

The Freethinker

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ACCOUNTS OF THE place of science in our society often degenerate into catalogues of technological achievements, instruments of warfare and objects of luxury. Thus, stories of the greatness of science, and of its mighty grip on us are usually punctuated with references to automation, sputniks, nuclear-powered submarines and television. Stressing these *products* of the scientific enterprise, however, underemphasises the conceptual *methods* in virtue of which such products have *scientific* status. Had scientists not been thinking, and exploring, in their characteristic ways—none of these chromium plated, super-powered objects of technological achievement would ever have seen the light of day.

With something like this contrast in mind the American philosopher of science, Charles Sanders Peirce, placed emphasis on the characteristically scientific methods of thought as constituting *the* significant contribution to life in our times. Thus, he sought to play down the mere tabulation of scientific productions, like television sets and supersonic bombers; these Peirce felt, had little to do with the important function of contemporary science.

New Thinking

My claim is that science is a never-ceasing struggle for possession of the human mind, a struggle to get us to think in new, and daring ways; let me spell this out by way of a few simple examples. Our popular press, our unpopular critics, and even our great museums of science and technology, often equate the goings-on at Canaveral, Los Alamos and the RCA Laboratories with "modern American science". This is a dubious equation. Take Cape Canaveral. Certainly, the engineering achievements of rocketeers (American and Russian) are fabulous. By harnessing available resources, they have achieved propulsive forces and ballistic velocities to make space travel an expectation of the present, instead of a vague dream of the future. So far as new scientific *thinking* within our rocketry effort is concerned, the principles involved were well understood in the 17th century. Newton argues, with diagrams, just what technical advancement would be necessary to put a projectile into a celestial orbit. Newton's conjectures are the inevitable consequences of his conceptually revolutionary theory of celestial mechanics. Newton fought the 17th century's battle for the mind and he won. Today's rocketeers are simply working out the technical details, and tracing the theoretical predictions which Newton set out in 1687. Contemporary rocketeers are still essentially Newtonians. They can give us products never produced before, but they rarely have thoughts which have never been thought before. So also with our applications of atomic energy. Our ideas about the insides of atoms, the arguments concerned with splitting atomic particles into more elementary microparticles, with a fantastic release of energy, all this was familiar scientific *thinking* long before we began disseminating our knowledge at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

What distinguishes us from the ages which have gone before, is not simply our great warehouses of instruments, technically-advanced vehicles, and weapons, all of which our ancient predecessors lacked. It is rather that scientific *thinking* has moulded our minds in ways quite characteristically different from anything to be found in the eras preceding us. We are not the same *kinds* of people as were our ancestors, because we do not think, indeed, perhaps could not think in the ways they did. We do not marshal facts, evidence and observations in anything like the manner they did. Our appeals to what we can see, touch, and feel are fundamentally different from theirs. Indeed,

the very idea of "proving one's point" about some matter of fact is conducted today in ways which would have been not only unfamiliar, but virtually unintelligible in ages past.

Real Effect of Science

This, then, is the real effect of modern science on us. The world is now a different place, not just because we have populated it with a lot of novel objects; it is a different place because we think about it differently; it looks different to us; we plan our routes through it in ways unlike those of our great grandfathers; and we appeal to it as evidence in ways characteristic only of the modern scientific era. This is the feature of science within contemporary civilization which all too often gets lost in the great, noisy, and spectacular shuffle of technological achievements. Too often we fail to notice the quiet Newton, or Darwin, or Mendel, or Thomson, or Dirac, the "theoretical" men who, by their powerful studies at the frontiers of scientific thinking are actually stretching our very capacity to think things never thought before. This kind of individual we too often overlook, as our eyes are fixed, rather, on the next explosion, the roar overhead of supersonic fighters, and our increased capacity to get from point A to point B more quickly and comfortably than had heretofore been possible.

It is the scientific mind-stretchers I would like you to give your attention to, not the technological power achievers. For, I believe, any lasting historical assessment of the place of science in our times will not be a chronicle of telephones, triodes, and Titanium. Rather, it will be a story of conceptual moulding. After all, when we think of the intellectual achievements of the 19th century, or the 17th, or the 16th, or the 14th, we think not of Fulton's ships, or Bessemer's converters but of Darwin's biology, not of Harrison's clocks, but of Newton's mechanics, not of the musket, but of Copernicus's revolution, not of the crossbow, but of the attempts at quantified measurement of Oresme and Cusa.

History's Verdict

Why should tomorrow's historians treat our century differently? It will not be our space ships, or our crop-controls, or our bombs which will headline the intellectual achievements of the 20th century; it will be the physicist's

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The Impact of Science on the Contemporary Mind

By NORMAN RUSSELL HANSON

new ideas about fundamental matter, the geneticist's fresh outlook on the mechanisms of inheriting the last generation's characteristics, the economist's novel conception of the place of science and of scientific thinking in the structure of our society, and the literateur's insight into the relocation of our values which the fact of science has brought about. These are the things we shall be remembered for—with gratitude, awe and admiration. What History's verdict will be about our chromium-plated bombs, our nuclear testing and our space-probing remains to be seen. Science, within the development of western thought, has been one of the most significant shapers of ideas, and sculptors of thought. This is a fact, incidentally, which is only just beginning to creep into the consciousness of the *literati*; historians, classicists, linguists, and philosophers are only just beginning to perceive that science is not just a collection of laboratory gadgets, but a way of life—and hence important to a full appreciation of all Arts subjects.

The criteria for good scientific argument change from era to era. And with them change the criteria for good argument-in-general, and hence our conception of the mind. We think differently now—because the last generation's scientists were forced, by Nature, to do so. Our children will think differently from us, because today's scientists are being forced, by Nature, to do so.

Planetary astronomy is an ancient discipline, and a modern discipline. It had its practitioners in ancient Greece, and has them now at the present time. Certain planets—Venus and Mars most spectacularly—do not *constantly* move across the heavens from west to east in perfect circles. Sometimes they apparently grind to a halt, loop upwards and backwards, and move aft for many days before halting again, looping forward and continuing on the original journey. The accounts given of this phenomenon by the ancient Greeks, the Medieval thinkers, the 17th century giants, and our modern astronomers, will underscore our thesis.

Ptolemy

The Greek had come to seek order and rationality throughout his life, his world and his universe. To him, the idea of a planet assuming such erratic and aimless deviations from circular motion verged on being unintelligible. His perplexity was allayed, however, by the discovery (of Eudoxes, Kallipos, Hipparchus and Appolonios) of an orderly *calculus* in terms of which such meanderings of these "wandering stars" (which is what "planet" actually means), could be predicted and computed. This at least meant that there must be some intelligible order in the universe, some rational pattern. Not until such a computational device was discovered, however, could the Greek feel intellectually content. The systems of geocentric spheres conceived by Eudoxos, and polished mathematically by Hipparchus, afforded this contentment to some degree. In the hands of Claudius Ptolemy (2nd century AD) these ideas were formed into a most elegant geometrical computer, by appeals to which the movements of the planets (*whatever* they really were) became predictable, hence expected, hence familiar and hence intelligible. For a Greek to fail to find *any* pattern in a phenomenon was for him to have failed altogether in fitting that phenomenon into an otherwise intelligible world.

The medieval thinkers adopted the Ptolemaic astronomy wholesale, but made some cosmological addenda of their own. The mere planetary computer described in the *Almagest*, was now infused with theologico-Christian essences. The entire set of planetary spheres were not, for Ptolemy, even related internally. But, by the 13th

century astronomer, they were all beautifully nested, like Chinese boxes. They were ensphered by the circle of the fixed stars, and angels, and encapsulated by the *Primum Mobile* itself—in other words, God. He was the author of the entire planetary construction, the source of its complex motions, and the shaper of all events taking place therein.

Thus, the Greeks had placed the earth in the centre of the world-system for *observational* reasons largely, and for *philosophical* reasons secondarily. The medievals keep the earth, and man, in the centre of things for *theological* reasons primarily. These reasons are not difficult to imagine. But suffice it to say that in the 13th century any argument for the earth's centrality within the heavens would have been advanced more in the form of a commentary on the Christian religion, than in the effort to achieve intelligibility for its own sake.

Copernicus

Copernicus was a geometer, a late medieval geometer and astronomer. The religious implications of the geocentric system did not overawe him; he found equally plausible arguments in favour of moving the earth around the Sun, "that divine lantern God had placed centrally for *our* sakes". Much more important, Copernicus did not find the Ptolemaic system sound geometrically or dynamically. He was not prepared, with Ptolemy, to proliferate *ad hoc* assumptions (e.g., the *punctum aequans* and an infinite battery of epicycles), just for the sake of predictability *per se*. He reasoned that whatever else He was, God was an excellent geometer. The system of Ptolemy was monstrously inelegant from a geometrical point of view. *Ergo* it must be wrong to suppose that Ptolemy has mirrored God's design.

So, we have traced the problems of planetary motion from an attempt at intelligibility, in the Greeks, through the theological explanations of the medievals, up to the geometrical criticisms of Copernicus.

Newton

With Newton we find an incredibly complex synthesis of the most impressive Euclidean variety. From a few, tersely-stated Axioms, and still fewer general physical Principles, Newton generates predictions of the planetary aberrations as consequences of a vast, geometrically-articulated physical theory. This then constitutes (at last) an *explanation* of the planetary aberrations, as well as supplying their predictions. By setting out the biggest possible picture of nature, the details of that picture had become non-problematic. This is reminiscent of how Thomas Hobbes, on first glancing at Euclid's 49th theorem, felt it was absurd. To prove this he undertook to learn geometry from the beginning. But by the time he reached in his studies the contentious theorem, he could find nothing in it to perplex him. Similarly, the apparent wandering of the planets ceases to be a problem, when this very fact becomes an inevitable part of a larger picture which takes the entire universe as its model.

But later, despite the fantastic success and seductive appeal of the Newtonian synthesis, questions were asked, cautiously and politely at first, and (by the end of the 19th century) loudly and aggressively. Had Newton ever really been entitled to treat the universe as if it were a congeries of punctiform billiard balls? By what right did he make his *Mechanics* approximate to the geometrical model? Classes of observations must be melted together through the good offices of statistics and probability-techniques. And inferences from such observations must be expressed with due regard for the likelihood of error.

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Cardinal Newman

By F. A. RIDLEY

[The following is the second and final part of a lecture given to the Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society on July 1st, 1962. The first part, dealing with Cardinal Newman's brothers appeared last week.]

IT WAS, I think, the late Chapman Cohen who once referred to Cardinal Newman as the last Christian thinker whom it was possible for Freethinkers to regard with intellectual respect. It is possible to view the career of John Henry Newman, successively Oxford Don, High Anglican Divine, and finally and best known, as Cardinal of the Church of Rome, under several headings. For, besides being perhaps the last original thinker that modern Christianity has known, he was also an eminent man of letters, a master of prose besides being a minor poet of respectable stature, and a model of pulpit eloquence.

Probably the general public of today, to whom in all probability the literary classics of the Victorian era do not mean very much and who are not much interested in the religious movements of that now remote era, still remember Newman—if they remember him at all—by his celebrated controversy with that staunch Protestant and pioneer Christian socialist, Charles Kingsley; a not particularly satisfactory controversy, which one could perhaps summarise by stating that Kingsley had most of the facts, whilst Newman had the better of the arguments. In any case, so rapidly has the world moved on since, that the controversy seems now somewhat remote from real life. One could indeed, plausibly arrive at the conclusion that the great Victorian Cardinal now conforms with that classic definition of a classic, in that everyone has heard of him but that nowadays no one ever reads him.

Such a judgment, however, would be incorrect, for like most really original thinkers who play a major role in determining the evolution of human thought, Newman's religious (or rather theological) influence has been gradual, cumulative, and posthumous. Indeed it is only just now becoming possible to measure in any adequate manner the permanent influence of John Henry Newman upon the evolution of modern Christianity, an influence which in my opinion is likely to grow rather than diminish with the passing of time, particularly of course, in relation to Newman's own adopted Church, the Church of Rome. But his influence is also felt acutely both in his original Church, the Church of England and indeed, in all the more serious Christian Churches which still make any attempt to express themselves and their dogmas in the terms of contemporary culture.

In the evolution of Christian theology, as in more securely founded branches of knowledge, certain major names stand out as representative of successive eras. Thus, in the technical evolution of Christian theology, one could say that the thought of St. Augustine, probably the greatest of all Christian thinkers, dominated the theology of the ancient Church; that of St. Thomas Aquinas effectively summarised medieval theology; whilst Roman Catholic theology in the era of the Counter-Reformation was dominated by the Jesuit, Cardinal Bellarmine. It is my contention, that future historians will ascribe a similar dominant position to the theological pre-eminence of Newman in relation to the evolution of Christian theology in the 20th century and if (a big if!) it can survive the Rationalist critique, in subsequent centuries.

This commanding influence exercised by Newman over the contemporary evolution of theology, was due first and

foremost to his "theory of development", probably the last original idea to make its appearance in a theological context. Newman expounded this, his master-idea, in a volume entitled *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, published in 1845, the same year that saw him transfer his own personal allegiance from Canterbury to Rome. His *Development* is beyond any reasonable doubt, his greatest work, far more permanent in its influence than was his brilliant but ephemeral controversy with Kingsley. For here, Newman laid down a novel principle (which very nearly got his book placed on the *Index*) the principle of "development", that entirely transformed the context of Christian theology.

Prior to Newman, it was universally held by all orthodox theologians, that to be accepted as a *bona fide* Christian dogma—as an article of faith binding on all Christians—any theological proposition that aspired to this status had to have been accepted by the whole Christian Church from the earliest times on. "Always, everywhere and by all", as ran the official definition of the old author, St. Vincent of Lerins (5th century). According however, to Newman's "development" thesis, this was not necessary; all that was necessary was that some orthodox theologians should have held any particular belief without censure in the earlier ages of Church history. Then it was open to the Church to "develop" this theological conception into a universally-held dogma at any subsequent period that deemed opportune. Turning from theory to its correlative practice, it is obvious why Newman's own Church eventually accepted his theory, for the whole evolution of Roman Catholic theology in recent years has consisted in "developing" earlier theological speculations into fixed dogmas.

The three canonically defined dogmas officially proclaimed since Newman's book first appeared in 1845: *The Immaculate Conception* (1854); *Papal Infallibility* (1870), and *The Assumption of the Virgin* (1950) can all only be explained and defended on the lines of Newman's "development" theory. All of them had been known and advocated in the Christian Church since her early days: none had been universally accepted as the pre-Newman theory peremptorily required, even by theologians. For example, St. Augustine rejected Papal Infallibility and St. Thomas rejected the Immaculate Conception—both would be heretics in the present Catholic Church! All the current indications are that there are still many more dogmas to be "developed".

When Newman's *magnum opus* first made its appearance, a Protestant critic, Isaac Taylor, made the apt comment that Newman's new theory of "development", revealed all sorts of possibilities for the Church. In a superstitious age, he said, "we shall see superstition piled upon superstition; whilst in a scientific age, the Church will refine its dogmas to suit the requirements of a scientific pantheism". So far, the former alternative has been the more conspicuous, but Rome is nothing if not adaptable; she may still "develop" in all sorts of ways. Already the movement of Christian modernism which avowedly based itself upon the "development" theory, has sought in both Rome and the Protestant Churches, to develop traditional Christianity into harmony with modern scientific and historical ideas. Newman himself

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Whatever else the "Exclusive" sect of the Plymouth Brethren has done, at least it has obtained plenty of free publicity these days, and that is better than being ignored. The present head appears to be an American, "Big Jim" Taylor, a New York linen dealer, and he certainly ignores any of its washing in public. For Big Jim won't give interviews, won't answer questions, and indeed hates to speak to other Christians, calling his brothers in Christ, "unclean".

★

Anyway, the Exclusives recently mustered 7,000 fervent believers in their hatred of other Christian sects at Alexandra Palace. As non-believers were rigidly excluded, we are unable to say whether the Holy Ghost descended upon them, or not, but some of the wives of thorough-going Exclusives, bemoan the fact that they are not allowed to listen to the radio, or peep into a TV set. In fact, they are not allowed to vote or take insurance policies, or university degrees. They are just like "our blessed Lord". Can we wonder why history has to record the 1,000 years of the "Dark Ages"?

★

So at last it is being recognised that we have plenty of "useless" churches—not, be it noted, by such "infidel" journals as ours, but by *Challenge* which is the combined newspaper of three churches in Deptford, New Cross and Brockley. These churches are redundant, and the land on which they stand could be more usefully utilised. At the moment, *Challenge* gives the number at 300, but surely this number could be extended? It would not be unfair to say that for the people who really want a church, a town of 100,000 inhabitants would only want one, and even that mostly for a few bored women. The only men who appear to want a church are fanatics like the "Exclusives".

★

Miss Trevelyan, the daughter of G. M. Trevelyan, the famous historian who died recently, has written a book all about her desperate struggles with the Devil, who seems to have done his best to prevent her going over to God. She was only 16 when God called her quite distinctly, and later she met Christ "who had a full and bearded Jewish face", had a walk and even talked with him. She was later baptised, and then found she "was possessed by a spirit", after which she "picked up a Bible and tried to kill herself"—though we are not certain here if it was through the Bible or the spirit.

★

Her book is called "Fool in Love", but is it not just the kind of book so many women Christians write? Have not dozens of them belonged to the Roman Church, and have not most of them given us similar preposterous "spiritual" experiences?

★

Of course, men can and do write "spiritual" bosh—for example, the writer of "A Saturday Reflection" in the *London Evening News*. "In spiritual matters", he piously says (July 14th), "we can be inactive only at our peril". We suppose this has some meaning, but what? What will happen if we continue to be "inactive" in "spiritual matters"? Well, we are told this—we shall be guilty of the "seven deadly sins"—pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth. All the lot at one time, or just one now and then? Really some men can easily equal some women when it comes to "spiritual" nonsense.

CARDINAL NEWMAN

(Concluded from page 243)

would not have gone all the way with them, but his influence on present-day modernism is both profound and incontestable. He is in reality, the patron saint of modern Christianity.

Will he even be its patron saint in name as well? Will St. Newman (of Birmingham), be added to the celestial roll of the saints? There is a canonisation process in being, but so far, the necessary process (including miracles), are not forthcoming. Will they eventually be so? Personally, I am not very sanguine. Certainly, as the above comments may demonstrate, no modern theologian deserves canonisation more. It would only be elementary gratitude on the part of the Vatican "for services rendered", apart from which, the accession of the great Cardinal to the ranks of the saints, would most certainly improve the intellectual level of the celestial hierarchy (particularly when one considers some recent canonisations in which intellectual qualifications do not seem to have played any notable part). However, apart from his regrettable omission to perform any *bona fide* miracles (an essential in any modern canonisation) John Henry Newman has always been suspect in orthodox theological circles. For the strain of scepticism that ran through the Newman family (which we have already noted) also runs through the Cardinal's voluminous writings. His incisive arguments too often cut both ways—for and against the orthodox conceptions that he was supposed to be defending. If Cardinal Newman never becomes "St. Newman", may that not be because the Vatican (along with the present writer) has a shrewd suspicion that had he lived today, John Henry Newman might have ended up not as a Roman Cardinal, but as President of the Birmingham Secular Society?

Theatre

WHATEVER WE may think of John Osborne, we do think about him: we cannot help it. And although his 2 *Plays for England*, at the Royal Court Theatre, London, are not among his best, they are outspoken, they make us think, talk, argue. The first, *The Blood of the Bambergs*, is a satire on the monarchy and its pious devotees. I say the monarchy because, although the play is set in an imaginary country, it doesn't require too much imagination to see some physical resemblances between the players and (English) life. In any case, the absurdities of royalty apply to all kingdoms, though here perhaps a little more so. And surely the boredom referred to by the Princess is a common factor, too.

The Princess's husband-to-be kills himself in a fast car on the eve of the wedding, and his red velvet-covered corpse is deposited near the altar of the cathedral while royal PROs and a Socialist "Minister of Culture" discuss what can be done. They find a photographer substitute and the wedding goes through as planned—or nearly so. A film sequence enables Mr. Osborne to parody a TV commentary and gives us a tantalising glimpse of Alan Bennett (*Beyond the Fringe* parson) as a slightly shaky Archbishop.

The second play, *Under Plain Cover*, also concerns an upset marriage, but it is very different. Not only is the lid taken off the suburban home scenically; Mr. Osborne fearlessly exposes the life of the married couple in a way that is bound to be shocking to many. Tim and Jenny, like all married couples, have their peculiarities, one of them being an obsession with knickers. I suppose these feminine undergarments have a particular fascination for a still puritanical people, witness the "sensation" and press exploitation of Miss Maria Bueno's pink ones at Wimbledon this year. Mr. Osborne is understandably—and legitimately—caustic about the press, incidentally, it being a reporter who reveals the incestuous nature of the happy marriage and breaks it up—or tries to.

There is, I repeat, much for Englishmen to think about in these two plays that John Osborne has written for us. They are also well directed and acted at the Royal Court Theatre, but they are also a little too long.

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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. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. P. MURACCIOLE, J. A. MILLAR.

(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.

Notes and News

WE ARE privileged to have for our Views and Opinions this week, a slightly condensed version of a lecture by Dr. Norwood Russell Hanson at Indiana University, USA. Dr. Hanson is Chairman of the Department of the History and Logic of Science in the University, and his talk was printed in *The American Rationalist* for May-June.

★
"YOU'RE NOT GOD" shouted the *Daily Sketch* in its issue of July 18th. "What a shocking and un-Christian way out of our responsibilities!" it exclaimed, referring of course, to the proposals of Commander J. S. Kerans (Conservative MP for Hartlepool) and Baroness Summerskill in connection with the deformed children of mothers who had been given Distaval (the trade name for thalidomide). Commander Kerans asked if the Minister of Health would authorise euthanasia in cases of extreme deformity. Baroness Summerskill proposed abortion for the pregnant mothers. "Who do they think they are?" asked the pious *Sketch*—in caps—admitting that it felt "very, very angry" about the two proposals to "kill them off"—again in caps. "No, no, no!" it went on—italic caps this time—and generally lined up with Cardinal Godfrey and his celibate moralists.

★
To give the *Daily Sketch* its due, it has campaigned to ease the plight of the thalidomide children, to give them "as happy and as near normal life as possible". But how happy, how normal a life can a hopelessly deformed child lead? That is the question. And it is not a question that will be settled by hysterical screams of "Murder!"

★
A DENOMINATIONAL rule of the Roman Catholic Church which declares invalid for its members, a marriage that is legal under United States law, has been challenged by a young Catholic couple in New York City. According to *Church and State* (July-August, 1962), Mr. and Mrs. Howard Glenn Carr have brought suit for reinstatement at

St. John's University, a Roman Catholic school, which expelled them for the "grave sin" of getting married before a civil official. Also joining in the suit, which is supported by the American Civil Liberties Union, is Miss Jean Catto, a witness to the wedding, who was also expelled for her part in the "invalid" ceremony.

★

THE CASE, says *Church and State*, recalls a similar one at the University of Detroit last year, when Dennis J. Makulski, a Roman Catholic, married Margaret Jane Davis, a Presbyterian, in a Presbyterian Church. Mr. Makulski was expelled from the Jesuit university for "attempting" an "invalid" marriage. Both St. John's and the University of Detroit would be recipients of Federal grants under legislation which is near to being passed in Congress. The press, says *Church and State*, "did not hesitate to draw the moral". As the *New York Post* said, "St. John's cannot have it both ways—to be a clerical institution when it comes to conformity with ecclesiastical law, and a lay institution when it comes to benefiting from public funds. It must make the choice".

★

TURNING NOW to a different aspect of Catholic marriage. Readers of *The Ecstasy of Owen Muir*, Ring Lardner Junior's superb satire on (among other things) the Roman Catholic Church, will recall Monsignor Frasso's elaborate proof that a much-married man had in (Catholic) fact never been married at all. We recalled it when we read (*Daily Herald*, 19/7/62) that Prince Alphonso de Hohenloe had hired a Madrid law firm "who are good at Catholic canon law" to induce the Vatican to dissolve his marriage. In (actual) fact, the Prince's marriage has dissolved already, his ex-wife Princess Ira having got a civil divorce and married Francisco "Baby" Pignatari of Brazil.

★

WE HOPE that Glasgow Freethinkers will turn out in force on Sunday, August 12th, for the Glasgow Secular Society's open-air meeting at Queen's Park Gates at 7.30 p.m. The speakers will be Joseph Dempster, recently-elected secretary of the Branch, and John Telfer, two keen and active young men, who deserve full support, and we are sure will get it, from the many loyal supporters in Glasgow.

★

A FRIEND has shown us a comprehensive textbook for Spanish (Castilian) children, a book of 450 pages containing some quite good stuff on language, arithmetic, geometry, geography, history and natural history. Sixty pages, however, are devoted to religion, illustrated, like the rest, with outline drawings. Here you have it all—or nearly all—Adam and Eve, Cain, the Tower of Babel, Isaac, Joseph and the other Old Testament worthies, and then the New Testament. Two drawings particularly caught our eye. The Magi loping along on their camels after a star that fairly hurtles across the sky, and a bearded, open-mouthed profile spewing out a fly-like demon. We don't go for pictures of hearts, even if they are sacred, but they're here too.

★

WHICH REMINDS us of a rather quaint description of Cardinal Larraona which we came across in the Sister Miriam Teresa League of Prayer *Bulletin* of New Jersey. "Having dedicated himself early in life to our Blessed Lady", the *Bulletin* says, "he became a Son of the Heart of Mary . . .".

★

DOMINIC BEHAN is writing a new book attacking the Roman Catholic Church in Eire. "It will be banned—I hope", he said to Arthur Pottersman (*Daily Sketch*, 17/7/62). "All the best books are banned there, and sell like glory in America".

Are Christians Inferior to Freethinkers?

By CHAPMAN COHEN

MOST people are familiar with the story of the man who informed a friend that he had been defending his character against the defamations of a mutual acquaintance. "Why", he indignantly exclaimed; "the fellow said you were not fit to black his boots". "Oh", said the aspersed one, "And what did you say?" "I said you were". And for this defence the friend was expected to be thankful. There is a certain defence of Christianity which reminds one of the above story. When the Freethinker argues that Christianity should be rejected because it is not true, a common retort is that the rejection of Christianity jeopardises the practice of morality. Now, if Freethought and immorality went hand in hand, there would be at least a *prima facie* case for the plea. But this is not so. Freethinkers are not, of course, all paragons of virtue. Taking the world as it goes it is impossible to say of any man, by merely noting his conformity with accepted ethical rules that he is a Christian or a Freethinker. To find out what he is we have to enter on an altogether different line of inquiry.

But the Christian of the type we are dealing with asserts that his morality is an outcome of his religious beliefs; and if we are to take his assertion seriously, some very curious conclusions follow. If he is married, we have to set on one side love of his wife as having no great influence; if he is a father, affection for his children must be eliminated; as a friend, we must do away with any feeling of loyalty; as a member of society, we have to set on one side all feelings of duty. If we admit the moral force of these things we diminish the ethical importance of his religious beliefs. If affection for his wife and children, loyalty to friends, and duty to society are admitted to be factors in determining morality, then it may happen that these will be strong enough to serve in the absence of religious beliefs. This kind of defender of the faith argues that he is only as decent as he is because he believes in God and a future life, and would be much worse than he is if he did not believe.

Now, we are quite aware that humility is one of the Christian virtues, but this certainly seems like straining a virtue until it becomes a vice. It is carrying self-deprecation too far. That *some* Christians are the better for a little watching, we should be the last to deny, but that not *all* of them are in this condition we strongly affirm. We do not believe that our Christian neighbours are only kept from burgling our house, either because they believe in a God or because of the policeman on the beat. Were they so inclined they could easily evade the latter; and experience proves that when the latter can be avoided, the former is not an insurmountable obstacle to rascality.

We do not believe that Christian husbands and wives, or parents and children, are what they are because of their religious beliefs, otherwise we should be denying them the possession of qualities that are obviously possessed by those who have no religious belief. We do not believe that all Christians are rascals held in leash by the fear of punishment. Many of their preachers say they are, a number of laymen think they are, and a proportion act as though they are. But *all* of them! Well, we have a much higher opinion of Christians than to believe it. We want to defend Christians against the slanders of the pulpit, and we claim that what the Freethinker can do the Christian can do. And, therefore, we call attention to a significant fact, or series of facts. Freethinkers as husbands or wives, as parents or citizens, are as well behaved as Christians. No chief of police has ever reported

that owing to the growth of non-religious opinions the number of crimes has gone up, and the police force has had to be strengthened. Freethought husbands and wives do not cut conspicuous figures in the divorce court. They are not notorious as child beaters. When the Christian asserts that only the power of Christ keeps him sober, the Freethinker legitimately replies that he can refrain from getting drunk without such assistance. There is really not a single social or domestic virtue practised by Christians that does not flourish with at least equal strength among Freethinkers.

Are we therefore to accept the calumny of the pulpit and say that the Freethinker is so much more richly endowed with the higher human qualities that he can do, without religious hopes and fears, what the Christian is only able to accomplish with their assistance. If that be so, what a superior kind of mortal the Freethinker must be! We do not say he is, we do not even believe he is; it is the Christian who implies as much. But it is certain that if all men and women were as bad as the Christian apologist paints them, society could not hold together for twelve months. A policeman is a bad teacher of morals, and he is certainly not improved by being shifted to an infinite distance and placed in an unlocalisable heaven. The moral ground-work of social life lies in the feelings and instincts and ideas that are generated by social contact, and for this reason substantially the same moral phenomena are manifested by all, irrespective of their religious or their non-religious opinions. The goodness of the Freethinker is a standing puzzle to the Christian. It is quite contrary to what he is led to expect. On the other hand, the goodness of the Christian — or his badness either — is no puzzle to the Freethinker. His philosophy of life includes the Christian view in a way that the Christian philosophy cannot include the Freethought view. The Christian hates the man in the interests of an opinion; the Freethinker hates an opinion in the interests of the man.

Hence our defence of the Christian against the slanders of his leaders. We are standing up for the innate equality of Freethinkers and Christians, because we do not believe that Freethinkers are made of such superior clay that they can play the part of real men and women under conditions that would demoralise a Christian. The Christian can be just as good as a Freethinker is if he will only throw off the demoralising influence of his creed. If a Freethinker can be sober, honest, and reliable without religion, so can a Christian. The Christian is not an incurable moral cripple who must get through life on crutches for the issuing of which the clergy hold the patent right. Underneath the Christian there is a man, or the nucleus of one, if we can only get at him. The trouble is that most Christians have been brought up with the idea that the deeper the man is buried the better, and they resent all attempts to disinter him. At any rate, in relation to the morality of non-Christians, the follower of Christ is on the horns of a dilemma. Either he must admit that his analysis of the moral forces is wrong, and that religion is not the moral determinant of the life of man, or he must assert, inferentially, that non-Christians are the innate moral superiors of Christians since they are able to maintain a standard of conduct admittedly as good as that of Christians—sometimes better and without any of the adventitious aids and extraneous incentives which the Christian believes is essential to his own conduct.

From Canada

By LANJE GARDYEN

MANY HARD blows were dealt the religious school system of Quebec Province during the two-year period that the Royal Commission of Enquiry on Education received and heard public and private briefs throughout the Province of Quebec.

Whilst most of the briefs were submitted by organisations and groups, a dozen or so private individuals appeared before the Presiding Bishop to protest against the undue or unfavourable influence of religion in French-Canadian schools. One of the last ones to appear before the Board was a Quebec City mother of eight children, who said she was the only member of her group of parents who wasn't "gagged with fear" at the thought of expressing her views publicly. She stated that it was regrettable the way the Commission hearings were organised; it was almost impossible for parents to appear before it to protest against "a school system which spied upon the parents and undermined their authority".

The Quebec City Women University Graduates and their Montreal counterparts presented voluminous briefs, in which they listed hundreds of instances of religious silliness and morbidity in school textbooks, which contributed to the deterioration of the French language in Canada. Several weeks later, a young married couple had a book published, *Comment on abrutit nos enfants* ("How they make brutes out of our children"), which gave hundreds of pages of inanities found in elementary school textbooks, which book became a best-seller overnight.

Whilst the Witnesses of Jehovah and the Seventh-Day Adventists proclaimed that religion should not be taught in school but in the home, the Unitarians, the French Protestant Forum, the French-speaking Protestant Ministers Association, the Mouvement Laïque de Langue Française and other groups asked for secular schools.

A few statements were made in the course of the hearings which caused many eyebrows to be raised. For instance, Italian priests said that 50% of "their" children didn't go to Church, and the spokesman of an Irish-Catholic parent-teachers group retorted that "things like that were the responsibility of the parents and not that of the school commission". French-speaking parent-teachers associations complained that "religion" took too much time, and the Federation of Catholic Parent-Teacher Associations of Quebec blamed the fact that 22 bishops formed part of the Catholic School Committee for the heavy emphasis on classical courses, adding that "a strong lack of leadership training in the Catholic schools resulted in the paucity of Catholics in leading and influential positions".

It is clear that the Church of Rome, which has already been giving ground everywhere in the last few years, is prepared to continue doing so. Even the Federation of Teaching Sisters (all congregations) asked that religious examinations be discontinued, and that the whole system of teaching religion be overhauled and turned over to specialists.

It remained, however, for a single individual to submit a brief which the newspaper *La Presse* termed "the most radical presented". At a public hearing held on July 6th, 1962, at Montreal, Joseph La Rivière, founder and Past-President of The Montreal Translators Society, bluntly accused the Church of Rome of "having debased our language and culture in order to promote its selfish interests".

"After having led our people, over the centuries, to an intellectual dead-end, the Church of Rome has the gall to ask that it be left at the helm of our educational system through the medium of dummies which the Church will control from behind the scenes!"

Calling for the complete secularisation of Quebec's schools and "the expulsion of all pernicious dogmas and indoctrination", Mr. La Rivière warned the speechless members of the Board that they would be held responsible by history if they failed in their duty to acknowledge in fact the separation of Church and School in Quebec.

Unprepared for such an onslaught on the clergy in public, the Presiding Bishop and the Vice-Chairman of the Board declined to ask any serious questions. And when Mr. La Rivière offered facts and figures to support his contention that the people of Quebec had never approved of religious schools, Sister Laurent de Rome, another member of the Board, promptly interrupted: "I don't want to hear the answer!"

A few days later, Mr. La Rivière was interviewed over the French TV Channel 10, when he accused the Presiding Bishop of the Commission "who has no children and pays no school tax" of refusing to discuss the fundamental issues raised in his brief.

Backing for U.S. Supreme Courts Decision

IN ITS EDITORIAL for Thursday, July 19th, 1962, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which has a larger circulation in northern California than any other newspaper, announced that a poll among its readers had shown public opinion in the area to be "strongly behind" the decision of the United States Supreme Court that a prayer in New York State schools was unconstitutional (Notes and News, July 6th; Views and Opinions, July 13th). The result, it said, "tends to refute the outcries of those politicians who said the decision was the most unpopular ever turned out by the court and who predicted rapid approval of a constitutional amendment to set it aside."

Out of the 2773 readers who responded to the poll, 64 per cent, or nearly two-thirds, approved the decision; "they felt even more strongly that Government should stay out of the business of writing or sanctioning official prayers; and the majority felt that even a nondenominational voluntary prayer in public schools violates the principle of church-state separation", though most of them found nothing in the New York Regents' prayer that would offend against their own beliefs or those of anyone else.

The San Francisco school practice of a prayer to God customarily said in kindergartens*, came in for disapproval by 56 per cent, while 65 per cent thought that Americans should no longer be required to say the phrase "under God" in reciting their pledge of allegiance to the flag. This is particularly interesting, said the *Chronicle*, "in the light of the pious claim of the Hearst newspapers to have been the instruments of persuading Congress in 1955 to insert "under God" into the pledge, which practically all school children in the country are obliged to repeat".

* The prayer reads: "We thank thee, God, for food we eat; for family and friends we meet; for books we read and songs we sing. We thank thee, God, for everything".

On the question of approval or disapproval of the Supreme Court's decision, which the *San Francisco Chronicle* regards as "the acid test of opinion", the breakdown of voting according to religious groups was as follows:—

Protestant (1,115)	587	522
Catholic (366)	103	259
Jewish (96)	87	9
Other Faiths (43)	35	8
Faith unspecified (365)	277	87
No religion (788)	677	110
	1,766	995

The slight discrepancy in the figures is due to the fact that some questions were left unanswered on some ballots. The comparatively large number of readers who declared themselves of no religion is also noteworthy.

THE IMPACT OF SCIENCE

(Concluded from page 242)

the risks within observations and the fallibility of theory. In short it was suggested by Newton's critics (e.g. Boltzmann) that planetary mechanics is most appropriately couched in statistical terms, as a system of predictions concerning distributions of observations and possible observations. Once this is felt to be necessary, the geometrical rigour of the *Principia* begins to seem like an illusion.

Contemporary observations within planetary astronomy clearly show this. There is now no posture of certainty, ever adopted by observers. Demonstrations are based *not* on geometrical arguments, but on the processing of immense classes of individual observations made under different circumstances, by different scientists, with different instruments. And the conclusions will never smack of the "QED" which characterises deductions within formal science.

In short, contemporary planetary astronomy, like contemporary television commercials, will be infused with the language, the techniques and the cautions of probability and statistics. The criteria of today's science have so influenced us all, that in every phase of our lives, sublime as well as ridiculous, the virtues of caution, statistical description, and allowance for risk, distinguish the sound from the unsound presentation, the reasonable from the unreasonable one, the "scientific" from the "unscientific". It is these very criteria which are exploited to such advantage by commercial television. But that exploitation of this kind is possible, itself reveals the profound effect scientific thinking has had on us all.

Even the Canaveral rocketeers, although their problems were also in a sense, Newton's, could not dream of expressing their conclusions with the same Euclidean flair found so familiar and natural. Thus, even the very subject-matter of yester-year's science is thought about today in characteristically different ways. This precisely mirrors the changes in science's conception of what constitutes good argument.

Our breathless romp to ancient Greece, and back, discloses a pattern almost too obvious to describe. The history of science is a history of scientific ideas, not technological objects. And the general history of western thought is what it is, largely because the history of scientific ideas has been what it has been. Conclusion? Tomorrow's man in the street will be thinking as he will, because today's scientific thinkers are forcing open the new thoughts they now need to step across the frontier of the unknown. Today's man in the street is essentially

a Newtonian. The subtleties of quantum theory and relativity have hardly percolated down to him as he describes internal combustion, or radiation, or electricity. But in the 17th century, the man in the street was certainly no Newtonian—he was essentially a medievalist. His was no billiard-ball machine of a world, it was, rather, still a cathedral imbued with God's purposes. There is a time-lag between the scientist's discovery of a new concept and its ultimate effect on the popular mind.

It is the function of our great universities today to shorten the interval of that time-lag. For here the research scientist and the *literati* work side by side. The conceptual breakthroughs of the university's laboratory can be more quickly felt, understood and interpreted in our humanities classrooms than in any other place. Our universities can become leaders in this programme of disseminating and describing the import of the science which is shaping our world, our minds and our plans for tomorrow's world and tomorrow's minds.

[Reprinted from *The American Rationalist*.]

CORRESPONDENCE

"FREEDOM OF THOUGHT"

In reply to Mr. Robert Dent I would not venture even a rough estimate of the number of ex-Roman Catholic priests (though "thousands" is probably an exaggeration). But whatever the actual number may be, it is certainly only a very small percentage of those whose religious faith could never be destroyed either by rational argument or by vulgar abuse. Moreover not all priests who leave the Roman Church become Freethinkers; some become Protestant ministers of religion, and a considerable number continue to regard themselves as Roman Catholics even when for some reason they have ceased to function as priests. I have heard of one priest who embraced religious Judaism as an acceptable alternative to Christianity.

I agree that my objection to mud-slinging is largely personal and temperamental. I have ceased to be a Christian, but I do not find the Christian Faith either comic or disgusting; it is merely something which has been rejected by one particular mind in the natural course of its own evolution. The past is over and done with as far as I am concerned, and I do not feel ill-disposed towards my own past. I may have wasted a lot of precious time, but not more so than many other people who have taken a wrong turning early in life. And had I not been a priest and remained in office as long as I did, I should never have met my wife. The Church did not intend to "give" me a wife but that is how it happened.

In reply to J. Goodwin, I am quite prepared to acknowledge that in all logical probability there is "something" corresponding to the concept of First Cause, and that this "something", the most necessary element in Creation and/or Evolution might reasonably be called God.

P. DE LA C. CROMMELIN.

With reference to your Notes and News on St. James (13/7/62), might not some footnotes have been inserted? That "Our Lady was always a virgin" is flatly contradicted by Matthew 1, 25, while the words "brothers" and "sisters" are used in conjunction with the word "mother" by Matthew 13, 55-56. G.E.P.

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