

# The Freethinker

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I RECENTLY BORROWED a small text book on Church history issued by that staunch Protestant organisation, the Religious Tract Society. The precise period covered, was the first millenium of the Catholic Church, and in particular that melancholy era which followed upon the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, commonly referred to as the Dark Ages. As one would expect from such a source, the anonymous author's perspectives are somewhat limited, and his narrative of the chequered fortunes of the Papacy throughout this stormy era, is punctuated with what appear at times to be rather wearisome outbursts again the Roman "Antichrist" and the corruptions which were introduced, under its influence, into the faith and morals of the Church. For Protestantism during the 19th century, from which this particular text-book dates, was still sufficiently robust to denounce the Papacy in set terms. The obsequious attitude which the present-day Reformed Churches appear to show in increasing measure towards Rome, then still lay far in the future.

## The Evolution of the Papacy

Like most Protestant historians, the anonymous author of *The Lives of the Popes* (Part I, Religious Tract Society, no date) ascribes the origins of the Papacy to historical accident, and not to any special injunction by the Christ of the New Testament. As he points out, the legend that St. Peter was the first Pope is unsupported, not only by secular evidence, but also by the silence of the New Testament itself upon this surely crucial issue. The author asserts, correctly enough from his own point of view, that, taking the New Testament as "gospel truth," the probable founder of the Church of Rome appears to have been Paul, not Peter. But he is constrained to admit that the actual origins of the Papacy are shrouded in the mists of time, and that the earliest Popes were obscure and not very important figures. However, whether founded by Peter or not, the Papacy had a trump card in its possession from the start. Rome was, after all, the capital and administrative centre of a vast and highly centralised Empire. As Bishop of the Imperial Metropolis, the Bishop of Rome was bound to become a leading figure in the evolution of the Christian Church. By the middle of the third century, the Emperor of the day referred to the Roman Bishop as already a serious rival, while the conversion of the Roman Empire in the 4th century to the new Oriental creed, necessarily increased his importance. By the end of the 4th century, the Roman Bishopric had already become a glittering prize, and in the year 378, the ruler of the Empire personally recognised the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome over all the bishops of the Western Empire. The Papacy had arrived!

## The Papacy in the Dark Ages

Two important historical events exercised a potent influence on the secular fortunes of the nascent Papacy. These were the collapse of the Roman Empire and civilisa-

tion in the West during the 5th and following centuries, and the simultaneous removal of the Capital of the shaken Empire to the newly-founded city of Constantinople. The latter event gave the Popes a free hand in Rome; while the former enabled the Roman Church increasingly to assume the functions previously exercised by the Empire of the Caesars. Under masterful Popes such as Leo and

Gregory (both surnamed "Great" by ecclesiastical history) the Church of Rome energetically set to work to convert to Christianity — and to what was left of Roman civilisation — the warlike, barbaric tribes who had overrun Western Europe in the 5th and 6th

centuries. The Franks, Goths, Lombards, and the Anglo-Saxon conquerors of England were all converted by Rome during these centuries. Roman missions re-converted England, Germany and other barbaric lands; and the outlines of medieval Christendom began to appear in succession to the old Roman Emperors. That is, a social order controlled by religion took the place of the secular Roman society. The Popes took the lead in this pious and profitable work, in which they were powerfully assisted by the Benedictine Order, founded during the 6th century when Western Europe was in its very darkest phase. This era of European consolidation under Roman spiritual, and often political, leadership, reached its zenith in the year 800, when the Pope crowned the King of the Franks, the famous Charlemagne, as Roman Emperor; in return for which favour the pious Emperor and his still more pious successors, both recognised the spiritual leadership of Rome and conferred on the Papacy a Papal State which made it a secular ruler as well. A contemporary ecclesiastical forgery, later described as "The Donation of Constantine," had bequeathed the temporal power over Rome to the Papacy.

## The Age of Pope Joan

The Frankish Empire of Charlemagne — the importance of which has probably been exaggerated by biased ecclesiastical historians — did not long survive its founder. The following era, the 9th and 10th centuries, represented perhaps the darkest of the many dark pages in the chequered annals of the Papacy. As our author vividly demonstrates, the general barbarism and brutality of the times were faithfully reflected in the manners of the contemporary Papal court. Several of these Popes were (as even a recent clerical historian has admitted) veritable monsters, murderers and tyrants. Papal orgies of the period were notorious, and several of these Popes died violent and horrible deaths, sometimes at the hands of their "holy" successors. Even devil-worship was apparently prevalent, along with other more carnal sins among the "Holy Fathers" of this savage era. It was during this period that the mythical "Pope Joan," in whose historical existence both the Middle Ages and the later Protestant Reformers firmly believed, was later located. (Luther used her reign as an argument against

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## The Age of Pope Joan

By F. A. RIDLEY

the divine origin of the Papacy.)

Actually, as our Protestant author concurs, no such person ever existed. But it does appear that there was at least a kernel of historical fact behind the later extravagant legend. This is apparently to be found in the prominent role actually exercised by Papal concubines in this self-same era. Two of these "infamous courtesans" (as they are usually referred to by modern ecclesiastical writers!) Theodora and Marozia actually dominated the Papal Court for many years, and succeeded in enrolling both their lovers and sons among the "infallible" successors of St. Peter! Here, it may be suggested, we have the historical starting-point of the later legend of "Pope Joan" — one not referred to by our Protestant author. In a still surviving account of this period, while they received the homage of the Popes and their Court, we are informed that these ladies, in the course of the Papal orgies of the period, actually seated themselves on the Papal throne

while the holy Triple Crown was placed on their heads. Here perhaps is the origin of "Pope Joan" who, incidentally, if she had been as learned as the legend indicates, would certainly have compared most favourably with her authentic, masculine predecessors?

### An Age of Reform

This dark age, however, eventually ended with the 11th century reformation that was begun by the German Emperors of the period and was later completed by the monastic reformers of the second half of the 11th century, who eventually succeeded in placing their leader, the monk Hildebrand, on the Papal throne. The text book ends at this date when, under the dynamic leadership of Hildebrand (Gregory VII) the reformed Papacy entered upon what proved to be its golden age; not only as the dictatorial ruler of the Catholic Church, but equally as the dominant power in the European history of the medieval "Age of Faith."

## Rationalism or Humanism?

By COLIN McCALL

WHAT'S IN A NAME? A very great deal, it would seem, as far as the Freethought movement is concerned. Perhaps I have an oversimplified (or oversimplifying) mind, but the old terms are good enough for me. If I say I am an Atheist, I mean I have no belief in God; a Freethinker, I reject authority in matters of opinion, especially religion; a Secularist, I concentrate on this life. These seem reasonably clear and easily definable to me, and they have proved adequate to my needs.

On the other hand, I have never been unduly worried if a person preferred "agnostic" to "atheist." Having made plain my own preference, I would leave it at that. With some it is different: they have a passion for seeking new — or resurrecting old — names. They have to be in fashion and, as with most fashions, the nineteenth century is out. For goodness' sake don't be identified with the Victorian: leave that to the John Betjemans.

The Rationalist Press Association Ltd. (of which I am a member) recently celebrated its Diamond Jubilee. And a very honourable 60 years it commemorates, too; in the van of human thought. "Rationalism" — another good term, I would have thought: a rational approach to life and its problems. Alas no! the curse of Victorianism is upon it. "You know McCall? He's an old-fashioned rationalist! We've got to think of a new name." Yielding to this type of argument is falling into a trap laid by one's opponents. It was the Christian, with beliefs 2,000 years old, who stigmatised his critics as "Victorian." Oh! of course, and "negative," too. In that way he hoped to silence them, or at least distract them.

To some degree, he succeeded. Rationalism is out. If not non-U, it is definitely non-Humanist. And that, these days, is the measure of things. In some mysterious, indefinable way, Humanism is modern: Rationalism is old. Please don't ask me why. Perhaps it has something to do with the United States. Everything American is modern, even a five-century-old name.

Personally, I don't like the term. It is vague; equivocal; expresses very little. As Sinclair Lewis said in his Nobel Prize Address, "Humanism" means so many things that it means nothing. It may infer anything from a belief that Greek and Latin are more inspiring than the dialect of contemporary peasants to a belief that any living peasant is more interesting than a dead Greek." Who could deny Father Huddleston's right to call himself a Humanist, if he wanted? Isn't he concerned about humanity? Isn't

Canon Collins of St. Paul's? These men are Humanists and I respect them as such. I support them in many of their aims and activities. But I differ strongly from them on religion. How can "Humanism" express that difference? These men are supernaturalists; I want a term that defines my opposition to this, not one that blurs it. "Humanism" doesn't fill the bill: it's what I have in common with them. "Rationalism" does.

There is "Scientific Humanism," of course. And those who argue for this, at least acknowledge my point: the need for distinction. And the adjective serves the purpose. But has the term any advantages over "Rationalism" that aren't offset by its clumsiness? Is the Scientific Humanist Press Association Ltd. preferable to the Rationalist Press Association Ltd.? I don't think so. Anyway, the double term isn't particularly favoured. Can it be too clear?

Tolerant as ever(!) I would be prepared to smile indulgently at the whims of the neo-nominal fraternity, having once made clear my views. *Chacun son goût.* But my good friend Hector Hawton has stirred me out of my quietude. And I know he will treat what follows as a friendly, though strongly-held criticism.

In his editorial in the December 1959 issue of *The Humanist*, Mr. Hawton refers to the R.P.A. Diamond Jubilee and calls Humanism "the constructive phase rationalism is now entering." What he means, I don't know. Indeed, I suspect this is merely word-play. "Rationalism" could be substituted for "Humanism" and the "constructive phase" clause omitted without any loss whatever. It would then read: "Rationalism can enlist public opinion on many such issues" (as abortion and divorce law reform).

What is meant by "constructive phase" anyway? Mr. Hawton has previously mentioned a "legacy of ancient taboos . . . embedded in our laws." Indeed, it is Humanism, "the constructive phase" etc., that "can enlist public opinion on many such issues." But isn't this *destructive* to the ancient taboos? Won't that awful, negative destructiveness creep in and mar our lovely, positive conception?

Mr. Hawton goes on to say that "what the public needs to understand is that the religion of the Churches is not a set of harmless ethical platitudes but an obstruction to progress." I couldn't agree more. But isn't this what the Victorian Rationalists said? And haven't obstacles to be removed? Destruction again!

Am I making too much of this? That must be for the  
(Concluded on page 404)

# The World's Most Holy Village

By THOMAS TRAVELLER

OBERAMMERGAU IS UNIQUE: a village of 3,000 simple Bavarian peasants, naïvely devoted to a quaint folk-drama. Most unjustly, they have been accused of making money out of their historic Passion Play. That slander can readily be silenced by examining the official figures for the 75 festival performances given in the economic depression year of 1934.

Receipts from theatre tickets and sales of books and photographs totalled less than £300,000. After paying expenses, including a mere £90,000 as honoraria to actors and helpers, the community was left with only £125,000. That sum soon vanished: on building a swimming-pool for visitors' benefit; on a new wood-carving school, to preserve craft standards; and on keeping down the rates. So nobody in Oberammergau profited from the Play. Likewise, nobody will profit in 1960.

But performance of their Passion Play puts the villagers in a quandary. It starts early in the morning — at 8 a.m. — and continues till 6 p.m., with only a two-hour lunch-stop. If visitors stay overnight in Munich, for example, they cannot possibly arrive in the calm and receptive state that the nature of the Passion Play demands. So, to protect pilgrims from exploitation from outside travel agencies and hotel-keepers, the reverent community of Oberammergau offers admission tickets only to visitors who lodge in their hotels, boarding-houses and private homes for at least two nights.

The villagers feel that theatre-pilgrims should not be whisked away, half dead with exhaustion, by unscrupulous business concerns who are only interested in sordid profit. By taking the "Oberammergau Package Tour" to include full board and a theatre ticket, travellers can relax from the hurly-burly of the 20th century and have time to select their religious wood-carving mementoes in tranquility. To help them do so, shopkeepers nobly sacrifice their own leisure to remain open till 11 at night.

Another quandary: the community is overwhelmed with applications from war cripples, refugees and other poor people who wish to erect souvenir booths around the theatre to earn a few D-marks. What are the kindly folk of Oberammergau to do? To allow a free-for-all for custom would be almost sacrilegious. So reluctantly, the community is forced to accept rent for site concessions.

Sometimes the unworldly villagers have an uncomfortable feeling that outside businessmen are trying to reap where they have not sown — profiting from all the devoted toil which the actors have lovingly spent on fulfilling their religious obligations. But, happily, not all traders are so dishonourable. Some, indeed, have helped Oberammergau in its struggle to make ends meet, by advertising in the official text-book of the Passion Play: goods that have ranged from cameras, peppermints and motor-cars to underwear and bathing costumes.

All the unsought publicity naturally draws thousands of visitors to Oberammergau, even during the years when no Play is performed. The villagers are troubled that not everybody understands the nature of Oberammergau's famous vow. Typical was the visitor from the Australian backwoods who said: "What's this Passion Play *about*? Sex stuff?"

To remedy such misunderstandings, there are conducted tours through the theatre. Built for the 1930 Festival, the steel and concrete theatre holds 5,200. The architecture has all the unadorned simplicity of a greyhound-racing stadium.

Entire coach-loads of tourists pay their one-and-sixpence entrance fee into the auditorium and the dressing-rooms. A saintly guide — "Once I was the son of Adam and Eve; another time, Lazarus; and in 1950, a High Priest" — explains everything, in English. Close behind, a rival saint pours forth German to a group of Austrians; while from the stage comes a steady patter of French directed at a group of the younger generation dressed in shorts, sandals, shirts and sun-tans.

The wooden seats, which ranged in price last time from nine shillings to one pound five, are innocent of padding. Understandably, spectators cannot expect the ostentatious luxury of a commercial theatre. One might as well demand interior-sprung armchairs in church, for comfort and true religion never go together. Besides, the audience can always buy cushions from the stall-holders outside, or hire them from their landlords.

Meanwhile, the guide continues his story of the Play. Nothing is forgotten: the number of actors, the method of casting, the length of rehearsals, a resumé of the plot, the high cost of apostolic robes. Visitors are then shepherded through the carefully-dusted dressing-rooms, where every costume is meticulously hung in place. One gapes at the Cross: hollow, for ease of handling.

At the end, as one stands wondering whether the guide would feel insulted by a tip, he delivers a final peroration: "Come back to Oberammergau in 1960! See the Passion Play in actuality — the experience of a lifetime which you will never forget! But be sure to book well in advance, owing to the huge demand for seats and accommodation."

The people of Oberammergau are hospitable folk, always saddened if they have to turn visitors away. This year they are inviting 265,000 pilgrims to share in this profound religious experience, given in 51 main performances. Owing to world-wide advance reservations from pious travel agents, there will certainly be no empty seats.

Origin of the Passion Play dates back to 1633, when Plague swept through the village and claimed 84 lives. All other preventive measures having failed, the community made a solemn vow: that if God would intervene and stop the Plague, the village would perform every tenth year a play of the Passion and Death of Christ. God answered the prayer. From that day, not another victim succumbed.

The villagers kept their vow. They already had experience of amateur dramatics. For, two centuries earlier, a similar morality play had been inaugurated — also in redemption of a vow made during time of a plague. A basic text already existed. In 1634, the new Passion Play was given its world premier outside the church door.

(To be concluded)

## IN "AULD REEKIE"

THE HARDY SCOTSMEN of the Edinburgh Branch of the National Secular Society still keep up their meetings at the Mound, and still stir up plenty of opposition. One of the speakers, though, Mr. "Paddy" Slemen, has left the area and, as Secretary Mr. William Cronan says, he is very much missed. However, Mr. Cronan himself and Mr. Victor Murray, the remaining members of the well-known trio, speak regularly and, again in Mr. Cronan's words, "Paddy has promised to visit us for Christmas and New Year to help us sing our carols at the Mound!"

## This Believing World

**That very forthright lady, Sarah Jenkins** of *News Chronicle*, gave a delightful description of the usual kind of sheer humbug one gets at a Spiritualist meeting, in a recent number (5/12/59) which will not at all be appreciated by the average believer. It should be contrasted with the usual report given in our Spiritualist journals in which the "medium" hits a bull's-eye every time. He or she "gets" a message from the dead with deadly accuracy; while Miss Jenkins's medium appears to have got hold of the wrong spooks for she got nothing right. Still, she did provide us with one long chuckle!

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**The "Daily Mail,"** always on the look-out for a new "story" sent one of its pet reporters, Miss Rhona Churchill, to find out what the Christian Church would be like in 1960. Miss Churchill, it may be remembered, gave a "factual" account of some famous Lourdes "miracles" in the same paper two years or so ago, of course fully believing every story told her; thus stoutly supporting the "miraculous" cures of incurable patients. One would never have suspected from her accounts that there was another side to these stories — and a debunking one at that. However, on this occasion she interviewed the Archbishop of Canterbury who promptly took the occasion to tell us how beautiful everything was in the garden of Christianity.

★

**It appears that young people were more and more** taking to religion; and the horrid old days of unbelief were quickly being forgotten. Dr. Fisher, in fact, was in one of his brightest and most optimistic moods. On the other hand, Canon Collins, according to Miss Churchill, "is fed up with the Church." He does "not believe it is ready for the 1960's." He even goes so far as almost to approve, "No wonder people say to Hell with the Church." The Canon was most pessimistic of the Church as it stands. "It fusses too much," he claimed, "about fornication and gambling, and ignores the real moral issues . . ." Canon Collins went on in this dismal way for columns and columns.

★

**No wonder another Canon — Canon Alexander Morris** — exploded with pious wrath. He was not interviewed by Miss Churchill, but got into the *Daily Mail* with some beautiful and angry fireworks against his fellow-worker in Christ, quoting a "workman" who "took his pipe from his mouth" and "drawled": "Why the hell doesn't he [Canon Collins] get out?" Canon Morris wants to know "what he hopes to achieve or what good he thinks he is doing the church," especially as, apart from a year or two, "he has no parochial experience." We have an idea that Rome will heartily enjoy Miss Churchill's articles. The Church of Rome may be divided behind the scenes, but the rifts in the Church of England are palpable and open to the world.

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**The "Sunday Post" tells us that** the Rev. Dr. G. F. McLeod, a former Moderator and founder of the Iona Community, is "one of the most controversial figures in the Church of Scotland," though he is dedicated to a cause — the Church. In some of the answers to questions put to him, we learn that "the Church is a divine institution—it is the mystical Body of Christ." And what is this "Body of Christ"? Well, "It is meaningless unless it is a Body of Love." We suspect that Dr. McLeod would be even more controversial if we hinted that he was talking "mystical" nonsense.

**However, we were glad to see that if he won** any money on football pools, he would keep it. Sixpence spent in this way, he declared, is not more sinful than a glass of beer (but where can we get a glass of beer for sixpence?). As for helping a man to believe in God who cannot, Dr. MacLeod's advice is to "make-believe in Him" and to act "as if God were alive." And then the unlucky believer "would by experience come to know Him." Has the good Doctor ever met an unbeliever? We doubt it. If he had, he could never have given such fatuous and futile advice.

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**The series of talks on Science and Religion** given every Tuesday by the BBC to schools came to an end this month — the last one being given by the well-known broadcaster, Mrs. Mary Stocks. Unless the boys and girls who heard the various lectures are immeasurably above the standard before the BBC took the course in hand, we cannot help wondering who profited by them. Many of the talks surely were as above the heads of these children as a course of lectures elucidating Kant's philosophy would be; but the speakers had no doubt only one thing in mind — to vindicate religion *against* science.

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**In any case, this was the object of Mrs. Stocks** who, while not exactly attacking science, made it quite clear that there always was the "spiritual" in us which science could not explain, and which was the uniform experience of man everywhere. She even dragged in Sir Winston Churchill and his early encounters with religion as given in *The Observer*. She did not mention Gibbon or Winwood Reade or Lecky, all of whom so strongly influenced Sir Winston: why, her hearers might have wanted to read them! We wonder how Mrs. Stocks would answer Gibbon who, as Byron noted "sapped a solemn creed with a solemn sneer."

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### RATIONALISM OR HUMANISM?

(Concluded from page 402)

reader to decide. My point is that there is nothing wrong with the term "Rationalism" ("Freethought" or "Secularism") and certainly that "Humanism" is no advance upon it. That constructiveness can't be separated from destructiveness where human progress is concerned, and that the R.P.A., like the National Secular Society, has recognised this by destroying religion and advocating a rational approach to human problems. It is meaningless to call Humanism a constructive phase of Rationalism. As Mr. Hawton himself uses it, Humanism is a synonym for Rationalism, but it suffers from the disadvantage of vagueness noted earlier.

Rationalism, as expressed by the Rationalist Press Association, has always striven — if I may use another phrase of Mr. Hawton's—"to place science at the service of humanity." Is it only now entering a constructive phase because—again in Mr. Hawton's words—the battle "has shifted to the sciences of life — to psychology and social studies?" I cannot see it. Of course, Rationalism develops as our ideas and our world develop, but the basic attitude remains. It remains because it is sound. It would, I think, be an acknowledgment of that soundness, to keep the term, were there no other advantages.

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—NEXT WEEK—

**A MERRY CHRISTMAS**

By COLIN McCALL

# THE FREETHINKER

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All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals. THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 15s.; half-year, 17s. 6d.; three months, 8s. 9d. (In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.00; half-year, \$2.50; three months, \$1.25.)

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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours. Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

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.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, CORSAIR, SMITH, etc. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH, etc.

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.: Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. TRIBE.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street.) Sunday, December 20th, 6.45 p.m.: A. R. WILLIAMS, "The Christmas Myth."

Central London Branch N.S.S. ("The City of Hereford" Blandford Place, W.1.) Sunday, December 20th, 7.15 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, M.A., "Use and Abuse of Symbols."

Leeds Humanist Group (1st. floor, Leeds Trade Council Club, Upper Fountain Street, Leeds, 1) Sunday, December 20th, 7 p.m.: J. MCLEISH, B.Sc. "The Technique of Conversion."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate.) Sunday, December 20th, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY, "Coal and its Conflicts."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street.) Sunday, December 20th, 2.30 p.m.: E. TAYLOR, "A Visit to a Democracy (U.S.A.)."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, December 20th, 11 a.m.: Dr. HELEN ROSENAU, "Why Art in a Scientific Age?"

## Notes and News

AGAIN WE OMIT THE "Have Faith" Christmas Card advertisement from our back page for space reasons, but we are glad to say that the demand for the cards continues. There is still time to order: 5/- per dozen (including envelopes and postage) from THE FREETHINKER office.

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ON FRIDAY, JANUARY 1ST at 2.30 p.m., Mr. M. L. Burnet, Secretary of the Secular Education League, will speak at the Conference of Educational Associations on "Humanism and Religion in the Schools." The lecture, which will be in the College of Preceptors, 2-3 Bloomsbury Square, London, W.C.1, will consider policy for immediate action in the situation created by the 1944 Education Act, and it will incorporate information obtained from the Secular Education League's questionnaire to Secondary Schools.

IN ITS REVIEW of *The Wisdom of the West*, the American magazine *Time* (30/11/59) did its best to line Bertrand Russell on the side of the Angels. "For two generations," it said, "Russell's skeptical prejudices [sic] have had their share in depopulating the church in Britain; now he can occasionally be seen looking in its direction with the suspicion that perhaps that is where the body of ethics lies buried." It notes that Lord Russell shows a "disdain" for Existentialism which "might be echoed by the Christian faith"; "demolishes" Marx; and speaks "far more respectfully of medieval scholastics such as Duns Scotus and William of Occam than he does of the modern West's fashionable philosophers" — by which *Time* seems to mean the Marxists, the Pragmatists and the Logical Positivists. One cannot, of course, expect Christian-inclined *Time* to understand a genuine free thinker like Russell — a man who is critical of ideas, no matter what their source, and a man who realises the relativity of morals — but one should note the significant absence of Aquinas from the medieval scholastics whom Russell admires.

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REVIEWING A RECENT BOOK on *Adoption*, by Mrs. Margaret Kornitzer (Putnam's, 10s. 6d.), Noel Gray rightly drew attention to "the stranglehold of organised religion on the adoption process" (*Daily Worker*, 28/11/59). In addition to the religiously-biased adoption societies, "Local authorities are also supposed to place children with parents of the same religion as the natural mother," humanism, agnosticism or atheism, not being recognised. In any case, said Mr. Gray, "desperate unmarried mothers are not likely to declare bravely that they are humanists, agnostics or atheists." A large number of unmarried mothers who cannot keep their children are foreign Roman Catholic girls, he adds; "there are not enough Roman Catholic couples ready to adopt these children, but the Roman Catholic Church has been allowed to prevent their adoption by non-Catholics." Mr. Gray concludes that, apart from Mrs. Kornitzer's acceptance of the religious hold on adoption, her book is excellent.

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SENATOR JOHN KENNEDY, possible Democratic candidate for the U.S. presidency, has — according to Alistair Cooke (*The Guardian*, 30/11/59) — been put on the spot by the Roman Catholic bishops who issued "an uncompromising denunciation of birth control either at home or abroad." *The New York Times* asked the Roman Catholic Senator how he felt about the bishops' statement. As the U.S. government had not advocated any policy at home or in Western Europe, Senator Kennedy thought "it would be the greatest psychological mistake" to appear to advocate limitation of the coloured peoples. But supposing the United States had to decide whether or not to support a policy if it were decided upon in India, for example? Senator Kennedy didn't think "it was wise for the United States to refuse to grant assistance to that country . . . pursuing a policy which it feels to be in its own best interests." But suppose Congress passed a law "recommending that countries receiving foreign aid should not allow their populations to excel their capacity to make the foreign aid funds effective?" Then the Senator would use his "personal judgment" as to what would be in the interest of the U.S. "If it became the law of the land, I would uphold it as the law of the land." Clearly Senator Kennedy's replies were considered and we believe they were honest. There still remains the problem that, if he were elected President, he would almost certainly be faced with conflicting loyalties — to the Constitution and to his Church. And it is not an easy problem to solve.

## What is the Christian Case?—4

By H. CUTNER

IT MAY COME AS A SURPRISE to both Mr. Ashe and a number of our own readers to learn that the word "crucifixion" *nowhere* occurs in the New Testament, and that the Greek word translated "cross" is certainly *not* meant to be the kind of cross we associate with the "crucifixion" of Jesus. And as for the words translated "crucify", or "crucified", they come from four Greek words, not one of which means "crucify." The word we translate "cross" is, in Greek, "stauros", which simply means a stake—one piece of wood only. Yet it would be safe to say that the picture of Jesus "suffering" on the "cross" has done more to perpetuate Christianity than the thousands of books written to elucidate the nonsense which is called Christian "theology", and for most of which "Paul" is responsible.

Whether the original writers of our Gospels meant the "crucifixion" to be taken literally, it is now impossible to decide. We do *not* know what was originally written, and probably never shall; and on this there is no "authority", not even the clever priests of the Catholic Church—or for that matter, Mr. Ashe. My own opinion, which I give for what it is worth, is that the Gospels were never meant to be taken as genuine biographies of a Jewish descendant of David, but were allegories based on known symbolism. Mr. Ashe looks upon them as being true narratives of historical events to be accepted as we accept the life of Mr. Gladstone narrated by John Morley—and he was obviously quite hurt when he complained that, in my first articles dealing with him, I "totally" ignored what he said about the Resurrection. Well, I had not the space to do so before, so let us first see—not what Mr. Ashe had to say, but what the "Sacred Word" has to say about the Resurrection.

The Synoptics make the day of the month when Jesus was "crucified" the 15th of Nissan. John makes it the 14th. The Synoptics say the day was a Friday; John says it was a Thursday. The question of these two days has been exhaustively dealt with by hundreds of theologians in thousands of books, and all we can gather from them is that, as Scribner's *Bible Dictionary* ruefully admits, "We are thus left with a conflict of testimony". Any green curate, or even a qualified Catholic priest, no doubt could persuade Mr. Ashe that it really doesn't matter *when* the Crucifixion took place—so long as it did take place. But it has always been argued by Christians that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Well, was he? If we go to the famous Church Father Irenaeus, the first Church writer who mentions the four Gospels, we find that it was impossible for Jesus to have been crucified under Pilate, for Irenaeus stoutly maintains that Jesus died "an old man," how is not stated. He nowhere in the long passage where he argues that Jesus was an old man when he died mentions the Crucifixion or Pilate. The only way Christians can dispose of this part of Irenaeus is either to throw him overboard as an old fool, or to make the birth of Jesus take place say at about the year 20 B.C., or 30 B.C., instead of the traditional date of A.D. 1, or 4 B.C., (the favourite date these days), or the many other dates theologians find when they come to examine the Gospels in the light of "history".

As Pilate left Jerusalem about the year A.D. 36 or A.D. 37, Irenaeus on this point at least provides a puzzle not yet solved.

When we come to the Resurrection, we find that

Jesus was to have been "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" like Jonah "in the whale's belly". But as he was, according to the Synoptics in his tomb from Friday evening to Sunday morning only, Christian theologians have been arguing about the Synoptic positive statements ever since. I expect the only person in the world who can answer the problem is now Mr. Ashe. Nobody else.

Nobody from the four Gospels can really answer the question, who were the first to visit the tomb, or give its exact time. Here theologians have cleverly steered clear of the four contradictory statements. The Gospels all contradict each other, they sadly admit, so they must have been describing completely different visits. The Evangelists do *not* say so, but what else can a priest do when trying to harmonise the blatant contradictions on this very simple point?

Moreover, while Luke says that the tomb was open when the women first came, Matthew says it was closed; and while Matthew says they met one angel, Mark says it was a young man, Luke claims there were two men, and John, who in most cases always contradicts his fellow writers, plumps for two angels. Note particularly that the presence of "angels" appears to have been exactly what the visitors expected. After all, "angels" or "heavenly beings" must have then been as common as boy scouts are to us and just as easily recognised.

The Evangelists are not able to agree as to whether these angels (or men) were sitting or standing. Probably the men were sitting, for I cannot remember ever seeing pictures of angels sitting. They are always piously depicted for us flying in nighties with huge birds' wings or standing reverently around New Testament characters. And talking about angels, does Mr. Ashe really believe the story, widely circulated, that "an angel of the Lord" (whatever that means) came to Joseph in a *dream* to tell him that God Almighty was to be the Father of Jesus? It was not, we must insist, a "dream" angel but a *real* one. How did Joseph recognise it? There were no illustrated works with drawings or reproductions of paintings of angels in his day.

In this connection, we must note that, according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Mary Magdalene had no difficulty in observing the angel—or angels. But according to John (who perversely appears to contradict them whenever possible) she did *not* see them. In any case, Matthew tells us that later the women *saw* Jesus; while Luke says, they did *not*. Luke also says that the women told the disciples what they saw, while Mark says "Neither said they anything to any man".

Needless to add that no two of the Evangelists agree as to the appearances of Jesus after his Resurrection. Even such a Fundamentalist Bishop like Dr. Westcott admits that the various accounts "contain difficulties which it is impossible to explain with certainty", while Dr. Farrar, in what has been called the most popular *Life of Christ* ever written says, "The locutions, the compressions, the variations, the actual differences . . . render all harmonies at the best uncertain". But perhaps not for Mr. Ashe.

I could give him of course dozens of these "actual differences" which cannot be explained, but my space is limited. However, he might like to tell us why, according to Matthew, Jesus finally appeared to his disciples in

Galilee, while according to Luke it was in Jerusalem? So blatant is the discrepancy, that poor Dean Alford, the editor of what was once a famous Greek Testament, and a monument of scholarship, pathetically agrees in his notes on this, "We must be content to walk by faith and not by sight!"

But the real cream of the story of the Resurrection is of course not Jesus's so much as that of the "saints" who arose with him—or a little later. We are told in Matthew that when Jesus was crucified

The graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after the resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

Notice the touching way in which these saints waited before coming out of their graves until *after* Jesus arose—no doubt out of politeness, or because Jesus had to be the first who ever arose after death. It is a beautiful story, and the only point about it which we should be troubled with is, what the joyous relatives of the dear departed must have thought as they trooped back to their native towns?

Whenever the Resurrection of "our Lord" is mentioned, one phrase always accompanies it. It is "the Most Authenticated Event in History". I do not doubt that this is the opinion of Mr. Ashe. But for myself, I find it difficult not to guffaw at what is undoubtedly "the Greatest Hoax in History". And this is not a question for Renan or Robertson. It is a question of sheer common sense.

I will try and gather a few loose knots together in (I hope) a final reply to Mr. Ashe in my next article.

## The Witness, The Ashtray and God

By PETER SINCLAIR

I HAVE HAD MANY DISCUSSIONS with members of the various Christian and Muslim sects on the question of whether or not God does in fact exist. Many's the time too that I've used the following method of showing up their beliefs as utter and complete nonsense, devoid of any concrete basis.

Me: "All right. If there is a God, do you agree that one of his greatest desires is to have all mortals love and fear him?"

Christian: "Yes."

Me: "Do you agree also that at any time of the day or night he can see and hear what each one of us is saying and doing? That he is tuned into us at this moment?"

Christian: "Yes."

Me: "O.K. I will now give you, and the Lord, a promise. If God, in his desire to have us all believe in Him, will lift this ash-tray even one inch from the table, he will have secured for himself a devoted disciple. If he will do this one little thing, I shall spend the rest of my life serving him — if not through love, through fear of such a powerful being."

Invariably the Christian (or Muslim — they are very closely allied in their idiocies!) reply to my challenge has been "Oh no, why should God do that for you? You must have faith. He wants you to discover and love Him of your own accord" and then the subject would be changed to more materialistic things.

There was, however, a man who took up my challenge. I will tell you about him.

It was Friday night, about 8 o'clock. My wife was out, the fire was beautifully in, I had ten Woodbines, *Freedom's Foe: the Vatican* and a Bottle of Brown Ale. I was, as they say, happy and contented. Then a knocking at the door broke the peace. I opened the door and standing there was a man of diminutive proportions who, from the gleam, the fanatical gleam, in his eye could be one of two things only — an insurance salesman or a Jehovah's Witness. Luckily he was the latter, selling *The Watchtower*, so I invited him inside. Always ready for a discussion, that's me!

He entered rubbing his hands, obviously pleased with

his discovery of such a willing victim for his Hellfire fables. He sat down and, when his eye lit upon the beer, started his sermon with "You know, we Jehovah's Witnesses aren't narrow-minded. We have nothing against a chap who takes a drink." He accepted my offer of a glass and we began our discussion in earnest. I learned all sorts of strange things. Women are not the equal of men. It is doubtful whether even good Communists will qualify for Paradise . . . all sorts of alleged facts were poured out by this, undoubtedly zealous little chap.

Then I said my ash-tray piece.

To my surprise — and delight — he didn't bat the proverbial eyelid. All he said was "Do you mind if I say a prayer?" I didn't mind at all, and putting the ash-tray in the centre of the table, sat back and waited for the Lord to do his stuff.

The little man sat with his eyes closed. His lips moved in prayer, the house was silent save for the spluttering of the fire.

I waited.

Suddenly my companion opened his eyes, exclaimed "Yes Lord," grabbed the ash-tray and flung it to the floor, scattering cigarette dust and spent matches all over the place.

He regarded me in triumph. "There," he said, "now do you believe?" I was dumbfounded at his cheek. "Now do I believe," quoth I, "what do you mean 'now do I believe'?" It was you who threw the ash-tray, not God."

His expression was one of pity mixed with contempt.

"Brother, please try to understand. God, in answer to my prayer told me to move the ash-tray *on his behalf*. When I did so I was filled with the spirit of Jehovah!"

It was a good ash-tray, too. It said on it "Beer is Best." I got it from a pub in Bolton, and my wife wasn't any too pleased at the mess it made.

## Thoughts on Truth

By NICHOLAS TOON

WHAT IS TRUTH?

For the Rationalist, this question is of fundamental importance, since the actual cause of a person's belief (particularly religious belief) does not necessarily bear a direct relation to the veracity of that belief.

Clearly *truth* applies to propositions. Truth may be considered to be simply the correspondence of a proposition with the fact to which it relates. Thus truth depends on *meaning*. Now a term can be defined only in terms of other terms, and hence to establish the truth or falsity of a given understood proposition it is necessary to apply a test or tests, by which criteria a decision can be arrived at.

In the ordinary way of things, a man would not make an assertion and present that assertion as fact unless he had some solid grounds for so doing. But we have to distinguish carefully between grounds which are *in fact* founded on reason, and those which derive from other sources — principally, deep emotional and subconscious motivations and powerful social forces arising out of those motivations. Man in his primeval fear has created forces he knows not what which terrify his imagination and paralyse his intellect. Of course, emotions are things for which we must have deep respect. But irrational fear is an emo-

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tion which we would be better rid of. Thus I believe that Freud was justified in describing religious belief as "the universal obsessional neurosis" of humanity. It is not an individual neurosis, but a collective neurosis — a kind of social sickness. The emotions which we ought to build on are the opposite ones — *Love, kindness and compassion, tolerance and goodwill*. And the point, too, I should like to make is that there are some men for whom the *naked truth* as such is something to revere. I believe as well that human happiness is infinitely more important than any "truth," but I do not think that happiness can be founded on nonsense, or that there is any incompatibility between truth and happiness; on the contrary. If our happiness depends on our believing something which is not true, there is something wrong with us, not with the world.

The ultimate arbiter of any dispute ought to be reason, but it is more usually the *pressure* of anything up to and including physical violence. In a free society, a person is entitled to believe that the moon is made of cheese, if he pleases. What he is not morally entitled to do is to teach that doctrine authoritatively to innocent children, to force other people into a hypocritical profession of it, or to write it into the secular laws of the State, thus nominally and vicariously committing a vast body of people to a professed belief which by its very nature must needs be a personal and individual profession in order to have any meaning at all.

If one day we are able to explain everything by science, "truth" will be an unnecessary word; an error will be instantly recognisable by everybody. It scarcely seems likely that we already have the ultimate explanation known to us, nor do people in their hearts really believe this. It is not true that it requires a sentient being to create a sentient being; the *potentialities* of mentality inhere in the lowest organism. Besides, we should have in that case an infinite regress. Moreover, we know of no mind with which a brain is not associated. We continue to strive toward the ultimate explanation of everything, but in the meantime it is futile to argue about something which lies so far beyond the bounds of our knowledge. Something may be either a fact or not a fact, but perhaps there are some facts we shall never know.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### ESTELLE ROBERTS

After reading "This Believing World" (4th December) I decided to read Estelle Roberts's article in *The People* (6th December). I have not read them in the past — no time for drivel.

I was amazed to learn Mona Tinsley's body was found by Miss Roberts. At the time of the enquiries I was a detective sergeant engaged in this case. Nodder, prior to his arrest, was a motor lorry driver engaged in conveying gravel from the Orsdale Quarries, Retford, Notts, to the Hemswell R.A.F. Station, Lincs, which, at that time, was being newly constructed. Now, 23 years later, I am informed by Miss Roberts, via *The People* that she discovered Mona's body.

I remember Mr. John Clarke, a body diviner, of Abb-Kettleby, near Melton Mowbray, Leics, making a similar personal claim to me. An old soldier's story, growing with the passage of time — even convinces the teller, the soldier.

Thuswise, I imagine the gospels grew into print.

A. C. ROBINSON.

### ORIGIN OF LIFE

On December 1st, BBC TV gave a first-rate report on the problem of the origin of life. We freethinkers have often had to criticise the BBC; on this occasion then let us not be niggardly in our praise. The God-hypothesis was never once mentioned. Words are inadequate to express the appreciation all freethinking viewers must have felt.

But on the following evening, Canon Raven appeared and, after paying lip-service to the previous day's programme, told viewers that although that was how life began, it was in its higher manifestations that we must look for its real meaning; and that there we would find God. Although he talked so glibly, he could not offer one shred of real evidence for his assertions. He did, however, twice quote Sir Julian Huxley in support of his statements. The programme closed with a picture of Christ's head crowned with thorns.

Unless Sir Julian makes his position abundantly clear to viewers, he may be accused of running with the hares and hunting with the hounds. Could you call his attention to this?

W. E. HUXLEY.

[In our issue of December 4th, we regretted "that Sir Julian persisted in retaining the terms 'religion' and 'theology,' even in a metaphorical sense" in a recent lecture.—Ed.]

### SHORTSIGHTED

When Almighty God decided to stage his spectacular act of redemption of the world by the sacrifice of his only begotten son, surely his publicity was very badly managed? After 2,000 years, countless millions are still unaware of this intense drama.

A really farseeing God would have postponed the event until today, when he could take advantage of modern methods such as TV, even if the divine news had to be sandwiched between adverts for washing powders and deodorants on one channel.

(Mrs.) MARY A. WATSON.

### FROM LISBON

There is a British Women's Social Service here, with a Roman Catholic at the head. During the year they have arranged bazaars, lotteries, dances, teas, etc., to raise money for charities. One day, when there were few members present, the RCs (Catholic Action) saw their chance, and voted two-thirds of the money collected to Roman Catholic charities, all of them in the direct hands of the religious. There has been a faint protest, but nothing will come of it. The Protestants bely their name. They are a lily-livered lot.

BRITISH WOMAN (Name supplied).

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