

The Freethinker

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ON JULY 1ST, *The Sunday Times* published an informative article on the preparations being made in Rome for the Ecumenical Council due to meet on October 11th. It is now common knowledge that the primary, or at least, the most publicised aim of this General Ecumenical Council of the Universal (Catholic) Church is to bring about a complete, or at least a widespread measure of reunion of the Christian Churches under the leadership of Rome.

As we have suggested on a prior occasion, this basic aim may be described in current political language as the speedy creation of an ecclesiastical Popular Front, led by the Vatican, with the express aim of checking and of finally eradicating the present spectacular advance of those anti-clerical and irreligious philosophies that may here be broadly designated as anti-clericalism.

Pope John and his Predecessors

It is already clear from his recorded actions that Pope John XXIII, may be generally described as a liberal ecclesiastical and as a reforming pope, at least when compared with his immediate predecessors, Pius XI and Pius XII. For it represents an important fact and one at that which too many critics of the Church of Rome are apt to overlook, that the Roman Catholic Church is not, and probably never has been, the entirely monolithic ecclesiastical structure of fervid Protestant (and sometimes freethinking) imagination. As the American Protestant (ex-Catholic) writer, Lehmann so ably demonstrated, there have always been two parties in the Church of Rome; one might term them respectively, the conservative and liberal wings of the Church, which stand also respectively for rival policies of coercion or compromise in connection with the non-Catholic world. This internal division was very evident even as far back as the Reformation, when the Jesuit-led advocates of a fight to a finish policy *vis-a-vis* the Protestant Reformation ultimately prevailed over the advocates of compromise (led by the English Cardinal Reginald Pole) with dire results, that were subsequently written in blood and fire all over the Europe of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48). In more recent times such Popes as Leo XIII and Benedict XV may be ranked amongst the more liberal advocates of compromise and conciliation, whereas Pope John's immediate predecessors, Pius XI and Pius XII were (like the earlier Pius IX and X) die-hard adversaries of any form of compromise and change. Pope John, it is clear, has reverted to the more liberal tradition and as *The Sunday Times* indicates in its most interesting article by John Raymond, the forthcoming Council is presently dominated by the liberal wing of the Church: its operative letter is "C": charity, conciliation, compromise. "Reunion with our separated brethren" is now the watchword, the order of the day. The apparently cordial reception given by Pope John to Protestant (including Anglican and Calvinist Presbyterian) leaders, represents the keynote of Rome's present policy, and as I have suggested before, the effective causes of this change of heart and tone are to

be sought in other fields than that of theology pure and simple. To paraphrase in an appropriate fashion the famous opening sentence of *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848: "A Spectre is haunting Rome; the Spectre of Atheism".

The Council and Reunion

Reunion is then to be the watchword of this second Vatican Council, as Papal Infallibility was the keynote of the first (1869-70). As Mr. Raymond notes, these dissimilar basic aims impart a dissimilar atmosphere to these two famous ecclesiastical gatherings. In the Rome of Pius IX, liberalism was (literally) anathema—an ecclesiastical swear word.

Today, we learn that a recently published book entitled *The Council and Reunion*, which advocates markedly liberal sentiments, has caused a sensation in Rome, along with criticism from clerical conservatives. The author, a Swiss priest named Dr. Kung, even makes the daring proposal that the Council's proceedings should begin with a frank admission by Pope John and his two thousand odd bishops assembled there, that they also needed Divine forgiveness for their part in causing "the sin of schism": the divisions of Christendom in bygone ages. In the light of history one might say that this was self-evident. For example, what about Papal Indulgencies in 1517? But it is certainly a bold suggestion for a Catholic priest to make to his "Infallible" Pope. Dr. Kung makes the equally daring suggestion to abolish *The Index of Prohibited Books*. Despite such bold suggestions, Dr. Kung's book has received the approbation of cardinals, not to mention that of our own Anglican ex-Primate, Dr. Fisher, who declared that he had never read such a book in his life.

Rome and the Christian Churches

Evidently the motto of the Council is to be "Unity"; at present its most important committee is its *Secretariat for Christian Unity* presided over by a German Jesuit Cardinal Bea (since when have the Jesuits become liberals?) who is to pay a courtesy call on the present Archbishop of Canterbury in August. What will come out of all this world-wide publicity and intensive preparation remains to be seen. But even the optimistic writer in *The Sunday Times*, has to admit that "no one believes that the theological differences that separate the Churches can be settled in an afternoon of tolerance round a conference table". And one may add, if the difficulties which arose in past Ages of Faith are formidable, what about the vastly more formidable difficulties inherent in this age of un-faith, of world-wide scepticism, of Communism-cum-technology that has reduced the whole medieval world to the status of a barbaric dream of primitive man? Without delving into these ultimate questions, we must express the opinion that the "reunion of Christendom" is very definitely a long term objective; that if realised at all, it will only be in the cause of a fairly lengthy period of time. Not in Pope John's time! After all, the robust-looking old gentleman is already 80, and even Catholic theology does not in-

— VIEWS and OPINIONS — *Rome and Christian Reunion* — By F. A. RIDLEY —

clude an indefinite longevity amongst the perquisites of Papal Infallibility! But if reunion is not to be effected in 1962, what is likely to emerge from the Council of Rome? Is it merely a case of much ado about nothing?

I do not think so. It must never be forgotten that the Roman Catholic Church is monolithic at least in the fundamental respect that her final aim never varies. It is, and it always remains, *world power*. To that final aim, all parties in the Church (and it goes without saying, all Popes, conservative or liberal) subscribe. All that change in the changeless Church are the current conceptions of Papal strategy and tactics in relation to the current non-Catholic world. This is evident today in the preparations for the Council of Rome: e.g. where Pius XII used the big stick, John XXIII prefers the less obvious tactics of permeation. We seem at present to be confronted with one of those oblique turning movements, towards which clerical strategy has so often indicated such a marked partiality.

As I have suggested before, the most probable result of the Council of Rome will be, not any cut and dried scheme of Church Unity, but rather the creation of some kind of Popular Front, a kind of loose alliance aimed primarily at the present major enemies of *all* the Churches, namely Atheism and Materialism; a front discreetly, but no doubt effectively, directed by Rome, which will give it all the benefits of her vast experience over the ages in fighting heresy. The recent establishment of a Chair of Atheism in Rome is, no doubt, in preparation for such an expert role.

However, the above strategy presupposes an indefinite continuation of the present regime of compromise initiated by Pope John. But the fundamentalist Catholic Party for so long in power at Rome under Pius XII is still there. At the last Papal election its candidate is stated to have been the famous Cardinal Ottaviani, who has publicly boasted that the Church had "One scale for Truth; another for error". The basic principles of Catholic fundamentalism, in particular relation to religious toleration in Franco Spain, were put with refreshing frankness by a recent correspondent in *The Catholic Herald*, (15/6/62). The name of the writer is Edward Knowles, and we quote *verbatim*: "Error has no rights, and therefore the government of every predominantly Catholic country has the duty to (1) allow non-Catholic sects to hold their services only under the most stringent conditions, (2) prevent absolutely any proselytising on their part and (3) in the interest of their immortal souls apply penal sanctions to renegade Catholics to induce them to return to the Faith . . . We pray for and aspire to bring about the conversion of England. Presumably once the process of conversion was so far advanced that Catholics constituted a majority of the population, the government would be under a moral obligation to assimilate the legal position of *English Protestants* to that of the Protestants of Spain today". (my italics F.A.R.)

Here we have the authentic voice of the 16th century; only the fires of Smithfield are lacking. However, we are living in the 20th century and not the 16th. Pope John and his advisers (unlike apparently, his unlamented predecessor, and Mr. Knowles) appear to have enough sense to recognise this fact. For which reason, I must express the opinion that their present clerical "turning strategy" in relation to the other Christian Churches to be brought into full play at the Council of Rome this autumn, is not only much more subtle than is the crude intolerance expressed above, but is also likely to be much more effective and consequently from our point of view, much more dangerous.

Secular Funerals

IN NOTES AND NEWS on June 22nd we referred to a Manchester man and wife being wrongly told by a funeral director that a Christian service was necessary at the cremation of their baby daughter. This has prompted quite a lot of letters, most of which give details of how the expressed wishes of the deceased or next-of-kin were carried out: recitation of poetry, singing of songs, playing of special music, and even draping the coffin with a red flag. And it cannot be too often emphasised that no religious service is necessary either in a crematorium or public cemetery. Indeed, no service at all is necessary: the coffin may be placed in the crematorium chapel or lowered into the grave without a word being spoken or music being played. But it is obviously important to make one's wishes clearly known to the funeral director when the funeral is being arranged. The surprising thing is that, not only are funeral directors sometimes unaware of the legal position, but that crematoria superintendents may be too. Witness the following case.

A man who died two years ago had expressed a wish to be cremated in a certain crematorium without flowers or religious ceremony, and his two sons made these wishes known to the funeral director. He in turn informed the superintendent. But, said the sons afterwards in a letter to the Town Clerk of the Borough concerned:

Your Superintendent made a categorical statement to the Undertaker that he would not allow the cremation unless a parson were present for the committal of the body.

The sons tried to get in touch with the National Secular Society, but were unable to do so, and therefore left the matter until they reached the crematorium, which was some thirty miles or so away.

The superintendent was not there to meet us, but we explained the position to the parson . . . he was most kind and considerate, but he understood that someone had to commit the body . . . we withdrew under protest. After the cremation ceremony the Undertaker tells us he again, at our request, drew the attention of the Superintendent to our protest, and he is alleged to have replied that he did not intend to have the crematorium turned into a factory.

The sons asked for an apology from the superintendent and payment of a sum to the RSPCA equal to the parson's fee.

Eventually they received a letter from the superintendent, containing the following:

Having now ascertained (after consultation with the Corporation's legal officers) that I had not acted wholly within the compass of the authority granted to the Council under the various Burial and Cremation Acts, I wish to express my sincere regret for any inconvenience to which you may have been put as a result of my decision, which was made in the interests of the good conduct of the Crematorium and the reverent and proper disposal of the remains of the dead . . . I did not say (as quoted in your letter) that I "would not allow the cremation unless a parson were present for the committal of the body". I am sorry if this was the impression I gave, but my actual comment was that there should be *some form* of committal. Indeed, in similar cases in the past, I myself have said a few words committing the body to the elements as it passes from the Chapel without any clergyman or relatives being present.

A receipt was enclosed for a donation to the RSPCA. The Secretary of the Cremation Society, while paying tribute to the superintendent's conscientiousness, could not understand where he had "obtained the idea that there must be some form of committal".

The term committal has come to mean the use of some words to be said when the coffin passes from the catafalque into the committal chamber. Many of us must have experience to the contrary. I myself have had occasion to be present in the past

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A Defence of Reason

By COLIN McCALL

How charming is divine philosophy!
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute . . .

PHILOSOPHY is not to everybody's taste, and Milton's "dull fools" will recoil in horror from Brand Blanshard's Carus Lectures to the American Philosophical Association, delivered in 1959 and now issued as *Reason and Analysis* (George Allen and Unwin, 55s.). But for those who share Milton's feelings, the book is a veritable treasure. If the price puts it beyond your range, do not hesitate to apply for it at your library. And bear in mind, when comparing prices, that it contains some 500 pages. Five hundred beautifully reasoned pages, whose merit can't possibly be conveyed in a review, even when based upon one's twenty-five pages of notes.

Professor Blanshard is in the rationalist tradition. He believes that "there is a drive towards reasonableness in human nature, gentle, perhaps, but persistent and universal;" that reason is our most reliable means of understanding the world and ourselves; and that "once the anchor of reason has been cut, one's craft may go anywhere." He instances such dangerous irrationalities as D. H. Lawrence's "religion of the blood" ("What do I care about knowledge? All I want is to answer to my blood, direct, without fribbling intervention of mind or moral, or what not"), but his main concern, as the title indicates is with the philosophy of analysis. His book is, in fact, a criticism of analysis and a defence of reason, the "prime office" of which is "the discovery of necessary connections," and which "in its wider senses has been a cardinal component of western culture since the time of the Greeks."

He doesn't take existentialism (another irrational philosophy) very seriously, but he rightly says that we cannot treat analysis lightly. It is "significant, formidably advocated, and in some respects highly plausible." He is scrupulously fair in his exposition and criticism, making due allowance for the changes of view to which, it seems, analytic philosophers are singularly prone. The difficulty is that "there is no distinctive thesis that the analysts hold in common." Some people have found one in the "verifiability theory of meaning," but "this theory itself means so many different things as to be not a bond of unity but a bone of contention and division." What unites them is rather "a set of tendencies, tastes and aversions." Yet they have accomplished something of a revolution in philosophy.

Is analysis really revolutionary, however? Logical positivism may be regarded as the stem from which the various analytic philosophies branched out. And "Hume anticipated all the positions . . . central to logical positivism." Would "the most widely influential movement in philosophy of the half-century just past" have created such a stir if it had been expressly presented as the views of an eighteenth century thinker? It is an interesting point, though not in itself a criticism. Indeed the famous Vienna Circle neglected Hume (no doubt mainly for language reasons) and it has been left to the English logical positivists to recognise him as their precursor.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, not actually a member of the Circle, but associated with it, and regarded by some as the philosophical genius of our time, brought its influence to Britain when he succeeded G. E. Moore in the Chair of Philosophy at Cambridge. He certainly had a high opinion of himself, writing in the Preface of his *Tractatus*

Logico-Philosophicus, that "the truth of the thoughts communicated here seems to me unassailable and definitive. I am, therefore, of the opinion that the problems have in essentials been finally solved." Professor Blanshard does not agree. And, frankly, it is hard to see what Wittgenstein did to deserve the acclamation he has received. What he called the "fundamental thought" of his book was that the logic of facts, their abstract and formal structure, cannot be represented by anything we say. Philosophical statements are, therefore, nonsense. But as Bertrand Russell has remarked, "the things that have to be said in leading the reader to understand Mr. Wittgenstein's theory are all of them things which that theory itself condemns as meaningless."

Wittgenstein agreed that his theory of language was nonsense, but claimed that it was "important nonsense." "My propositions are elucidatory in this way; he who understands me finally recognises them as senseless when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up on it)." But, Professor Blanshard comments:

if the rungs of the ladder make no sense, how can he climb up on them? Wittgenstein is in a dilemma from which he can hardly escape by a metaphor. If the structures he is talking about cannot be talked about, and all such attempted talk is nonsense, then the book is nonsense, and we should close it and turn to something more profitable. On the other hand, if the book is profitable—and Wittgenstein considered it "unassailable and definitive"—this can only be because it does succeed in saying something about its subject, namely the structure of language and fact. And if it does thus succeed, what better evidence could be offered that the theory is mistaken?

Speculative philosophers of the past, says Professor Blanshard, "have sought to arrive by reasoning at general truths about the world. They assumed that so far as this reasoning was valid, it somehow reflected necessities in the nature of things." He holds this to be so. It is the business of the philosopher, "without prejudicing the outcome, to carry rational understanding as far as he can."

Wittgenstein said that one fact never necessitates another. Professor Blanshard is surely right in maintaining that it often does. Supposing we look at a patch and note that it is red and that it is extended. We can say to the analyst:

"Make your own choice as to what 'this' shall mean. So long as it means the same thing in 'this is red' and 'this is extended,' the first statement will entail the second. And it will do so because the facts reported by the statements are themselves not independent. The fact of x's being red requires, entails, necessitates its also being extended."

The "tiresome obsession with language" is making philosophy trivial, says Professor Blanshard, and he gives examples. Professor E. Nagel has actually stated that the reason why the physical penny cannot have two different lengths at once lies in our use of words; Professor A. J. Ayer, that the assertion that a surface could not be green and red at once "records our determination to call a colour expanse which differs in quality from a neighbouring colour expanse a different part of a given thing." "Philosophical questions are not factual but verbal," said Dr. M. Macdonald; while Professor J. L. Austin commented "Knowing *what a thing is*, is, to an important extent, knowing what the name for it, and the right name for it, is."

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

The late Hannen Swaffer who was in his day known as the Pope of Fleet Street and, though a Socialist, loved to be in the company of "my friend Northcliffe or Beaverbrook", to say nothing of Royalty, appears to be enjoying the same sort of life in "Summerland". Already a message has come from him (so very characteristic of his journalistic days): "As I was saying to St. Paul the other day". *Psychic News* reports that Swaffer "was more vigorous and alive than ever".

★

It appears also that he was shocked to learn—perhaps from Jesus Christ himself! — that "Hell does exist" but, alas, only "as a state of mind for a frustrated journalist like himself". Considering that Swaffer is so very much alive "up there" (or wherever it is) we wonder what is making him feel so "frustrated"? However, we are pleased to learn that he is preparing a story, which will be duly transmitted, giving us full details of what is happening in Summerland. And perhaps we shall find out not only what St. Paul, but also what Shakespeare, Dickens, Michelangelo, Byron, Zola and other notables think about the place.

★

The one melancholy fact about Lourdes these days is that so very few miracles occur—so different from those early days when the Virgin Mary came to meet little Bernadette to give her a message in perfect modern French. Then, miracles followed each other thick and fast. However, the more or less gloomy aspect at Lourdes these days is enlivened now and then by tragic happenings — passing strange from so fully-believing Catholics as the pilgrims.

★

For example, a cutting from a French newspaper reached us the other day giving particulars of the murder of one of the officials on a camping site. It seems that a German pilgrim wanted to pray at the foot of a cross there, but for some unknown reason the official objected, and was promptly shot and killed by the all-Catholic German. When arrested, he protested that all he did was to kill because he was not allowed to pray — "it was" he declared, "quite normal". And no doubt, for a student of Catholic history, "killing" was quite normal.

★

Oh dear, even among Methodists, there is little "unity". Here we have them (or some of them) attacking one of their wealthiest supporters, Lord Rank, who must have donated many thousands of pounds to their cause, all because he has opened a number of Odeon Bingo clubs. Of course, Methodists are notorious for, in the past, fiercely denouncing smoking, drinking, cardplaying, theatres and cinemas as "of the Devil". Now, horror of horrors, here is one of their own elect — with plenty of money — encouraging Bingo!

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However, thank God, when the matter was raised at the Stoke Methodist Conference the other day, 600 Methodist leaders, mindful we are sure that money, even hateful money, talks, "let him off". And no doubt he will be duly elected as "treasurer of the Church's home mission", in spite of the fact that Dr. Donald Soper hoped that, "we shall not involve ourselves in an attitude of acceptance of the theology which lies behind what I consider to be the delinquency of Lord Rank."

★

The Bishop of Llandaff and the BBC got into very hot water at the Church Assembly in Westminster the other

week. According to the *Daily Mail* (July 4th), the Very Rev. J. Waddington was horrified that, in a programme at Bristol called "Why Cathedrals?", the Bishop declared that the cathedral should not have been built, and that "the money should have been used to build a hospital!". The Very Reverend gentleman was "appalled", and actually called the Bishop "an ecclesiastical beatnik". The Bishop considered Mr. Waddington very "rude", and said that his outburst would be ignored. We gladly give points to the Bishop. A hospital is of greater value than a cathedral — and to say so is pure *Secularism*.

SECULAR FUNERALS

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at a cremation where no words whatever were said, according to the expressed wish of the deceased. Moreover there is nothing in the cremation act or regulations which convey the impression that anything has got to be said.

The lesson of this case is, of course, that Secularists should get to know their rights and insist upon them. In the case of funerals in a public cemetery or a crematorium, there is no need for the services of a clergyman, and the funeral director should be told so. Providing always, of course, that there is orderliness, a tribute to the deceased may be spoken by a relative, a friend, or a representative of the National Secular Society or similar body. Or, there may be no service at all.

A DEFENCE OF REASON

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Indeed, the fundamental difference between the standard view of philosophy and the linguistic view is that, while the former is an attempt to gain fuller and clearer knowledge by reflecting on the nature of things, the latter, while at best an attempt to gain such knowledge, concentrates on ridding language of absurdities. This is important, of course, but as Professor Blanshard argues, the only way to detect such absurdities is by reference to the objects thought and spoken of. Human language conforms with the structure of things, not the structure of things with language. The positivists, in fact, have found it impossible to live up to their theory that logic is merely convention. And Professor Blanshard instances the logical law of contradiction as applicable to the world of things. We must accept the law because "nature has said it." "If we hold that a thing cannot at once have a property and not have it, it is because we see that it cannot." The law of contradiction is, then, "at once the statement of a logical requirement and the statement of an ontological truth." To deny the law, anyway, is to say that it is false, rather than true, and that its being false denies its being true. But this is the very thing that is being denied.

We must treat the world as consistent. It is at least subject to the law of non-contradiction. Our means of understanding it is reason. "To think at its best is to find oneself carried down the current of necessity. To choose most responsibly is to see alternative goods with full clearness and to find the greatest of them tipping the beam. This, in a way, is to be determined. But there is nothing mechanical about it. For that is what the rational man means by freedom." That is how Professor Blanshard ends his comprehensive and convincing volume.

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Notes and News

WE OFFER our best wishes for the future happiness of Mr. and Mrs. George Brian Leslie, who were married in the Conway Hall, London, on Saturday, July 7th. Mr. Leslie, a physiologist, is a member of the National Secular Society, and has contributed to THE FREETHINKER. Mrs. Leslie, formerly Miss Susan Anne Mitchell is a teacher. The wedding ceremony was conducted by the General Secretary of the NSS.

THE "brutal truth is", said the *News of the World* (which has always shown some predilection for the *brutal* truth), "that in Britain today the pregnant schoolgirl is no longer a rarity" (1/7/62). In Lichfield diocese, which takes in most of Staffordshire and is "an average place", it seems that there were seven 14-year-old, thirty 15-year-old and thirty-seven 16-year-old unmarried mothers last year, and the paper described the pathetic scene as the young girl waits in a back room while her child is adopted. What is being done to prevent this tragedy? What is the Church doing? According to the report, "Clergy and church workers are stepping up sex instruction to youth clubs". Stepping up something they opposed for years!

"THESE things wouldn't occur if children had more religion in their lives", said the Dean of Lichfield, the Very Rev. —and very naive—W. S. Macpherson. "If only parents would insist on their going to Sunday school it would help a good deal", he added. What the *News of the World* ought to do now is, publish the "brutal facts" of the religion of Lichfield's unmarried schoolgirl mothers. Let the Dean — and readers — see what a small percentage of unbelievers there will be among them if the area is "an average place".

"PIE in the sky is not for me", said Dee Wells in her *Daily Herald* "Looking at Life" column (5/7/62), in which she castigated the Exclusive Brethren for their recent home-wrecking activities. "But like most irreligious people", said Miss Wells, "I have firm beliefs about life on earth. I believe that people are decent, if decently treated. I believe that life, so far as possible, should be pleasant — even sometimes fun". An admirable little expression of Secularism.

THE HOLY OFFICE has issued a warning against the "dangers" in the works of the late Father Teilhard de Chardin, and has "urged all bishops, superiors and rectors of universities and seminaries to defend the minds of students from these dangers in works which present such ambiguities and grave errors as to offend Catholic doctrine" (*The Observer*, 1/7/62). We wholeheartedly agree about the "ambiguities", and we can appreciate the Holy Office's concern over the harmful effects on Roman Catholic students of the palaeontologist's unorthodox works. Our own concern is their harmful effect on non-Catholics due to the blessing they received from Sir Julian Huxley.

TEN-year-old Yossele Schumacher is now back with his parents after being abducted by "religious zealots" (*Daily Express*, 4/7/62). And Sarah Bat David, the woman who took him to Switzerland, France, Belgium, San Francisco and New York, was described as "originally a French-German Catholic turned Protestant and then turned rabid orthodox Jewess with Messianic tendencies". An interesting study in the psychology of conversion, no doubt, but quite a menace to have around.

TAIDUWA SOMARA, assassinator of the Premier of Ceylon, Mr. Bandaranaike in September 1959, affords another example of curious religious conversion. A Buddhist monk when he committed the murder, he was baptised a Christian 24 hours before his execution (*Daily Herald*, 6/7/62).

FROM James Harrington in Sydney comes this appreciation of Professor John Anderson, philosopher at Sydney University for thirty years, who died at the beginning of July. "An atheist and realist, Professor Anderson was quite a character, a fearless debater and opponent of religion. He maintained that only the Atheist can be really moral, as morality conceived as obedience to the authority of sacred books and codes is bogus morality. Our actions towards others must be prompted by genuine concern for their well being as a good. Good, in Andersonian philosophy is a social phenomenon". Mr. Harrington studied under Professor Anderson.

THE Rationalist Press Association and the Ethical Union will be holding a joint Conference this year at Nottingham University from September 7th - 11th. The subject is "Youth in Revolt? the Conflict between the Older and the Younger Generation" and the speakers will be Dr. Ronald Fletcher, Dr. Howard Jones, Mr. D. A. Feasey, and Mr. J. H. Wallis. Members of the National Secular Society are invited to attend at the reduced rate available to RPA and EU members: £8 for the full Conference or £2 per day for a shorter period. Further particulars may be obtained from either the Rationalist Press Association (40 Drury Lane, London, W.C.2.) or the Ethical Union (13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8.)

ON PAGE 231 we print one of Charles Bradlaugh's characteristically clear and convincing "Doubts in Dialogue". It is taken from the *National Reformer* of January 11th, 1885.

Emile Zola—Novelist and Humanist

By H. CUTNER

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ZOLA'S Rougon-Macquart series was immediately followed by *Les Trois Villes*—"The Three Cities"—the first volume of which was *Lourdes*. With the other two, *Rome* and *Paris*, they formed "integral portions of M. Zola's conception," as E. A. Vizetelly notes in the preface to his own translation of *Lourdes*. He adds that they deal with "the three cardinal virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, each of which the author discusses in turn."

In *Lourdes*, Zola "argues that Faith in revealed religion is virtually dead, destroyed by free examination and the teachings of science. In Rome he argues that no Hope can be placed in Christianity as typified by the Roman Catholic Church . . . Finally, in *Paris*, he points out that Charity is powerless to relieve the sufferings of mankind; that all the alms dispensed since the days of Christ are a mere drop of water beside the ocean of human wretchedness . . . with Faith dead, Hope denied, and Charity powerless, he (Zola) points to the eventual collapse of Christianity, the decay of all the superstitions and delusions of the past, and to the advent of a new religion in which Science will play no inconsiderable part."

From all this we can see that, after the exposure of French military incompetence in *La Débâcle*, the attack on religion in *Les Trois Villes* made the Church in France as implacable an enemy of Zola as it was of Voltaire. One of Zola's great ambitions was to be a member of L'Académie Française — like, for example, François Coppée and Anatole France—but *Lourdes* helped kill his chances of receiving this honour. (Zola is increasingly read these days, but who reads Coppée now?) If the Roman Church could not stop the sale of *Lourdes*, at least it could see he was boycotted as far as possible. Certainly it was a terrific exposure of the wonders and miracles of *Lourdes*. So it had a great success with unbelievers but caused an immense controversy with the Church of Rome, prompting a "reply" by Mgr. Ricard which Vizetelly calls a "farrago of nonsense." To deal with such a book as *Lourdes* in an article is just impossible, and the same may be said of *Rome* and *Paris*. The three had immense success everywhere except in Catholic centres, and there, the hatred boiled up against the author. Yet it was even then nothing like what happened when Zola wrote his terrible "*J'accuse*," when at last he discovered what had happened to a Jewish officer named Dreyfus.

The military high command discovered that someone was selling army "secrets" to Germany, and it is quite possible that at the time the generals in command knew perfectly well that it was French major, Esterhazy, an ardent Roman Catholic. But it was not politic to let the French public know. The Army Command, investigating the leakage, put the blame entirely on Captain Dreyfus, for no other reason than that he was a Jew. He was found guilty, "degraded," and sent to Devil's Island for life. This was in 1895; but soon after, doubts about his guilt began to circulate — mainly through his devoted brother — and great public figures like Clemenceau began to press for a re-trial. In addition, Colonel Picquart, who became Head of the Intelligence Department, gradually became convinced that a grave miscarriage of justice had occurred. Thereupon, he was superseded by Colonel Henry who immediately began to forge evidence against Dreyfus, and later committed suicide when found out.

But what brought the whole question before world

opinion was Zola's famous letter, "*J'accuse*," published in *L'Aurore* on January 13th, 1898. It roused all good Catholics to a tumultuous fury, and caused a stormy debate in the Senate, ending in the decision to prosecute Zola. He was found guilty and had to fly for his life to England.

In the meantime, France itself was divided into two hysterical camps, one for, the other against Dreyfus. All the Jews in the world were abused for the "crime" of Dreyfus; while poor Zola was assailed in the foulest and most bestial language. To make things worse (if that were possible) famous artists like Forain, Caran d'Ache, Willette, and many others, all fervent Catholics, allowed themselves the liberty of supplementing the bestialities of Catholic writers with caricatures just as infamous. Zola could not be attacked as a Jew, so he was called a stinking Italian in the pay of both Germany and the Jews.

Zola showed in *La Débâcle* the crass incompetence of the leaders of the French army in 1870.

At last, through force of world opinion, the French government re-tried Dreyfus, despite every effort on the part of Dreyfus's enemies and the Church to prevent it. And the whole world rocked with contemptuous laughter when, at the new court martial, Dreyfus was found guilty again but — can it be believed? — "with extenuating circumstances!" Needless to add, the President then stepped in, and Dreyfus was "pardoned" for a crime he never committed; and later France had to admit he was completely innocent.

Apart from the military critics who denounced Zola for writing *La Débâcle*, and from ardent Catholics who attacked him for writing *Lourdes*, it was the Dreyfus case which did Zola as a popular — indeed as a great — novelist most harm. It killed all his chances of gaining entrance into the French Academy — his great ambition; and it curtailed the sale of his books, though it should not be forgotten that *L'Assommoir*, *Germinal*, and even *Le Débâcle* had a constant sale. In 1893, when *Dr. Pascal* was published, the first named had sold 127,000 copies; *Nana* 166,000; and *La Débâcle*, 170,000.

By 1900, *Lourdes* had sold to the extent of 140,000, *Rome*, 100,000, while *Paris* had a mere 88,000 to its credit. I suspect most of these sales took place before the re-trial of Dreyfus.

Zola had by then planned *Les Quatre Evangiles*, of which only three were written. *Fécondité* ("Fruitfulness") the first, did well for it sold 88,000 copies. *Travail* ("Work") by 1901 had sold 44,000; while I have no figures for *Justice*, the third of the series.

The great novelist died through asphyxiation while asleep. A few years ago, a book was published in France proving, or trying to prove, that the outlet of the charcoal stove which killed him was deliberately choked up by a pious Catholic. I have not read the book, but one must never be surprised at the malignity always displayed by fanatical Catholics when their religion is attacked.

If one wants proof that part of Zola's lost popularity was due to his magnificent defence of an unfortunate Jew, it can be seen in the way his reputation and his work were later attacked by pious critics and books on French literature.

Read, for example, the notice given by Prof. G. Lanson in his well-known *Histoire de la Littérature Française*. The edition I have is dated 1906, and Lanson tries his best to damn Zola with very faint praise, his religious bias coming

out strongly in the account he gives of a writer who is one of the greatest in French literature.

Zola was of course a "naturaliste", a realist, as anyone reading *Nana* or *La Terre* could see in a moment. This realist school, which included Guy de Maupassant and Flaubert among many others, was the object of long and often violent criticism with attacks on Zola especially. Lanson did not like Zola's "science" or psychology, and so he considered that the "Life" of the Rougon-Macquart people was really "a monstrous dream" — it was not

just "transcribed"; his characters became merely "animated forms" of a coalmine, a huge store, a locomotive, "grim beings who menace, devour, suffer." And so on.

All the same, the reputation of Zola has steadily become greater; and now paperbacks of his novels are selling more than ever.

And let us never forget that, like so many great French writers, Zola was above all both a Freethinker and a free thinker.

Doubts in Dialogue

Between a Theist and an Atheist

By CHARLES BRADLAUGH

Theist.—Surely your Atheism is most unreasonable. How can the universe exist without God?

Atheist.—What do you mean by "God" and what by "universe"?

T.—By God, the creator, preserver, and ruler of all things. By the universe, all that he has created.

A.—What do you mean by creation?

T.—Origination . . . beginning.

A.—A chair is originated from the wood of a tree; a stalagmite is begun by the water dropping through from the limestone.

T.—Those are instances of change of form. By creation I mean origin of existence.

A.—Do you mean that once the universe was not, and that what you call "God" created the universe?

T.—Yes.

A.—By universe I mean all phenomena, and all that is necessary for the happening of each and every phenomenon. I cannot think the universe non-existent — can you?

T.—The universe must have had a commencement.

A.—Why? Why may it not always have existed?

T.—Everything must have had a beginning.

A.—Even the Creator?

T.—No; he is eternal.

A.—Why he? and what do you mean by eternal?

T.—Not to think a deity personal is Atheistic, and the deity is self-existent. By eternal I mean without beginning.

A.—But even if deity must be personal, why masculine? and how do you think masculine person self-existent?

T.—All religions make God a masculine person. I cannot help thinking God self-existent.

A.—But are all religions true?

T.—Truth pervades them all, but there is only one true religion.

A.—Then the pervading truth does not save the great mass of religions from falseness. But if you can think God self-existent, why may I not think universe self-existent?

T.—The universe is finite; God is infinite.

A.—Then there exists infinity *plus* the finite universe.

By infinite I mean illimitable extension, indefinable extent; that is, extension of x , to which I cannot think bounds.

You say God is infinite. Infinite what?

T.—Infinite God.

A.—But what is God?

T.—I have already answered: the creator, the preserver, and ruler of all things.

A.—But five minutes before the creation of anything what was God?

T.—God is spirit.

A.—But what is spirit?

T.—All that is not matter.

A.—Five minutes before the creation of matter what was spirit?

T.—The question is monstrous.

A.—Only because it is the test of a monstrous misstatement.

T.—But if there be no God, whence came intelligence?

A.—Intelligence is not an entity; it is a result, and an ever-changing result.

T.—What do you mean?

A.—Intelligence = all mental phases — perception, including consciousness, memory, comparison, judgment, reflection, reason. Intelligence does not come from, or go to; it grows with and of. Unless you change the meaning of words, God is not properly describable as intelligent.

T.—Why?

A.—The basis of intelligence is sensation. Prior to creation what could God sense?

T.—You cannot compass God with finite terms and by your finite mind.

A.—Yet you preach God in finite terms and to my finite mind.

T.—Your Atheism is mere negation.

A.—Not so, except as the affirmation of any truth negates the falsehood it contradicts.

T.—Your Atheism leads men to vice.

A.—First, that is rather abuse than argument, and if true, would scarcely demonstrate the existence of God. Are all Theists virtuous?

T.—Unfortunately not.

A.—Are most criminals Theists?

T.—They profess religion, but they are practical Atheists.

A.—The last statement is again abuse. Are all Atheists vicious?

T.—No; they are, many of them, better than their principles.

A.—That, again, is abuse, unless you state the Atheistic principles which you allege lead to vice.

T.—Why should not an Atheist lie and steal and cheat, if he can do it without being found out?

A.—Why should he? It is easier to tell the truth than to lie, especially if you cultivate the habit of truth-telling; stealing and cheating are practices of social misdoing which involve at least the possibility of being discovered. An Atheist cannot clear himself from rascality by repentance. He finds it much more comfortable and profitable to encourage habits of truthfulness and honesty in others by practising them himself.

T.—But this a low and selfish view.

A.—Is it? It is a view which, if extensively adopted, would afford ground for economy in gaol chaplains, who would not be required to preach to orthodox convicts.

CORRESPONDENCE

"FREEDOM OF THOUGHT"

In his "Freedom of Thought" (6/7/62), Mr. P. de la Cherois Crommelin says that "Emmett McLoughlin in his open letter to the Roman Catholic priests of America, probably gravely underestimates the actual magnitude and difficulty of the conversion he proposes".

Now, in his letter, Mr. McLoughlin writes: "Many have been helped and are now happily adjusted". That is presumably a fact. He goes on: "Many have gone through hell in their strike for freedom". That does not seem like underestimation. And later, Mr. McLoughlin refers to the "seemingly unconquerable obstacles of theology (not the Scriptures), emotion, persecution and lack of education equipment", in spite of which thousands of American priests have left the Church successfully. This again does not seem like underestimation.

Mr. Crommelin's article is very personal. It is none the worse for that, but being so, it is likely to miss the mark in its generalisations. It seems to do so in its reference to the "few priests who have managed to become free men" (Are they so few?—McLoughlin does not think so) and the unlikelihood that these few will show contempt for things formerly revered. A few weeks ago, one ex-priest did in fact reveal such contempt in the pages of THE FREETHINKER, and I have little doubt that many others feel contempt for a disgusting religion once they have thrown it off.

ROBERT DENT.

If Mr. Crommelin is not prepared to call himself an Atheist, that is quite all right. But the reason he gives for not doing so is not. He is not, he tells us, "prepared to assert that there is nothing corresponding to the concept of First Cause or Universal Creator neither good nor bad to individual creatures but absolutely and eternally necessary to cosmic evolution". Surely he has got things the wrong way round. The question is: is he prepared to assert that there is *something* in reality corresponding to the above concept?

If he is not prepared to assert this, although he may not be prepared to call himself an Atheist, his position is essentially atheistic.

J. GOODWIN.

ACTS OF GOD

I notice on page 59 of the current *Radio Times* (28/6/62) that the BBC are greatly concerned with occasional spoilation of their TV programmes, by other stations. They assert that this interference, "is brought about by natural causes, over which the viewer, the radio-dealer and the broadcasting organisation have no control". Presumably, they are blaming *God*!

ZOLA IN PAPERBACK

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In view of their daily out-pourings of gratitude, praise and supplication, I should have thought the gentleman would have treated them better. Doubtless, if the service were run by a bunch of wicked Atheists we could only expect blank screens and mute loudspeakers. Which is a thought!

P. A. WEBB.

CHEAP LAND FOR CHURCHES

Further to Mrs Ebury's statement to the National Secular Society on the above subject (THE FREETHINKER, 29/6/62) let me quote the letter I received from the Town Clerk of Ilford, dated June 5th, 1962. "I have to inform you", it reads, "that the power to dispose of sites for Churches at one-quarter of the housing value of the land was contained in a Circular issued by the then Ministry of Health in February, 1950". Note, one-quarter of the housing value of the land!

R. J. CONDON.

POLITICAL IMPARTIALITY

I leave Mr. F. A. Ridley to reply to the bulk of Mr. G. Beddoes's letter in the issue of July 13th. As Secretary of the National Secular Society, however, I might point out that the Executive Committee passed a resolution condemning the Russian interference in the internal affairs of Hungary at the time of the uprising. A copy of the resolution was sent to the USSR Embassy in London. At the same time, incidentally, a protest went to the British Prime Minister on the subject of Suez.

It is precisely in the interests of impartiality that my own article on "The Portuguese Angle on Angola" was written. The NSS had protested against the Portuguese government's conduct, and when that government replied to the protest I considered it only right to make known the substance of that reply. I was not of course, uncritical, but I tried to be fair.

COLIN MCCALL.

OBITUARY

James H. Matson of Dover, who died on July 11th, was, in the words of his devoted wife, a sensitive, even nervous man, but absolutely fearless in speaking of his convictions. He had the free-thought cause at heart and retained his keenness to the end, despite three years of illness, the last year confined to bed. His letters to the editor, some for publication, some private, revealed also his mental alertness and his courage in face of physical collapse.

The funeral took place on July 15th.

We send our sympathy to Mrs. Grace Matson.

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