

The Freethinker

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ON MARCH 3RD, 1939, after one of the shortest conclaves in the modern history of the Vatican, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, former Secretary of State, was elected Pope and promptly assumed the Papal style of Pius XII. The choice of this particular title was not actually either accidental or without significance; a newly-elected Pope, on choosing his official name is guided by policy as well as by personal inclinations. By assuming the title of the XIIth Pius, Pacelli linked himself up with some of the worst reactionaries (in both the religious and political sense) in the long and chequered annals of the Papacy; for Pius IX was the arch-clerical reactionary of the 19th century, the Pope of the *Syllabus* of 1864, in

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Two Popes

By F. A. RIDLEY

which toleration and liberalism were denounced outright as deadly sins, and of the Vatican decree of Papal Infallibility in 1870. Pius X was the arch-fundamentalist in the theological sphere, who set himself to extirpate every vestige of liberal thought in Roman Catholic circles, comprehensively denounced by this Pope as "Modernism" (in the theological sphere the extent of his infallible Holiness's acquaintance with modern Biblical scholarship is indicated by his remark that the Hebrew Patriarchs, Abraham, etc.—"were comforted in their adversity by the thought of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary!") While Pius XI, Pacelli's immediate predecessor and mentor, will go down in history chiefly for his activities in the political sphere as the major architect of the Catholic-Fascist alliance, which played so prominent a part in European politics throughout the twenty odd years that spanned the era between Mussolini's march on Rome (1922) and the final debacle of Hitler, Mussolini and Co. in 1945. In the politics of which melancholy era, Pius Pacelli undoubtedly played a largely *sub rosa* but undeniably important role.

Pius XII 1939-58

As has been noted before in this column, his now departed Holiness was, by both training and temperament, a diplomat rather than a theologian, or even a priest. The life of Eugenio Pacelli, a Roman aristocrat by birth (his grandfather was one of the most reactionary ministers of Pius IX, and his brother negotiated the Lateran Treaty as the representative of Pius XI with Mussolini in 1929) had been passed in the diplomatic service of the Vatican. In particular, as its leading German expert, as Papal Nuncio in successively, Munich and Berlin between 1922 and 1929 (where he was recalled to the Vatican in 1929 to become Secretary of State) this astute cleric played again a *sub rosa* but again also undoubtedly important role in the German political history of the stormy era which preceded the rise of Hitler to power in 1933. As Papal Nuncio in Munich (where the Nazi movement originated) Pacelli was present during the abortive Hitler *coup d'état* in 1923, which began—and but for abnormal circumstances ought to have ended—the Führer's spectacular career. Actually, the official Bavarian clerical party kept aloof from that adventure and from Hitler,

then regarded as a crack-brained adventurer. However, it appears to be tolerably certain as far as anything can be which is cooked up in the winding corridors of the Vatican, that the eventual election of Pacelli was primarily due to his then outstanding diplomatic ability during one of the most complex periods in modern European history, and in particular to his reputation as the leading German expert at the Vatican. Germany, then the most powerful State in Europe, and the hope of every reactionary in the world, represented the major agent, the trump card so to speak, in the plans of the clerical-Fascist international anti-Communist, anti-Russian alliance of which Pope

XI (Achille Ratti, 1922-39) had been one of the major architects. It was to political services that Pacelli owed his election to the Papacy and, as was only to be expected, once elected (on his 63rd birthday) he faithfully continued his predecessor's pro-Fascist policy. However, the Vatican, and Pacelli in his diplomatic capacity, had too much experience of the realities of this uncertain world to put *all* their eggs in the Fascist basket; fortunately for them! since in this case they would have turned out to be bad eggs. For Fascism went in 1945 and its clerical ex-ally was left with the invidious task of a co-existence with the victorious Democracies, including at first, the unspeakable Russians! However, it must be said that Pacelli accomplished a diplomatic somersault of truly acrobatic agility. When the melancholy diplomatic history of the immediate post-war years comes fully to light, it will probably be found that the tragic breach between the former allies, Russia and the West, which has now put mankind in imminent danger of nuclear suicide, was largely due to the subterranean machinations of the clerical death-watch beetle in the Vatican. At any rate, by the end of his reign, Pacelli had regained most of the lost ground and had sold the counter-revolutionary ideology of the Vatican most successfully to the nowadays Democratic Conservatives of Europe and America. It must be conceded that from the standpoint of the Cardinals who elected him Pacelli made an excellent choice; but again, like his opposite number the then Communist "Supreme Pontiff," Joseph Stalin, Pacelli outlived his era and, again like Stalin, had really become a liability to the cause he represented some time before his eventual demise last year.

The "Krushchev" of the Papacy

It has often been pointed out that despite their marked enmity, there are actually many points of resemblance between the Kremlin and the Vatican. This fact was forcibly indicated by the mysterious wire-pulling which went on in both Rome and Moscow after the sudden deaths of both Pacelli and Stalin. But the final result was markedly similar in both cases; the effective substitution of the proclaimed principle of "collective Leadership" in the person of Roncalli and at Moscow, of Krushchev—both incidentally, of peasant origin. In the

case of his present Holiness, an "infallible" Pope can of course, only be "collective" up to a point (after all, he is the only one who has direct access to the Deity) but it does look as if the personal autocracy of both Pacelli and of Stalin has been succeeded by a milder and a more tactful regime. (In the case of Russia, this follows probably in the wake of the recent growth of a scientific culture. A people who can launch sputniks, and plan to colonise the moon in the foreseeable future, cannot be pushed around like the illiterate priest-ridden peasants, whom the Bolsheviks inherited from the previous Tsarist regime). In the case of Rome, the Fascist methods culminating in the irresponsible "Führer principle" which Pacelli and his predecessor, Ratti, shared with Hitler and Mussolini, is now rather antiquated in this age of Universal Democracy; even the medieval Papacy has nowadays to be *of* the modern world as well as *in* it! We are all Democrats now—including the dictators: the Vatican dictatorship, the oldest of all (except the formerly Divine Emperor of Japan now also translated into a Democrat) and of course the more recent "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" also.

According to the famous prophecy of St. Malachi allegedly written by an Irish monk about 1150) there will

only be five more Popes following Roncalli, after which comes the end of the Papacy and presumably of the world. Without indulging in facile, but highly speculative predictions of final nuclear disaster as regards the world, I, personally (though on more mundane grounds) am inclined to agree with the holy prophet. I, too, think that the crisis of the Vatican will probably come to a head by about the end of the present century. Not, of course, because of the coming of the Day of Judgment as predicted by Malachi, but as the result of the present accumulation of political, industrial and intellectual causes which are steadily, if silently, undermining the still superficially imposing facade of Roman Catholicism (as indeed, of supernatural religion in general) throughout the modern world, I think that the present come-back of Rome is actually a flash-in-the-pan, due ultimately to Rome's current alliance with the political reaction Fascist under Pacelli, pluto-democratic under Roncalli. But this will not last for ever, any more than these two Popes themselves. Nor, if we may plunge into the admittedly hazardous business of terrestrial prophecy, will the Church of Rome in the future, any more than did "The Eternal City" and Empire of Rome in the past. We shall see—what we *shall* see!

Heresy in Sierra Leone

By C. W. Marshall

When the Christian Institute (later to become Fourah Bay College) was set up in Freetown in 1827, there must have been misgivings in the minds of some secular administrators about the Church Missionary Society's teaching of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French and German. How was it going to emancipate the backwardness of the polyglot tribes who formed, with the Creole ex-slaves, the population of the African peninsula then forming the Colony?

The 17th century had seen the establishment of a Jesuit mission on one of the colony mountains (nearer my God, to Thee?) but this outpost of Rome had been reduced by the ravages of time and tropical diseases to the odd fragments of walling, when the larger scale settling of the colony by the British was undertaken in 1787. Tropical disease, notably malaria, had put paid to a further effort by Rome in 1859, when six Fathers arrived on their edifying task in the January of that year. They managed to keep body and soul together for a few months, but by the June their maker had claimed the last survivor.

Rome had certain successes with the establishment of a short dynasty of Christian Temne kings in the north-west part of the hinterland, now forming the enlarged Protectorate, but the ending of this dynasty towards the end of the 17th century by the superior merits of Islam (polygamy and concubinage) has resulted in the relative extinction of Christian influence there ever since. And in fact, in the 19th century, the Muslim kings of Port Loko refused to let the Church Missionary Society have a settlement there.

With the varied attempts at implementation in the country of mankind's different gods, it was to be expected that various heresies should have developed due to the social interplay of the various sects. An instance of this sort of thing is apparent in Freetown during the Easter period. Albinos of African parentage are popularly believed to be some sort of descendants of the betraying Judas of the New Testament and, on Maundy Thursday, they take to the hills or otherwise keep themselves well out of sight. Failure to observe this precaution brings the distinct possibility of their being beaten up if seen on the Good Friday by their normally pigmented Christian brothers. Attempts

are being made to discourage this "festival" by some ministers but with varying amounts of success. In the Kono Tribal area in the east of the Protectorate, I frequently came across small village mosques, with the womenfolk going through the whole gamut of religious exercises on a cleared piece of land outside the building; a practice I have seen in no place outside Sierra Leone. Back-sliding amongst the Christian temperance sects is of such a magnitude as would cause deep concern to their brothers in this country and America, were the truth widely publicized.

It was my occasional practice to have a drink with junior African colleagues on a Sunday morning, but one of them could never turn up until quite late through having to usher his brothers in Jesus out of the chapel at the close of the morning service. However, once arrived, he then made up for lost time!

American evangelism, and its more rigorous social codes, introduce more shocking examples of the fall from virtue. A train journey from a station where I had just finished a job of work, found me in the company of an American lady missionary just back from "furlough" in the States. Never having trusted untreated water supplies, it was my practice to drink imported bottled beer when away from a water filter and, setting up table, I offered the lady a share of my meal. This was politely refused, and was followed up with a long dissertation on the evil effects of alcohol on the higher brain centres. At a station up the line she broke off the lecture, and told me she was expecting to be met by the sub-mission headmaster (a Christianised Mende) and true enough, there he was. Yes, he was there all right, but three parts incapable from what must have been a marathon binge on the local palm-wine brew, to judge by his breath! The temperance lecture was *not* resumed once the train started again!

The Roman Church also has its ups and downs. In a south western district there lived a paramount chief who was supposedly a Romanist, and was married to another Romanist, yet he still thought fit to accept a post as a Governor on the Board of an Evangelical Mission. A Romanist father, whom I tackled on this irregularity, opined that it was probably due to tribal communistic opportunism!

(Concluded on next page)

Religion and Crime

By COLIN McCALL

Speaking at a Young Conservatives Rally at Burton-on-Trent on April 18th, 1959, Mr. H. E. Gurden, M.P. for Selly Oak, Birmingham, made the outrageous suggestion that: "No atheist, agnostic or non-believer should be allowed to teach in Britain's schools" (*The Observer*, 19/4/59). By allowing this, he said, "we are defeating the whole basis of education in this country." For, "Without the correct religious background for children in our schools we are helping to breed juvenile delinquency."

On April 20th, I wrote to Mr. Gurden in my capacity as Secretary of an organisation of atheists and agnostics, challenging him to substantiate his statement. Figures are hard to come by, I said, but I suggested that atheist and agnostic juvenile delinquents were very few in comparison to numbers, and that religious delinquents were high. If you have contrary figures, I added, "I should be interested to see them. Otherwise I think you ought to make it perfectly clear that you are not only voicing a personal opinion, unsupported by the facts, but one that is contrary to the facts."

On May 1st, I received a printed acknowledgment card on which Mr. Gurden had written, "*The Observer* did not give a full report of my speech," a rather obvious fact since the report in question was 18 lines long. Considering Mr. Gurden's "reply" quite inadequate, I wrote him again on the same day. It was not a full report I was concerned about, but the statements quoted. I asked: "Now did you make them, Mr. Gurden? If you did I repeat my request for figures or any other evidence to support them. If you did not make these statements then you should write to *The Observer* informing them that they have misquoted you. If you made the statements but cannot support them, then you should admit this." After some delay I received a similar, printed acknowledgment card to the earlier one, but this time with no written message. The printed words "have been noted" (referring to the contents of my "communication") were, however, underlined.

Now, since Mr. Gurden has not written to *The Observer* nor denied it to me, we may, I suggest, conclude that (1) he said the words quoted, and (2) he has no figures to support them. But we cannot treat Mr. Gurden as an isolated curiosity. His views are not unique. Indeed, we are here up against the old illusion that religion is conducive to, if not identical with, morality.

On May 21st, therefore, I wrote to the Prison Commission, Horseferry House, Dean Ryle Street, London, S.W.1, referring to the speech and the mere printed acknowledgments, and saying:

I believe the statement to be utterly without foundation; indeed I think that statistics might well show that religious criminals and juvenile delinquents far outnumber non-religious ones. I should be grateful, therefore, if you would supply me with the latest figures for the religious beliefs of criminals and juvenile delinquents. I am prepared, of course, to meet any expense incurred, in trying to show statistically that Mr. Gurden and those who share his apparently widespread view are mistaken.

This brought the following, dated May 27th, from an "obedient servant," whose signature I cannot read:

Sir, In reply to your letter dated 21st May, 1959, I am desired by the Prison Commissioners to say that the data you require is not available and the Commissioners are unable to assist you.

A month later (June 26th), on the instruction of the National Secular Society Executive, I asked the Prison Commissioners if it would be permissible to write to the

individual governors of English prisons because:

We understand that each prisoner is asked his religion and, indeed, is visited by a representative of his Church. Clearly there must be a record, then, at the different prisons on the number of Roman Catholics, Church of England members, and so on. And it is this we wish to obtain. We consider it to be most important information, particularly when a British MP goes around making the type of statement that Mr. Gurden did.

The same obedient servant at the Prison Commission answered me on July 6th, and here is his letter:—

Sir, In reply to your further letter of the 26th June, I am desired by the Prison Commissioners to say that they cannot accede to your request to be allowed to approach Prison Governors direct in pursuit of the information you require.

Denominational data is obtained solely for internal administration purposes and for the use of the chaplains and the information would be of no use whatsoever in either proving or disproving the questions you have in mind.

Let us just look at the second sentence. That the data is obtained solely for the purposes mentioned is no doubt true. I am not concerned with why it is obtained. But it is quite another matter to say that the data, once obtained, would be of no use for other purposes. It is, in fact, absurd to argue that denominational data from various prisons "would be of no use whatsoever in either proving or disproving questions"—of denominational data in prisons! It is precisely the data required.

Take an imaginary case. Prison A has 500 inmates, of whom 50% are registered Church of England; 25% Roman Catholic; 23% other denominations and religions; and 2% no religion. These figures may have been compiled so that the Church of England chaplain knows he has to minister to the spiritual needs of 250 inmates; that the Roman Catholic priest has to receive the confessions of 125; and so on. It will also be helpful to the authorities to know that at least 125 convicts will want fish on Fridays. These are some of the purposes for which the denominational information is obtained.

But, once obtained, it has other uses, not at present exploited. It gives a picture; in this case, of course, an imaginary picture—the percentages are invented and I have no idea whether they conform to reality. It is for this reason that I should like the true figures from each English prison. Then I could get an accurate picture of the religious beliefs of English criminals. I could see whether Fr. Alan Keenan, O.F.M., was right when he said, "The sad fact is that the proportion of Catholics in prisons and Borstals is greater than the proportion of Catholics in the population." (*Scottish Catholic Herald*, 17/10/58.) I should have the religious statistics of our prison population, and this would help in assessing the moral value of religion. But our obedient servant at the Prison Commission assures me that, because the figures are not obtained for that purpose they would be no use for that purpose. His logic eludes me but his reasons may be guessed.

Heresy in Sierra Leone (Concluded from previous page)

The facts are that increasing pressure is building up in Sierra Leone along with other colonial territories for more education, and many are beginning to see that the reason for the apparently slow progress of African scholars is not their inherent ability, but is due to the fact that the teaching of fable occupies a disproportionate time in the curricula of the schools.

But the Christian Piper is still playing his tune as, up to now, he has been the one who has put down the money.

This Believing World

That ever lively writer in "News Chronicle," Sarah Jenkins, had better look out, or she will get her paper into a Holy Row with the Roman Church. In a review of the film "The Nun's Story" which shows how any nice girl can become a nun, Miss Jenkins says, "What brought about my outburst was the boot-kissing penance scene"; and she adds, "Never could I accept a faith which demands in any circumstances that one human being should kiss the boots of another."

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The really wonderful thing about it all is that Miss Jenkins obviously never knew that "grovelling" in this way is part and parcel of Roman Catholicism. Its followers, and particularly its converts (like, say, Miss Edith Sitwell or Miss Pamela Frankau or Mr. Evelyn Waugh or Mr. Graham Greene and dozens of others) are all thoroughly proud of grovelling. Miss Jenkins says "No doubt the Roman Catholics' answer is that this (her criticism) shows pride and arrogance. No doubt they could overwhelm me with clever theological argument . . ." They could do nothing of the kind. They could not "overwhelm," as she thinks, her "instinctive emotional rejection." But what the Roman Church can do is to frighten so many journalists from criticising it. Congratulations to Miss Jenkins.

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At last there's going to be "A Voice for the Church" the *Daily Mail* tells us—and for once the "Church" is not the Roman one but the English—quite a surprise. The "voice" will be that of Colonel R. J. Hornby, and we are informed that "with a small staff he will run a 24-hour information service" to "put over" the Church and "answer questions" at "a moment's notice." This is great news, and we shall see how he can answer some of the "questions" in THE FREETHINKER "at a moment's notice." If we were betting on it, we would lay heavy odds that neither he nor his "small staff" could answer some of our questions in a lifetime. Colonel Hornby obviously has never met Freethinkers.

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The "Manchester Guardian" gave a spirited account of some "Pentecostals" who are also "whole-Gospellers," ardent Christians who believe "in the Gospel from cover to cover." No lukewarm Christianity for them, thank Heaven. They were trying to evangelise Tavistock in Devon with "singing," preaching, and playing a guitar; and one of them, earnestly preaching for the Lord, was most enthusiastic about "the tenor saxophonist of a London Jazz club who had seen the Light, and was now blowing his tenor sax for Jesus Christ." Yet in the face of all this, the happy, if pious, guitar player is troubled with a question—which is, "Where shall I spend Eternity?" Alas, we can only say "in a grave." But we advise our Pentecostal champion to ask Colonel Hornby (as above), and he will get an answer at "a moment's notice" guaranteed by the Church of course. Or will he?

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But the guitar player, Mr. Tyte, is particularly keen on the way his faith can cast out Devils and Demons. He once had a Demon himself, but faith and joining "The Voice of Deliverance" community, accounted for the Evil Spirit, though we are not told in what way. This rather nettles us, if the Thing was only cast out, is He still at large? Can He get into Christians only, or is He just as likely to enter a frightened infidel, or what? But the mysterious ways of the Lord are beyond us.

The Modern Churchmen's Union insists that Artificial Insemination must not be considered a "sin" though "at the worst" it is "ill-advised." Of course only if it is used "irresponsibly," can it be "stigmatised a sin." The real difficulty about A.I.D. is, according to the Bishop of Birmingham, "that it cannot be fitted into the traditional categories of sexual sin"—Jesus appears to have known nothing about it, and therefore left no heavenly ruling for good Christians to follow; and even the sexual experts who flourished in the Roman Church never discussed it. We wonder what Pentecostal and Hot Gospel Christians think about it?

Chapman Cohen on Religion

AS THE botanist demonstrates the fundamental kinship of all roses by ignoring superficial differences and reducing them to their essential similarities, so the scientific Freethinker treats the various forms of the belief in God. He sees that all of them have certain features in common, whether they exist in a Piccadilly church or in the depths of an African forest. And the former has no higher warranty of its truth than the latter. Nay, but for the latter the former would not be in existence. It is the mistaken ignorance of the savage that gives birth to all the gods, and all that later ages has ever done is to modify a primitive superstition in the hope of making it more acceptable to later thought, without ever being able to furnish a single piece of evidence in its support.

There are really no "undisputed facts of human nature" on which religion may be based. With all the facts to which the believer appeals the Freethinker is perfectly familiar. It is not the facts the Freethinker disputes, but the interpretation placed upon them. He sees what the religious person will not see—that the interpretation of the modern religionist is essentially that of the primitive savage. Its form has undergone a change, the language in which it is expressed has become more refined, but it remains essentially the same. It is the believer who refuses to face the facts. He closes his eyes to the mass of knowledge at our disposal concerning the origin and nature of religious beliefs. He maintains the mental attitude of his far-gone ancestors in his dealings with modern thought. To use an old simile, he stands with his back to the sun worshipping the dark. And, so standing, he mistakes his own shadow for evidence of the existence of his God.

[THE FREETHINKER, July 10th, 1910.]

FILM CENSORSHIP

IT IS in *Annunciation* that the Roman Church censorship of films is reported. They are listed: "A"—"Suitable only for adult audiences"; "B"—"Suitable for adults and adolescents"; "C"—"Recommended for family audiences"; "D"—"Particularly suitable for children"; "A (1)"—"Indicating that the film contains elements requiring certain reservation"; and "A (2)"—"Indicates that a film is permeated with morally degrading or pernicious atmosphere and should be avoided." In the current list (July, 1959) only one film *Question of Adultery*, is placed in the last category, but no less than fourteen are classified A (1). They include the superb Italian film, *Cabiria*, *The Captain's Table*, *Gigi*, *The Naked and the Dead* and *Room at the Top*.

NEXT WEEK

C. E. RATCLIFFE and G. H. TAYLOR
ON REINCARNATION

THE FREETHINKER

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F. A. HORNIBROOK, COLIN MCCALL and G. H. TAYLOR.

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Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (rear of Morley Street Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. CORINA and DAY.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

London (Finsbury Square, E.C.2).—Every Wednesday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and C. MCCALL.

London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Saturday from 6 p.m. and every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. TRIBE.

London (Tower Hill).—Every 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).—Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 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, 6.30 p.m.

Notes and News

THE MAHARAJAH OF BARODA, manager of the Indian cricket team, is an M.P. in Delhi and, when interviewed recently by Mr. Logan Gourlay of the *Daily Express*, he didn't confine his remarks to cricket. "The biggest problem facing India today," he said, "is over-population. We'll have to apply some kind of birth control." But it's not easy, he added. "Some Hindu sects forbid it."

DR. HAROLD SCOTT, Pastor of the First Unitarian Society in Salt Lake City, Utah, U.S.A., had some strong words to say about "Neo Orthodoxy" in his *Ram's Horn* paper recently. "The Neos, it seems to me, are weeping and wailing because they are going to die," he wrote. "The danger is that being so occupied with death they will do little to improve life. A morbid crew, I'd say. Death is part of the life cycle. We're going to die. So what? Many of us have faced death and our chief concern was whether the insurance premiums had been paid up to date." Elsewhere Dr. Scott says: "Some of the great religious leaders of the past would have done less mischief in the name of religion if they had patronised a (psychiatrist's) couch instead of a pulpit." As a friend of ours remarked, Dr. Scott and his like reveal healthy aspects of America's religious revival.

ANOTHER American Unitarian, Dr. Winfred Overholser, aged 67, is retiring this year as Professor of Psychiatry

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged £245 13s. 9d.; A. George, £1; W.H.D., 5s.; E.C.R., 5s.; H. W. Day, 5s.; R. V. Ross (U.S.A.), £1 13s. 8d. —Total to date, July 31st, 1959, £249 2s. 5d.

at George Washington University and as Superintendent of the University's St. Elizabeths Hospital. Overholser's "sane humanism"—says *Time* (20/7/59) "stood him in good stead at St. Elizabeths" where "For 13 years he endured endless legal wrangling over his most celebrated patient, Poet Ezra Pound." More important, we read, "he helped make St. Elizabeths one of the most enlightened mental hospitals in the U.S."

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THE League of St. Gerard has its English headquarters at St. Mary's Clapham, London, where letters of thanksgiving or requests for medals and prayers leaflets should be sent. *Novena* magazine for July-August, 1959, prints four letters of thanks to the saint. "My wife wore a St. Gerard's medal," writes a husband from Kingston, "and we prayed to him during my wife's second pregnancy, as our first child had given my wife a difficult confinement." "However, thanks to Our Lady and St. Gerard, together with the devoted help of sisters and nurses in the hospital, we had a healthy bouncing boy." A London wife has had her prayers "doubly answered" because her non-Catholic husband "has begun to take instructions to be received into the Church" and she is now praying to the saint "and most of all to the Holy Ghost and Our Lady of Perpetual Succour that these instructions may be fruitful." Well, who could resist that trio?

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ANOTHER wife (from Cokermonth) begins unself-consciously: "I am writing to give you the good news of the birth of our seventh baby, Laurence Joseph. You may remember that I wrote to you," etc. But a second London wife is less pretentious. "Please publish our grateful thanks to Our Lady and St. Gerard," she begins, for "our fifth son," the first "since we became Catholics." "We recited the League Prayers daily" the letter continues, "And although my husband and I had hoped for a baby girl, God knew best and sent us another son." That may not, perhaps, be such a good testimonial to St. Gerard, but it is a noteworthy instance of resignation in face of the inevitable.

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MR. D. PENKETH of 119 Bennetts Lane, Bolton, Lancs., would like to get in touch with other readers in his area.

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WE LEARN from the July issue of *Annunciation*, the "official Catholic guide" to television, films and radio, that David Lloyd James, a Catholic, has become Assistant Head of Children's Hour. Perhaps we are over-suspicious, but the appointment disturbs us. After all, we read in the same issue that the BBC "spring term series on 'The Evolution of Living Things' may not be so acceptable to Catholic teachers though it might provide an excellent opportunity for the expounding in the classroom of the Church's teaching on the subject." What we fear is that the BBC might expound "the Church's teaching on the subject" or at least might adapt its programmes so as not to offend the Church of Rome. The more Catholics there are in influential positions, the more likely this is to occur.

A "Philosophically Respectable" View of the Soul

By DR. EDWARD ROUX

The Bulletin of the Philosophy of Science Group of the Newman Association may be considered to express the thoughts of philosophically-minded Catholic scientists in Britain. Their ideas about such subjects as the "soul" may be of interest to other scientists as well as to freethinkers. In the April, 1959, issue of the Bulletin an article of mine on *Catholics and Evolution* (which appeared in THE FREETHINKER, 12th December, 1959, p.393) is published together with a reply by the editor, Father Laurence Bright.

Readers may recall that I had suggested that the idea that man has an immortal soul was an unnecessary hypothesis from the scientific point of view. Scientists try, following Occam, not to multiply hypotheses unnecessarily. Thus forms of activity which men call "spiritual" should be attributed to the functioning of the human organism and should be thought of as inseparably connected therewith.

In reply to this, Father Bright says that though Catholics believe that souls are the direct creation of God, they differ as to what the nature of the soul may be. Some follow Descartes in thinking of the soul as a spiritual substance, which, joined to the substance of the human body, makes up the composite man. Father Bright says that he personally would not try to defend this view "against the Occam razor brandished by Dr. Roux," but that he will try "to give an account of the soul which is philosophically respectable." I think I can summarise the argument that follows without being unfair to Father Bright, more particularly as I agree with him up to a certain point.

He begins by saying that "the best way to approach the matter is in terms of the different ways we speak about things." He goes on to illustrate this with a number of examples. Thus "biology, the study of living things, cannot be reduced to physics. A physical description is valuable, but it is not the most appropriate. We need also to use language proper to that which we study . . . We say of an animal 'it walks with its legs,' rather than 'its legs walk' . . . This fact is expressed philosophically, at least in the Aristotelian tradition, in terms of soul . . . There is nothing vitalist about the idea. The soul is not an extra substance, hidden within the animal, but simply that about it which enables us to describe its activity appropriately . . . At death we do not say the soul leaves the animal, for it is not a thing that could leave; what remains behind is not, however, ensouled, because it is not living in an organised way."

These arguments do not differ in any essential, as far as I can see, from those put forward by holistic biologists and emergent evolutionists. My only criticism of these views is that (as is also the case with teleological ideas) they may lead to facile "explanations" which really do not explain anything. It is convenient to think of the rat for most purposes as an organism and therefore a unit, rather than as an association of cells or a conglomeration of atoms. We may say "the rat learns to run a maze because he wants to get at the cheese," but this hardly advances the science of neurophysiology, which is concerned with the details of the process. The rat is an organism and therefore more than the arithmetical sum of his parts. To suggest that he is more than the product of the organisation and integration of his parts is really vitalism,* and Father

*Vitalism: the idea, popularised by Bergson but not acceptable to most modern biologists, that there is a vital force, *entelechy* or *elan vital*, which infuses matter and causes it to become alive.

Bright agrees that that should be ruled out. He also agrees that, in the case of the non-human animal at any rate, the "soul" does not survive the body.

Being a good Catholic, Father Bright is not prepared to stop here and agree that in the case of the human animal the soul is equally the product of physiological, biochemical and atomic organisation. He is not willing to repeat, with regard to the human soul, that "it is not an extra substance hidden within the animal, but simply that about it which enables us to describe its activity appropriately." "The human soul," he says, "bound up as it is with bodily functions, yet has an activity which considered in itself does transcend them, and can therefore be said to exist in its own right." What "exists in its own right" means is not at all clear to me, because Father Bright goes on to say: "In all his activities man is a single substance, not the union of two; but his most characteristic activity is done in virtue of a soul which is itself able to exist, but not to act in any way that we can understand apart from the whole human being."

One wonders why the soul is "able to exist in its own right." We do not normally use such terms except in a sort of quasi-legal sense. The important idea here is apparently connected with the word *transcend*. "The human soul or mind," we are told, "transcends that which it describes. . . . The transcendence of mind means that man can in principle know everything that exists." What the human soul knows is apparently independent of experience, and it is this that makes it different from the animal soul.

This is all very difficult. Perhaps it would be easier for those of us who are not professional philosophers or theologians if it were put as follows. The world of the animal consists of sensations—sights, smells, sounds, etc.—to which he reacts in various ways depending on previous acquaintance with such sights, smells and sounds. The world of the human being is largely the same, but has something in addition. This extra something results from the fact that man has been able to invent a language as a result of which certain sounds, when uttered by other human beings, possess meaning and even abstract meaning. That is to say, these sounds refer not only to specific things in the external world which produce sights, smells and sounds, but to classes of things. Starting with this very simple but still wonderful beginning, man has been able to achieve a form of activity which we call conceptual thought, and it is this which distinguishes him from the other animals.

There thus develops among men a world of ideas expressed in words. One may perhaps say that this world is a spiritual world, since it deals in part with essences, qualities and other abstractions. We may contrast this with the other and more real world of sights, sounds and feelings, which we may call the mental world. We can, if we like, though it is not always necessary, refer man's mental activities to his "mind" and his spiritual activities to his "soul". Abstracting further from these abstractions, we sometimes talk of mind and spirit as things already existing in the universe and which man has discovered. But in my view this would be a false deduction if it meant that these things could exist independently of animals that think.

A materialist view of the world assumes that it consists of some fundamental substance which we can describe as

matter-energy. At present physicists would say that it is made up of electrons, protons, mesons, and similar entities. Everything in the world consists of these things in some form or other. The most abstract idea may exist in someone's brain as some form of electro-neural motion. The materialist finds it hard to conceive of conceptual thought, and hence "soul," as existing apart from electro-neural activity.

The philosophical view that all knowledge is ultimately founded in experience conflicts with the idea "that man can in principle know everything that exists." The difficulty here probably arises from the failure to distinguish two kinds of "knowledge." We may say we *know* that the earth rotates on its axis and that the square root of 64 is 8. The former statement is an inference from certain observations and is subject to empirical confirmation. Its truth is probable to a very high degree but not certain. The latter statement is absolutely true if we accept certain very simple mathematical axioms which are true by agreement.

Because we can be so certain of certain things, like propositions in Euclid or logic, we sometimes attribute to reason powers of comprehending the world which in fact are not justified by logic at all. Some Catholics declare that by pure logic they can prove that man has an immortal soul. A Catholic priest once told me that the existence of God (the Catholic God) was "proved by science." He did not seem to realise that his "proof" was like the Euclidean proof that two sides of a triangle are always greater than

the third. Such proofs are based on assumptions which are not necessarily true, and which may be entirely arbitrary, as every mathematician knows.

Father Bright has tried to give us a philosophically respectable view of the soul. Apart from trying to show that the human soul exists in its own right (a proposition which I have queried), he has avoided any direct mention of the *immortal* soul. Presumably the implication is that souls that so exist must be immortal. If this is a theory—and why should we not consider it a theory?—it must be subject to empirical investigation like every other theory. The spiritualists claim to be able to produce evidence of the post-mortem survival of the human soul or personality. Sceptics are not impressed with spiritualistic "materialisations" and table rappings. Catholic theologians may share this scepticism and cling to logical proofs.

Charles Smith* invented a useful aphorism when he said that truth is never certain and certainty is never true. According to this use of words, truth is what really is. Our capacities being finite we can therefore never attain it, but by scientific methods of observation, experiment and inference, approach it asymptotically. Certainty does not apply to scientific knowledge; it applies only to propositions, like those made by mathematicians or theologians, which do not demand observational verification. It is a mistake, as Smith says, to confuse consistency with truth.

**Sensism*, by Charles Smith, 1956. I do not like Charles Smith's views on race any more than I like Catholic views on birth control. He has, nevertheless, said some clever things.

The Holy Coat

By WALTER STEINHARDT

As could be expected, the German Freethought Press (from which the following is taken) did not fail to deal forthrightly with the exhibition (from July 19 to September 20) of the so-called "*Holy Coat of our Lord*." It is to take place at the Dom Church in Trier, on the Mosel, Germany's oldest town—and incidentally, the birthplace of Karl Marx in 1818. The Roman Catholic Bishop of Trier, Matthias Wehr, named his precious exhibit modestly, "The greatest monument humanity possesses of Christ." What Martin Luther called it, is perhaps a little too strong to print . . .

The local authorities of Trier have spent—or rather invested—hundreds of thousands of pounds, to receive and accommodate the vast numbers of pilgrims invited from all parts of the earth to file prayerfully past the holy relic. When it was last shown, 26 years ago, in 1933, the Nazi Gauleiter, Simon, led 2½ million pilgrims, who knelt in front of the sacred cloth. This year, Bundes Kanzler Adenauer is to render a similar homage.

The whole affair is being organized in the manner of big business. The bishop taxes the trade in devotional goods, which will include car key-rings, stands for beer-glasses, pipes, scarves, pictures of the Holy Coat, Madonnas in china, etc. All pilgrims may buy a booklet for 1 D. Mark, and it will receive the church's stamp at the precinct. Trier expects 3-4 million visitors, so a good turnover seems assured. Considerately, too, Pope John XXIII has granted to all pilgrims the usual absolutions from sins.

What is, briefly, the alleged history of this remarkably brazen piece of impudence and fraud, presumed to be the seamless coat mentioned in John 19-23?

It is said to have been discovered by the Roman

Empress, St. Helena, the mother of Constantine. It was brought from Palestine together with the gown of the Virgin. Helena gave the coat to the town of her birth, adding the bones of the apostle Matthew, a nail of the Lord, a tooth of Peter, the sandals of St. Andreas and the head of Pope Cornelius. She was obviously of a generous disposition.

The first public showing was only in 1512, at the request of the Emperor Maximilian I. The coat had been lost, but Maximilian ordered it to be found—and found it was. After that it was exhibited frequently, but from 1844 onwards only at intervals of 25 years. Otto von Corvin's famous *Pfaffenspiegel* (*Priest's Mirror*) was written in 1844 as an anti-clerical protest against the exhibition of the relic. In the same year the Bonn Professors, Sybel and Gildenmeister, claimed in a treatise that another 20 Holy Coats existed in various places, partly with papal confirmation.

Catholic scholars themselves are very dubious as to the origin of the Trier, or any other Holy Coat. It is not a dogma to believe in it. And yet, the Roman Church calls upon its ignorant faithful to adore en masse this remnant of unidentified material, now too frail to be put on a coat-hanger. Any attempt to examine it scientifically by modern methods for dating, etc., is, needless to say, frustrated by the hierarchy.

The German news-magazine *Der Spiegel* called the present exhibition a "Fetish Festival," "The Big Show"; and it referred to the bishop as a showman. The paper is being charged by the Rhineland Pfalz Minister of the Interior and through the Public Prosecutor, with the criminal offence of religious libel and profane derision. The action in open court should be most interesting for free thinkers everywhere.

CORRESPONDENCE

BLUE PENCIL DEPARTMENT

A Catholic member of Parliament recently had the impertinence to say: "I suppose it is quite in order for birth control to be discussed on the air if there is somebody on the same programme available to present arguments against it." I was distressed because I know that the Conservative member for Brighton would be outraged if one told him that in many people's opinion no case for Catholicism should be broadcast without someone present to state the case for those who believe that the Catholic Church, with its opposition to birth control, is one of the greatest menaces of our time to humanity and the humane.

Oh, these Catholics! And while all the hullabuloo was going on about the Bishop of Southwark's talk on behalf of Family Planning, *The Evening Standard* quoted the novelist Solange Boillet saying: "When I was 14 years old I was overwhelmed by the tragedy of illegitimate children who could not become priests." I mean what, in all, is one to think? But then one pulls oneself together and realises that the whole point for Catholics is that they should not think—but accept what they are told by their corpse-women (dead to the world and feminine to the godhead), their mighty priests carved out of solid beef or cold and pale as a fish's belly. The rest, for them—is censored!

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

FREETHOUGHT AND FICTION

I was very surprised to see in this column, the astonishing statement that Freethinkers are normally allergic to the reading of fiction. Surely the only difference between the Freethought point of view and that of, say, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, is that the former, unlike the latter, does not carry over his capacity for fiction into real life?

Personally I almost believed in the verbal inspiration of the late Sir Henry Rider Haggard in my youth! And I still think that, in particular, his *Cleopatra* and *Montezuma's Daughter* are great historical novels; while his Zulu hero, Umslopagaas (in *Allan Quartermain*) is a figure of truly Homeric proportions.

In relation to Conan Doyle, I am always rather surprised that admirers usually concentrate on Sherlock Holmes. For, good as these stories are, they do not represent Doyle's best literary work. This is found in his historical novels; in particular, I think, his *Micah Clarke*, set in the context of the Monmouth West Country rising in 1685; whilst his great stories of the old English archers, *The White Company*, and his pugilistic classic of the Regency era, *Rodney Stone*, are nearly equal.

What a pity that this great master of fiction eventually overstepped the legitimate bounds between fiction and fact!

Let us have more literary articles from the erudite pen of our versatile colleague, Mr. Cutner. Why should this connoisseur of fiction, ancient and modern, concentrate exclusively upon the Biblical kind?

F. A. RIDLEY.

"UNION WITH THE COSMOS"

Mr. Hammersley and I appear to be at cross-purposes. My interpretation of "being united with the cosmos" takes little cognisance of one's social and economic status vis-a-vis the organised community.

I am rather more concerned with the possession of a certainty that one is in tune with "the nature of things," the "oneness" with life and nature: "seeing the world in a grain of sand" as William Blake says.

It is the lie and fraud of the Christian system that one can only enter such a realm by "spiritual" living; the body is to be despised and mortified in order that "higher" thoughts may be encouraged. This is neurotic, inhibitive nonsense. There is only one reality, one world, one nature, one sort of mind and one sort of "soul." The strife between "God" and "Satan," "flesh" and "spirit," "sacred" and "secular" and "this world" and "the next" is a phantom strife taking place between shadows in uninstructed minds.

S. W. BROOKS.

P.S. Re: Mr. Alfred Almond and FitzGerald's *Omar*. Some passages suggest a "mindless" universe, but there is also the following:

"... He that tossed you down into the Field,

He knows about it all—HE knows—HE knows!"

FitzGerald puts the first "He" in italics and the second and third in block capitals as shown here.

Other passages refer to "The Master of the Treasure House" who "remains" while the transitory "shapes" "vanish." Then there is the "Tapster" who is said to be "a good Fellow." *Omar* seems to have been a genuine Freethinker; he not only

doubted the tales of gods, he also allowed himself to doubt the tales of woe by the materialists!

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

S.W.B.

I have read in your columns, letters from Mr. Macfarlane, Miss Nan Flanagan and others who think that withdrawal of children from Religious Instruction is a necessity for Freethinkers, and the only way to get Religious Instruction stopped in schools. I am not convinced that they are right in this; there are so few Freethinkers that withdrawal of their children can be conveniently ignored by the Educational authorities, and the Government.

In my opinion, withdrawal does not make Freethinkers but indifferentists. I know of a number of these, who imagine that religion is old fashioned, cranky, and harmless. They have married Christians, and their children are being brought up as Christians.

In the cases quoted by Miss Flanagan, it is no use trying to instil the case against religion after four years of Religious Instruction or at the age of 14 years. Our point of view must be put during the time, and children should be encouraged to discuss their problems at home. One should point out discrepancies in the Bible, put questions for them to ask teacher, and above all, see the teacher and the headmaster, and tell them that your child is not religious, and not to be surprised at any questions they might get.

In this way I think we could make Religious Instruction work for us, and that we could use it to instruct children into the evils of religion, and introduce a note of scepticism into the classroom.

C. H. HAMMERSLEY.

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