

The Freethinker

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FREETHINKERS DO NOT, as a rule, expect to find themselves endorsing views expressed in a papal encyclical. But in his recent *Mater et Magistra*, John XXIII paid a tribute to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation, which on July 1st, 1960, inaugurated its five-year Freedom from Hunger Campaign. Looking at the world situation, His Holiness declared that the "true solution is found only in the economic development and in the social progress which respects and promotes the true human values, individual and social, an economic development and social progress, that is, brought about in a moral atmosphere, conformable to the dignity of man and to the immense value the life of a single human being has; and in the co-operation, on a world scale, that permits and favours an ordered and fruitful interchange of useful knowledge of capital and manpower".

No mention here of appealing to those ethereal Dignitaries whose confidence the Pope alone enjoys. A practical, commonsensical approach is preferred instead. Through the Humanist Council, one of the voluntary bodies backing the official United Kingdom Committee of the Campaign, the National Secular Society welcomes this descent to realism. It helps in discussions if all parties are talking the same language. But when Dr. B. R. Sen, Indian Director-General of FAO, appreciatively replied to the Cardinal Secretary of State, perhaps he had at the back of his mind troubled memories of Vatican history, where reaction so often speaks louder than words.

In Christian countries at this moment preparations are being made for the annual ritual—a sort of moral fireworks display. It used to be dedicated to "peace on earth, goodwill to men", but now, more puristically, to "peace on earth to men of goodwill". It's not unknown for soldiers at such a time to interrupt World Wars to exchange carols and beer as an entr'acte in the drama of mutual extermination. This is the period when great ladies prepare to sally abroad with Christmas dinners for distribution to paupers. Returning, like the kings of Barataria, with "the gratifying feeling that our duty has been done", they fail to consider how the poor wretches will get through the intervening 364 days before the next giveaway anniversary.

"My concern is that much lip service is paid to the need for action, more often than not without any real notion of the true state of affairs, of what is at stake and of what must be done about it", said Dr. Sen in 1960. It's my concern too. The whole history of philanthropy from the ancient emperors through the medieval abbots and renaissance princes to the Clapham Sect, Rothschilds, Vanderbilts, Morgans, Rockefellers, Nobel, Carnegie, and Lipton of modern times is consistent. We see the amiable, but desultory and inadequate promptings of good, mixed, or ulterior motives.

British Campaign

The British Campaign will be officially opened in

summer, 1962, by its Patron, the Duke of Edinburgh. Its climax will be a World Food Congress in 1963. Incessant lecturing, project-planning, pamphleteering, and fund-raising will supplement. Governments have made, and will make financial contributions. Private bodies and citizens, who modestly deny their ability to help in other ways, will naturally like to contribute financially too. But the Campaign is foredoomed to failure if it should be nothing more than a marathon of flag-days and charity bingo.

It is foolish to imagine that you can emancipate the world by endowing research stations in agriculture, animal husbandry, and pest control, or sending out food

shipments and FAO experts to underdeveloped (now, euphemistically, called "developing") countries. Certainly this pattern is part of the fabric of progress. A steady search for new knowledge, the relief of crisis by emergency importation, the sharing of expert advice—none of these devices should disappear. It's hard to read of the latest developments in capitalisation, soil conservation, irrigation, reafforestation, mechanisation, transportation, fertilisation, cross-pollination, crop rotation, irradiation, hormone implantation, artificial insemination, immunisation, food preservation, and insect eradication; of dietetics, calories, and eugenics, without a thrill. But a thrill may not be a constructive emotion. The problem of hunger is not read off from an agronomic profit and loss account, or from Board of Trade figures. It lies in the remotenesses of peasant cottages, huts, and tents. It lurks in their food bowls. Grain imports and charitable donations may pass them by. Experts may come and go unheeded.

Projects and Practice

It's all very well to establish experimental stations and pilot projects. You can take pretty photographs. They're marvellous for promotion. Visitors to the 1958 Brussels International Exhibition may recall their awe and admiration as they entered the Congo pavilions. From these gaudy shop-windows, education, medicine, modern housing, technological development, social welfare, and political progress smiled down from thousands of pictures and models, and were embodied in scores of hand-picked "representatives". How tragically soon the world learnt of the shabby reality!

Pilot projects have to be translated into general practice. What's the use of bringing in a foreign expert to train native assistants, if the assistants, when left alone, have no facilities for training others, or are thrown into gaol for criticising the government, or are too impatient or arrogant to explain their techniques adequately to a backward peasantry? What's the use of publishing tons of improving pamphlets, if the population lacks either literacy or leisure to read them? What's the use of sending foreign gifts ("Splendid effort, chaps. We're past the 2 million mark now. We'll soon have hunger sent for a burton!"), if the windfall somehow finds its way into

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Freedom from Hunger

By D. H. TRIBE

the pockets of nepotistic dictators whose families are preparing for a hasty getaway, or a corrupt civil service, or venal armed forces, or rapacious chieftains, instead of into the bellies of the needy? Cohabitant social inequalities were graphically illustrated at the 1961 London Film Festival in two Japanese films—grinding poverty (*The Island*) contrasted with greedy luxury (*The Bad Sleep Well*).

Food may be walking around outside the door, or even sitting in the larder, and religious observances can deprive the hungry. Muslims must not eat pork; Hindus, beef; Jainists and some Christian sects, any meat; Jews, pork, shellfish, or meat and dairy produce together. Religious fasts often intervene to make nutrition, already in a parlous state, quite give up the ghost. New foods may be rejected if there is no traditional ritual for preparing them; old foods can be inaccessible if the qualified ritualist should be absent. There are psychological factors too. People on the breadline hesitate to risk experimentation. However much research has been done, each transplanting of technique from station to small-holding is, in a sense, a unique experiment, and will certainly be regarded as such by the peasant concerned. There is little incentive to modernise farming methods where loan interest rates are 100 per cent, and rent 50 per cent of produce. While people everywhere are apt to become apathetic amid opportunist political struggles, and under the threat of a nuclear holocaust.

I don't want to belittle technical developments. But you do not solve Old Mother Hubbard's prandial problems by presenting her with a set of anodised aluminium saucepans. I don't want to discourage the outflowing of spontaneous generosity. But you do not make Tiny Tim well-nourished on an annual treat of roast goose and Christmas pudding. Lofty principles, resounding phrases, and even a periodic flutter of the cheque-book are not enough. The world-wide problem of hunger demands a radical onslaught on the vested interests of the status quo. Let me take a concrete example. Shall we return to Pope John? We accept His Holiness's sincere regard for the hungry. But we must be excused a lurking suspicion that he has a much sincerer regard for the dogmas and political fortunes of the Catholic Church.

Encyclicals no doubt have a place in the Catholic scheme of things. But if His Holiness really wants to help, there are a number of practical things he can do. One thing is to recognise the need for radical State action in areas like Sicily or South India still oppressed by feudalism, imperialism, or repressive capitalism. It doesn't help by anathematising these efforts as "communistic" or "socialistic", and excommunicating the politicians. Some may be careerists or the agents of foreign powers, but no one can claim that their policies are being impartially investigated by the Vatican. Recently we saw an outbreak of shooting at foreign Socialists in Malta as the direct result of archiepiscopal incitement. Then there is the desperate need for social and scientific education in Catholic countries, whose already deficient teaching resources are largely dissipated in the inculcation of theological propositions.

Even more important is the question of family planning. I have before me a range of Freedom from Hunger literature. In article after article appear solemn warnings on the population problem. The FAO Annual Report just issued shows that in 1960-1 world agricultural production rose by only 1%, while world population increased by 1.6%. Had Communist China been included in these figures, the picture would be even gloomier. Prospects for next year are no brighter. The Catholic interdict on

family planning, which is best enforced in those backward countries where its effect is most devastating, is one of the major causes of this population crisis. As the question is not even one of specific Dogma, no Ecumenical Council need be called, and theoretically the policy could be reversed tomorrow. Without some practical proposals from the Pope, any gratitude for the commendable generalities in his recent encyclical will be premature.

What of this country? If the Government is taking an imaginative and long-term view of world problems and the need for enlightened international co-operation, its vision is modestly hidden from the public. The picture we get is of a declining imperialist power preparing to ditch an empire it has all but sucked dry, and do a deal with its former rivals; having a final suck by keeping local populations where they are in politically, but not economically independent territories. If this is so, then social awareness, like charity, should begin at home. Until each country has done its utmost, it can hardly propose UN economic sanctions against its neighbours. I should like to see progressive reduction of military budgets everywhere, and earmarking of the money saved for the hunger problem at home or abroad.

On November 11th, the first Educational Conference of the Campaign took place in London. It was lively and stimulating. The December News-letter says it was "attended by representatives of the entire formal structure of education". Presumably this means teachers and tutors from all types of educational establishments. For, perhaps impatiently, I was a little disturbed to find that the official structure of education—Ministry experts, local government officers, school broadcast units, newspaper educational correspondents, and apparently all teacher unions save that of headmasters (admittedly important)—were conspicuously absent.

I was also disturbed by some remarks of one of the speakers, Mr. Nicholas Gillett, lecturer at Coventry Teachers' Training College. "Any honest report on teacher training colleges would present a gloomy picture", he said. "Education ought to be the spearhead of progress. Training colleges ought to be the place where action is to begin. But when we look at the spearhead we find it is blunted." Even more disturbing was his introduction to this comparatively mild observation: "I don't see any of the press here. I wouldn't want to be quoted." Mr. Gillett might have said that our educational system is still largely based on the archaic notions of God, Queen, and Country; and that secondary modern schools often seem to have been created so that less bright or lucky or rich children will not be educated "above their station".

I hope Mr. Gillett's words will not become a slogan of the Campaign: "I wouldn't want to be quoted." Someone might be embarrassed. But the Campaign is necessary only because a lot that could have been done has not been done. If it is to be effective, many people may have to be embarrassed. Without another scientific discovery anywhere in the world, implementation of existing knowledge would solve the hunger problem. Those who have responsible and constructive criticism to offer have a duty not only to be prepared, but to demand to be quoted.

Let me commend the Campaign to all Freethinkers. Literature may be obtained from the U.K. Committee Headquarters at 17 Northumberland Avenue, London, W.C.2. Study will lead to debate: debate to proposals: proposals to ways of implementation. Through MPs, local and national papers, trades unions and professional bodies, and international organisations, all can wage a Crusade that none could condemn: Freedom from Hunger.

Christianity, Islam and the Challenge of Communism

By F. A. RIDLEY

IF ONE WERE ASKED to name the most important, as well as sensational fact in relation to the religious world of our day, it is, in my submission at least, the spectacular rise of Atheism in recent years. For this fact is strikingly evident on both sides of the famous Iron (Dollar) Curtain, the current political equator of our era. Though for reasons of a political and an economic, rather than of a strictly religious or theological nature, the current expansion of Atheism and Materialism is officially sponsored by the State in the Communist East, whereas there is a more or less universal alliance between the Capitalist States of the Western World and the Christian Churches. This ranges from the virtually complete identity that exists in the Iberian Peninsula to the entirely unofficial, but in practice, extremely effective alliance between Christianity and Wall Street in the present-day USA. As a necessary result of this state of things, Atheism is official in the Socialist countries and unofficial in the Capitalist lands. Nevertheless, in both, the rise of Atheism in recent years has been so spectacular as to make it religion's major antagonist in the present era. "Atheism" succeeds "heresy" as the bugbear of the Churches.

Every known effect must be due to some cause, known or unknown. In the case of the present dynamic expansion of Atheism on a world-wide scale, its motivating cause is known, for it is only since the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century that Atheism has become a mass-movement in Europe, while similarly, it is only since the world-wide expansion of modern industry within the current century that Atheism has become a genuinely world-wide force. During the long era of predominantly agrarian civilisation, when both mankind and his productive powers lay at the mercy of wind, weather and of natural forces, Atheism necessarily remained confined to small urban cliques and minorities. The famous prediction of Karl Marx made in the 1840s that the then introduction of railways into India, would inevitably lead to a revolt against the immemorially religious society of Hindustan with its animistic personification of natural phenomena, has now eventuated in a Hindu Secular State a century after Marx. Similar transformations can be quoted in many other lands both inside and outside Europe. For Animism, the mental basis of all religious phenomena is, essentially a pre-industrial (and therefore pre-deterministic) phenomenon.

If 20th century Industrialism marks the rise of Atheism firstly in Europe (and North America), the cradle of the original Industrial Revolution, and currently throughout the non-European world, Atheism and Materialism have entered the evolution of States via a series of major political and social revolutions. This series, which began with the Deistic French Revolution has ended in our own century with the Atheistic revolutions in contemporary Russia (1917) and China (1949-50). These latter were associated with the rise to political power of Communism. However, from the standpoint of Atheism, with which we are here concerned, the spectacular successes gained by these Communist revolutions were characterised by their professions of Atheism and of Materialism rather than of Communism. The contemporary Churches, with the intransigent Vatican at their head, hate and fear the contemporary Russian and Chinese Revolutions not, primarily as Communist, but as Atheist, revolutions. As indeed, the first

major Atheist revolutions in recorded annals. For example, neither Rome nor the Protestant Churches are strangers to economic Communism (e.g. the Jesuits in Paraguay, the Shakers, etc., in Protestant lands), but Atheism upon a mass scale is something hitherto unknown. Actually, the title of this article is itself something of a misnomer: it is the challenge of Atheism, not Communism, that represents the major preoccupation of the world's religions today, for religion might perhaps co-exist with Communism, but never with Atheism. It is, consequently as the first successful Atheistic regime that the Churches, with Rome at their head, hate and fear the Communist Revolution.

This ubiquitous fact represents the root cause of the present tendency to form one united front of the Christian Churches today: Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant alike, against the common enemy, Atheism, already dominant in the Communist East and rising rapidly (often in a non-Communist context) in the Western Capitalist world. Such recent previously unheard of religious innovations as the visit of Archbishop Fisher to Pope John, the recent entry of the Russian Orthodox Church (with Communism on its doorstep) to the mainly Protestant World Council of Churches, the projected Ecumenical Council to be assembled in the near future by the Vatican for the express purpose of effecting the eventual "reunion" of Christendom; all these (and no doubt many others) are straws that indicate most significantly which way the ecclesiastical winds are blowing. By what agency is this current reunion being brought about? By that of the Holy Spirit? Hardly. Actually, just as the motion of one solar planet is affected by the unseen pull of another more powerful one, so is it with regard to the present day ecclesiastical firmament. The movement towards ultimate reunion is finally motivated by the unseen but potent pull of Atheism. Nor, to all present appearances, is this united front of religions apparently destined to be ultimately confined to the Christian Churches. Definite contemporary tendencies point to an eventual alliance, not only as is already beginning to take shape before our eyes between formerly bitterly opposed Christian Churches, but between former rival and bitterly hostile religions as well, in particular between the two most powerful of all recorded religions: the Roman Catholic Church and the Muslim creed and cult of Islam. For signs, at present only remote upon the horizon but evident to the keen-eyed observer, point to a future united front between Jesus and Muhammed, between the Bible and the Koran; between these two colossi of the religious world, who have so often in the past waged holy wars against each other.

[The above is substantially the talk given by Mr. Ridley to the Conway Discussion Group on Tuesday, November 21st, 1961.]

WITHOUT COMMENT

Ladies from various churches have been chosen to call on every household in the district to collect towards the British and Foreign Bible Society. In 1960 the Society introduced one new language to its list giving a new total of 858; published additional books of Scripture in nine languages; completed five New Testaments, three whole Bibles and numerous versions; printed in London alone 4,806,776 copies of Scripture; circulated 9,296,443 copies of Scripture throughout the world; spent over a million pounds on Scripture translation, production and distribution, of which little more than half was recovered in Scripture sales.

—*Prestatyn Weekly* (2/12/61).

This Believing World

How long does it take for a parson to learn the truth about his Christianity? The other day, the Rev. J. Charley of All Souls, Marylebone, declared in his magazine that "Christmas cards might just as well be commemorating a pagan feast for all one might guess". Although most scholars have for centuries known that Christmas — no matter what the feast is called — is certainly Pagan, and has no more to do with the birth of somebody named Jesus Christ than it has to do with aeroplanes, only in this year of grace 1961 has the truth trickled down to Mr. Charley.

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In any case, Christmas is important these days because giving presents stimulates trade. Shopkeepers stock-in and look forward to good business — a fact which seems to have pained the Rev. H. Smith of St. John the Evangelist, Liverpool. What he wants is that any money earmarked for presents should be given instead to his church. "Give £10 to the church" is his Christmas slogan, to help him raise £4,000 for improvements. Needless to add the president of the National Union of Small Shopkeepers is "shocked" at the suggestion that Christmas should honour the birth of "our Lord" by helping a church rather than by helping small shopkeepers. But Mr. Smith is confident he will get the £4,000.

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Thirty-two Anglican theologians addressed an open letter to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York a few weeks ago begging for more inter-communion between the Church of England and the Free Churches, and are now backed up by the Bishop of Manchester, Dr. W. Greer. It must have been obvious to them all that it was little use fighting for unity between the Church of England and the Church of Rome when there was no unity between Anglicans and Dissenters; so the Bishop wants all Christians of different denominations "to meet at the Lord's Table". But as far as we can see, Anglo-Catholics oppose Protestants as much as Roman Catholics oppose Calvinists.

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While the late J. N. Maskelyne was alive he was, like Harry Houdini, a most determined opponent of Spiritualism which he contemptuously characterised as fraud of the worst kind. Directly he was dead, whisperings began that he was secretly an out-and-out believer in all that Spiritualism stood for. The same thing happened to Houdini, who spent the last ten years of his life in exposing the fraud all over America, but who was at once hailed as a believer as soon as he died. It is not surprising to find now therefore, that the late Harry Price when alive "privately" told Mr. Hannan Swaffer and Mr. Barbanell that "he accepted the whole Spiritualist case". During his lifetime, there was not the slightest hint of this.

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On the contrary indeed. Price did his utmost to pour contempt on "the whole Spiritualist case" by bringing in a mongoose who could speak perfect English, by going up into the Hartz mountains to change a goat into a prince through a "virgin" present, and doing his best finally to get a medium, the late Helen Duncan, convicted in a court of law of arrant fraud with "ectoplasm" a substance which Mr. Swaffer naturally believes in as much as he does conversing with "spirits" from the "etheric world". Though Price pretended in his book that he was unable to account for some "phenomena", he knew perfectly well that spirits were not responsible. Still, it makes good "copy" always to insist that opponents of Spiritualism while alive were secretly complete believers—as Mr. Swaffer so well knows.

"Le Cercle Ernest Renan"

FRANCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN recognised for its classic Free thought—the names of Voltaire, Diderot, Helvetius, Zola, de Maupassant, and many others come to one's mind. Yet between the two wars, on my visits to Paris, I found it increasingly difficult to buy any Freethought works of some of the lesser known writers. You could buy books on almost anything at those famous stalls lining the river Seine, but not on Freethought.

Whether this brought about the formation of *Le Cercle Ernest Renan*, I do not know; but this now so well known group of eminent and scholarly Freethinkers has just celebrated its tenth year of increasing success, and we here in England heartily congratulate the Circle for so splendidly carrying on the great tradition for Freethought which has been so distinguished a feature of their forerunners in the past. The current number of their Bulletin is a special one, indeed, an extra special one, with seven splendid articles all on Freethought subjects, and all marked with that sound scholarship which makes them a delight to read. In the Introduction to this special number is an account of the work of the Circle which I am sure will interest all our readers. So here is a translation:—

"The number of people who are interested in the critical study of the Christian religion grows from day to day. Did (for example) Jesus Christ exist? If answered in the affirmative, was he the person whose life is traced in the Gospels? How can a Divine Being become a man? How can a man become a God? Was this God (or this man) crucified? In what way, and under what circumstances? Did the essential parts of the Christian religion exist before Jesus? Was the Christian religion truly born in Jerusalem, in Palestine, in precisely those regions where it has so miserably failed? The (existing) manuscripts of the Gospels date from the fourth century; are they exact reproductions of the originals? How were such re-edited and contradictory texts composed?"

"It is to answer such questions and many others that *Le Cercle Ernest Renan* has been formed. Founded ten years ago, it has published 85 monthly Bulletins, and 32 quarterly pamphlets. These studies are exclusively reserved for its members and are not sold to the general public. On the first Saturday of each month in Paris, a meeting is held to discuss a question of religious history or a contemporary religious event dealing with either Christianity, or with the religions of Israel, Islam, Gnosticism, etc. In addition, the Circle tries to set an example of free thought, of courageous research, and of devotion to science. As far as we know, *Le Cercle Ernest Renan* is the only one (in France at least) which devotes itself to a clear analysis of Christian texts, as well as of Christian origins basing its researches on the rules of a rational logic. And everybody who is attracted by such a programme is heartily welcomed by us."

All who have read the bulletins and pamphlets issued by the Circle must heartily concur that it has splendidly fulfilled its promise. It is a great pity that we have no organisation here which can translate and publish some of its more notable publications. The work of such scholars as Dr. Couchoud, Prosper Alfaric, Georges Ory, Dr. Lassalle, and many others deserve to be better known outside France. May this work in the "Best of Causes" long continue.

H. CUTNER.

NEXT WEEK

THE CHRISTIAN SATURNALIA

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE FREETHINKER

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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours. Inquiries regarding General 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, McRAE and MURRAY.

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m. MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. P. MURACCIOLE. (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.

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: L. EBURY.

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, Paradise Street), Sunday, December 17, 6.45 p.m.: DR. M. BARROW, "The Health Service at the Crossroads".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, December 19th, 7.30 p.m.: HECTOR HAWTON, "The Uses and Abuses of Religion".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, December 17th, 6.30 p.m.: FILMS, "A Light in Nature" and "Story in the Rocks".

Marble Arch Branch (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, December 17th, 7.15 p.m.: MILTON BECK, "The Beliefs of a Mormon".

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Co-operative Education Centre, Heathcote Street Entrance), Sunday, December 17th, 6.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Vatican and the Common Market".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, December 17th, 2.30 p.m.: GEOFFREY MACPHERSON, "Around the World".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, December 17th, 11 a.m.: PROFESSOR HYMAN LEVY, "An Unbeliever Looks at Death".

Notes and News

DURING A MEETING of Queen's University (Belfast) Conservative and Unionist Association, we learn from the *Belfast Telegraph* (24/11/61), "the view was put forward that the IRA was now out of favour with many of its former supporters, and that many Roman Catholics were now sympathetic to the Unionist position: this was therefore the time for the Party to campaign for the allegiance of Roman Catholics".

"A DAY OF joyous celebration" was how *The Irish News* (20/11/61) described the dedication of a new Roman Catholic church at Crebilly, Ballymena. The paper also reported the special sermon by the Rev. Dr. C. Daly of Queen's University, Belfast, with its references to Mary's womb and Christ's crucified flesh. Neither the Canon nor the Bishop could make a church, said Dr. Daly. "Only God can do that by coming to dwell in it in the Body of His Son". "It was a tragic error of the Re-

formers to abolish the Mass and the Blessed Eucharist in the name of spiritual worship", said Dr. Daly, "for the Mass and the worship of His Eucharistic Body were precisely what Our Lord meant by spiritual worship". For this carnal-minded priest, in fact, worshipping "in spirit" is worshipping "God in the Temple of Christ's Body".

★
ACCORDING TO Dr. S. M. Abdullah, writing in the Pakistan paper, *Al-Islam* (1/10/61) there is no distinction in Islam between "religious" and "secular". "Muslims", we are told, "are averse to the idea of separation. The Islamic mind believes in the wholeness and continuity of life, and insists on the fusion of the secular and the non-secular elements of existence". But Dr. Abdullah is anxious to dissociate Secularism from any "European associations", and even uses his own term *Dunyawiyyat* instead (though he defines it as "care for bodily and worldly affairs"). So, after somewhat summary dismissal of Plato, Aquinas, Spinoza, Butler, Hume, Kant and Sidgwick, not to mention such incidentals as Materialism and Humanism, he tells us: "In short, a good society is the one which seeks 'goodness' and goodness is an attribute which could be achieved by combining practical wisdom with spiritual alertness, i.e. faith in the Divine Body. The present Western attitude may be called 'efficient' but it cannot be called good . . .".

★
"WITH ONLY the slightest sigh", Cassandra (*Daily Mirror*, 28/11/61) introduced the latest doll for little girls. Not only does she walk and sleep, she also laughs, sings and recites. Above all, she prays: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep". What more could a little girl want?

★
THE SAME DAY, the *Daily Mirror's* industrial editor, Roland Hurman contributed his second report on India's efforts to reduce her enormous birth rate. "There is nothing in the doctrines of Hinduism or the Muslim faith to prohibit the attempts of parents to limit the size of their families", he said. "The obstacles are plain ignorance and a natural adherence to the primitive fertility tradition that a man with many children is rich". Obviously the use of contraceptives presents enormous difficulties and Mr. Hurman agreed with the young medical officer of health of the Mysore village of Rannagaram, Dr. H. R. Basavaraj, that "Undoubtedly, sterilisation is the real answer".

★
WE WONDER IF *Psychic News* will publicise the statement by a baronet who was accused at Staffordshire Assizes of indecently assaulting an eleven-year-old girl and taking her away by fraud with intent to deprive her father of possession. According to the baronet, the girl's mother "had said that she and her husband were spiritualists and, after communing with the spirits, were satisfied that they should let their daughter go with him" (*The Guardian*, 30/11/61). And we wonder if the parents will "commune" with the spirits again. Come to think of it, they probably will, making some excuse about the former occasion.

★
AN AUSTRALIAN 5d. postage stamp depicts the Holy Family on one page of an open book and on the other, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace . . .".

The 7-inch, 33r.p.m. reissue of Chapman Cohen's record, "*The Meaning and Value of Freethought*", should be ordered right away if wanted for Christmas. Price 18s. 6d. including postage and packing, from the Pioneer Press.

Oral Tradition

By H. CUTNER

ONE OF MY American correspondents, Mr. Patrick D. Corsaro, who is quite firmly opposed to the Myth Theory, the theory that Jesus Christ is not an historical person but a literary creation based on Pagan and other myths, has at last discovered that I have "overlooked one or two essential points which are vital for the understanding of the issue in question". In his very courteous letter to me, printed last week, he enlarges on these points.

His first point is that I have neglected "oral tradition" which, in a way, is perfectly true. The reason is—and he appears to have overlooked the fact—that all or nearly all ancient history is based on oral tradition. It would have been quite impossible for anybody to have given us any accounts of ancient battles whatever if it were not for oral tradition. If Mr. Corsaro can give me any slice of ancient history as we have it these days which did not depend on oral tradition, I should be glad to examine it for myself.

Take as an example the history of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC). How do we know anything about it? Did anybody talk about it before it was "written up"? How did Thucydides get his facts? Or we can come down much later—say, the Battle of Hastings (1066 AD). Who wrote it up and from what? Are not all the facts leading up to the famous battle based on "oral tradition"? And I might add here that because of this, it is at least doubtful whether some of the "facts" are not purely imaginary.

But as we are dealing with the Myth Theory, with Gospel "history", let us ask ourselves how some of the incidents described therein could possibly be known except on the theory of oral tradition. And first, the story of Jesus's adventures with the Devil. How could Matthew possibly have told us about them except on the theory, or rather on the fact, that either the Devil told Matthew all about them, or it was Jesus who gave Matthew all the particulars. Matthew wasn't there—as far as we know—so it must have been either Jesus or the Devil; or perhaps Mr. Corsaro knows of another explanation?

Or take the wondrous story of the Ascension of Jesus. What other explanation but that of oral tradition can account for this story which has produced some marvellous paintings, and which all Christians believe with the most pious fervour. It may be worth examining it a little for the benefit of newcomers to Freethought.

And first, note that the two Apostles who actually saw Jesus ascending unto Heaven, Matthew and John, say *nothing whatever about it*, a most remarkable omission in their narratives. How does Mr. Corsaro explain this fact? Here, oral tradition need not have played any part: for all that was necessary was to write down what the Apostles saw. And this they failed to do.

Mark on the other hand tells us that "after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God". We do *not* know who Mark was, and therefore we do not know whether he was present at the ceremony or not. But in any case, as quite a large number of great Biblical critics look upon the last twelve verses of Mark—they contain this passage—to be "interpolated", that is, they were fraudulently inserted into the "true" text of Mark, his story of the Ascension may be just as fraudulent as the rest. But was it for Mark an "oral tradition"? Does Mr. Corsaro know?

We come now to Luke who was admittedly neither an Apostle, nor a Jewish writer, but a Greek; and he cer-

tainly never *saw* the Ascension. Yet he tells us—"And it came to pass, while he [Jesus] blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven". Now the only way Luke could have got this story as neither Matthew nor John, who saw it happen, mention it, and the account in Mark is a fraud, was from "oral tradition". But why should I believe this religious twaddle? Am I expected to believe that Elijah went up to heaven in a fiery chariot because it also must be based on oral tradition?

If Mr. Corsaro can get it, I should advise him to read what David Hume has to say on oral tradition in his celebrated *Essay on Miracles*.

Mr. Corsaro claims also that most scholars use oral tradition "to arrange chronological facts", which may well be true if no other sources are available.

On this question, however, he tells me that I insist in all my arguments, and particularly in my book, *Jesus—God, Man or Myth* "that the canonical gospels are officially dated in the fourth century, and are therefore unreliable". I wish Mr. Corsaro would be good enough to give me "chapter and verse" where I have made this extraordinary statement. Of course, I have done nothing of the kind.

But take oral tradition on the problem of chronology—we find that the Last Supper (as it is called) of Jesus is made to take place on the 14th of Nisan by the Synoptics—that is, on a Thursday evening. This was the Jewish Passover. But John (who is the despair of so many good Christian writers) so often disagrees with his brothers in Christ that we must not be surprised that he places the Last Supper a day *earlier*, that is, on the 13th of Nisan which was on Wednesday evening. Strauss calls this "an irreconcilable contradiction" but Mr. Corsaro ought to have no difficulty in showing which is the correct date through "oral tradition".

For some reason that I cannot understand, Mr. Corsaro also accuses me of confusing "contradictory statements of an author with the very existence of the author", but he takes very good care not to give my exact words. He claims that I *deny* the historical existence of Paul, for example, because he so often contradicts himself, and "in turn he is contradicted by Luke" in Acts.

Now what I did try in my book was to show how little is worth the "witness" of Paul, because what he may say in one place is so often contradicted in another place—in fact, that the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles, are a mass of contradictions apart altogether from the fact that in Paul, his testimony for Jesus is a fraudulent interpolation; and that many Christian critics throw overboard also all the Epistles except four, and that even these are considered by some critics as second-century inventions.

"I quite agree" adds Mr. Corsaro, "that Paul's Epistles contain interpolations, and require a great deal of patience to find some sense in them. But these aspects of the Epistles do not rule out the author as being Paul". Quite so. But I never, as far as I remember, said that these things prove that there never was a Paul. All I contend is, that no one has produced a scrap of evidence proving that the Saul of Acts (if he really lived) ever wrote a line of the Epistles; and that *secular* history never mentions Saul or Paul anywhere. Considering that Paul and Peter were constantly preaching in the synagogues in Jerusalem, and that they were constantly making converts, why have

the preaching and the converts escaped Josephus? He hasn't a word about either of them.

Somebody wrote the Epistles of course, just as somebody wrote the Gospels, but who? Until Mr. Corsaro can bring evidence that there ever was a Paul, I prefer to look upon the Epistles as very much edited—and badly edited—Gnostic documents which are quite anonymous.

Finally, Mr. Corsaro insists that I rely too much on "outdated" scholars like Professor Van Manen and Thomas Whittaker. Who are the people who say they are "outdated"? People like Mr. Corsaro? Supposing I say that far from being outdated they have never yet been answered by Christian scholars? The great weapon today of these gentlemen is "boycott". If we never refer to their work (they say) people will forget not only what they wrote, but their very names. And this is, I sadly admit, what is happening.

No one in Christian eyes has been so constantly "outdated" as Thomas Paine, but his work is still very much alive because it has never been properly "answered". Van Manen and the Dutch theologians who have drastically criticised the Gospel stories are almost unknown in England and America because they have been so little translated, or if they have been translated, so thoroughly boycotted.

Mr. Corsaro is going to pose many more difficulties for me, he says. More power to his painstaking elbow.

The Laic Movement in Canada

THE MOUVEMENT LAIQUE DE LANGUE FRANCAISE continues to win support in the Canadian province of Quebec, and at a meeting held in the University of Montreal on November 17th, and reported in *The Montreal Star* (18/11/61). Pierre Lebeuf, the Secretary of the organisation described confessional education as "at a very low level" and those who administer it as "extremely narrow-minded".

"Repetition of hackneyed phrases is the norm in religious education", he said, "and robs students of individual liberty, poisoning the very atmosphere". Religion, in fact, is sold like popular beverages in Roman Catholic schools, and the atmosphere has become such that parents of no formal religion fear for the psychological balance of their children, who hear the opposite at school from what they are taught at home.

"To prevent this, many parents of French culture sent their children to more liberal Protestant Anglo-Saxon schools, so that now 1,500 attend these in Montreal". In this way Anglo-Saxons absorb children of French culture as well as those of New Canadians who find the Protestant schools more liberal. In Roman Catholic schools, said Mr. Lebeuf, religious instruction is "dispensed like soft drink", and "entire centuries of European culture" are censured. But he foresaw the time "a few years"—when politicians may stop exploiting religion in demagogical arguments designed to avoid the real problems. "At this point the *Mouvement Laïque* will have succeeded", he concluded.

Another speaker at the meeting was Professor Paul Lacoste, Chairman of the organisation's juridical committee, who restated his so-called "Lacoste solution" to the educational problem in the province. Non-denominational school boards should be set up in Montreal and Quebec City for those parents who want a non-confessional education for their children, and there should be an English and French-language committee under a Minister of Education, with three sub-committees, Roman Catholic, Protestant and Neutral.

According to Taste

OSWELL BLAKESTON'S new book, *The Night's Moves* (Gaberbochus, 12s. 6d.) is rather ambiguously described by the publishers as "one for the criminally curious!" Well, I suppose we are all criminally curious in some—though most of us, I trust, not in the worst—sense, but it must be said right away that this book is likely to disappoint the ordinary crime-fiction addict. It is not just a thriller, but a Gaberbochus thriller. Oswald Blakeston, we are told, "specialises in off-beat books"; so too do Gaberbochus. Be prepared then, for something unusual. Then you will be far from disappointed; you will be entertained and intrigued.

The book contains two stories, or "problems", the second of which gives the book its title. AS FREETHINKER readers would expect, it is delightfully and skilfully written, with titillating undertones. The problem posed is, what does the bracelet stand for? And perhaps a clue is to be found in the following engaging passage:

"Queenie," I said, "I'm keeping a secret from you. Journalism's just a stop-gap. One day I'm going to write a poem that's as wonderful as saying 'I love you.' Up to now, that's been my favourite poem; but I haven't had a chance to read my own poetical works and alter my whole life. The bracelet'd do it for me. It'd give me time to write an express letter to immortality. Don't you want the world to be full of lovely poems?"

Mr. Blakeston does this sort of thing extremely well. His touch is light but telling, and he is always witty. His first story, though, "The Ultimate Trap", is to my mind the better. Without any sacrifice of delicacy, he succeeds in creating a Kafka-like atmosphere, which becomes horrifying.

From the moment that Sam Dark, an American negro, finds a woman dead in his bedroom in a hotel in Africa, he is doomed. At first he might only be held as a material witness, but he is in fact caught up in a relentless, irreversible process. "But by God, you can't do this to me!" he might exclaim, but he knows—and we know—that they can and will. "They" are a black African government, and the President replies for them:

"Mr. Dark, the world has done it to us all." And he adds comfortingly(!) "You won't suffer, Mr. Dark, if it has to be . . . You won't know a thing. We command all the medical facilities . . ."

That impersonal "we" can be a terrible word, in whose name crimes may be committed without personal responsibility. And if the world is already "both silly and tragic"; "unhinged"; then "our" actions must be in conformity. It is unfortunate, but it can't be helped. Or can it?

"Who knows who will win—equality in charity or equality in destruction?"

Mr. Blakeston's humour can certainly be sardonic (as when he presents the black judge wearing the white cap) but it isn't always so, even in "The Ultimate Trap". There is the prison chaplain, for instance, who distributes nudist magazines because he believes they act as an antiaphrodisiac. And there is the modern painter, who explains:

"I work in the abstract. You may not believe me when I tell you that it takes me only five minutes to paint one of these pictures. Astonishing, isn't it, when you think of the time other artists squander seeking inspiration. But I use Zen, Mr. Dark. I do not try to force the picture. I let the picture paint itself. That's why my work carries significance. You could not alter a line without disturbing something that has arrived. Do you understand the word *arrived*?"

As one who has been lucky enough to taste Mr. Blakeston's cooking (he has also written a book on this subject!) I naturally turn to that for a comparison. *The Night's Moves*, though too rare for some, will tickle the sensitive palate.

COLIN MCCALL.

Theatre

Many who have not read Gwyn Thomas's books will have seen him on the TV programme, "Tonight". Those who live in London can see his play, *The Keep*, at the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, and enjoy the full flavour of his language. For it is the words of *The Keep* that are important, not so much the characters or the rather contrived plot. Few would believe that even a Welsh family that produced a lawyer, a doctor and a schoolmaster among its six children would converse in such brilliant, often sardonic, and always metaphoric prose. But it is Mr. Thomas's achievement that he creates a very real Welsh atmosphere through the medium of his exalted language.

A grandfather, we are told, dug the foundations of a chapel with his own hands out of gratitude for safe delivery from a pit disaster, though the town already had five more chapels than it needed. "He wore his hair shirt so long", someone says, "that it nearly tickled us to death". The father recalls that, as a boy of 9, his least bright son won a prize for an essay on the evils of drink and carnality, and "I sometimes think it's a pity you didn't die at that moment". When the lawyer son tells him he got down on his knees when afraid, the father approves. "Quite right. Be on the safe side".

With these and other dry comments, Mr. Thomas takes us right into the South Wales he knows and observes so acutely. But there is, too, a bitterness; against the narrowness—against life in the keep. Or rather, in the two keeps: the family keep, "this nice cottonwool shell of a world, the best preparation for death there is"; and the social keep, typified on TV by a head reflecting the "combined ravages" of chapel religion and pit labour. Mr. Thomas, in short, gives us much to think about as well as to laugh at, and he is admirably aided by his cast.

Big Soft Nellie, at the Theatre Royal, Stratford, London, has little of *The Keep's* bitterness. Indeed, it is over-sentimental and slightly embarrassing at times, but at others it is moving, and it is nearly always funny. Again no one could pretend that such a TV shop as this could exist—at any rate for long. Again though, the author, Henry Livings, illuminates real life in a particularly individual way. This time it is through his not only likeable, but even lovable characters. The Theatre Royal is noted for its presentations of working people (not just working class people) and in Mr. Livings's play it succeeds again. The typist and salesman could be found in countless offices all over the country; the mechanic of the title, about whom all revolves, is sensitively observed; while the employer is not far from a comic masterpiece, at least as played by Mr. Roy Kinnear. C.McC.

CORRESPONDENCE

SPINOZA AND THE JEWS

Mr. F. A. Ridley says in his article "The Evolution of Atheism" that "the Jewish and Calvinistic Churches in Holland would have burned Spinoza if they could". Would he give his authority that the Jewish Church in Holland had such an intention but were prevented—say, by the authorities, or by whom? J. RENTON.

PLAY IT SAFE!

In the December 1st issue of the *Daily Record* a guitarist who received a shock from his electric guitar strings was reported as saying, "I thought my number was up when 250 volts shot into my hand. I had a word with the band about it and I decided that we would include one or two spirituals and hymns from now on for some of the slower dances. I feel this was a warning from God".

Surely we are then entitled to assume that at any time we non-believers will be struck down by the "merciful" Christian God! But seriously, how can the world possibly progress hampered by ridiculous superstition such as this? The less of this sort of nonsense, the better for mankind and the world. G. W. GAIR

IMMIGRANTS BILL

I question the wisdom of the National Secular Society motion to enter the raging controversy around the Immigrants Bill and to expect a Tory Government to introduce measures contrary to their *Credo*, the profit motive.

However, if ever a freethought body wanted to contribute anything to this controversy, the motion ought to have stressed the religious aspect which declares family planning a sin. Whether in their home countries or here, whether "Coloureds" (this hypocritical term which only underlines our consciousness of their skin colour) or Catholics from Eire—it is always their increasing numbers through unlimited procreation which must nullify any measure however well meant. P. G. ROY

"APOLOGY FOR THE BIBLE"

As Mr. R. W. Morrell remarks in his article "Freethought Pioneers" (in your December 1st issue), Richard Watson, Bishop of Landaff, was very worried about the effects of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* on the industrial working class. In the *Anecdotes*

of his life he proudly tells how a certain David Dale of Paisley asked his permission, "which was most readily granted", to print 3,000 copies of his *Apology for the Bible*, "to be distributed amongst his own workmen", and how many thousands were also printed at Dundee and other places of England and Scotland at a small price without any profit to him.

Watson's preface, which Mr. Morrell quotes, does not appear to have been printed in some of the early editions—I have copies of the second and third editions (both 1796) without it.

A most interesting later edition of the *Apology* is that published, believe-it-or-not, by Richard Carlile on March 30th, 1819. This does contain Watson's preface with the dateline, "Calgarth Park, May 10th, 1796". Carlile's preface to this edition is so beautifully revealing of Carlile's strength of character that I give it in full:

"Having been frequently called upon to publish the Reply of the Bishop of Llandaff, as an antidote to the *Age of Reason*, my answer has invariably been, that from the high estimation I have ever held the doctrines laid down by Mr. Paine, and from my not feeling a conviction of its necessity, I could neither conscientiously nor consistently undertake the office; however, finding those solicitations continually pressing upon me, and to convince the Public that I am no enemy to a full and impartial investigation, I have given my consent to publish the Work, with my name attached to it; at the same time, I take the opportunity of informing its readers, that the printing and publishing are entirely at the expense of a few gentlemen for the support of the Established Church".

CHRISTOPHER BRUNEL.

CHRISTMAS WISH

Soon the faithful ones will be happily rendering, "Christians, Awake!" How I wish they would!

HARRY MORRIS.

F. A. RIDLEY'S

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