

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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IT MUST BE a very insular-minded person who doesn't know or isn't interested that a fancied contender for nomination as Democratic candidate for the United States Presidency is Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, a Roman Catholic. Another Catholic aspirant for the nomination, the Governor of California, Edmund G. Brown, has also been in the news recently in connection with the Caryl Chessman case, but at the moment he

would seem to be an outsider for the Presidential stakes. Kennedy is certainly among the leaders and, although there is still a long way to go, he must be reckoned the most likely Catholic candidate since Al Smith was defeated in 1928.

Catholicism has thus become an issue in American national politics. As *Look* (16/2/60) put it, "The possibility that a Catholic will be nominated for President or for Vice-President this year has focused attention on a number of questions about relations between Church and State that are seldom discussed publicly and frankly in the United States." The magazine proceeded to discuss them with the Rev. John A. O'Brien, Ph.D., Research Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame and a Catholic co-chairman of a commission in the National Conference of Christians and Jews. "How do you explain the fear of some Americans that the separation between Church and State will break down if a Catholic is elected President?" it asked. Father O'Brien attributed it mainly to a 12-year propaganda campaign by the organisation, Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, a campaign which, he said, had "no more basis in fact than those of a century ago." And he added: "Such groups as the POAU stir up antagonisms and create tensions between citizens on matters of faith. Such matters have no place in politics, but belong entirely to the realm of conscience."

At which temperate words — so natural, one would think, looking at the portrait of the benign and scholarly Ph.D. — it behoves us, no doubt, to forget Cardinal Spellman's (and others') stirring up of antagonisms and creations of tensions at the time of Mr. Khrushchev's American tour. But can we? Father O'Brien may be as sincere as he looks, as moderate as he sounds, but what is his voice against the hierarchy?

### Practical Reasons

He may honestly believe that Catholics would still favour separation of Church and State if they were in a majority in the U.S., but his reasons for favouring it now are very practical ones: "Because Catholics are a minority in this country" and "Any possible union of Church and State in the United States today would be between the Government and a federation of Protestant churches — not the Catholic Church." Even looking ahead, he sees it as "patently impossible for a slim Catholic majority to impose its belief upon a numerous and unwilling minority of Protestants" and "In the most roseate forecasts, it seems unrealistic to predict a Catholic majority in this country."

### Questionable Sincerity

And even his sincerity must be questioned on one, surely vital, point. "Does the Catholic Church in the United States take part in politics?" he was asked. No, he replied. "The Church as an institution does not. No member of the hierarchy tells priests or nuns how to vote. A priest is not permitted to tell his parishioners how to vote. He is not allowed to endorse or denounce candidates for public office from his pulpit. Like other Americans, Catholics enter the polling booths as free citizens, responsible only to their own consciences." Now there has been another recent pronouncement on this very topic, and one which the Pope himself had a hand in. The Synod

of the Roman diocese declared that "the Church must maintain its right and duty to advise laymen on how to vote in elections." And, while the articles apply specifically to Rome itself, Roman Catholic bishops everywhere have been urged to follow them in their own dioceses "as far as local conditions permit" (*Time*, 8/2/60), which gives the lie to Father O'Brien. Even if we grant the fine distinction between advising and telling, the former is still endorsing, which the Father said a priest was not allowed to do. Of course, "local conditions" may not "permit" as much latitude in the United States as they do, say, in Ireland, where Father O'Brien no doubt has ties, but one can sympathise with the *Time* reader who accordingly asked (29/2/60) "Why call Protestants bigots who worry about putting Catholic laymen in the White House?" And in case it be argued that Father O'Brien might not have heard the Rome Synod pronouncement when he was interviewed by *Look*, let us recall the wording: "The Church must maintain its right and duty . . ." etc.

Naturally, Father O'Brien told *Look* that a Catholic President wouldn't be required "to place the so-called demands of his religion above the demands of his country." "Catholics cannot conceive of any set of circumstances that would prevent a Catholic from fulfilling the Constitutional obligations reflected in the Presidential oath," he said. And on the specific question of the birth control controversy, he returned to his line of "a personal or moral issue for individuals, not a political one." But the U.S. President is not just another individual and, in a sense, all his actions are political. This is ignored in all Father O'Brien's answers, yet it is crucial. And the Father's sincerity must again be called in question when he states that "There is a natural method of birth control, highly approved by medical science as effective . . ." Other answers reveal his, perhaps unconscious, equivocation.

### Conscience

So, too, did those of William A. van Roo, S.J., American Professor of Theology in the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, when reported in *Newsweek* (21/12/59). The Church, he said, would regard a Catholic President as "an American citizen and official, bound by a sacred duty to love and serve his country, and to uphold

## — VIEWS and OPINIONS — *Catholic Professors and a Catholic President*

By COLIN McCALL

its laws in accordance with his conscience." But, "For any man who has a religion, this means doing what he considers right according to the law of God." Asked "If there should be a conflict between the American public interest and church dogma, which should be considered paramount?" Father van Roo called the question "ambiguous," involving "a gratuitous assumption." "There can be no such conflict of conscience in a Catholic or in any other religious man . . . there can be a sharp clash of opinion as to what is the real American public interest in a particular case. But any man, Catholic or not, must hold firmly that in doing right according to his conscience, he is serving the best interest of his country."

### Conscience

If the question is ambiguous, it is nothing compared with the answer. How religionists love that word "conscience": and how effectively its introduction here smothers any clear statement of the problem! Father van Roo settles the matter with the absurd "There can be no such conflict of conscience in a Catholic or in any other religious man."

## More About Fatima

By N. F. (Lisbon)

AS I AM HERE ON THE SPOT and as I have been to the hospitals to verify the diagnosis, and spoken to the father and mother of Jacinta and Francisco, I would like to add something to Mr. Ridley's article on Fatima. A book called *She Was a Lady More Brilliant than the Sun* by an Italian priest of the Fatima seminary who is the best authority I know on the subject, naïvely states that, though all the people examined were illiterate, they all said the same thing. I lived for five months in Leiria and knew the Marto family intimately. They consisted of father, mother, and nine children, seven of whom died of tuberculosis. Francisco and Jacinta were the two youngest.

Francisco, born in 1908, went to school for a few months but, as the boys made fun of his visions and the teacher declared him mad, he was unhappy there. Our Lady then told Lucia to tell him not to go to school any more as She (Our Lady) was calling him soon to Heaven and reading wasn't in vogue there. At nine, he already had the seeds of TB and saw great globes of fire. He wanted to die in order to console Jesus for the insults He received from sinners. In 1920 he got the bad 'flu with pneumonia, had a cough and spouted blood and died with — as his mother said to me — the light of the skies always shining in his eyes. I'm afraid some of the light and visions were the result of his sickness.

Jacinta was born in 1910. She had been ailing from birth, but in 1920 she also got pneumonia. The doctor advised the parents to take her to the hospital at Ourem for treatment. The father, settling her on the donkey's back walked the 11 kilometres with her to the hospital. As she got no better she was taken to Lisbon, and she stayed at the convent orphanage, "Our Lady of Miracles," while waiting for a bed in the Hospital of Estafania. When the Reverend Mother appeared at the hospital with Jacinta the doctor and nurses said it was a disgrace to have let this child, so far gone with TB, eat and sleep with the healthy children. The Reverend Mother replied to these godless sinners that they should know that Our Lady would never permit such a holy child to contaminate the health of other children. At this point Our Lady came in a special vision to Jacinta to tell her that she was attending these hospitals, not to be cured, only to suffer more so that she would have a better place in Heaven.

In the Hospital of Estafania, Jacinta occupied bed 38 and was put under the care of Dr. Castro Freire — one of

But it just won't do. We all have "conflicts" of "conscience," or loyalties: in the family; at work; between the two; between family and group (nation or smaller) right up to national and international level. Such conflicts are part of the human lot, and they are far from easy to resolve. The point of *Newsweek's* question — and the thing that is worrying many Americans — is that Senator Kennedy's religion considerably complicates the matter. Religion of any kind is a complicating factor: the religionist has (theoretically at any rate) to take heavenly, as well as earthly views into account. But Roman Catholicism is worst of all, precisely because of its extreme claims — in the political as well as the theological sphere. And a Roman Catholic President might have to choose between loyalty to the American Constitution and loyalty to his Church.

"Can Catholics separate Church and State?" was the title of the *Look* interview with Father O'Brien, which the latter answered affirmatively. Father O'Brien is sure that a Catholic's faith would not interfere with his duties as President. But some Americans are not so sure.

the best doctors of his day. He diagnosed her case as "Pleurisia purulenta da grande cavidade esquerda, fistulizada: osteíte das 7 and 8 costelas do mesmo lado" (Purulent pleuresy of the left lung fistulised; inflammation of the 7th and 8th ribs also of the left). Our Lady again appeared to Jacinta to tell her that many souls are lost because of the sins of the flesh and advised her to censure some lady visitors for showing their legs in their short skirts. She died in about a week from then. Many people came to touch her garments with rosary beads and to kiss and embrace the body which now exhaled an odour of roses, though in hospital the smell from her was nauseating. Two months later two of Jacinta's sisters died from the same dread disease. I cannot understand why Jacinta was never taken to Fatima, where Our Lady was curing so many people.

## Missing ESP

THE BBC "LIFELINE" PROGRAMME on Extra-Sensory Perception (March 2nd) adequately ruled out any possibility of collusion and, in consequence, ruled out ESP. A random selection of numbers from 0 to 9 appeared on the TV screens, and the viewers were asked by the Consultant Psychiatrist, Dr. Stafford Clark, to "concentrate" on them. Meanwhile, four people with ESP claims tried to "receive" them. They failed dismally, the best individual result being 3 right out of 25, and the total for the panel being 6 right out of 100.

We tried our own little experiment, writing down the following 25 numbers before the first one appeared on the screen: 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4. There was, as you will note, a certain sequence about them, and the four italicised ones coincided with the corresponding numbers when the latter appeared on the screen some time later. We thus achieved a better result than any member of the panel, 4 out of 25, and far above the panel's individual average of  $1\frac{1}{2}$ .

Does it prove anything? As Dr. D. J. West (who so much *wants* to believe in ESP, as we know from personal experience) said afterwards, we can't come to any firm conclusion from this one experiment. But if anything was clear from the BBC programme, it was that the four people were purely and simply guessing.

Incidentally, two of them, twins, claimed genuine telepathic powers, but admitted that they cheated to get better results in public. The public wanted higher scores than they could give them with their "ESP," and the public, we suppose, must be given what it wants!

# The Great Religious Orders—3

## The Dominicans

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE COUNTER-REFORMATION of the 13th century was, as Professor Coulton in his book, *Inquisition and Liberty*, has demonstrated, chiefly the work of certain new forces that first appeared at the beginning of the 13th century after the impact of the Crusades had opened up a new era in European history. As already noted in the preceding articles, these new forces consisted of the two great Orders of preaching Friars, the Franciscans and the Dominicans: and the Holy Office — better known under its sinister title of the Inquisition—that was founded by the Papacy during the Crusade against the Albigenses during the opening years of the 13th century. As we have suggested previously, these novel formations of the Catholic Counter-Reformation anticipated the combination of terrorism (then represented by the Inquisition) and demagoguery which have characterised Fascism in our own day. The effective link between these two potent arms of the medieval Papacy in its ruthless war against heresy, was furnished by the Order of Preachers, or Dominicans as they have been more usually styled after their founder, who started with the primary objective of preaching among the Albigenses and ended up as the ruthless director of the Holy Roman Inquisition, a judicial role that they were later to repeat in the case of its better-known successor, the — also holy — Spanish Inquisition.

The Dominican Order was officially constituted in 1218, a few years after the Franciscans. Its founder, Dominic, was a Spaniard and an ex-missionary amongst the Albigenses, who were at that time the major enemies of Rome, much as the Protestants were to be later. Though the newly founded Order was an Order of Mendicant Friars without — at first — individual or corporate property, and organised on very similar lines to the Franciscans, the followers of the fanatical Spanish preacher displayed from the start a very different spirit from that of the mild St. Francis, to whom one must suppose that the brutalities of the Inquisition must have been as abhorrent as would be the callous treatment of animals (e.g. the current Irish traffic in horses) which the Church later adopted largely under the influence of Thomas Aquinas and his fellow Dominican moralists. As befitted its founder's early career, the Dominican Order first won its spurs by organising and directing the ferocious war of extermination against the French Manicheans commonly known as the Crusade against the Albigenses. The horrors of this Crusade — the most permanently successful of all the numerous crusades launched by the Church during the Middle Ages — are notorious; it completely destroyed the flourishing civilisation of Provençal France. The Dominicans were the "spiritual" ringleaders in this colossal piece of gangsterdom, and no doubt inspired the notable injunction of the Papal Legate upon entering a captured stronghold of the Albigenses: "Kill them all, my son; at the Last Day, God will know how to distinguish between His own and the heretics." It was in this spirit that the war was concluded with the virtual extirpation of Manicheism in Europe; and it was in this spirit that the Dominicans, the "heroes" of the Albigensian Crusade, organised and consistently ran the two great engines of persecution permanently run by the Church of Rome, the Roman Inquisition, probably founded during the Albigensian War, and the later Spanish Inquisition, an even more celebrated "spiritual police" which was founded as a separate autonomous organisation in 1480. The Inquisitors

who ran these fearful engines for the permanent repression of "dangerous thoughts," were usually Dominicans. The two most celebrated were Torquemada, the founder and first Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition, and Ghisleri, later Pope Pius V, the former Roman Grand Inquisitor and the instigator of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, but Pius V is now a canonical saint! In broad historical perspective, the Inquisition must be regarded as the first of the two major tasks effected by Dominic's Order of Preachers. For it represented the Gestapo and the clerical "Brown Terror" of the Middle Ages, because they were then ceasing to be the Ages of Faith. It would hardly be too much to say that ever since the Foundation of the Inquisition, Rome has been the primary enemy of the revival of European civilisation.

The second major service rendered to Rome by the Dominicans, lays in their reformulation of Roman Catholic theology of which the chief architect was Thomas Aquinas, now officially recognised as the principal representative of Catholic orthodoxy. Prior to St. Thomas, Dominic himself had been responsible for the introduction of the now universal repetition of the Rosary into the popular devotional system of the Church. In face of the new cultural standards with which Europe, after the Crusades, was confronted as a result of the new contacts then established with the higher culture of the Muslim East, an intellectual wave of scepticism threatened to overrun the Christian West. Faced with this dire danger, Rome had not only to suppress the by now ubiquitous heretics, but to meet them on their own ground with intellectual weapons. This feat was accomplished mainly by the theologians of the Dominican Order, with Thomas Aquinas at their head. For which purpose, Aquinas adopted (and expurgated) the Pagan philosophy of the Greek, Aristotle, which they thenceforth constituted as the essential basis of Catholic philosophy. (They derived this from the translations and commentaries made by heretical Muslim philosophers like Avicenna and Averroes.) It is not always recognised that, in their own day, and against their own intellectual background, Aquinas and Co. were definitely modernists, and were regarded as such by the Catholic die-hards. For Aristotle, after all, was a Pagan — possibly even an atheist. So reasoned both the contemporary Archbishop of Canterbury and the University of Oxford — then as later, apparently the home of lost causes! However, the rulers of the Catholic Church had evidently sufficient sense to see that they could not hope to defeat heresy by the terrorism of the Inquisition alone and unassisted. In an age of rising culture more subtle weapons were also required. So, the modernist Aquinas and bowdlerised Pagan master, Aristotle, have now become the definitive pillars of modern Catholic orthodoxy. Undoubtedly this intellectual revolution represented one of the principal services rendered by the Dominicans to the Church. Even their powerful modern Jesuit rivals have never dared to set up a counterpart to the "Angelic Doctor." Reinach has described St. Thomas as possessing an intellect "almost liberal" — for his age, that is, for the Saint explicitly believed that "incorrigible heretics should not be argued with, but should be immediately put to death!"

Since the Reformation, the major activities of the Dominicans in their twin spheres of theology and Church-

(Concluded on next page)

## This Believing World

To help to get the millions of viewers who watch BBC's TV back to the Bible, a Mr. J. Huxtable tried to explain the undoubted fact that though "millions of Bibles are sold every year, yet amongst the public the view prevails that it is 'no go'" (as the *Radio Times* put it). In this, he completely failed, for all he did was to bring to the screen Dr. Nathaniel Micklem, a noted theologian, who immediately entered into a discussion on the existence of Jesus, and not on the Bible as such at all.

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Unlike so many of his brethren in Christ, Dr. Micklem did not go to Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny, and the Talmud; he pinned his proof for the existence of Christ as a "Man" and a "God" on Paul who was a "contemporary" witness; and though it is true Paul never met Christ in the flesh, so to speak, he met hundreds who did. Did he not say that Jesus after the Resurrection "was seen of above 500 of the brethren at once"? Here then was unimpeachable evidence not only for the existence of Christ as "a Person," but also as God Almighty and the Son of God Almighty. Alas, Mr. Huxtable did not seem too impressed; but as far as the Bible was concerned, he advised everybody to read it. And that, he knows well, few will ever do.

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The onslaught on the Lord's Day Observance Society recently made by Mr. Jimmy Edwards in the *Daily Mail* brought a crop of replies, particularly from those who reverently believe in every word and comma in the Bible as coming from God Almighty himself — especially the English Authorised Version. One lady indignantly asked "Who is right — God or Jimmy Edwards? God wrote with his own finger 'Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy' . . ." Presumably God hadn't a fountain or ball point pen, and we can't help wondering what the Divine Finger looked like after being dipped so much in the Holy Ink. Still, it is good to note that in spite of God's injunction to keep the Sabbath Day holy, the lady herself throws it completely overboard, and keeps the Pagan Day of the Sun holy instead.

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So, after all, Nigel Dennis's anti-religious play, "The Making of Moo," produced in that home of pure religion, Oxford, was "loudly applauded," and was a "triumph" for the only lady in the cast, according to the *Daily Mail*. Seven hundred people, mostly undergraduates, laughed at the jokes about the Pope and at the mock service — and we hope that the repertory theatres all over the country as well as the amateur dramatic societies will put on this witty play in spite of its being "anti-religious." The one thing religion cannot stand is being laughed at. If "our Lord" or Paul had been laughed at, there might never have been our solemn and dreary Christian religion.

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The editor of "The Bible Speaks to Britain," a Mr. J. McWhirter, which has a 750,000 circulation (we have never heard of it) is a very angry man who does not believe in turning the other cheek. He has made a slashing attack on the religious "rock 'n' roll" programme on ITV on Sundays — the Sunday Break — in which a number of teenagers indulge in the usual kind of "twirling" so reminiscent of African witch doctors. Other teenagers bang drums and make noises with various kinds of trumpets. We always thought that this programme was designed to prove that Jesus was the greatest "rock 'n' roller" the world has ever seen, but Mr. McWhirter thinks otherwise — poor fellow.

TV's star turn the other Sunday in "Meeting Point" was Dr. W. R. Matthews, the Dean of St. Paul's. He was asked some very pertinent questions on his beliefs — and of course he claimed to have been an agnostic before becoming a parson. In all probability he knew as much about agnosticism then as the average Hottentot. For the rest, the Dean's religion emerged as a very hazy and vague type of Theism, for he protested that his God was not a white-bearded old gent residing in Heaven. He had no idea where God really was.

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In truth it was difficult to sort out what his actual beliefs were for he seemed to shirk any definite conclusions as to Christianity and Christ Jesus. Indeed, his references to "our Lord" were almost nil. In spite of the terrific advantages enjoyed by the Churches in propagating their religion on the radio and TV, their impact on Dr. Matthews was obviously nil.

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Then again the BBC staged a discussion between three people — Messrs. Norman Fisher, Stuart Holroyd and the Rev. D. Jenkins. As far as it was possible to learn from what he said, Mr. Holroyd was "agin" everything — politics, religion, ideologies — but appeared to be so thoroughly confused in his "exposition" that it was quite impossible to say where he stood. He had nothing whatever constructive to offer and, of course, Mr. Fisher and Mr. Jenkins managed to score points against him. His ideas against religion were — more or less — infantile. But the BBC uses religion as a main prop, and we cannot expect the Corporation to bring an out-and-out Freethinker to the screen. The protests would be far too voluble.

### THE GREAT RELIGIOUS ORDERS—3

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politics have centred around their often violent controversies with the Franciscans over the Immaculate Conception (which St. Thomas rejected but which has proved too potent even for him) and with the Jesuits over the formidable problems connected with "sanctifying grace" and its current relations with the freedom of human will — a still unsolved and undefined problem in Catholic theology. In more mundane matters the Dominicans appear nowadays to represent Catholic Democracy in politics, against the Jesuits, the great Fascist order of the Church — a rather curious role for the former administrators of the Inquisition. In the Spanish Civil War, the Dominicans were the only Catholic Order to oppose General Franco's usurpation. Today the Jesuits and Dominicans are probably the two dominant Orders. And one significant pointer, at least to their *past* relations may be noted here, in conclusion. When a Dominican General dies, his Jesuit opposite number conducts his funeral, and vice versa. This is a relic of the stormy period when the Vatican evidently considered it preferable for the heads of the two great rival Orders to bury, rather than to kill, each other.

[Mr. Ridley's concluding article on The Jesuits will be held over one week to accommodate his special article on Agadir.]

### MISTAKES OF MOSES

Ingersoll many years ago, wrote an interesting and illuminating pamphlet about "Mistakes of Moses" who was, and still is, considered the greatest prophet in Israel. Well, what I am wondering, and it certainly requires an explanation, is this: a prophet, inspired by the Lord, foresees the distant future. If that be so, why didn't Moses lead the ancient Jews, in their flight and wanderings from Egypt, towards the south rather than towards the north? Then the Jews would have had the petrol and the Arabs the desert!

M. BYRN.

# THE FREETHINKER

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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. I. 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.

Marble Arch 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.

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.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street.) Sunday, March 13th, 6.45 p.m.: J. ROBINSON, "Progress—In Which Direction?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute) Lecture every Sunday, 7 p.m.

Central London Branch N.S.S. ("The City of Hereford" Blandford Place, W.1.) Sunday, March 13th, 7.15 p.m.: A Lecture.

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Tuesday, March 15th, 7.15 p.m.: Conway Memorial Lecture—Mrs. MARY STOCKS, B.Sc., "Youth in an Affluent Society."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate.) Sunday, March 13th, 6.30 p.m.: F. MUSGROVE, PH.D., "Gods Old and New in Africa."

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (formerly West London Branch) (Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, off Edgware Road, 3 mins. Marble Arch Station) Sunday, March 13th, 7.30 p.m.: F. MCKAY, "Ireland and Freethought."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street.) Sunday, March 13th, 2.30 p.m.: I. PAINTER, "Towards Soviet Communism."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, March 13th, 11 a.m.: D. G. MACRAE, M.A., "The Religion of America."

## Notes and News

WE LEARN FROM AN UNIDENTIFIED CUTTING received recently that Anton Preisinger, the leading player in the Passion Play at Oberammergau this summer, "joined the Nazi Party from 1932 on. Now he plays Jesus."

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WRITING ABOUT POLAND in *The Guardian* (1/3/60), Mr. James Morris tells us that, above all, it "remains an intensely religious country." But, he says, "The intelligentia, like its brethren everywhere, is mostly agnostic . . ." Another interesting article in the same issue deals with the Evolution of the Stars and *The Guardian* Scientific Correspondent begins: "It becomes more and more probable that the universe was never created, at least in the ordinary

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

Previously acknowledged, £65 11s. 9d.; N. Cluett, 3s. 3d.; A. T. Browne, 15s.; W. Craigie, 5s.; Mrs. A. Calderwood, £1; Anon, 2s.; Total to date, March 4th, 1960. £67 17s.

FROM MR. JOHNSON

To the Secretary, National Secular Society:

Dear Mr. McCall,

Thank you for your letter and enclosure [THE FREETHINKER, 26/2/60].

You are, of course, perfectly entitled to deny my claims to be in touch with another world, and I am entitled to my opinion. I am certainly not interested at all in any public meeting as suggested by you.

I am very busy at the present time trying to help people who are in need of some comfort, and to me this is of primary importance.

Yours faithfully,

DOUGLAS JOHNSON.

meaning of the term. This is one of the tentative conclusions of the latest, and by far the most convincing, attempt to work out how the stars evolve with the passage of time."

★

"AFTER FOUR YEARS OF STUDY by a commission of 70 in 24 areas of the United States," we are informed by *The Guardian* (23/2/60), the Methodist Church of the U.S. "has decided to continue the present separation of white and Negro churches . . ." This "gives the 360,000 Negroes (out of a total church membership of ten millions) their own government and their own bishops." And what could be more democratic than that?

★

WE HAVE JUST SEEN A COPY of the Rationalist Association of South Africa's reprint "with the Author's permission" of Bertrand Russell's *Why I am not a Christian*, in English and an Afrikaans translation by James J. Ravell, within the same cover for half-a-crown. It will be remembered that this publication was to beat the ban imposed on the import of the pamphlet into South Africa. We believe it has since gone out of print in Britain. Lord Russell's lecture delivered March 6th, 1927 for the South London Branch of the National Secular Society remains perhaps the clearest presentation of the anti-Christian case in such a form, and we hope it will circulate widely in the Union. Certainly there is great need for it, for the Dutch Reformed Church is rigidly fundamentalist.

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THE SIX MEN who were selecting films for the Venice Film Festival resigned in protest against the nomination of Signor Emilio Lonero to replace Count Luigi Ammannati as the Festival's President (*Daily Express*, 1/3/60). Not surprising either, because the Festival has a liberal tradition, and Signor Lonero is the Secretary of Italy's Catholic Cinema Centre, which publishes a daily list of prohibited films. The independent newspaper, *Momento Sera*, described him as "a man rather strict in classifying films according to the official Catholic point of view," and the joint letter of resignation from the selection committee said that his appointment "would qualify" the Venice Film Festival, "making it impossible for us to share in it." *Momento Sera* added that the appointment of Signor Lonero came after Catholic pressure following the production of films which had been condemned by the Film Centre, and following Vatican protests against the film *La Dolce Vita* ("The Sweet Life") a satire on Roman high society which has broken all box-office records in the city.

# Birth Control

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

IN THE *New Statesman* of 19/12/59, I read a letter on Birth Control by a Jesuit priest named Eastwell. For classic unctuous Catholic arrogance and cool impudence, it puts up an unbeatable world record. And he has since written others.

Amongst the usual Catholic casuistry, he says, "... it is a high privilege that God should allow married people to co-operate with Him in His work of creation. Sex is a blessing, but the blessing is abused when a creature takes it on himself . . . to make it impossible for God to create . . . When the Church says that the 'safe' period is 'natural,' she means that it is part of the nature of woman to be infertile at certain times." In the letter are three major fallacies though in the whole context the reverend parades his superior learning by pretentious and unnecessary bombast about undistributed middles.

The first fallacy is the assumption that there is a god. For the existence of such a personality there is not the remotest trace of evidence. Like all gods, this one is a figment of the human imagination and is dying as all other gods have died. The second is that, even if we assume the existence of a god, he has any influence on human affairs. If he has, his effect is abominable, and the teaching said to be derived from God has been maintained by terror, torture, murder, mass extermination as at Bezier, and the most repulsive cruelty. To imagine a criminal like that running our affairs is revolting. The third is that, assuming God exists, this Jesuit is one of his accredited agents who knows what God wants. For this claim there is simply no evidence, no more and no less than that for the claim of Jesus to be the son of God, that is, exactly nil. The complete and devastating fallacy here is similar to that of Pascal's Wager. Pascal assumed that God was on the side of the Catholic Church, necessarily. But for this there is no evidence, and if we start guessing as Pascal did, it is just as legitimate to guess that he is against the Church: indeed, that is precisely the way I would imagine a sensible god to act. So that what the reverend says has no substance and no cogency. Instead of basing an argument on human considerations, he uses a non-existent figment, an unjustified abstraction.

But taking him on his own ground, what is the position? If contraception as I use it, the occlusive method and the only "safe" one, deprives God of the power to create, what has happened to his omnipotence? And when we operate on a patient for appendicitis, we make it impossible for God to carry out his intention to kill off the patient by rupture of the inflamed appendix. And when we rescue Jews from concentration camps, we make it impossible for God's agent, Tiso, to ship Jews to Auschwitz for their destruction ordained by God, in revenge presumably for their rejection of Jesus. This Jesuit argument is rubbish.

If, as Catholic priests say, contraception is unnatural, so is surgery, so is the wearing of clothes, etc., etc., etc. And to suggest the "safe" period advocated by the reverend as not being contraception is a typically dishonest Catholic piece of casuistic quibbling. And the "safe" period is not safe, and the reverend is incorrect in saying it is a time of infertility; I grant it is relatively infertile, but not absolutely. In my practice of sex- and contraception-instruction I have known women who conceived in the "safe" period. But to say it is not contraception is lying hypocrisy, since its object is to avoid conception. Now the reverend burbles merrily like a bullfinch from the tree-tops about God wrapping up pleasure in the sexual act. This is news to me

from Jesuit HQ. I once was asked to advise a young Catholic wife who was unhappy in her marriage because of sex frustration. She told me that her parish priest, a Jesuit, had warned her that she had to be just as modest after marriage as before. This irritated the husband, and rightly so on the story I got from the pair; neither had had any pleasure and the girl hated the whole business. On what I told them they had a whale of a time and were thoroughly happy and were as immodest as it is possible to be. What happened here is going on in numberless Catholic marriages, in which the total amount of misery must be intense. I find it hard to believe, by reason of the anti-human unhealthy sex ideas of Catholic priestly teaching, that there can be such a thing as a really happy Catholic marriage.

Now, back to the "safe" period and God's dispositions. The maximum libido, or desire for intercourse by the woman, occurs about the middle of the cycle at the time of the maximum chance of conception. God meant it that way but the Jesuit won't play it properly. He says, if you want to space your family, practise birth control (and be honest about it, I suggest), our way and have intercourse at the time of minimum libido; indeed, in many cases, have none at all and for months on end live this sexually frustrating life and become neurotic. That is just what the "safe" period entails. If you are going to quote God on pleasure, at least give him the chance of doing his best and not make it impossible for him to confer pleasure. The "safe" period is just as much anti-God as occlusive contraception, the only difference is in the factor involved. But the intention is the same in both, namely to prevent conception. And let there be no lying nonsense about it.

The hypocrisy of the Catholic attitude is repulsive: mechanical contraception is no more unnatural than having a hair-cut or a shave, and it enables human beings to rise above the animal level and to control their own procreative destiny; to have a family of the size they can manage in reasonable comfort of happy healthy children and not a mob of half-starved ill-educated urchins in a slum home, as so many Catholic homes become, as I saw in Liverpool. Unless contraception is universally practised, population pressure throughout the world will end in catastrophe as surely as two plus two equals four. Even now in Japan and India alone, misery, starvation and premature death are rampant due to the excessive birth rate. Happily both governments encourage birth control.

Decency, human dignity and commonsense require safe, that is mechanical contraception, until a simple pill can do the work, as an urgent necessity for the world. Catholic women know it since, in USA, a high proportion of Catholic families practise it. In a survey I made of the families of Catholic doctors and lawyers, I found 2.6 children per family, and that is not by any means due to the "safe" period, as I have been informed by my scouts at tea-parties to organise raffles for St. Patrick's school or the Sacred Heart Orphanage.

Contraception is one of the world's great discoveries. Women know it, and God and the Jesuits are fighting a rapidly losing battle against them on this issue.

NEXT WEEK

AGADIR

By F. A. RIDLEY

# The Atheist and Social Purpose

By E. G. MACFARLANE.

ATHEISTS, LIKE THEISTS, differ among themselves as to what the proper general aim of their own lives should be and consequently there will be differences among them as to what the social purpose, which is so essential to a cohesive social order, should be. However, I would like to offer some reflections on this subject which may help to unite atheists—and perhaps even theists and atheists together—in their approach to the ever present problem of achieving and maintaining social cohesion in the world.

The first point I would like to make is that every man alive (and of course I am including women as equal partners with men in this use of the word "man") comes into this life in complete ignorance of what it is all about. And it is only when parents and neighbours and teachers and all the other people around us begin to communicate with us that we begin to pick up ideas concerning the way we should conduct ourselves and the aims we should try to attain.

You will notice that I am baldly asserting the importance of aims and indeed this is a matter of expediency in an article of this sort. But we should also notice that for social purposes of a controlled kind, such as is necessary for the running of a social enterprise such as a state, the statement of a social purpose seems to be the only possible basis for widespread co-operation in creative work. Indeed, I would say that a world-wide social purpose (which will at least be adopted by the majority of mankind) is essential if we are to construct a secure social order for the world as a whole. Just as architects who are co-operating in the design of a building must have explicit agreement concerning the purpose of the structure before they can hope to agree about constructive suggestions so must the people of the world (i.e. the effective majority) agree the purpose of the social order they are to build and maintain.

Now let us turn to what will be a possible winner among the various contestants for the shaping of the social order in the world of the future. As I have already said the common factor which can be agreed for every person alive in the world today—and I would assert for every person who has ever lived—is the reality of our basic ignorance of the ultimate significance of ourselves and indeed of all living things collectively and severally which have ever existed. Surely the most intelligent reaction which the human mind can devise in the way of social order in these circumstances is to ensure that all views and theories and guesses concerning the ultimate significance of our lives should have a fair and square opportunity of being heard and of winning political power to implementation.

As I see it this general attitude of complete liberalism—as opposed to a liberalism which is based upon some notion of local national sovereignty or of some racial superiority or of some economic class or of some religious creed, etc.—must be allied to a strictly scientific view of life, living things and of the universe as a whole.

We will have to rule out all thoughts of the intervention of supernatural agencies in the ordering of human affairs just as scientists naturally rule out the possibility of supernatural intervention in the phenomena they are investigating. And of course the education of the youth of the world state will have to be in harmony with the general idea of the search for truth and the fair consideration of all possible theories where knowledge is absent. To unite mankind under a single umbrella of law and order which is

designed to encourage the search for truth in accordance with scientific principles and to promote free thought on speculative questions would be a fundamental departure from all the social programmes which have been set before mankind so far. What are offered all over the world are short-sighted and frankly very muddled affairs of local nationalism, ancient religions, racial prejudices, class warfare and similar barbarisms. Such social aims are not merely inappropriate to our modern situation and the manifest possibilities attending a clash of such partial systems in the form of inter-national or inter-continental wars, they are positively menacing in the fact that these partial groupings are the outcome of partial social purposes which are mutually exclusive in aim and thus are logically certain to result in world civil war in one form or another. We are not therefore discussing some metaphysical notion when we deal with the form of the social purpose which is to determine the future form of a viable world society—it is rather an urgent matter of immediate practical import for us all; perhaps even the veritable basis for determining whether the human race is to survive or be annihilated.

I do not think it is surprising that an atheist should be the person who should thus put his hand to the task of trying to create order out of the present crazy chaos in the world. After all the weakness of the theists is that they incline to leave things "in the hands of God" instead of realising that we have on our hands an urgent problem of human social psychology and behaviour. Wars are made by groups of men who are inspired or motivated by clashing group interests. Obviously the only remedy is to arrange for the present clashing motivations to be replaced by a common motivation in which the efforts of those previously separated by rival notions of local national interest, racial persuasions, religious fetishes and class-war theories will be harmonised by the general acceptance of a common aim out of which can grow and be propagated a common morality and set of customs which will draw all mankind into a truly united social group on the world scale.

There are so many people who appear to assume that it is unreasonable to expect an atheist to be interested in the survival of the human race and in matters of purpose and morality that I felt a statement of this kind was needed. No doubt this is because so many of these people have been educated to believe such statements as, "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." In opposition to this I would say that an honest desire to investigate the mysteries of the universe without any fear of Gods, devils or any other kind of supernatural beings is a *sine qua non* of our present situation in the world.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### PUSHKIN AND AFRICA

Mr. Hutton Hynd is correct in saying that Pushkin had an African ancestor.

About 1700, it was fashionable for European Courts to possess a coloured page-boy — so Peter the Great acquired an Abyssinian princeling. This boy grew up to be so unusually clever that he became Peter's secretary and he was ennobled. One of his sons married into the great Pushkin family, and a daughter of this union married a Pushkin cousin. They were the parents of the illustrious poet.

I gladly endorse Mr. Hutton Hynd's enlightened views on modern Africans. Having lived a year in Kenya and two years in Cape Town, I know their possibilities for "grace and talent" — if only they were given adequate opportunities. Africa today pre-

sents a remarkable parallel to the Russia of 160 years ago; i.e., it is a vast country with millions of worthy (but repressed) people. Most of them are given as little chance of education and development as the serfs of Russia used to receive.

What is urgently wanted today is the arrival of a new Alexander Pushkin, to publicise the current iniquities. (To parody Wordsworth, "Pushkin, thou shouldst be living at this hour.") One eloquent *Ode to Liberty* would rouse humanity far more effectively than would a dozen massive Devlin or Monckton reports.

The freedom-loving Pushkin castigated the tyrannical Czar Paul. Today "Czar" Verwoerd and the whip-wielding "Czar" Swart both deserve to be addressed in the same scathing and indignant terms:—

"I loathe thee, monster — and thy bloody throne."

Yet both Messrs. Verwoerd and Swart "confess and call themselves Christians!"

ADRIAN PIGOTT.

#### STAR OF BETHLEHEM

I wish to comment both on the statements about the Star of Bethlehem by Patrick Moore and by R. T. Fishall.

Let me say at once that I have not the slightest sympathy with the "divine" theory of the object, and from every viewpoint Mr. H. Cutner is clearly right. On the other hand I am not satisfied that the object is a pure fairy-story, because, contrary to the statements by Moore and Fishall, several astronomical phenomena were recorded at that epoch. Fishall stresses that Biela's Comet came to periastron on this date. To be more precise, it passed within the perihelion node of Mars, and continued through the constellations of Equuleus and Eridanus. Sulpicius describes it as "a hairy star," and Lucullus as "a fearsome omen." Moreover, the computations by Theakbury show that there was a simultaneous inferior conjunction of Venus and Jupiter in Equuleus. Since the synodic period of Venus is a perfect sine harmonic, the positions agree exactly. There is thus no doubt in my mind that this phenomenon has been seized upon and converted into the familiar fairy-tale.

ALAN BANDON

(Dept. of Astronomy, University Laboratory).

It appears probable that the gospel story of the magi — the three kings (or more literally, astrologers) who followed the star to the manger at Bethlehem — had neither an astrological, nor even astronomical origin, but an historical one. In the valuable *Chronology of Christian Origins*, recently published by the scholar Ernest Renan Circle, in Paris, we read under the year 64 A.D. the following instructive story:—

"Tiridates (an Armenian potentate) and his magi, paid a visit to the Emperor Nero at Rome, where the Parthian ruler adored the Roman Emperor in the same manner as the Sun God, Mithra. After which he returned to his own country 'by another route.'" (Words identical with those of the gospel account—Matthew 2.12.) This account, adds our authority, "very likely influenced the gospel story of the magi." No doubt many episodes related in the gospels could be traced to a similar source, e.g., "the veil of the Temple," which was "rent asunder" at the death of Jesus, probably derives from the rent veil of the Temple carried in triumph by the Roman Emperor, Titus, after the fall of Jerusalem, 70 A.D. This, no doubt was seen by Roman Christians who identified it with the Crucifixion. This veil had been singed by the flames as the Roman soldiers carried it from the burning temple. Probably many early Christian legends had a similar origin in current secular history.

F. A. RIDLEY.

#### MR. A'HARA

I am very grateful to Mr. McCall for letting me have my say. I have no further wish to prolong the argument, which seems to me to have developed into a points-scoring match with little hope of a satisfactory outcome. To answer Mr. McCall's rather feeble verbal distinctions such as "what such people think about 'our paper'," would only evoke similar distinctions.

I think Mr. McCall has been so incensed by my somewhat ex-

travagant phraseology that he has missed my point, that while THE FREETHINKER, like all or most representative journals of minority opinions has a necessary place in our society (particularly the likes of THE FREETHINKER which prints information withheld in some cases by the national Press) nevertheless by its tone and approach to its subject matter it is unlikely to get more than a first reading by those with other than outright or latent freethought views. This, I think, is regrettable.

It is not so much "wooing with sweet phrases," as Mr. McCall says in that unfortunate emotive style of his, as finding a form which can put over a point of view and be acceptable to the casual uncommitted reader. Perhaps some concessions in this direction can be made. It would prove worthwhile. A. W. A'HARA. [Mr. McCall writes: *Mr. A'Hara began his last letter: "I have been misquoted before, but seldom so blatantly." I challenged him to give just one case of misquotation, but he hasn't done so. I remind readers of this, not to score points, but to illustrate the fairness with which THE FREETHINKER treats its critics.—Ed.]*

#### OBITUARY

As Lydia Oakley's intelligence led her to Freethought, so her sensitivity led her to Vegetarianism, and for over 50 years of married life she shared these attitudes with her husband. Her death at 74 was a great blow to him and his family, and we express our sympathy to them.

The funeral took place at Mitcham Churchyard Cemetery (where their first child was buried) on February 25th, and the General Secretary of the National Secular Society conducted a secular service.

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