

# The Freethinker

Volume LXXXI—No. 10

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

BELIEVE IT NOT there is a snowballing anti-clerical movement among young French-Canadian intellectuals (writers, TV artists, students at the Université de Montréal, etc.). It's growing so fast that the Archbishop of Montreal, Cardinal Léger, and other bishops have shown signs of getting jittery. As I wrote to a friend of mine in France not long ago, now the French Freethinkers seem to have passed from the offensive to the defensive—with the Church in France growing stronger in influence—her long-forgotten child on this side of the water (Quebec, formerly called *la Nouvelle-France*) is getting ready for its first big assault on the Church. And the encouraging thing is that the fight is going to be led by the young people—25 to 40 years old.

They are strong, angry, and full of words! They publish one printed magazine, *Liberté 61* (formerly *Liberté 60*) and a mimeographed one called *Les Cahiers de Rabaska*; they run a Youth Centre, have a very strong influence on television and radio programmes in the French language, address letters in the big dailies to bishops and priests—much to the addressees' amazement—and so on. Needless to say, I give them every assistance I can, because they are fighting for all of us. They are taking up the struggle that my generation (I'm 50) was too lazy or too cowardly to take up: the fight against the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec Province.

## Going To Pieces

Twenty years ago it would have been an unheard-of oddity, but today there are many Protestant French-Canadians. Some of them are, of course, on the lunatic fringe: Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostal Church, etc. But not all by any means. What then has become of the good old French-Canadian Roman Catholic entity? The answer is, it's going rapidly to pieces. It is, in fact, being weakened from inside as well as outside. "No conception of French Canada is more false than the image of a monolithic church exacting unquestioning obedience from a meek people", says the magazine, *Macleans* (February 25th, 1961). A few months ago the 100,000 strong French-Canadian labour alliance, the Confederation of National Syndicates, dropped the word "Catholic" from its name, and the General Secretary explained that, "while still sworn to follow Christian principles", they were recognising that their field was labour "and the Church's field is religion". There is an acute shortage of priests: in Montreal, one priest for every 3,000 "souls"; 27 having been ordained in 1960, with a diocesan population of 2 million, compared with 25 in 1911 when the population was only 600,000. "It has taken", says *Macleans*, "on the yearly average, 12,000 families and six entire parishes to produce a single priest, a far cry from the ancient Catholic tradition that it is every family's ambition to give a son to the priesthood".

## Frère Untel

A young friar of the Marist Order, Brother Pierre-

Jérôme (real name Jean-Paul Desbiens) has caused a sensation with his book, *Les Insolences du Frère Untel* ("Frère Untel" is "Brother So-and-So") in which he says that our educational system is out of date and much too religious in approach, and since the bishops have ruled the school system since time immemorial, whose fault was it if not that of the "authorities"? "Let us face the facts", he says, that the Protestants "have known better than us, how to conserve and develop the sense of liberty; that sense of liberty which so well possessed St. Thomas Aquinas, but which later became suspect, for tactical and not for dogmatic reasons. Historically, our Catholicism is the Catholicism of the Counter-Reformation. Add the Protestant Conquest. Yet get our Catholicism—shrivelled, fearful, ignorant, reduced to a morality, to a sexual morality, and still negative".

Frère Untel's book has sold over 110,000 copies (a best-seller here usually sells 7,000 or 8,000 copies). The Vatican has ordered him *en quarantaine*—that is, they ordered him to stay indoors until further notice—but he had been on TV and radio and had made after-dinner speeches. And, of course, Freethinkers and anti-clerical Catholics are taking advantage of the situation. Several books have been published about the affair (*Mon petit frère le frère Untel* by Paul Michaud, a Quebec City editor; *Les souvenirs d'un commissaire d'écoles* by Gérard Filion, etc.) and there has been more publicity for "le frère Untel" in the newspapers, magazines and radio programmes in Quebec than about the Queen, the US President and UNO put together.

*Le Quartier Latin*, a little newspaper run by the students of the Université de Montréal, has also been in trouble with the Church, and its editor or *directeur*, Jacques Guay, pleads for fair-play—still hoping the Church will be fair with him! He has been accused of anti-clericalism, and the Cardinal tried to "purge" him by forcing the student body to vote on his tenure of office. But despite an impassioned plea by the Cardinal's delegate, a medical doctor, the students decided to keep their *directeur*. So the Church is spreading "doubts, slanders and calumnies" about M. Guay. Obviously he is a Catholic and a believer, but he is also apparently getting fed up. Recognise the pattern? Catholic anti-clericals. And his entourage may not be as patient as he is: from Catholic anti-clericals they may develop into plain anti-clericals, and then freethinking anti-clericals.

## No To The Jesuits!

Here's another interesting item. The Jesuit Fathers applied to the Provincial Government for two charters to found universities: an English-speaking one (Loyola University) and a French-speaking one (Université Sainte-Marie). The request came a few days after Brother Untel's book had been published and *il y'avait de la poudre dans l'air*—there was thunder in the air. Negative

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## Anti-Clericalism in Canada

By JOSEPH DA SYLVA



comments came from everywhere, even from the Catholic newspaper, *Le Devoir*, whose editor, André Laurendeau, helped Brother Untel prepare his book and wrote a preface to it. The Catholic labour unions opposed the Jesuits, while the Association of Professors of the Université de Montréal (French-speaking Catholics) said "No!" in a book entitled, *L'Université dit NON aux Jésuites*. The Dominicans don't want the Jesuits to have the new universities either, while even the Freethinkers managed to get articles in the large daily, *La Presse*, which is avowedly Catholic, and to appear on radio and TV. So, in face of all this pressure, the Provincial Government has had to postpone the charters until a Royal Commission has investigated all problems concerning education in our Province.

This gives us a little under two years to fight. Fortu-

## A Visit to a Monastery

By FRANK PEARCE

I WENT TO St. Hugh's Charterhouse with two misconceptions. One was that the first act a new entrant does is to dig his own grave outside his cell, and spend his life contemplating death. This is not true, although the graveyard certainly occupies a prominent position and contemplation does play a large part in the lives of the Carthusian monks who occupy this series of long open corridors joined by magnificent stone and oak ice-houses.

Roland, a fellow Freethinker, shared my second illusion and we did not allow it to be shattered until Humphrey Pawsey, the Guest Master, shook hands with us as we left. Monasteries no longer offer a glass of home-made wine to the traveller, nor even the mundane cup of tea; and after an hour and a half at St. Hugh's we felt the need of something hot.

As we drove up to the gates a lay brother appeared, dressed in a dark brown habit, but instead of the usual bunch of keys he was carrying an oil stove. He told us that Vespers would be starting in about five minutes, and asked if we would like to assist at it. As Atheists we had no idea of how we could assist at this function, but as our guide would not be available until after the service we decided to offer what help we could, and were led up to the balcony of the church, where we were alone apart from an unexpected youth in a black plastic jacket. We took no part in the service, which was mainly of plain-song, but it seemed that our assistance was not really necessary, as all went without a hitch.

After the half-hour service we were met by our guide. As a Father he wore an off-white habit, with an under garment of the same material. The neck band of this shirt looked rather grubby and, as Roland remarked afterwards, was obviously washed in Brand X!

Father Humphrey had been in the monastery forty years and, considering the mode of life, looked remarkably healthy. The fifty-odd monks there lead a solitary existence, each having his own small "house", comprising living quarters and a workshop. Most of their time is spent alone, either in reading or prayer. In their workshops they usually do some form of woodwork, carving or turning, and they also have their own gardens. These houses are separated from the Charterhouse itself by the graveyard and orchard, but Humphrey regretted that he could not show them to us as they were all occupied. I have noticed this reluctance in similar establishments to show visitors the personal living quarters.

Once a week the monks congregate in a large meeting hall, empty except for benches round the walls, where

nately, as I say, we have the men to fight. *Liberté 61* and *Les Cahiers de Rabaska* will certainly lead the way. Jacques Godbout edits the former; and on its editorial staff are Maurice Beaulieu, who edits the latter, and Maurice Blain, recently elected Provisional President of the Association Laïque de Langue Française. These indeed are the leaders: Godbout, Beaulieu, Blain, Jacques Bobet, Pierre Charbonneau, Pierre Leboeuf, etc. Newspapermen, authors, and all young (30 to 35), full of pep. Right now they are starting a movement to obtain *des écoles laïques* (lay schools) as in France.

Yes, the Church has the jitters, there's no question about it. So salute these names: they are the young laics. They say: "Clericalism is not a habit, it is a disease" (Godbout) and "Secularism must succeed clericalism" (Blain).

they discuss a variety of subjects. This is one of the few occasions when conversation is allowed, although there is no definite vow of silence. On the walls are some extremely gory pictures, which Humphrey told us most visitors ask to see. They are, in a sense, good propaganda, as they show monks of the order being hanged, drawn and quartered at the time of the Reformation, and they are alleged to be copies of engravings current at the time. These atrocities were exceeded by the Spanish Inquisition, but no mention was made of that.

Once or twice a week the monks eat together in the refectory, which again is a lofty cold hall. It was divided in two, the fathers eating in one half and the lay brothers in the other. One cooked meal a day is taken, between ten a.m. and noon, usually in the cells. It never contains meat and, apart from as much dry bread as they want at the evening meal, has to suffice for twenty-four hours. With the dry bread goes the drink of the country. In England until fifty years ago it was beer, now it is tea or home made cider. Humphrey himself found the food sufficient, but some of the younger men, he said, were often hungry.

Outwardly, Humphrey was the typical genial monk when he was showing us the buildings and speaking of the life in them. He would laugh about visitors wanting to see the gruesome prints, of monks being hungry, of the readings of religious books when meals were taken in the refectory, and of the weekly walk in the surrounding countryside. I wondered why, for these things are not funny in themselves, and he must have taken them seriously to have spent forty years with them. Perhaps he laughed simply because monks are expected to be jolly. But beneath his laughter was a deadly seriousness.

He had served in the first world war, and must have joined the order about 1920. He agreed with us, naturally, about the horrors of war, but did not laugh when we said we should probably be conscientious objectors in another one. Monks are not liable to conscription in Britain, but in France, where these things are better ordered, they are. However, they usually solve their consciences by becoming medical orderlies. Humphrey had been in an Italian monastery when Italy entered the Second World War, and had been interned, presumably as an enemy alien. Thus, he said five or six years of his life had been wasted. But has he not wasted forty?

On the way home we stopped at a small-holding a few miles from the monastery, to buy some eggs. We told the farmer where we had been and the last word on the monks shall be his: "What good do they do? They used to clear the snow from the paths around here, but they don't do that now. And they often wake us at midnight with their bell clanging".



# The Rationalist Annual

By JACK GORDON

THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS have witnessed a significant change of emphasis in discussions of religious questions. The slow decline of traditional religious belief seems to have focussed attention away from purely theological questions and directed it instead to moral and social issues. Whereas our forefathers were concerned to acquire the right answers to theological conundrums like: "does salvation precede Grace or follow from it?" we, on the other hand, ask ourselves questions like these: "Is suicide really a sin?" or "Is birth control 'natural'?" or even, "Can religion supply an adequate basis for morals?"

It does not surprise me, therefore, that of this year's *Rationalist Annual's* hundred pages, nearly half are devoted to essays on various aspects of moral theory and practice. The philosopher, P. H. Nowell-Smith heads the list with his contribution entitled "Morality: Religious and Secular". He states his thesis clearly: religious morality is infantile—that is, in the sense of never having grown up. The initial assumptions are explicitly stated; the argument then proceeds with fairness and skill towards conclusions which strike me as eminently reasonable. I cannot do justice to Professor Nowell-Smith's reasoning here—the reader must buy the book for himself; it is well worth it to follow the argumentation carefully because I consider the author's position to be a very defensible one. Moreover, by accepting the criteria offered for formulating a reasonable attitude towards moral rules, one may find the answers to moral problems for oneself. The scalpel wielded so adroitly by Nowell-Smith certainly makes short work of sententious Christian pronouncements on so-called "sins" like adultery, which can be considered a prototype moral rule of the sort commonly met with in the "categorical imperative" form of moral system. Professor Nowell-Smith is fair to those with whom he disagrees. He recognises that different versions of Christianity have emphasised different aspects of morality and he is not above pointing out that childish attitudes survive in the moral attitudes of some secular moralists as well as adult Christians, "as an alien element, like an outcrop of igneous rock in an alluvial plain". What a pity that some secularists should have rid themselves of the shibboleths of Christian theology without quite having repeated the operation with the shibboleths of Christian morality!

Having disposed of moral theory, the reader might next consider C.D. Darlington's contribution, "Instincts and Morals". This is concerned to show the relevance of modern biological teaching about the nature of man to the problem of the individual as a member of the social group. I found much to interest me in the chapter dealing with inbreeding within a homogeneous group, of which incest is a special case. Cousin marriage continued in small communities for many generations "has given rise to some very successful communities or castes—Jewish, Parsee, Mennonite, or Greek". But such homogeneous groups have a fatal disadvantage and Professor Darlington claims that on an evolutionary time scale these disadvantages become manifest. "They have no means of producing useful new variations. These can arise only by crossing and recombination." This knowledge has some important consequences. Of the four groups mentioned I know only the Jewish, but presumably it applies to the other three as well. Responsible Jewish leaders today are practically unanimous in maintaining that Jewish separa-

tion, and particularly the banning of intermarriage with non-Jews is essential to the preservation of the Jews as a people. Yet, according to Darlington, the exact opposite is true. A degree of intermarriage between Jew and non-Jew—that is, Jewish and non-Jewish by birth—would probably be a good thing all round. However, it is not generally a good thing when the parties to a marriage are of a different religion.

Continuity of subject demands that I consider next R. Osborn's contribution, "The Rational Basis of Moral Theory". I do not recommend the reading of the *Rationalist Annual* in this particular order—too much of anything can be tedious—but this essay logically belongs with the first two, even if it does not quite reach their level. To anyone already convinced of ethical relativism and the subjectivity of ethical values, Mr. Osborn's plea for a basic objective standard, even a Rationalist one, may appear unconvincing. Even so, the author is conversant with the work of Piaget and Lerner, and he sees in their studies of child development from egocentric ways of thinking about the world to broader and more sympathetic attitudes to others, the psychological basis for an objective moral theory. (Where the author uses "objective" I would prefer "commonly agreed" as a better term.) He is fair with opponents' views, and one can hardly blame him for not appreciating the force of ethical relativism, for example. Yet one example he quotes completes the exclamation, "How can he have failed to see it!" During the discussion, there appears this gem: "I have yet to meet a Socialist who regards the atrocities of Nazism or racial hatred as simply expressive of different moral standpoints". Perhaps so, but has not our author met a Nazi—one, say, who was an ardent follower of Rosenberg? Would *he* regard racial hatred (e.g. of Jews) as an atrocity? Or substitute the Vatican for Nazism. *We* regard as immoral, or even as atrocity, some of the pronouncements emanating from that quarter, just as the Vatican regards everything *we* stand for as pernicious and false. In the absence of a generally recognised frame of moral reference, how can agreement be reached about who is "right" and who is "wrong"? All we can do is hope to persuade others by reason, personal example, education, political action, and so on. Still, Mr. Osborn is very readable, and I particularly applaud him for his remarks on logic and meaning; while many will agree with his concluding remarks that the problems of moral thinking are becoming less of a philosophic issue and more of a scientific one.

W. K. Taylor's, "Free Will and Brain Function", will be read appreciatively by those who are not without previous knowledge of the subject matter. But without some acquaintance with electronic models and simulators, and a little theory, a reader might find this contribution rather heavier going.

An old favourite, J. B. S. Haldane, writes on "The Dark Religions". As a resident in India, Professor Haldane's experience of East and West perhaps enables him to take a more global view than most of us in Britain. Once more, he writes with that quiet assurance and unpretentiousness which are characteristic. He returns to his old theme: that the West is falling further behind the Soviet Union because the need to develop a true scientific world outlook on our part is being strangled by

(Concluded on next page)



## This Believing World

An Anglican clergyman, a non-conformist parson, and a Roman Catholic priest discussed on ITV the other Sunday in the programme "About Religion", Confession and Absolution. It was of course a completely useless discussion from any point of view, and we would not have noticed it but for the fact that they all knew what God Almighty intended, or what "Our Lord" insisted upon, with a familiarity which exceeded their knowledge of their parents. No doubt the 8 millions (or less) of viewers were mostly convinced that priests and parsons in general do meet God and Jesus in the flesh, but it is a long time since we have seen this go blatantly assumed. For the rest, the conclusions drawn were for the greater part just nonsense.

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Just as the Roman Church or the Pope manages so often to get a free press in the shape of articles in our widely-circulated national journals, so we have noticed similar eulogistic and even enthusiastic articles about the Mormons, and the way they are gathering in converts in England, and how wonderful is the stern injunction, "No tea, no coffee, no alcohol" which so beautifully characterises all Mormons. The *Daily Mail* had an impressive article about the "Latter Day Saints" (February 23rd) recording how successful are their missionaries in getting more converts, and we were (almost reverently) told that "the Mormons have come a long way from their rough tough persecution on the Utah salt bowl".

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We always thought that it was before the Mormons settled in Utah that they suffered murderous persecution from their fellow Christians, who murdered Joseph Smith and his brother under the foul circumstances, but this does not affect the truth that Mormonism is a conglomeration of rubbish based on fantastic nonsense. But we willingly admit the bigger the nonsense where religion is concerned, the more it will gain adherents. Look at orthodox Christianity!

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We do not know yet what has happened to the Christian Devil who was recently omitted from the New Catechism prepared by the Church of England for the edification of its members. Canon Tindall of Salisbury heartbrokenly says, "I do not know how the Devil got left out" for, as a good Christian, he would have preferred him to be left in. Dr. Jalland of Exmouth wants him back, and the Bishop of Coventry told his hearers at the Convocation dealing with His Infernal Majesty, "We have made a careful note of the Devil's absence".

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The strange thing about the whole affair is that nobody appears to have suggested asking the Devil himself what he thought about being—more or less—kicked out of the Catechism? All Christians in authority, even the most humble parson, can get in touch with God Almighty through a simple prayer—so there really is no excuse for not getting in touch with the Devil who can nearly always be summoned with a curse or a blasphemous oath. Can't we get the Devil's opinion at first hand?

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We do not know for certain of course, but just as articles about the Pope and what a wonderful old chap he is regularly appear in our national journals, so do articles about "unity" if written by Catholics. Recently, there was one in *The Observer* by Norman St. John-Stevens who made it clear how difficult was the role of Roman Catholics on the question. Why? the answer is very simple. It is merely that "they have to bear witness to their doctrine

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED £40. K. Brown, 9s.; K. Lidaks, 15s.; Anon, 1s. 2d.; W.H.D., 10s.; R.J.C., £1 8s.; S. C. Merrifield, 3s. 6d. Total to date, March 1st, 1961. £43 6s. 8d.

of the nature of the Church, which is that the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church is the visible Church of Christ on earth . . .". Which of course settles the whole question for there can be only one such Church, not a dozen—or is it ten dozen?

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Thus, when it comes to "unity" it must be all the other Churches which have to give in and join the one and only "visible Church of Christ". But apart from all this, the union of the Church of England with that of Rome would undoubtedly be a prize worth fighting for as our Ecclesiastical Commissioners would sadly agree. All their funds and properties and shares would be immediately administered by the Vatican. Cash and religion have almost always been the loving twins of Christianity.

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the great incubus of the Church. India, too, has its "dark religions" which nullify in part the advances made in science there and elsewhere. A typical Haldaneism: "It is in the nature of religion to evolve towards intolerance by natural selection".

Space permits but brief mention of the remainder. E. Grebenik contributes an article on the origins of the birth control movement in Great Britain and recalls memories of pioneers like Bradlaugh and Annie Besant.

"Crime and Modern Science" by Edward Glover, attempts to show how the united efforts of experts working in various scientific fields may throw some light on the causes and prevention of crime. An expert himself on this subject, the author lays stress upon statistical analysis of the results obtained from field work and surveys in the field of delinquency in finding lines of approach to solve problems of diagnosis and treatment of pathological crime. Victor Purcell has a stimulating essay on "Imagination and the Rationalist", contending that creativity in the arts is independent of religious feeling and that "when the great poets invoke grandeur or hint at mystery at its most profound they always do so from a firm basis of the rational and the secular". Megrick H. Carré rounds off this year's *Annual* with an interesting essay on the "Free-thinking Puritans".

The production is up to the usual standard, but I would like to see in future years a short biographical "Who's Who?" Many of the contributors are already known to us but the inclusion of a short note on each would be of interest, especially to new readers of the *Rationalist Annual*.

*The Rationalist Annual*, 1961 (Rationalist Press Association Ltd., Cloth, 7/6d.; Paper 5/-).

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY  
FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION  
ADVERTISEMENTS BANNED FROM LONDON  
UNDERGROUND BECAUSE OF  
RELIGIOUS PRESSURE

### PICKET

BRITISH TRANSPORT COMMISSION  
HEADQUARTERS

222 MARYLEBONE ROAD, N.W.1

(Opposite St. Marylebone Town Hall)

Saturday, March 11th, 1961—11.30 a.m.



# THE FREETHINKER

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1

TELEPHONE: HOP 2717

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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## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Thursday lunchtimes, THE FREETHINKER on sale, Piccadilly, near Queen Victoria Statue.)

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 4 p.m.; MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. TRIBE and J. P. MURACCIOLE.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

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, Nottingham).—Every Friday, 1 p.m., Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street), Sunday, March 12th, 6.45 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "The Great Illusion".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Tuesday, March 14th, 7.15 p.m.: DONALD G. MACRAE, M.A., "Religion in the Secular State".

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, March 12th, 6.30 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "The Gods Who Died by the Nile".

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, W.1), Sunday, March 12th, 7.15 p.m.: FRANK MAITLAND, "Religion in Scottish Literature".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, March 12th, 2.30 p.m.: REV. KENNETH WAIGHTS, A Lecture.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, March 12th, 11 a.m.: RICHARD CLEMENTS, J.P., "The Bible: Why a New Translation?".

Sussex Branch N.S.S. ("Place Pigalle", 1 Waterloo Place, The Level, Brighton), Sunday, March 12th, 3.30 p.m.: DEBATE: F. A. RIDLEY v. Dr. D. NORRIS (Tape Recording).

## Notes and News

THE BRITISH TRANSPORT COMMISSION, which banned the Family Planning Association advertisement as "religiously controversial", has accepted (in profusion) posters of the Moral Re-Armament film, *The Crowning Experience*. *The Times* (16/2/61) also accepted an advertisement for the film, full page in fact, containing a letter, "For God's Sake Wake Up!" and photographs of six well-known sportsmen who, with a seventh man, were declared to have "signed" the letter. One of these sportsmen, Bryn Meredith, Welsh Rugby international, made it quite clear that "I have nothing to do with this organisation. Neither did I give written or verbal consent to my name or photograph being connected with the advertisement printed" (letter to *The Times*, 21/2/61), but Essex cricketer, T. C. Dodds, whose picture also appeared, wrote the following day that he thought Mr. Meredith "understood exactly what was intended and was in full accord in his participation". However, he apologised for "any inconvenience that this statement may have created for Mr. Meredith".

WHAT NEEDS EMPHASISING is that the advertisement specifically stated that Bryn Meredith and the others had signed the MRA letter, yet Mr. Dodds's own letter to *The Times* (22/2/61) said, "The draft of the statement was left with him [Mr. Meredith]". Clearly the latter didn't sign it. And indeed, the *Daily Express* (22/2/61) quoted the Welsh Rugby star as saying, "I had no idea where the picture came from and I certainly did not sign the letter which was published". He had attended the premiere of *The Crowning Experience* at the invitation of Mr. Dodds, and had found it "not too bad". "But it didn't fill me with a desire to go all religious," said Mr. Meredith, "although I do not object to anybody attempting to raise the moral standards of the country". Nor do we; but we don't rely on MRA to do it.

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THE BRITISH TRANSPORT COMMISSION bans Family Planning Association posters from the London Underground. A London team of experts advises the Governor of Mauritius that the colony is "heading for disaster" and that the only thing which can prevent this is a Government-backed campaign for family planning, linked with a Government economic plan to create a higher level of employment (*The Guardian*, 24/2/61). Though the team (from the London School of Economics) had not been specifically asked to consider the population problem, "they had been forced time and again to take account of it". The report, *Social Policies and Population Growth in Mauritius*, is published by Methuen & Co. (15s.) who will now no doubt receive many letters of protest about their "religiously controversial" book!

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IN THE SAME ISSUE OF *The Guardian*, Michael Frayn reported his receipt of Roman Catholic protests against his remarks on Mr. Kenneth Robinson's Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill (see this column, 24/2/61). Mr. Frayn's critics were apparently amazed that he should think a foetus was "anything but a human being from the moment of conception". But, as he pointed out, "if a newly fertilised ovum is a human being, then, a fried egg is fried chicken, an acorn's an oak tree, and when the keel's laid we'll all set sail".

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WHETHER MR. FRAYN'S major critic, Dr. A. C. P. Campbell of Manchester University is a Roman Catholic, we don't know. But we suspect so from his reasoning. As a biologist and a medical man, he said, he can't make a distinction between a human being and a thirteen-week-old foetus. If the latter is not a human being, he asked, what is it? "That it is human is undeniable; that it is a being seems also undeniable". If this is not a Catholic arguing, it is certainly a Catholic type of argument. As Mr. Frayn replied: the question "how do we distinguish?" is not so much a biological one as a philosophical one; and he cited Max Black's suggested exhibit for a museum of applied logic. "It consists of a series of a thousand objects, the differences between any two neighbours of which are almost imperceptible, but which are graduated so that No. 1 is a Chippendale chair, and No. 1,000 a shapeless lump of wood. Problem: We obviously want to go on calling No. 1 a Chippendale chair, and No. 1,000 a shapeless lump of wood. But to draw the line in any one place seems absurd, for No. 542, say, and No. 543 are almost precisely the same."

"Black's point is that you draw the line where it's most useful for the purpose you have in mind. You have to define your own limits—there's no other way of making sense of the series. Unless, of course, they all have chair-like souls."



# From Jewish Messianism to the Christian Church

By PROSPER ALFARIC  
(Translated by J. V. DUHIG)

## II

In many of the pages of the Prophets, it was said, in effect, that the Chosen People would not be long left to themselves. Jahveh's goodness was too great to leave his faithful subjects in distress. The Saviour was coming; all mankind was soon to see him.

How could one doubt such firm and precise oracles in which was visible the word of God? Each read them as if written for himself and his generation, ignoring the accumulated disappointments of his predecessors. Faith is never held up by critical discussions. In such a state of mind, it was inevitable that one day some would end up convinced that the times were accomplished; that the announced Messiah had come at last; the merest trifle would be enough to convince them.

One prophecy, notably, was to help in the crystallisation of faith: the "Seventy weeks of Daniel". Nobody bothered that it had been formulated for an age long gone by. By an illusory perspective familiar to the believers, everybody saw in it a contemporary imperative. In it the Angel Gabriel said to the prophets, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make a reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy" (Daniel 9, 24). How natural it seemed to see in this "anointed", in this "Most Holy", the Messiah or the Christ. All that remained to be known was when exactly the Seventy Weeks had started. What follows in the text makes it start "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem . . ." (9, 25). It was thereby understood, according to a commonly current misinterpretation, as a decree ordering the reconstruction of the Holy City and the Temple. One might think of that of Cyrus mentioned in the Apocrypha (Esdras, 1, 2 ff), that of Darius, son of Hydaspes, quoted a little later (6, 1 ff), that of Artaxerxes addressed to Esdras (7, 11 ff), of another from the same king to Nehemiah (Neh. 2 and 6, 15). The starting point swung between about 538 and 460 B.C. All agreed in the estimate that the prophetic weeks did not represent 7 days but 7 years and thus made up 490 years. Even adopting the latest date, opinion tended to the idea that the predicted term was due under Tiberius. Another well-known oracle suggests similar and still firmer conclusions. In the prophecy of Jacob (Gen. 49, 10) we read, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come . . .". This Shiloh has left all exegetes guessing, with no acceptable explanation, doubtless because the relevant text has been altered. But the very mystery surrounding it caused the Messianists very early to think that it must refer to the Christ. The rest of the verse seems to favour this interpretation, saying in effect: All nations will obey him, or, according to the Septuagint, And he, he is the expected of the Nations.

Who else but the Messiah could be so universally obeyed or universally awaited? But in that case, it was necessary that he should appear before power was taken from Judah. Now the last prince, properly so called, had disappeared on the rise of the Idomenean Herod, in 37 BC. And the Herodian dynasty itself, which now in spite of everything maintained a certain Jewish autonomy, had been removed in 6 BC by Augustus, who had installed a Roman

procurator in its place. From then on fervent Messianists could convince themselves that the times had come round, that the era of Shiloh was at hand.

This conviction held such a large place in the people's minds, it played such an active role that Josephus, however little disposed to strong views on such a subject, goes so far as to say that it was the principal cause for the rise of his compatriots against Roman rule. "What most stirred them up to the war", he says, "was an ambiguous oracle, found in their scriptures, according to which, about this time, somebody from their country would govern the whole earth". The remark is aimed directly at the final revolt which ended, in 70 AD, in the ruin of Jerusalem. But already before this other seditious movements had occurred, stemming from the same motives, aiming at the same result.

"The country", said Josephus, "was swarming with brigands and impostors who deceived the people". "Braggarts and charlatans persuaded the mob into being carried away by a sacred ecstasy and led them into the desert pretending that God would be there to give them indications of their liberty."

The expressions used by Josephus, despite his deliberate discretion, suggest that a religious Messianist-based movement is in question. Certain details even suggest a tendency to identify the expected leader with the former conqueror of Palestine, Jehoshoud, Joshua, or Jesus. Already the successor of Moses had come from the desert. He too had divided the waters of Jordan to cross it dryshod. He too had forced the walls of fortified towns: he had been the Great Liberator. His name had been given by God himself and meant Jahveh, Saviour. By these titles the memory of him haunted the popular imagination, and it was expected that he would come to resume and complete his work in the role of the Messiah.

It must not be forgotten that it was in the midst of this mystical agitation of mind that Christianity appeared. Like the Jews, the first Christians were persuaded that the great period of maturity had come at last; that a new era was at hand. "The time is fulfilled"—such are the first words put into the mouth of the Christ by the oldest gospel (Mark, 1, 15). Such in other words, is the original reason given by it for Christian propaganda. There is a similar remark already in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (4, 4) "But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son". This remark is made incidentally, as if it was a matter of course. It then expresses not only the intimate thought of the author but that of his readers, that of the primitive Church.

In these conditions, to explain the genesis of the Christian community, it is not at all necessary to admit, *a priori*, despite the absence of texts, the real action of a historical Jesus who would have imposed himself on the attention, then on the veneration of those around him, while playing the role of the Christ. From the moment when people were convinced by meditation on divine oracles, that "the times had come round" when the Saviour already forecast was to arrive, this conviction alone, amongst an ardently Messianist circle, sufficed to create the belief that he had come, even when nobody remembered having seen him. In such surroundings, the word of God, in effect, counted for more than all human testimony. The faith carried its own justification.

This faith moreover was not long in creating its own



guarantees of another order. Insofar as the mystics took no interest in what was said and done outside them, to that extent were they successful in creating their own internal feeling. The first to persuade themselves that the Christ had already appeared, in the absence of any real portrait, created for themselves an ideal image, which they contemplated in dreams and ecstasies. They then communicated to each other the prodigious thing and thus hastened its constant renewal. Their visions completed the interior work of meditation, and they furnished to the new faith the verification needed for it to endure and take form.

In this respect, the apostle Paul gives personally a typical example. "But I certify you, brethren," he says, "that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me . . . immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." (Gal. 1, 11-16).

Elsewhere, writing to the Corinthians, certain of whom turned against him to take sides with Caiphas and Peter, Paul returns to the same subject, to show that he yields in nothing to any of the authorities opposed to him. "For I suppose," he says, "I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles" (2 Cor. 11, 5). And of this he gives proof: "have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9, 1). This does not mean he had been an eye-witness of his (Jesus's) life, but rather that he had been favoured by a supernatural apparition.

A little further on, he speaks expressly of "visions and revelations of the Lord". And he adds, "I knew a man in Christ . . . (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words" (2 Cor. 12, 2-4). Such detail is typical. It shows that, among Christians the question was whether the visionaries were transported in spirit to God or whether it was God who came to them. [The late Pius XII alleged the latter in respect of Christ's visit to him—Translator.] Such controversy is evidence of the considerable role played at that time by the mysterious phenomena to which these people laid claim.

Paul, as he himself insists, discusses this simply to deprive his opponents of their arguments. The Caiphas party had the advantage of him by reason of certain visions. He retorts that he himself has had others equally as good. In his view, Peter and his partisans do not know the Lord any better than he does. Their opinion was formed simply by revelations similar to those with which he has been favoured.

(To be continued)

**TALE OF TWO ARCHBISHOPS**

IN HIS LENTEN PASTORAL, the Archbishop of Dublin forbade Roman Catholic youths "under pain of mortal sin" to frequent Trinity College, Dublin, as students are not mature enough "to be exposed without danger to the environment of a neutral or Protestant university" (*The Observer*, 26/2/61). Dr. Ramsey, Archbishop-designate of Canterbury, who has just completed a mission to Trinity College, may not regard the pastoral as helping the cause of reunification.

**Virgin Birth?**

THE *Daily Telegraph* reported (30/1/61) that a Protestant bishop has been raising a lot of excitement and getting himself accused of heresy for publishing his doubts about the Virgin Birth Story.

I suppose it can be said of most of us (specially of priests, whose bread and butter depends on a blind uncritical credulity) that we don't start thinking and studying for ourselves until we're too old to profit by it.

Ever since, in my late teens, I started studying all the great religions of the world in an insatiable search for knowledge it has continually astonished me how little many religious people, and their priests, really know about their own religions, let alone about all the older, just as authentic ones; and I quickly found out that, "He little of religion knows who only knows his own", when I came across miracles such as virgin births, upon which our religion is based, Christs being tempted by a Devil, Commandments being delivered by gods to prophets on the top of a mountain (well away from witnesses!). Biblical wise sayings and ethical principles in the Holy Scriptures of religions centuries older than ours, even as far back as Babylonian days.

We know, of course, that parthenogenesis does occur in Nature, but not among mammals. However, our Bible tells us (Gen. 6) that "in those days" it was quite a common thing for "the daughters of men" to conceive and bear children to the "sons of god" (angels). Also, several previous "Saviour" gods (Christs) had been conceived by Holy Spirits so the Christian Fathers when trying to decide just which out of the enormous masses of probably true, doubtful, or too obviously legendary material for even their simple credulity should be incorporated in our Bible as being God's Holy Word, which preserved as Apocrypha and which rejected entirely, saw no reason to reject the Virgin Birth story, including the Star in the East and Wise Men, as related about Buddha circa 500 B.C., Zoroaster c.800 B.C. and Mithra c.4000 B.C.

Now one of the best known and best loved Bible prophesies (for snobism is innate in us humans) foretells that a Messiah would be born of the Royal House of David, and the New Testament gives us (Matt. 1 and Luke 3) two genealogical tables showing in detail how Joseph was descended from Adam (4004 B.C.) via King David, which fulfilled the old prophesies and so established the genuineness of Jesus son of Joseph as being the long awaited Messiah.

These two tables could not possibly have been compiled by man and must therefore have been received direct from God. Hence the difficulty in explaining why they disagree so much.

One of my favourite home-made mottoes has always been that "Without knowledge opinions are worthless".

M. C. BROTHERTON.  
(Commr. R.N. Ret.).

**N.S.S. BRANCH REPORT**

The President and Secretary of the North London Branch of the National Secular Society wish to thank all members and supporters who helped to make 1960 one of the most fruitful years for propaganda and sales of literature. The Branch, with the assistance of individual members, has been able to contribute to date £53 11s. 6d. to the Society's Building Fund and hopes to continue to support this necessary cause. Our thanks are also due to Mr. J. W. Barker of Kingston Branch, who has lent such willing support at the Tower Hill meetings, and Mr. L. Harris, who is attempting to get a shot of our platform and speaker at White Stone Pond, Hampstead, included in the film for display at the 1961 Hampstead Festival E.E.



**BELFAST BREVITY**

FOR SOME WEEKS PAST, writes Mr. Alasdair S. Jenkins, "Belfast newspapers have been humming with controversies regarding unification of the Protestant Churches, family planning, etc.". Long letters have appeared from clergymen of different denominations, but no space has been given to the Freethought point of view. Yet Mr. Jenkins himself wrote several letters, and there were no doubt others. But Mr. Jenkins reports good news, too. As a result of a note in these columns (9/9/60), he has made a lot of new friends and met quite a lot of Freethinkers from various parts of Belfast. They meet together on the first Sunday of every month as the Belfast Rationalist Group.

**THEATRE****RELIGION AND SEX**

**THE DEVILS** by John Whiting, one of three plays being performed in repertory by the Stratford-on-Avon Company at the Aldwych Theatre, London, is based on Aldous Huxley's book, *The Devils of Loudun*. Readers of the book will know what to expect when I say that the play follows it very closely. A hanging corpse in the opening scene reminds us of the violence of the time (early 17th century) while the clanging bells (actually of St. Peter's church, Loudun) and the settings of Sean Kelly set the religious atmosphere.

The handsome priest, Urbain Grandier, looks remarkably like his portrait, the frontispiece in the book. No wonder he is desired by the women! The tragedy is, of course, that he is fanatically desired by the deformed Sister Jeanne of the Angels, the Prioress of St. Ursula's Convent. Unable to have his love, this sex-repressed woman will have his life. Others want him out of the way and Grandier is finally burned at the stake. But revenge is bitter, not sweet, for the Prioress, and she is still calling out "Grandier; Grandier", as he burns.

*The Devils* tells a horrible story, principally of religion and sex. It is apt, therefore, that the great, contorted Christ in the stained glass window should be so obviously male. And the Grandier who kneels in prayer before it is very finely played by David Sumner, though a deputy. His first mistress ominously tells him, "You possess me!" The hysterical nuns are perfectly portrayed and admirably directed by Peter Wood. "Secluded women, they give themselves to God, but part of them cries out to give themselves to man", in Mr. Whiting's words. And Dorothy Tutin as Sister Jeanne reveals her sex-obsession from the first moment we see her. She is superb, as most critics have said.

Max Adrian has been less widely liked and accused of playing the exorcising priest, Father Barre, for laughs. It is true we laugh at him, but surely Mr. Whiting means us to. After all, a devil-seeker is absurd. Witchcraft, indeed, is a mixture of the hideous and the absurd, and Mr. Whiting blends the two with tremendous effect in *The Devils*. C.McC.

**CORRESPONDENCE****FAREWELL**

Our sorely-tried editor has forwarded a letter from a reader, who complains that he cannot find the Ecclesiastic quotation I used in my last article. Our reader states that "there is no such a passage" (!) in this particular book of Holy Writ, and goes on to accuse me of "miss-representation, miss-quotation, and reservation" (sic.).

What we poor devils of writers have to put up with—or should I say, up with put? For many years now I have been amazed by the thousands of futile critical letters appearing in the press, accusing writers of some microscopic inaccuracy. The letters are obviously written to display the writer's profound knowledge, and are generally beneath the notice of the author criticised, especially when the latter gives his services free, gratis and for nothing, and only produces his efforts after a more or less lengthy period of blood, tears, toil and sweat—in the intervals of earning his bread and cheese, and the occasional pickled onion.

No, Sir! I do not propose to answer my critic—tho' 'twere easy! Does it matter whether the disputed quotation was written by Moses, David, Solomon or Edgar Wallace? These piddling, piffling, pin-pricking pedants . . .

Our editor informs me that he is meeting with increasing opposition to my rural notes. This, therefore, being my farewell

appearance, I should like to thank those few readers who have kindly troubled to write in support of my humble efforts to amuse and instruct!

Incidentally, poor old Charlie Green—of binocular fame—is being conveyed to the village churchyard this very day. That rare being, a real "character", Charlie was the last of the Victorians. Dare I say *Requiescat in pace*? Though a freethinker, I, for one, do not begrudge his humble family the consolations of religion. RUSTICUS.

**ONLY A THEORY**

I was disappointed to find your contributor Jack Gordon ("In The Beginning", 24/2/61) describing the alleged expansion of the universe as observed fact. Most of the cosmologists and astronomers seem to be guilty of this unscientific attitude but one expects more from a Freethinker. The "expanding universe" is of course only a theory and although I cannot claim to understand Relativity theory to any great extent, I suspect that the reddening of the light from distant galaxies (which is the other main ground for the theory) is probably due simply to the selective damping of the frequencies in the visible spectrum by inter-stellar gas, etc., as sunlight, etc., is reddened by fog. Thus the greater the distance of a galaxy the redder it would naturally appear. No need to worry about the Doppler effect!

A. HAWKSWORTH.

**OBITUARY**

The first 1961 issue of THE FREETHINKER addressed to Mr. D. Dainow of Johannesburg, recently arrived back at the office bearing the brief note, "Mr. D. Dainow passed away on 30/1/61".

It came as a shock. We got to know David Dainow well when he was over here a year or so ago for an eye operation. He called in at the office several times and attended a number of meetings. He phoned us the morning before his return home and we experienced the sadness of friends' parting. So, we believe, did he. But we kept in touch with him by letter and his last one contained an invitation of hospitality to any National Secular Society members who should happen to be in Johannesburg. "Please remember this", he emphasised. We shall. Though no one can accept the invitation, we shall certainly remember it. C.McC.

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