

The Freethinker

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SOME YEARS BEFORE the Second World War, a French government which held power for a short period, received the support of a number of political parties ranging from the French Communist Party to the French equivalent of the Liberal Party in this country. This pre-war French anti-Fascist coalition, then presided over by the late M. Leon Blum, was described by the collective title of "The Popular Front". Though—as the tragic events of 1940, when France collapsed so ignominiously under the impact of the German invasion were soon to demonstrate—the Popular Front failed in its avowed objective of saving France from Fascism both external and internal, the name survived the government. Along with such contemporary terms as "Quisling" and "Fifth Column", the term "Popular Front" has now passed into the permanent international vocabulary of politics.

Christian Unity

A closely analogous process seems to be eventuating today in contemporary Christian circles: a coalition against Atheism instead of Fascism. For decidedly the most conspicuous feature of the present-day Christian Churches is their talk about, and drive towards some kind of eventual unity. The recent scurrying to and fro of Archbishops, General Moderators and the like, to Rome and Istanbul, not to mention the Holy Land, is primarily concerned with "getting into touch with our separated brethren"; with ostensibly forwarding schemes of Christian Unity—truly a novel feature for the Christian Churches, whose record (ever since New Testament days) of internal dissensions and not infrequently, wars and persecutions is probably worse than that of any other religious organisation in recorded human annals. Such outstanding examples as the Crusade against the Albigenses (13th century), St. Bartholomew's Eve (1572), and the Thirty Years War (1618-48) of the Reformation v. Counter-Reformation which turned Germany into a wilderness inhabited largely by cannibals, will readily occur to any reasonably well-informed person. And even since the end of the Wars of Religion, the air has been dark with Christian inter-denominational curses and mutual anathemas.

Whatever view may be taken of the scope and validity of Biblical prophecy, one inspired prediction of the titular founder of Christianity has been abundantly fulfilled over and over again by the current practices of his followers: "I come not to bring peace but a sword". Ever since the days of the New Testament in which thinly veiled religious controversies are easily discernible by the critical reader, the mutual hatred of Christian against Christian has been a major and inescapable fact. Christian Unity has been honoured far more often in the breach than in the observance.

The Holy Spirit or — ?

Nowadays, times seem to have changed, for the theological vendettas immemorially characteristic of Catholic

versus Protestant, of the Orthodox East against the Churches of the West, have now apparently ceased. Even the totalitarian Church of Rome now lays emphasis on points of unity rather than on the sorts of anathema that have distinguished Papal utterances in the past. Everywhere there is a spate of comings and goings amongst the hierarchies of the Protestant Churches. Ex-Archbishop Fisher hurries to Rome to see Pope John, by whom he is most cordially received; Dr. Fisher is speedily followed by the General Moderator of the former staunchly Calvinistic Church of Scotland, who actually visited "The Scarlet Woman" on her native Vatican heath; to be soon followed by the

Right Reverend Father in God, Dr. Mervyn Stockwood, Bishop of Southwark. Not to be outdone by his predecessor, the present Archbishop of Canterbury hurries off to the East to further the great work of reconciliation with the ancient Churches of the Orthodox East. On all hands and in all present theological vernaculars, "Unity" is now the operative word; Unity brought about by the Holy Spirit. But is it really the Holy Ghost who represents the efficient cause of this seemingly spontaneous movement towards Christian Unity; between the three major historic divisions of Christianity, Roman Catholic, Protestant and Greek Orthodox? We very much doubt it.

Atheism Arrives

The actual inspiration to effect a reunion of Christendom—or at least of Christianity—does not, or so I submit, actually stem from any such celestial source; it stems from purely terrestrial sources that have only become influential during the present period of social and intellectual evolution: in fact, really only within this century. For one misses the essential point in present day religious reactions, if one fails to grasp that the real cause of this sudden desire for Christian Unity amongst the Churches is to be found in the unprecedented spread of Atheism and (as one may broadly term it) anti-supernaturalism throughout the present century, and very particularly since the Second World War, an era that has witnessed such astounding technological advances. It is only since the two great revolutions of the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, that Atheism has quit the study of the philosopher and become a mass-movement. Prior to recent times, Atheism was an affair merely of intellectual cliques and of speculative coteries, and the Church had no occasion to worry seriously about it. Very few Atheists were entered in the register of the Inquisition, which was concerned mainly with Jews, heretics (particularly) and infidels. Today, times have changed; it is—or so I contend—the threat of Atheism that constitutes the real driving force behind the present moves towards Christian Unity rather than any hypothetical Holy Spirit.

The Ecumenical Council

The high water mark in this mounting campaign towards constituting a United Front of the Christian Churches against the present common enemy, Atheism,

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Christian Popular Front

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

may be expected to be reached in the Ecumenical (General) Council of the Roman Catholic Church, due to meet this October under the auspices of Pope John XXIII, the ostensible aim of which is to effect some sort of Christian Reunion under the leadership of Rome. Actually, as we have noted before, since the Dogma of Infallibility of 1870, no real General Council can be held, since the only function left to a General Council is to act as a rubber-stamp for the Infallible Decrees of the Pope. Similarly, no real "reunion" on anything like equal terms can conceivably take place between the Infallible Papacy and the fallible heads of other Churches, Dr. Ramsey, *et al.* For which reason, I do not think it at all likely that any (shall we say?) amalgamation will take place between Rome and the non-Roman Churches. What

is likely is the effective formation of a kind of Christian Popular Front, a loose alliance of all, or most, of the Christian Churches under the leadership of the Vatican for certain specified purposes, amongst which purposes, the defence of Christianity against scepticism and of Theism against Atheism will presumably figure in the front rank. The Vatican is probably too experienced a campaigner to try and make the initial mistake of showing its hand too obviously; for the moment its need for allies is too great for Rome to assert her mastery too openly. For her next step is the effective formation of a pan-Christian alliance against the advance of Atheism. It is a tactic familiar to both Catholics and Communists, and something upon these lines may presumably be expected from the next Vatican Council.

Criticism and Religion

By DENIS WATKINS

THERE APPEAR to be many non-believers who are inclined to the opinion that the basic tenets of Christianity and the Biblical fables should not be criticised, their argument being that non-believers know the beliefs of Christianity to be absurd and that endlessly to refute them is useless. Turn instead to objects more worthy of attention and abandon the sterile discussion of ideas which were routed intellectually during the last century.

This attitude is probably nurtured by the frustrating nature of many of the arguments which take place concerning religion. The protagonists operate on different dimensions and are frequently unable to make contact with each other. Believers, with their undiscerning faith, accept the manifestly impossible as being actual and certain. Their mental conditioning precludes the re-focusing of their thoughts which would reveal the impossibility of their beliefs. Non-believers find their own viewpoint so obvious that the mental gymnastics, performed through the agency of faith, are quite unfathomable to them.

Religious discussions tend to begin with the believer enthusiastically supporting his religion on grounds of reason. The argument from design and Pascal's Wager are particular favourites. Soon, however, reason must be abandoned and faith called to the rescue. Eventually the believer's faith is brandished so belligerently that there is some justification in thinking that it is being used merely to annoy. This is a useful subterfuge to disguise discomfiture suffered when an argument is lost. Beyond this point further discussion is likely to be acrimonious and of little value.

There is, however, much to be said for such discussions taking place, even though they may have to be abandoned with little resolved or agreed. Religion is at the root of so much retrograde thinking that any attempt to demonstrate its weaknesses is worthwhile. It is important to foster a climate of opinion in which untruth, superstition and fable are not readily acceptable. For too long Christians have been left unaware of the vast body of opinion inimical to their beliefs. In the absence of dissenting voices the believer has little incentive to look critically at the views he holds. Discussion demonstrates that such views can only be held if the most outrageous assumptions are first accepted. Human progress cannot fail to be delayed if reason is subordinated to faith; religions generally tolerate rivals only when there is no other choice.

Christians constantly try to stifle dissenting voices in the bigoted belief that they themselves are so right that

other opinions should not even be heard. The atheist or agnostic is held, because of his opinions, to be a worthy target for every conceivable calumny. Non-believers, however, are no longer isolated individuals at the mercy of every ranting fundamentalist. Apart from their numbers, they include men of a calibre that no society can afford to reject. For Christians this is a bitter pill, but the spread of dissenting opinion is forcing them to swallow it.

A Decent Christian Burial

IN A PUBLIC welfare office in New York, an elderly coloured woman asked for help with her rent. Asked by the social worker in charge of her case what she had done with the twenty dollars received the week before, the Negro woman explained that she had spent it making the last payment on her cemetery plot, and she produced a photograph to prove it.

This showed a mound of earth at one end of which stood a white wooden cross bearing the woman's name. For this prize she had paid, in instalments, six-hundred dollars.

"Is it in Greenwood Cemetery?" asked the astonished social worker.

"No", the woman answered with a beatific expression, "it is in Heaven!"

She then explained that she belonged to a Negro Church in which the pastor sold resting places where human souls could find peace with Jesus until the Resurrection. He also sold plots for dead relatives, whose souls would be automatically transferred from the earth.

The social worker informed the authorities who decided to indict the pastor for fraud. But the district prosecutor reminded them that the pastor had enough money to engage a clever lawyer who might challenge them to *prove* that there are no cemetery plots in Heaven or that selling them is worse than selling indulgences as the Catholics do. Then it was discovered that an old law made it illegal in New York to make a profession of selling cemetery plots without a licence, even if they are located out of town.

A warrant was issued for the pastor but he had disappeared.

RICHARD STERN (U.S.A.).

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH ANNUAL DINNER

The Birmingham Branch National Secular Society Annual Dinner at the Stork Hotel, Corporation Street, Birmingham, on Saturday, June 30th, at 6.30 p.m. Tickets 12s. 6d. each from W. Miller, 62 Warwards Lane, Selly Oak, Birmingham, 29.

Blasphemy in Irish Law

By COLIN McCALL

I WAS RECENTLY SENT an interesting, unpriced little pamphlet, *Blasphemy in Irish Law*, by Paul O'Higgins, B.A., LL.B., Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, reprinted from *The Modern Law Review*, March, 1960, and published by Stevens and Sons Ltd., 11 New Fetter Lane, London. There is, says the author, little material on this topic and his own thesis was prompted by the refusal of an Irish District Justice to commit a Dublin theatrical producer (Simpson) for trial on a charge of having produced for gain, in May, 1957, performances of Tennessee Williams's play, *The Rose Tattoo*, which were "indecent and profane and obscene", at the Pike Theatre, Dublin. The charge, it will be seen, was of profanity, not blasphemy, but "it seems that profanity is equivalent to and synonymous with blasphemy" in Irish law, and in this case, the District Justice "seems to have regarded profanity and obscenity as similar, if not identical, offences". The case leaves open, says Mr. O'Higgins, the question whether Irish law, in Professor C. S. Kenny's words:

... rendered punishable all open expressions of a disbelief in Christianity, or only such as were couched in language so irreverent and scurrilous as to be likely to offend ordinary Christians deeply enough to provoke some of them to a breach of the peace. To put it briefly, could the mere matter of an expression of disbelief constitute it an offence of criminal blasphemy, or would the offence arise only when the *Matter* was aggravated by the *Manner*?

Obviously a very important distinction, though it is, of course, desirable to abolish the offence of blasphemy completely. The prosecution in the Simpson case seemed to believe that certain matters were, in themselves, blasphemous or obscene.

Now, according to the Constitution of the Republic of Ireland:

The publication or utterance of blasphemous, seditious, or indecent matter is an offence which shall be punishable in accordance with law (Article 40.6.1.i).

Indeed, Mr. O'Higgins reminds us that the whole Constitution is Christian-inspired. It begins:

In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from whom is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all actions, both of men and States must be referred,

We, the people of Eire,
Humbly acknowledge all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial . . .

And Article 44, which deals with Religion, provides:

i. The State acknowledges that the homage of public worship is due to Almighty God. It shall hold His Name in reverence, and shall respect and honour religion.

ii. The State recognises the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens.

iii. The State also recognises the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland, as well as the Jewish Congregations and other religious denominations existing in Ireland at the date of the coming into operation of this Constitution.

Fa'mon de Valera himself prepared the first draft of the Constitution, and Mr. O'Higgins wonders, "What was his intention in including these provisions?" An inquiry to Mr. de Valera elicited the reply "that no new offence had been created by article 40.6.1.i; that the offence of blasphemy is one at common law, and that it is impossible to attribute article 40.6.1.i to any particular source". The use of two languages (with Irish to prevail should there be a conflict between them) complicates matters, but Mr. de Valera originally drafted the Constitution in English, so "blasphemous" presumably has to be interpreted in the

light of the legal meaning at the time of the drafting.

The English Blasphemy Act of 1697, which made it a criminal offence for anyone who had been educated in or at any time made profession of the Christian religion to assert or maintain that there are more gods than one or deny the Christian religion to be true, or the Holy Scriptures to be of divine authority, never applied in Ireland. And there were several other differences between English and Irish law.

The earliest recorded blasphemy prosecution in the common law courts of Ireland was that of Thomas Emlyn, a Unitarian minister, in 1703, for writing and publishing *A Humble Inquiry into the Scripture Account of Jesus Christ*, in which he asserted that Jesus Christ was not equal to God the Father. He was found guilty, fined £1,000, received a year's imprisonment and was obliged to find security for good behaviour for life. It should be emphasised that Emlyn had not spoken irreverently of Christ: as the law was then, it was blasphemy to deny the divinity of Christ. In 1817, when Roger O'Connor, father of the Chartist Feargus O'Connor, was asked in cross-examination whether he believed "in our Saviour", he inquired of the court: "Am I subject to any pains or penalties if I say I do not?" The court assured him "not by our law", so O'Connor testified that he believed in the Old Testament only as an historical record and in the New Testament only as relating to a human reformer. Mr. Justice Daly, "probably [says Mr. O'Higgins] the most liberally minded man on the Irish Bench at the time", assured him again:

"I have taken down your answer, and I think it fair to tell you that it does not subject you to any penalties in these courts."

But, in the course of his summing-up, the Judge added:

"... I trust I am not superstitious—Mr. O'Connor will probably think me so, when I say that a man who denies the authenticity of the Holy Scriptures, both old and new, who believes that the Saviour of this world who came to redeem mankind, and hold out the strongest motives and sanctions to moral duty, was a dupe or an impostor, does not only stand disparaged in his testimony, but should be considered as not sworn at all".

Mr. O'Higgins then deals with several cases of "blasphemously burning the Bible", the particular version burnt being immaterial. Cardinal Wiseman, it may be noted, commenting on one such case in an anonymous article in 1856, considered it undesirable that all versions of the Bible should be regarded as being equally deserving of legal protection, and ridiculous that a Redemptorist Father should be prosecuted for blasphemy "when prosecutions might more suitably have been initiated by the Crown against secularist propaganda in England". (Incidentally, the Father was rightly found not guilty, being unaware that a Bible had been burnt among the "evil" literature.

However, Mr. O'Higgins concludes from the Irish cases satisfactorily reported that "at the beginning of this century the offence of blasphemy might be committed rather because of the matter than the manner of what was said or done".

The outstanding problem is whether the judgement of the House of Lords in *Bowman v. Secular Society* had the effect of altering the Irish law of blasphemy. Their lordships were unanimous in accepting Lord Coleridge C.J.'s dictum in *R. v. Ramsey and Foote* that, if the decencies of controversy are observed, even the fundamentals of religion may be attacked without the author of such attacks being guilty of blasphemy.

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Just as all true Christians believe in a literal Ascension of Jesus (and wild horses would not budge them from that belief) so every Spiritualist, like his grandad before him, believes in the materialisation of a spirit called Katie King by medium Florence Cook, and vouched for by the eminent scientist, Sir William Crookes, an event which took place last century. In fact, Sir William even kissed the spirit while she was on his knee, and he seems to have liked it. Every historian of Spiritualism recounts the beautiful incident as one of the greatest proofs and triumphs in the history of Spiritualism.

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Yet—alas!—"Psychic News" now tells us that a psychical researcher, Mr. Trevor Hall, has definite proof that "both Crookes and his medium were frauds", and he is writing a book to be published next month which will "rock the Spiritualist world". At the same time it will be "a denigration of a great scientist". The story has, of course, been riddled by anti-Spiritualists ever since Sir William first published his "experiences", but no convinced Spiritualist has ever been shaken in the least by this, so that Mr. Hall's book will in all probability be thoroughly boycotted. The bigger the lie in both Christianity and Spiritualism, the more it will be believed in by devout believers.

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Whether a born "dowser" really can tell with a forked twig if some piece of land has water under it, may be a matter of opinion—or doubt; but the *Daily Mail* (June 2nd) gave positive proof from a dowser that some pictures recently stolen from an art gallery were now in Cuba, as was also Goya's famous portrait of Wellington. Unfortunately, by the time this edition of the paper was being sold, the pictures were recovered from a underground luggage locker in London. Which only goes to show . . .!

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The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners will certainly not thank the Bishop of Bradford for what some of us might call, "blowing the gaff". At Luton the other day, the Bishop said, "I don't remember a time when the Church of England wasn't asking for money; when it wasn't bitterly complaining that it hadn't got enough money. It has been going round with a hat for years". The Bishop can rest assured that it will continue to go round with the hat without a break in spite of the Commissioners banking the fine, fat profits made every year through wise investments of Church funds and property, which are mostly in the realm of millions of pounds. As for the Christians who constantly give for the Lord's sake, they will always continue giving. Has anybody ever heard of a bishop starving?

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Another Bishop—of Derby this time—told clergymen at a meeting a short while ago to turn on the radio at 6.50 in the morning and listen to the "unconscious mannerisms and at times the rather condescending tone of many religious speakers" in "Lift Up Your Hearts". Then listen, he said, to "the clear plain matter-of-fact tone of the weather report and the news". But this is manifestly unfair. How are you going to impress anybody with true religion unless you speak in that reverent, parsonic voice which men of God always use when in touch with the Lord? Any parson who preached like a weather report would be sacked on the spot—even by the Bishop of Derby.

At last the Church—or Churches—are going to do something about the blatant way in which Easter is fixed through the position of the Sun in the sky, and not because Jesus was crucified on a fixed date. The Vatican wants to make it April 8th, and wants to fix the birth of Jesus on a Sunday. It is all rather an unhappy mix-up. The truth is that nobody knows the date of either the birth or the death of "our Lord". In fact, all the dates given in the margins of our Bible were invented. And April 8th for Easter is also an invention.

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Whatever may be said of Eichmann, the unashamed murderer of millions of Jews, we at least have his public confession: "I have been believing in God all my life, and I die a believer in God".

BLASPHEMY IN IRISH LAW

(Concluded from page 187)

In fact, says Mr. O'Higgins, "the Supreme Court in Ireland has never shown the slightest evidence of any tendency to adopt such a restrictive approach". Moreover, he regards it as "quite a tenable argument" that the Constitution of the Irish Republic "has had the effect of altering the pre-existing law, including its modification in the light of *Bowman's case*".

The *Bowman* case is also, as Secularists well know, "the authority for the principle that public policy does not require the courts to refuse to assist the subversion of Christianity by upholding the gift to a secular society as valid". But Irish public policy today is grounded in the Constitution.

It seems, therefore, that as regards gifts to secular societies and bodies conducting anti-religious or irreligious activities, it is possible that Irish courts would refuse to enforce them on the grounds of public policy, in particular art. 44.1 of the Constitution.

And this might conceivably affect the National Secular Society, which has quite a number of members in Eire.

What other legal effects might this article have? It would seem capable, Mr. O'Higgins thinks, "of rendering unenforceable, or perhaps simply non-charitable, gifts for the purposes of religions other than those specifically named or which existed in Ireland on December 29th, 1937". It might even "deny to parents who belong to a non-recognised religion the right to educate their children in that particular religion". And this is not an unreal problem, because "there are now in Ireland refugees from Asia, whose religion can hardly be said to have existed in Ireland in 1937".

To return to blasphemy, however, Mr. O'Higgins concludes that there is considerable doubt as to the meaning of "blasphemous" as used in the Irish Constitution and in modern Irish legislation. "The Constitution is open to a retrogressive interpretation which would discard the progress which has been made in the legal toleration of sincere religious dissent and rational disbelief; the high-water mark of which is to be seen in *Bowman's case*. Not only may the Constitution be interpreted in a way unfavourable to the non-believer, but even to members of religions other than those which are recognised by the Constitution". Such uncertainty is, as he says, regrettable, and he recalls Walter Bagehot's remark that: "No one knows what blasphemy or sedition is, but all know that they are vague words which can be fitted to any meaning that shall please the ruling powers".

ABORTION LAW REFORM ASSOCIATION aims at saving women and children from injury, disease and often death through the unprofessional operation. Local branches need your help and money in struggle for new legislation. Please apply for membership to Chairman, Col. J. Campbell, 17 Meadway, N.W.11.

THE FREETHINKER

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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 Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m. MESSRS. I. 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. (Platt Fields), Sunday afternoons. (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday evenings.

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, June 17th, 6.45 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY, "God, Free Will and Immortality".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1.) Sunday, June 17th, 11 a.m.: H. L. BEALES, M.A., "The Decay of the Middle Class".

Tyneside Humanist Society (100 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, 1), Wednesday, June 20th, 7.30 p.m.: ROY CAIRNCROSS, "J. M. Robertson, Rationalist".

Notes and News

ON MAY 25TH, we referred to an article in the April issue of the AMERICAN magazine *Progressive World* by an ex-Roman Catholic priest, "Thomas Monahan". In its May issue, *Progressive World* printed another article under Mr. Monahan's real name, William Moore, and we are pleased to reprint it on page 190.

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"PERHAPS THE MOST obvious single scandal in India," wrote Paul Johnson (*New Statesman*, 1/6/62), "is the extraordinary position, a curious combination of privilege and misery, enjoyed by cattle". Most of them "wander about the cities and countryside, stealing crops and foods from stalls, and breaking dykes. Many are starving. Because of the ban on slaughter, it is virtually impossible to improve the quality of herds . . . In fact, in India, cattle, instead of adding to available food supplies, compete for them with human beings". The attitude to cattle, said Mr. Johnson, is a symbol of "the Indian government's extraordinary reluctance to take drastic measures to modify the socio-religious structure". And he found Hinduism in "almost all its manifestations", "evil and backward-looking . . . reinforced by the operation of a caste system which the legal ban on caste victimisation has done little to destroy".

"BUT IN cataloguing the failures of India's planning system", Mr. Johnson went on, "we must always remember that, with a few minor exceptions, they spring from a single source; an absolute refusal to use compulsion. And compulsion on a massive scale would be needed to transform India's socio-religious structure, which is by far the most deeply-rooted in the world". The Indian government "not only operates a democracy but also (and this is a much more important thing) believes in it".

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IN A LETTER which we printed on February 9th, L. Tukums of Canada referred to the possibility of a USA postage stamp commemorating Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore in response to numerous communications received by the Stamp Advisory Committee. Mr. Tukums suggested that American readers should approach the Committee with a suggestion for a Robert Ingersoll memorial stamp. Richard Stern of New Jersey accordingly wrote to the American Post Office Department, Division of Philately and was informed: "While we have received proposals for a special stamp in honor of the late James Cardinal Gibbons, our Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee has not recommended its issuance. As you know, it has been the practice of the Department to refrain from issuing stamps of a direct religious nature. Your suggestion that a stamp be issued in honor of Colonel Robert Ingersoll has been noted and will be placed on file for consideration by our Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee in formulating future stamp programs". The letter was signed by Virginia Brizendine, Administrative Assistant in the Division of Philately.

★

CONFIRMATION THAT—as F. A. Ridley says—the impulse towards Christian unity does not stem from any celestial source but from the fear of atheism, came in an article on the Archbishop of Canterbury in the *Sunday Pictorial* (20/5/62). Dr. Ramsey, wrote Douglas Howell, "has sought closer ties with the former enemy—the Church of Rome. He believes in a Common Market of Churches to fight their real enemy in the Twentieth Century—materialism".

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FERNANDO CASTILLO, the Spanish poet "Marcos Ana", suffered twenty-three years' imprisonment at the hands of Franco. Now free at the age of 41, he was asked by the *Daily Herald* (30/5/62) how a man holds himself together through such a time; was it religious faith? "It is hard to say", Castillo replied. "I do not believe in God. I can only say that a man must try to be true to himself". The Spanish Ex-Servicemen's Association held a meeting in the Mahatma Gandhi Hall, London, on Sunday, June 3rd, in honour of the poet, at which he expressed his solidarity with the thousands who still remain in Franco's prisons.

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SINCE THE WAR there has been "a grave lowering in moral standards", declared the Roman Catholic Hierarchy of England and Wales, in a statement issued on May 31st. There followed the usual condemnation of divorce, premarital relations, sexy films and the like. "Premarital relations are often condoned and there is an alarming rise in the illegitimate birth rate. Almost every day we read of crimes of violence and robbery" (*The Guardian*, 31/5/62). A deplorable picture! Perhaps now the Hierarchy will explain why Roman Catholic illegitimacy and crime rates are so high.

Now I am a Man Again

By WILLIAM MOORE

AFTER TWENTY-THREE years as a Dominican monk and seventeen as an ordained priest I have returned to the world and to life once again. I feel a special obligation to the *Progressive World* magazine and to its editor, Hugh Robert Orr, for this development—hence this article. It is a sort of thank-you card to the writers whose contributions in that magazine have helped to guide my steps.

My first reaction on leaving the Church is that for so many years I have been an utter fool. So hideous do I now regard not only Christian orthodoxy but all supernatural faiths. I find it hard to believe I blindly played a part in it so many years. I also feel a deep and bitter resentment against the Church and its system for having destroyed the best part of my life. Here I am, a man of forty-five years, without funds or profession, forced by conscience to make a new life for myself. However, I am the happiest of men and am in good health. I am grateful that I awoke before all my remaining years were lost.

I would like to pay special tribute to Harry Barnes's *Twilight of Christianity*, which banished all lingering doubts after I had left the order. I don't see how any intelligent person can believe in supernatural religion after reading this penetrating and devastating analysis of religious belief. It amazes me that men such as Bishop Pike and theologian Niebuhr, who show such depth of thinking, can still believe according to any traditional faith. The conviction grows, as one reads Barnes, that religion is one of the principal evils of society, holding back the reforms needed if we are to escape the nuclear hell that seems inevitably to be descending upon us. Our technological advance has no outstripped our application of scientific principles to our social institutions that one despairs of time to catch up. Religion is a roadblock here, teaching such things as guilt, immortality of the soul and free will and preventing, accordingly, the changes that are necessary.

One point not sufficiently emphasised is the fact that the very nature of his vocation can destroy the clergyman as a man. He can become a parasite, living off the sweat and labour of his parishioners. He doesn't have to face the daily struggle to make a living. He tailors his sermons to suit the convictions of his audience, thus destroying any convictions of his own that he may have. In most Catholic churches it isn't necessary to worry about the Sunday sermon. The people have become accustomed to not hearing anything worthwhile, and the emphasis is on the august mystery of the Mass. In the majority of Catholic parishes the laity rarely hear any word that has relevance to the problems of the world in which they live. There are many priests who work extraordinarily hard, but the temptation is too easy for many others to float through the week, perfunctorily hearing some confessions and attending a few meetings. Having no family to support, the average priest is well off financially and the pocketbook is fattened by Mass stipends from little old ladies seeking release of some friend from the fires of purgatory.

A national magazine ran a story recently about the heroic work of a parish priest in ministering to would-be suicides. The average priest would have to laugh, knowing that most pastors would never tolerate such an assistant who would be out all the time thus leaving the pastor to answer rectory calls and to take care of the less dramatic business of the parish. It is the system that deadens. I know of some priests who have done little else for years

but say a half-hour-long morning Mass. These men entered the seminary with the best of intentions but the conditions of their environment were too much for them and they deteriorated as men.

Each year thousands of innocent boys and girls are caught up in the romantic adventure that is the religious life. They swear away for life their most precious natural gifts, freedom, the right to a mate and to own property. They little realise that they are becoming tools of a power-mad hierarchy who will have little time or consideration for them when their inhuman sacrifice reacts as nature dictates. They don't realise that if there were a god and he had any brains he couldn't possibly wish to see people forswearing their most natural gifts to him. They are unaware that the reason why celibacy was forced on the clergy was to prevent their having any legitimate sons to inherit the clergy benefices of their ecclesiastical and natural fathers. Nor do they reflect upon the fact that by their vows they have become a cheap labour force for the Catholic school system, the hierarchy's *power base*. As far as supernatural merit is concerned there is much more, obviously, in the busy hands of the mother. As a matter of fact, relieving as it does the religious of family responsibility, the tendency, in many cases, is to make one selfish and lazy.

There is no more inhuman institution than the Church in its treatment of those who fail their vows. Laymen can get a dispensation, but the Church excommunicates the priest who leaves and marries. Catholics regard this as the worst of sacrileges. What they don't reflect on is that married men are ordained in the Oriental rites. The fact is that the Church simply had to allow a married clergy in the Balkans and the Near East or face elimination. She would do the same in the West tomorrow if she had to. In the meantime, priests who simply have to leave because of difficulty with the vows are shunned as the worst sinners.

One can remain in the religious state and be fairly happy if one is engaged in some absorbing work, such as education. What is forgotten is that it is the *nature* of the work that makes the religious subject happy, not the life. The latter soon grows onerous as one repeats over and over again the words of that great, chaste soul, David, invoking the Lord's help in persecuting his enemies and crushing their heads. For many religious the life becomes most boring and lonely—for the sisters, especially, as they are strictly confined to the convent and are denied the normal pleasures and friendships that make life interesting. They go from cell to chapel to classroom to cell, year after year. There is one salvation: a person can survive if he is left free to explore the truth, for the highest pleasure of man is found in the exercise of the mind. But it is here that the Church exercises its greatest tyranny, strictly forbidding all reading that would jeopardise one's faith. But that is how I escaped. I simply disregarded this law, and soon my eyes were opened. I must pay special tribute to Thomas Paine's, *The Age of Reason*, and to the writings of the immortal Robert Ingersoll. These are the books that our youngsters in school should be reading, but Christian clergymen denounce these great men, and their works are largely unread. It will forever be to America's shame that she allowed her greatest hero, Paine, to die in poverty and obscurity due to the pious persecution of the Churches.

It is reading such men as Paine and Ingersoll that the Christian for the first time realises the absurdities he has embraced as coming straight from the Lord's mouth. That is really the trouble, the average Christian simply doesn't reflect on the ridiculous propositions he is forced to accept. He is unaware that the whole Christian myth originated in illiterate, savage minds. The intelligent, educated man simply can't accept such teachings as that the poor, old Devil has been boiling in a pot of flame for some two billion years or that millions of unfortunate humans today are destined to join him for two billion more. One simply can't call God merciful and just, and at the same time believe that he would deliberately create millions of people who are predestined never to enter heaven and are therefore consigned for billions of years to hideous torment. One could go on for hours pointing out the savage and obscene nature of much of the Bible and Christian doctrine. The fact is that modern science, particularly astronomy, has so demolished supernatural religion of all kinds that educated people today who still accept it are living a lie upon which they have not given sufficient reflection.

Not only must we reject supernatural religion, we must seek to destroy it. This may sound rather harsh but one should always remember that religion is still destroying thousands of lives, as it almost did my own. Religion is built on fear and superstition and ignorance. I recall a

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little girl who couldn't sleep nights for fear of hell. Religion blesses ignorance and such idiotic movements as the Christian anti-communist crusade. It teaches man that he is essentially bad, whereas we must build a world based on the conviction that man is potentially good and is capable of unlimited fulfilment.

The trouble with the average atheist is that he is too tolerant of religious superstition. Naturally in fighting religion we must do so under the principles of freedom guaranteed to all by our Constitution and its amendments. But that doesn't mean that we have to keep silent. We must preach the truth and challenge error at every opportunity. The secularist should feel little compunction in the matter, knowing, as he does, that religious forces are constantly suppressing the legitimate right of the atheist to speak.

I am a man again. I don't want, any longer, to be god. I just want to develop to the fullest the natural powers that nature gave me. I sorrow at the naive youngsters who are just starting the career that I embraced twenty-three years ago, and wish that I could advise them. If the reader knows any young men who are contemplating entering the priesthood as a vocation, let him contact me through the Editor of this magazine and I will write them, telling them of my experience. If I can prevent just one from throwing away his life, as I did so much of mine, I will feel my life hasn't been entirely in vain.

The Ageing Faith

By DAVID SILLOC

SO OFTEN the conflict between East and West is represented as a conflict between ideologies, Christian and non-Christian. Whether this conflict will be resolved by compromise, by ideological conquest, physical conquest, or by a combination of the two, is debatable. Certainly, ideological strength is a powerful ally of physical strength. It is thus worthwhile to study the state of Western ideology, for in this way we can begin to estimate our chance of survival in the face of formidable opposition.

It is maintained by many that Christianity is the foundation and framework of Western ideology. Britain is considered one of the great long-established strongholds of Christianity where most of the main sects exist and continue to affect social and religious development. Yet although over half the British population has been baptised less than one tenth is churchgoing; which prompts the question "How strong are the strongholds?"

It appears that, in spite of alleged revivals, the power of Christianity is diminishing fast. True, Christianity has survived, in some form or other, for nearly 2,000 years. True, it still has a great influence on our Western civilised society. But if we study the nature of this influence we can recognise the weaknesses which could bring about its future effacement.

More than half the population of the British Isles has been baptised. Why? As likely as not the parents of the majority have been conquered by the fear inculcated by traditional thought that God will deny admission to the Kingdom of Heaven to those who have not been baptised in the Christian faith. Most parents try to obtain the best for their children, particularly when it does not cause them much trouble or expense. With half an hour's church attendance they believe they can pay, in one lump sum, the whole premium on an everlasting life assurance policy. And there it ends. Less than one fifth of these "Christ-

ians" attend church thereafter with any degree of regularity. After all, they say, what is to be gained by attending ordinary church services? They do not guarantee you an extra helping of heavenly caviar, so why bother? You might just as well spend your time digging the garden and cutting down the grocery bill or plastering a few more bricks to help pay for that holiday at Blackpool. It's only worth your while going to church when you or your family are going to get something out of it.

And there is the core of the whole matter. Most people are interested in Christianity for what it gives them and many go in for baptism because of the life assurance angle. But it is likely that in time more and more people will arrive at a rational viewpoint and see that they acquire grace and the right of admission to this ubiquitous God's nebulous Kingdom of Heaven at birth and they will retain this right unless they, through anti-human behaviour of their own, forfeit it. They will see that no "merciful, loving God" with any sense, and presumably this omnipotent being has some sense, is going to grant the opportunity of admission to a child whose parents have handed their offspring over to the spiritual fear-inspirers for Christian initiation, yet deny this same opportunity to another human being who dies at infancy unadorned with churchly grace simply because his or her parents were too heretical or merely negligent to have their child cleansed. And as the light gradually dawns so will the number of members affiliated to the Christian Trade Union gradually decrease.

The claim is repeatedly made that any religion which can survive the innumerable onslaughts for as long as Christianity has done is bound to survive to the end of time. What these claimants conveniently forget is that Christianity has for centuries had a cherubic ally—mental infancy. However, the civilisation which it has helped to build is

beginning to afford large-scale liberal education of a kind which generates genuine enlightenment. And this enlightenment reveals the senselessness of many hitherto unconditionally accepted fears.

Christianity started with Christ. But since Christ has departed, materially at any rate, from this world, Christianity has split and changed, rejoined and changed, aged and changed. Not only has the wording of tenets changed, the doctrine content has changed also. A considerable number of practising Christians denounce certain points of former Christian dogma as profoundly unreasonable. Many changes of doctrine have been necessitated by the strong demand of reason and there can be little doubt that as the force of reason grows more changes of dogma will become necessary if the small number of believers is not to diminish even further. Christianity may well change to the extent that it becomes a quite different company retaining of its past little more than its former name for the purpose of keeping face and a few old customers.

The Christian trumpeters incessantly sound the blaring point that many people acknowledged as mentally-sound accept Christianity and do so because it appeals to reason. Regrettably the trumpeters strike a somewhat flat note. Those allegedly mentally-sound people may be mentally-sound indeed, but many of them accept Christianity because it is still socially convenient to do so, whilst others accept as a beautiful reality something which their mentally-sound calculating machine designates a beautiful fantasy. Self-delusion comes easily to those who seek it.

CORRESPONDENCE

GEORGE ORWELL

You seem to score a point when you express horror at my condemnation of Orwell's *Animal Farm* and (later) *1984* although I hadn't read either. Really, I didn't need to! Both got a good press and constant boost in the most reactionary circles. I ceased to admire Orwell when I reflected that he had never to my knowledge fired his satirical salvos at the real target, Rome, the age-old HQ of brain-washing and consequent mental servitude against which the National Secular Society had, and is still battling without help from these same sources which boosted Orwell. It paid well to attack Communist Russia. That was always a good card to play since 1917. With a single variation one could say with Russell Lowell:—"I do believe in Freedom's cause as far away as—Moscow is"! The fiction here is that there is more freedom in Britain because it is Democratic, than there is in Soviet Russia. Facts against that: Very few newsagents will stock THE FREETHINKER. Through all my years of buying it in various places, it has always been hidden under the counter. I have read Avro Manhattan's books and others dealing with the same matter and have never yet seen them *openly* on sale or reviewed in our "free press—THE FREETHINKER is an exception. Generations of people have been educated *into not wanting* to read them. I speak from experience. Stalin's government *openly* forbade Russians from reading anything critical of his regime. The Christian Governments here had a better way and got away and are still getting away with intellectual murder! Orwell could have tackled that question. He didn't. So he chose the *popular* target. Genuine Freethinkers have a name for that! CHARLES DORAN.

SINKING HEART

Every week I await THE FREETHINKER with a sinking heart and too often with reason.

Here you have a religion disgusting in its observances, contemptible in its utterances, dishonest in its origins and the essence of hypocrisy in its practice. Almost daily it exposes itself to ridicule culminating in a Coventry Christ wearing a Victorian maiden's pinafore coupled with the statement that this extravagant stunt is preferable to homes or hospitals (am I right? It seems incredible).

The blessing of motorcycles, though not on the same scale, was another opportunity missed. Could not some intelligent person have rolled up impromptu with a pocket radio to ensure better reception? A wander plug could have provided a new miracle on the spot!

And now, June 1st, we have this rubbish headed "As Others

See Us", so garbled (vide "education" *et seq*) that it is hard to identify the speakers, in which McCall relies on antiquated philosophical fog, treats his opponent's statements with undeserved respect and, by your account, leaves him with the last word: yet Pillar by the same account unmasked his spiked batteries at the outset and was not molested.

What is the position regarding blasphemy today: can truth still be penalised while Coventry and Shergold are accepted? Please stop scratching your initials on the gargoyles and get to work on the rotten foundations: that will be good, clean and fun!

R. FLEMMING

BOOKS WANTED

Can anyone suggest where I may possibly secure copies of *Eight Months at Rome during the Vatican Council* by "Pomponio Leto" (Francesco Nobili-Vitelleschi), English edition published by John Murray and/or *New View of Society* by Robert Owen, Published in 1813.—Thanking you, IRA D. CARDIFF (709 N. First Avenue, Yakima, Washington, USA).

OBITUARY

Beryl Cottingham, who died on May 28th at the age of 65, was the widow of H. W. Cottingham, Honorary Secretary of the Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society, 25 years ago. Mrs. Cottingham was, like her husband, a grand worker for the Society, until stricken with Parkinson's Disease eight years ago. The funeral took place at Lodge Hill Cemetery, Birmingham on June 1st, and the Birmingham Branch expresses its deepest sympathy to Mrs. Cottingham's sons, Jack and Billy. C.H.S.

PAPERBACKS

The Face of the Earth by G. H. Dury, 6s. plus 6d. postage.
Freud and the Post-Freudians by J. A. C. Brown, 4s. plus 6d. postage.
The Flame Trees of Thika by Elspeth Huxley, 5s. plus 6d. postage.
Childhood and Adolescence, by J. A. Hadfield, 5s. plus 6d. postage.
The Normal Child by C. W. Valentine, 4s. plus 5d. postage.
The Affluent Society by J. K. Galbraith, 5s. plus 6d. postage.
The Uses of Literacy by Richard Hoggart, 5s. plus 6d. postage.
Education for Tomorrow by John Vaizey, 2s. 6d. plus 4d. postage.
Communications by Raymond Williams, 3s. 6d. plus 4d. postage.

FREEDOM'S FOE: THE VATICAN. By Adrian Pigott. Illustrated. Price 3/-; postage 6d.

A SHORT HISTORY OF SEX WORSHIP. By H. Cutner. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK (11th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 5/-; postage 8d.

AGE OF REASON. Thomas Paine's masterpiece with 40-pages introduction by Chapman Cohen. Cloth 5/-; postage 7d.

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MATERIALISM RESTATED (Third edition). By Chapman Cohen. Price 5/6; postage 7d.

MEN WITHOUT GODS. By Hector Hawton. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE IDEA OF GOD. By Grant Allen. Price 3/6; postage 8d.

THE CULTURE OF THE ABDOMEN. By F. A. Hornibrook. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

THE LIFE OF JESUS. By Ernest Renan. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

THE ORIGINS OF RELIGION. By Lord Raglan. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

JESUS, MYTH OR HISTORY? By Archibald Robertson. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

A LETTER TO ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIESTS. By Emmett McLoughlin. 2/6 per doz. (incl. postage).

POPE JOHN AND THE COLD WAR. By F. A. Ridley. Price 5/-; postage 4d.