truth and something of error in their views; and whilst each sees the other's shortcomings, neither sees his own." An observation that did not endear him to either side.

His judgment of the Reformers was seriously at fault in one respect, however, for he thought them to be earnest seekers after truth who would tolerate, if not welcome, heterodox opinions honestly conceived and boldly expressed. Self-confident, he set to work to write and publish a book, *Mistaken Conceptions of the Trinity*, in which he tries, not only to reform the Church, but also its doctrine, for the Holy Trinity is set aside and the Deity expressed as a pantheistic idea. Servetus was by culture and natural genius as well equipped as any of the Reformers to present his own ideas, for in liberality and tolerance he surpassed all others. Moreover, he was not handicapped by being either a professed monk or priest, so had a far better chance of coming to the simple truth than either Luther or Calvin. Without detriment to his piety, or his belief in what was commonly held to be the oracles of God, he had loosed himself from the chains of necessary assent to the interpretations put upon these by the dogmas of his Church. Expecting to receive the toleration that he was prepared to give, his book came from the press bearing not only his name, but that of his mother's family and the land of his birth. The printer and publisher were more cautious; they remained anonymous and were undiscovered for twenty years.

Today Unitarianism is a respectable and academic subject causing no agitation to the few who discuss it. In the days of Servetus it burst upon the ears of the faithful like

the explosion of a nuclear weapon. Luther denounced the work as "a fearfully wicked book," for Servetus had attacked his favourite Doctrine of Justification by Faith in most uncomplimentary terms, and the other leaders of the Reformation hastened to disclaim responsibility for the book. One only showed favourable leanings towards the ideas of Servetus, but he expressed it only in his letters and private conversations, showing that then, as now, preachers have private opinions which differ from their public professions.

Studios and learned, tolerant and charitable, freed from the fetters of Rome, Servetus had come to the Reformers of Germany and Switzerland as a torchbearer and fellow worker for the truth. He expected them to reciprocate the liberality and comprehensiveness he felt in himself. To the end of his days he had difficulty in understanding why he had not been received with open arms, until, confronted by a host of enemies, he was forced to leave the land of Reform. He made for Paris and, knowing that Catholic France would have even less toleration for the author of the work on Trinitarian Error, he assumed the name of Villeneuve, entered as a student of mathematics and physics, and eventually took his degrees of M.A. and M.D. in the University. Under that alias he subsequently wrote and edited various works at Lyons, and as Villeneuve he finally settled at Vienne in Dauphiny, where he lived for twelve years, practising medicine and on terms of intimacy with the Archbishop and other notabilities.

While in Paris Servetus had made the acquaintance of Calvin, then a budding reformer yet to make his way in the world. During his peaceful sojourn at Vienne Servetus saw Calvin exiled from France and rise to become virtually dictator of the city-state of Geneva and eventually Servetus renewed his ambitions as a reformer by entering into a correspondence with Calvin. This correspondence soon became acrimonious and disparaging on both sides, and Calvin, guessing the true identity of Villeneuve, waited his opportunity to expose and destroy Servetus.

His chance came when Servetus secretly printed and attempted to distribute a book entitled *Christianity Restored*. In this work he lashed both the Papacy and the Reformers and expounded more fully his Pantheistic views; ridiculing the Trinity as a "three-headed chimæra," he expounded a correct monotheism. Rejecting the horrible doctrine that all infants who died unbaptised were consigned to Hell, he proposed that the rite should be delayed until the individual arrived at an age of discretion. Jesus he proclaimed to be a naturally begotten man. In short, Servetus proposed a Christianity more fit for reasonable and humane men.

A manuscript copy of his work was sent to Calvin, who was so enraged by it that he cast aside all scruples and denounced Servetus to the Inquisition at Lyons. The Inquisitors demanded more evidence, which Calvin was at pains to supply, and on this a case was made out against Servetus, who was arrested, tried and found guilty. It appears, however, that everyone in Vienne wished Servetus well, even the Archbishop, who must have been a tolerant and intelligent man. Though none dared speak openly on his behalf, they did what they could; they allowed him to escape from prison.

No doubt Servetus found the road to his native Spain barred and next made for Northern Italy, where he had reason to suppose he would find sympathisers. Forced to

take the road to Geneva, he was waiting there for a boat to carry him across the lake when he was recognised, arrested and once more imprisoned.

Calvin, himself a refugee from tyranny, who had spoken in praise of tolerance, was now resolved to destroy Servetus for no other reason than that he was intolerant of a rival who proposed to restore, and not merely reform Christianity and who refused to bend his mind to either Catholic Pope or Protestant Dictator. With all the power of Calvin arrayed against Servetus, the result of the trial was a foregone conclusion. The only hope was to abase himself before Calvin and cry for mercy. Instead, Servetus attacked him on every point and abused him to his face. So, despite the fact that he was no citizen of Geneva, Servetus was condemned to be burnt at the stake for having published a book that no one in the city save Calvin had read.

As a last touch of horror, the wood that was heaped around him was purposely green and it was a full half hour before life left him.

The "Great Man" Fallacy

By RICHARD NORTH

RESPECT for the opinions of great men merely because they are great, and not because of the particular subject by which they achieved that distinction, is well illustrated by one who was himself illustrious. Doctor Johnson said there was a balance in favour of Christianity from the number of great men who had been convinced of its truth, and he referred specifically to Grotius and Newton. That view is in fact the common one, but I mention Johnson because his acute and independent judgment would never have used such an argument to support any other subject than religion, and because he thus provides a striking testimony to the strong anchorage of even the ablest minds in custom and tradition.

Let us enquire whether the beliefs of great men are of such all-round intrinsic merit as to justify this attitude of mind. Mahomet believed in the virtue of numbers, preferring odds to evens; he was apprehensive about certain weather conditions, and he read omens and prognostications into such trivial and accidental matters as the drawing of a sword from its scabbard. The style of the verse and the arrangement of the parts and cantos of Dante's "Divine Comedy" were the outcome of his faith in the mystical properties of certain numbers. The cultivated Trojans had their Palladium and the cultivated Greeks their Delphi. Examples are numerous enough to provide an almost unrestricted choice, but perhaps the most astonishing of them all is Kepler. By his unrivalled genius of observation and calculation he was able to discover the laws of planetary motion before Newton's later discovery demonstrated their inevitability. Yet alongside his incomparable logic and mathematics was a stock of astrological rubbish inconceivably out of place in such a head. Those who support Johnson's credibility of Christianity generally follow up with the question—If such things are superstitions, why have great men cherished them?

Without exploring the complex psychological answers to this, two simple and obvious ones at once spring to mind. One is that great men are generally great in one particular only, and are in other respects no better than their fellows. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the matters upon which they can speak with authority and those upon which they have no special claim to be heard. For it is unreasonable to ascribe credibility to a stupid belief on the ground that it is upheld by someone who is an authority

upon something else. Attila was a soldier, and the folly of soldiers in matters outside the profession of arms is notorious. The censure which Buckle bestows upon the excursions into civil affairs of England's two greatest generals, Marlborough and Wellington, is equally deserved by military chiefs in general. In peace a soldier's mouth should be shut. Similarly Kepler was an astronomer, and his claim to greatness rests not upon horoscopes but upon telescopes. In three words of wisdom was exposed Kepler's obtuse credulity—"Astrology is bunk!" Of the two men referred to by Johnson one was a lawyer and the other a physicist, and their testimony upon Christianity therefore had no special value.

The other answer is that all through the ages and all over the world great men have accepted beliefs widely different and sharply contradictory upon subjects in which they were not specialists. Credibility based upon reputation in another matter is therefore stupid, for if the belief of one great man contradicts that of another upon some matter in which neither is an expert they cannot both be credible.

In these days when the word progress is in everybody's mouth, and when it is impossible for the layman to keep pace with the advance in knowledge of the physical sciences, it is too often forgotten that the crust of culture which lies over the general ignorance and error is very thin. Beneath the flimsy covering there is a deep and solid layer of superstition bequeathed from a savage ancestry. In this present year of grace and enlightenment how many horseshoes can a man count on houses and sheds in a day's walk? How many refuse to walk under a ladder, how many put mascots upon their cars, and what officers' mess will dare to sit down with thirteen at table? Even in the most cultivated members of the most highly developed communities the legacies of a remote parentage appear with such alarming frequency that hardly anyone seems immune.

Facts for Freethinkers

No. 21

FIGURES ARE NOW AVAILABLE showing rate reduction for the financial year 1957/58 under the Rating and Valuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1955. Two tables have been prepared for the Committee on the Rating of Charities and Kindred Bodies, and they are issued by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Whitehall, London, S.W.1, ref. R.C. (58) 58. They list, among other items, reduction on hereditaments used for religious purposes, provision for which was opposed by the National Secular Society. Here are some statistics on religious rate relief in England and Wales.

They are listed under four heads: (1) Training colleges and theological colleges; (2) Official residences of clergy, church officers and servants; (3) Headquarters of religious organisations; (4) Other religious purposes. The number of hereditaments involved under each head is (1) 151, (2) 8,646, (3) 260, (4) 653; total 9,710, of which the total rateable values are: (1) £125,931, (2) £335,011, (3) £133,331, (4) £141,763; total £736,036. Of these, a total of 81 had a rateable value of £1,000 or over, and the total rateable value of these 81 was £218,363.

Prior to rate relief under Section 8 of the Rating and Valuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, the normal rate charges on the hereditaments listed would have been: (1) £117,344, (2) £309,670, (3) £103,531, (4) £125,690; total £656,235. Rate remission under Section 8 amounted to: (1) £53,986 (a reduction of 46%), (2) £76,848 (a reduction of 25%), (3) £30,255 (a reduction of 29%), (4) £46,488 (a

reduction of 37%); total £207,577 (a reduction of 32%).

To get these figures into true perspective within the framework of Section 8 of the Act, the total remission of £207,577 should be compared with totals of £1,338,345 for Education; £596,324 for Social Welfare; £27,774 for Miscellaneous Charities; £72,376 for Almshouses; and £333,302 for Playing Fields. It might also be noted that the figures cover 96% of the rating authorities in England and Wales—those from whom returns were received by June 5th, 1958.

Subdividing that same total religious rate relief of £207,577 among the various types of boroughs, etc., we find that it comprises: £60,684 for County Boroughs; £42,536 for Metropolitan Boroughs and the City of London; £34,683 for Other Boroughs; £23,279 for Urban Districts; and £46,395 for Rural Districts.

The Metropolitan area is a special case. In the others, relief on residences is high and relief on headquarters low, but because many organisations have headquarters in London, the relief on such premises forms more than half of the Metropolitan rate relief figure. It is, in fact, £22,263 out of the £42,536 given above.

That non-profit-making, propaganda organisations like the National Secular Society should have to pay full rates when religious organisations can obtain partial or full relief, if the local authority agrees to grant this, is most unfair. So too is relief on vicarages, presbyteries and manses, when neighbouring private houses are rated. We raise no objection to relief for educational purposes, genuine charities, youth clubs, playing fields, etc.

But compare the relief on religious residences in rural districts, £31,406, with Social Welfare figures for the same districts as follows: For the young, £14,870; the aged, £6,060; the poor, £337; the sick, etc., £25,807; other needy, £2,892; community, £53,075; other, £4,501. C. with Youth Organisations, £116.

These are a few of the statistics from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government's tables. It should be borne in mind that they are figures purely and simply under Section 8 of the 1955 Act. As such, they do not include exemptions for places of worship, church halls, etc., which come under Section 7 of the Act, and for which no figures are available, though these must be considerable.

C.McC.

CORRESPONDENCE

JEWISH LAW

In the column "This Believing World" (July 18th) it is stated that "nothing has caused bigger headaches in the Church than St. Matthew, v. 32." Surely what has caused much more questioning thought is the fact that St. Mark x 11-12—quoted by Miss Coe—do not make sense, for Jewish women could not divorce their husbands. Under very exceptional circumstances the marriage could be annulled but divorce for a wife was unheard of. In St. Matthew v. 32 it is the husband who puts away the wife; and to a Jewish wife there could not be such a concept as an unfaithful spouse, for the Jews contemporary with Jesus, and for 1,000 years more—were, by immemorial legal custom polygamists. To a Jew, therefore, an adulterer meant only a woman unfaithful to her husband, or a seducer of a lady *already married* to someone else.

The twelve tribes of God's chosen people were descended from the polygamous union of Jacob with his two wives, Leah and Rachel, and his two concubines, Bilhah and Ziplah. Abraham, married with God's blessing to his half-sister Sarah (Gen. x 12), put away his second wife, Hagar (Gen. xvi 3-16).

How can what was right in God's sight in the days of Abraham become "wrong" in God's sight in the days of Tiberius, or in the days of Dr. Fisher?

And why did not Jesus make mention of these facts? The authors of the New Testament back their varied argument with

Old Testament quotation at every opportunity, but seem to have forgotten that as Moses had his laws direct from a God, who talked to him "face to face as a man to his friend" (Ex. xxxiii 11), if the "Jewish" laws which permitted multiple marriage and divorce were wrong and displeasing to God, then surely God would have told Moses so. And Moses, who ruled the chosen people with a rod of iron, would have seen to it that God's laws were obeyed. Or the God who punished complaint by death (Num. xi 1, Num. xi 4-6, 31-34) would have visited the guilty with wholesale fire and plague.

G.E.P.

JORDANIAN IMPORTS

Jordanian tourist brochures emphasise that members of the Jewish faith are not admitted to the country and tourist visas are granted only "provided the tourist holds a certificate of church membership." In view of this, I sincerely hope that the British forces recently sent to Jordan were carefully screened to make sure no atheists, Jews, agnostics (or similar riffraff), etc., were illegally imported as nothing should be done to offend His Royal Majesty King Hussein and our gallant Jordanian allies.

Yours anxiously, DAVE SHIPPER.

OBITUARY

WILLIAM MCKEE, (66) Scottish born, was a well-known Freethinker around Coventry, where he lived, and in the National Secular Society, where he was loved and respected. Bill—as he was known to his friends—had long since outgrown his Roman Catholic upbringing and in recent years, when ill-health struck him suddenly, he tried to ensure that his well-meaning religious relatives should not claim him at the last. The secular service and cremation that he wanted were, it is feared, denied him; the National Secular Society only learned of his death (on August 6) after a private funeral had taken place.

It was William McKee who, in drawing up his Will, happened to approach a solicitor with "conscientious objections" to assisting in the bequeathing of money to an anti-religious body. With Bill's permission we publicised the matter anonymously in THE FREETHINKER (July 11) Bill accepted his terrible illness with stoicism. We shall miss him, and so will many others. It is some consolation to know that, at least, he died peacefully.

GEORGE SEIBEL, of New York, was a staunch Atheist and Freethinker all his life, and his death on July 24, at the age of 85 leaves a gap in the ranks of our American friends and readers. He had, in fact, been ill for some months after a cerebral haemorrhage, and life slowly ebbed away. We send our sincere sympathy to his widow, Helen Hillier Seibel, likewise an Atheist, and to her family. "Our grandson"—writes Mrs. Seibel—"is the fifth generation of unbelievers on my side of the house".

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