

The Freethinker

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ON DECEMBER 8TH, 1869, Pope Pius IX, formally opened the Council of the Vatican as an Ecumenical Council of the Universal (Catholic) Church. After a session of about eight months, marked by stormy scenes and fierce internal controversies, this famous ecclesiastical gathering was hastily prorogued in August 1870, upon the arrival of an Italian army which took advantage of the outbreak (in July), of the Franco-German war and of the subsequent withdrawal of the French garrison (which had protected the Papacy since the Roman Revolution of 1848) from Rome, to annex the Papal States to the newly-formed Kingdom of Italy. Now 92 years later, Pope John XXIII, has reconstituted this new Vatican Council, so far usually designated as the Council of Rome, which ranks officially as the 21st Ecumenical Council. Under the chairmanship of Pope John, some 2,816 Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and heads of religious orders, are presently considering the problems of the Roman Catholic Church in the light of the situation current in 1962, an age vastly dissimilar from that when the preceding Vatican Council met.

General Councils—

Since the famous Council of Nicaea was convoked in 325, by that astute political opportunist and very dubious Christian, the Roman Emperor Constantine, general councils have played an important role in ecclesiastical evolution. Perhaps the two most famous ones were the 15th century Council of Constance, which *inter alia* burned John Huss, and the Council of Trent, which launched the movement of internal consolidation and reform within the Catholic Church, usually denominated as the Counter-Reformation. Ostensibly, the Vatican Council of 1869-70, was convoked for the purpose of condemning certain current theological errors—notably the theory of Fideism, which denied that the existence of God, etc., can be proved by human reason unassisted by revelation. Since 1870, it has been the official doctrine of Rome that it can be so proved. However, during the course of the Vatican Council, the famous controversy over Papal infallibility, soon overshadowed all other topics. After an embittered controversy, marked pre-eminently by backstairs intrigues in which the Jesuits were conspicuous, the famous dogma was carried by a practically unanimous vote (with only two dissentients) on July 18th, 1870. Shortly after (as noted above) the Council was adjourned *sine die*. Then the Italian army entered Rome on September 3rd and extinguished the Papal States of the Church (cf Pomponio Leto: *Eight Months at Rome*, a day-to-day account by an actual eye-witness and participant in the Vatican Council).

—Or Rubber Stamp?

The 1962 Council of Rome, is meeting under very dissimilar conditions to those that confronted its 1869-70 predecessor. To begin with, one very important change must be noted with regard to the internal constitution of the Council itself. Prior to 1870, a General Council was

held to be both juridically and canonically the supreme organ of the Church. It was held to be superior to its chairman, the pope, and its decisions alone were held to be, not only immediately authoritative, but doctrinally infallible as well. For example, all the major dogmas of the Church from that of the Trinity (Nicæa) to Transubstantiation (Lateran Council, 1215), etc., etc., were originally promulgated by General Councils and not by the contemporary popes. Since 1870, all new dogmas (e.g., the Assumption) can only be promulgated by the pope. One council—the reforming Council of Constance (15th century)—even went so far as to depose the pope! His name

and number were, incidentally, also John XXIII, but they are now expunged from the official Pontifical lists. The dogma of Papal infallibility, as officially promulgated in 1870, has entirely transformed the whole status of General Councils within the canonical framework of the Roman Catholic Church. For today, it is axiomatic that the pope *alone* is infallible, and all that a General Council can do is to assent to (confirm) the sacrosanct and infallible pronouncements of the pope. As an inevitable result of its changed status, the present General Council is not a General Council in the historic sense. To employ non-theological language, the Council of Rome in the last analysis, can only be a merely advisory body, a glorified rubber-stamp to affix to the infallible decrees promulgated by Pope John under the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit! For, in voting Papal infallibility in 1870, not only did the General Council of the Vatican then make itself unnecessary, it simultaneously made all succeeding councils unnecessary as well. If all wisdom is concentrated in the infallible person of Pope John, the Council can only be at best, a sounding-board for the unerring Papal judgments. Actually, since 1870 the only practical use for a General Council is to sound Catholic world opinion (which the Holy Ghost who inspires the pope presumably knows anyway) and to record a clerical "vote of confidence" in Pope John XXIII's policy.

Problems before the Council

Writing while the Council is actually in session, it might be somewhat presumptuous to anticipate the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit. However, when regarded from a merely mundane point of view, it seems unlikely that any new major theological definition will emerge from the Council of Rome. It does not appear that this Council will be torn by any such fierce controversies as rent the Vatican Council of 1870 for months on end. This one seems to be much more of a reforming council like the Council of Trent, three centuries ago. As Trent was convoked to deal with the current problems of the revolutionary era of the cultural Renaissance and of the Protestant Revolution, so the present Council has been convened to meet the novel intellectual problems of the space-cum-atomic age on the one hand, and the immediate and peremptory challenge of the communist-cum-

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Council of Rome

By F. A. RIDLEY

atheist revolution on the other. One is probably entitled to conclude that most of the positive results of this Council will be of a defensive character; the fundamental aim of this Council being ultimately to strengthen the Church against the twin spectres of atheism and communism. It is, no doubt, with this supreme objective in view, particularly in relation to the spectacular growth of atheism in recent years, that the Secretariat for Christian Unity was created under the chairmanship of Cardinal Bea, and that the air nowadays echoes with Catholic protests of good will and brotherly love towards "our separated brethren" against whom, only the other day, the whole arsenal of clerical invective and denunciation was so vehemently directed. It is in fact, atheism, far more than the Holy Spirit, which is in reality the unseen "spiritual" guide to this no doubt momentous ecclesiastical assembly. For the Vatican, an institution with a finer secret service (via its ubiquitous priesthood and confessional boxes) than any secular regime, does not need to read THE FREETHINKER (though it probably does) to make it aware that today, it is atheism (more so even than communism) that is its public enemy number one. Or that this is positively the very first time in history that atheism has now not only become a truly world-wide force, but that it has now superseded all previous religious rivals in that role.

What Will Come Out of It?

We do not imagine that any very general scheme of Christian reunion is likely to emerge from the deliberations of the Council. I do not personally think that the Church of England is at all likely to become a Uniate Church (as some Asiatic Churches already are), a Church in communion with Rome but with an English ritual and a married clergy under the immediate jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury. As we have previously noted here, the most probable result would seem to be the eventual formation of some kind of loose alliance of all orthodox Churches, with Rome, no doubt, as a supervising Big Brother; a soft-peddling of past and present theological differences, and a more self-conscious concentration of the common ideological enemies, atheism and materialism. In the theological sphere, one does not expect any major concessions, though no doubt the Council will continue the already familiar process of quietly dropping overboard interpretations that have become so obviously absurd as to represent mere dead-weights around the Church's neck. Perhaps some much-publicised concessions will be made to the Teilhard de Chardin school of Catholic evolutionists, since obviously the literal accuracy of Genesis is becoming quite as indefensible, and as great a source of embarrassment to the Church, as the Ptolemaic astronomy eventually became. Already, some liberal Catholics regard Fr. Teilhard as the Thomas Aquinas of our era. No doubt a time will eventually come when the Church (if it lasts long enough—nowadays a big if!) will deny that it ever denied evolution.

Caution

In political and social matters, one may expect a very cautious move towards political liberalism and economic collectivism. The *Sunday Citizen* seems to have been rather rash—or at least premature—in predicting a radical change in the present rigid Catholic prohibition of birth control, but, as this represents the Achilles heel of Catholicism in the over-crowded lands of the Far East, Rome may yet make a move in the direction of relaxing her currently inflexible policy of "increase, multiply—and damn the social and economic consequences".

Tribute to Heretics

By GUSTAV DAVIDSON

SIMON MAGUS (AD)

HERETICS ARE NEARER the truth than saints. This is the moral you teach us, Simon Magus.

For what did you seek, through your reputed sorceries, raptures, wonder workings?—God and the Truth.

And in the name of God and the Truth, the saints of the Church (themselves believers or dabblers in divination, magic, and miracle; themselves traffickers in silver and gold) slandered, denied, and sought to obliterate you.

And Dante, that poor cuckoo, knowing no better, put you in the 8th circle of his private hell.

ORIGEN (185-254)

Q.—Who presumes to define and circumscribe the will of God?

A.—The Church.

Q.—Who sets bounds to His boundless charity?

A.—The Church.

Q.—Who denies, to God, the power and the love to forgive the most sinful of His creatures, even the most ancient of the damned, and embrace them all in a final restitution?

A.—The Church.

Hail, then, Origen, prince of heretics! Not all the thunders of the Holy See can snuff out your cry for universal salvation. For it is as you say: evil and hell must have an end, else God Himself is condemned out of the words of His own mouth.

WYCLIFFE (1324?-1384)

"Sacrilège!"

Thus did the medieval custodians of "God's Word" greet your Bible, the first in English (for until then the holy book was safely embalmed in the learned tongues).

It was your greatest crime, Wycliffe: to make scripture the common property of man. For this "crime" and others like it, the Church fulminated against you and did its best to destroy you. Happily to no avail.

You were the first Protestant. You were the first to challenge openly the false claims of the Pope and to unmask the worldliness and venality of the clergy. And you proved that fiats, bulls, encyclicals, however hallowed by precedent or authority, stultify and enslave the mind, while what is condemned as heresy illumines and sets men free.

JOAN OF ARC (1412-1431)

For believing you were answerable directly to God rather than to the Roman Church, you were twice condemned to death as a "relapsed heretic" and burned at the stake.

Twenty-five years later, when the purgatorial fires had long since reduced your body (if not your soul) to a Catholic cinder, King Charles VII pronounced you innocent. But it took another 500 years before the holy and infallible See realised you were a saint, not a witch: and so, in 1920, Pope Benedict XV fished you out of hell and hustled you off to heaven.

Extra ecclesiam nulla salus—"there is no salvation outside the Church".

BRUNO (1549-1600)

Poet, humanist, philosopher, martyr.

Rome was anathema to your soul; Jerusalem, another waste of the spirit.

Where Rome and Jerusalem sanctified error and falsification, you exposed them.

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More Light on Christian Origins

By H. CUTNER

An Analysis of Christian Origins by Georges Ory. Translated into English by C. Bradlaugh Bonner. 63 pages, 1962. The Secular Society Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. 2s. 6d. net.

GEORGES ORY is one of a distinguished band of Frenchmen whose work for Freethought in general is very widely appreciated in France, as well as by those of us who read French, in other countries. In particular, M. Ory and his associates are intensely interested in Christian origins, to which they have devoted much of their scholarship and research. They have patiently examined all kinds of by-paths, and I have thought it a great pity that some at least of their results published, for example, by the *Cahiers du Cercle Ernest Renan*, or by *L'Union Rationaliste*, have not been available in English. I hope that this admirable and lucid translation by C. Bradlaugh Bonner will be read widely, and will be the forerunner of many other pamphlets from France.

M. Ory poses at the very outset of his brilliant little work the question—"Was Jerusalem the Birthplace of Christianity?" and, step by step, takes readers through a mass of evidence suggesting that it was not. It has always puzzled me why, when the early Christian Church was at last established in Rome, the Gospels and Epistles and Acts of all kinds should have been written in Greek? Why, particularly after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, when Rome was at the height of its power as a conqueror, were they not written in Latin?

In any case, all the Churches are quite persuaded that, after the death of Jesus (as recorded in the Gospels and Acts), it was in Jerusalem that the Apostles and disciples convened, and from which all their missionary efforts were begun. As M. Ory points out, "This opinion is based on Christian texts composed two or three generations after the events they pretend to report, texts known to us only in manuscripts of the fourth century".

Nobody of course really knows when the texts of the Gospels, Epistles, and Acts, were actually written. We do not know for sure *where* they were written, or indeed how they could be written in the form we have them. Who, even among our clergy these days, believes that they all came exactly as we have them from "Almighty God"—and anyway, if they did, why were they all composed in Greek? In Genesis, like the Serpent who tempted Adam, God spoke in Hebrew.

There is one other difficulty which Christian historians have to face and that is, when did the word "Christian" first appear? M. Ory says that it did not appear till the second century and, if the reader is interested in pursuing this one point, he will find it analysed in detail by Professor Edwin Johnson in his notable *Antiqua Mater* (1890?) which, like M. Ory's book, is also a study of Christian origins.

What was the language Jesus, if he was born a Jew as Christians maintain, habitually spoke? It was, as far as it is humanly possible to judge, Aramaic, the language of all Jews in Palestine. It should have been Hebrew, but even Jewish rabbis cannot explain why Hebrew in the time of Jesus should have been almost dead. At all events, whenever the Old Testament is referred to in the New, the quotation comes from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, supposed to have been made in the third century BC. In other words, we find Greek everywhere, and unless Greek was spoken by Jesus

in Jerusalem, in which case all the people who heard him "gladly" must also have known Greek—a manifest impossibility—the only conclusion we can come to is that the Gospels are *translations*. Are they? Who translated them—and how? The Churches have no answer.

M. Ory deals fully with this question, and insists that "the first Church spoke Greek", and this was not in Jerusalem. "Another astonishing thing", he argues, "is that there is not a single Jewish witness of the first century indicating the existence of Christian communities, which are equally unknown to contemporary pagan authors"; and, "where a reference is found in Jewish writings", Guignebert in his *Le Christ* insists that it will be found to be an interpolation by "a Christian hand". In fact, says M. Ory, "there is not a word of the Christian Church of Jerusalem after 70 AD . . . it is as though no one knew that it had ever existed before that date".

Space prevents me from quoting more of M. Ory's penetrating analysis of these and other points, but his conclusion is that "the Jerusalem Church was a secondary and artificial creation". Another question which Christians hate to answer is posed by M. Ory—"Should Jerusalem be taken literally or metaphorically in the gospels?" and I think his answer will surprise many of our own Freethinkers. (I long since plumped for Jerusalem as "metaphorically speaking" but how I came to this conclusion is a long story.)

On the question of Jesus as a historical person M. Ory makes the definite assertion that "history can show no sure trace of the man said to have founded in Jerusalem a new religion . . . What adds to the surprise is also that the New Testament, apart from a few doubtful texts, offers nothing which sheds a sure light on the origin or on the evolution of Christianity". Even Catholic critics "have declared that it is impossible to establish a genuine biography of Jesus". Professor A. Drews in his *Christ Myth* quoted H. Raschke—"The historic existence of Jesus need not be denied as it has never been affirmed". And M. Ory points out,

In a recent article ("Can a life of Jesus be written?" by Jean Steinmann) a cleric recognised that it is commonly admitted that "no longer can anyone write a life of Jesus . . . nothing is known of the life of Jesus: the theologians because he is God, the professors of the *Formbeschichlich Schule* because he is an idea of the Christian community; the wretch who writes a life of Jesus has obviously no inferiority complex and is afraid of nothing . . . he does not know that Jesus has no life . . . Jesus has only a story . . .".

and he concludes, "From this we can note that the Christian critics are themselves very embarrassed when confronted by a biography of a historic Jesus".

The three "pictures" of Jesus submitted to us are also discussed by M. Ory. The first is that there never was a Jesus. As Dr. Couchoud claimed, "Jesus is a god made into a man". The second view is that, "there was a man Jesus of whom we know very little for certain; he has been so overlaid by myth that he might as well not have existed". And the third wants us "to accept as a working hypothesis the existence of Jesus, but—what a restriction—he was not at all the person depicted in the gospels. He is thought to be a fanatical Jew . . .". But this man did not found Christianity. All these points of view are discussed in some detail by M. Ory, who also gives some valuable notes for students.

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This Believing World

ATV's "About Religion" on September 30th was a discussion on "Does Science Disprove Christianity?", and all we got were the *opinions* of three people, two professors, Dame K. Lonsdale and C. Coulson, and Dr. R. Harris from the Imperial Cancer Research Fund. None of them dealt with the impact of science on religion at all. Dame Kathleen kept telling us what she *believed*; so did Professor Coulson and Dr. Harris. All three were supposed to answer questions from students of two Birmingham schools; needless to say, none of the questions was in the slightest degree "heretical". They were almost infantile. *

Dame Kathleen felt that the real issue was to come back at all costs to Christ; Dr. Harris believed everything, almost like a thorough-going Fundamentalist; while God alone knows what it is that Professor Coulson (who almost always turns up in religious programmes requiring a professor who believes in Christianity) really believes. The fact is that if the BBC or ITV brought a militant Free-thinker on TV, all the "old ladies" (of both sexes) would rush to the telephone with angry protests at blatant "infidelity" being allowed to raise its blasphemous head. *

It would prove interesting to learn whether Dr. Leslie Weatherhead attacks "faith-healing" because there is no such thing, or because he hates competition. In his book,

Wounded Spirits, he claims that "faith healers" even if they do appear to "cure", do so for only a short time, for the symptoms reappear. Dr. Weatherhead does not like the *Christian* faith-healing evangelists who conduct "come-one-come-all services", and perhaps it is this, more than the failure to cure, which rouses his opposition. *

And Dr. Weatherhead does not think prayers have much (or any?) therapeutic value. He claims that "no man ever healed another man". Anybody who disagrees with him should answer the point made by his old teacher, Dr. W. R. Maltby—"If you fell into a river and were drowning, would you rather see on the bank near you a burglar who could swim, or a bishop who couldn't?" Clearly, comments Dr. Weatherhead, "God could make better use of a swimming burglar than a sinking bishop". *

Whether Pope John will or will not impose any "liberalism" on the Council, or whether the die-hard Cardinals will get their own way, remains to be seen. Many English Roman Catholics belong to the die-hard group. Sure that they hold every Christian ace openly or up their sleeves, they won't renounce their Christian heritage without a bitter struggle. If however, unity is to be brought about, the various sects will just have to give way on many points. What about the celibacy of the clergy? And the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary? And—dare we mention it—Infallibility itself?

MORE LIGHT ON CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

(Continued from page 331)

The Jewish and Pagan witnesses for a real Jesus are carefully examined, and M. Ory thinks very little of them. He suspects the authenticity of the famous *Letter* by Pliny to Trajan, and gives positive reasons for doing so; and the famous passage in Tacitus is critically examined and rejected. And he asks:

Are we to think that from the works of Jewish historians and of Greek and Roman writers all mention of Jesus has been expurgated by imperial censorship or by the rabbis and by the Fathers of the Church? . . . Is it likely that every reference in every work should have been cut out? . . . Had it been possible to destroy, revise, correct all the MSS, such treatment would surely have been impossible with regard to inscriptions, monuments and paintings . . .

The truth is that, except in a few very disputed passages no profane author has mentioned Jesus, though this statement has been cleverly changed into the statement that "no such author has contested it". As M. Ory points out, "If these writers had never heard of Jesus they would have no grounds for denying his existence".

My own theory has been that Gnostic writings, possibly written before our era, began to be circulated and they taught something about "a spiritual Christ of sorts" placing his abode in heaven alongside the "supreme" God, but that no one understood what was meant by a "spiritual Christ" in heaven. He was therefore brought down to earth by "Gospels" and "took the form of a man". For, just as is the case these days, the growing numbers of Christians would have nothing to do with a merely "spiritual" Christ "up there". He had to be a "man" as well. Hence, we have Christians who look upon Christ as being both God and man, and some Rationalists who believe that he was only a man. But, as M. Ory insists, "a belief is no proof of an existence".

Jesus, whatever else is claimed for him in Christian writings—for nowhere else can it be shown that he lived—was a God, and this is M. Ory's conclusion: He "is a god that works wonders, resurrects after a descent into death, and then ascends into heaven . . . Gods are the

creation of Man, and Jesus was a god 'from the beginning'; he precedes human history and is an object of worship . . . Christ's history is like that of other gods . . .".

M. Ory's little work puts the facts concisely, and they seem to me to be unanswerable. In his all too few pages, he has compressed an enormous amount of research, and his case against the Churches' "scriptural" history will give all Freethinkers some magnificent ammunition. If we have to fight religion we must have facts, and M. Ory has given us them in abundance.

No reader of THE FREETHINKER should be without this little masterpiece of Freethought.

TRIBUTE TO HERETICS—(Continued from page 330)

And when, degraded and excommunicated as an "impenitent apostate", you mounted the pile of faggots, no cry of pain or remorse passed your lips. And when the crucifix was held up before your dying eyes, you turned away from it with contempt and disgust, for you would have none of a religion that condemned its opponents to so vile a death.

Time has delivered the Inquisitors to the judgment of history. It is they, your excommunicators, your executioners, who now burn in the quenchless fires to which they consigned you.

SPINOZA (1632-1677)

For refusing to accept scripture as the word of God you were execrated, damned, and cast out of your community "after the judgment of the angels".

You broke with ritual. Altar, built on the grave of reason, you demolished. Prayer, you considered presumptuous and vain. Like another heretic-saint, you threw the moneychangers out of the temple.

Love of God, you said, was impossible without knowledge of God. And who had better knowledge of God than you?

Best of all, you brought the Prime Mover down from a non-existing heaven, from the clouds of unknowing, from the smoke of Sinais, and reinstated Him in the heart of man.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, October 21st, 6.45 p.m.: A MEETING.

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, October 23rd, 7.30 p.m.: M. L. BURNET, "A Humanist Looks at the Personal Life".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, October 21st, 6.30 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "Nelson and Wesley: Two Studies in Reaction".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, October 21st, 7.30 p.m.: RICHARD CLEMENTS, OBE, JP, "Giants of Freethought: Bradlaugh and Ingersoll".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, October 21st, 11 a.m.: R. W. SOKENSEN, MP, "1662 and All That! Conformity and Non-conformity in 1962."

Notes and News

AFTER LUNCHING with Joseph Lewis and his charming wife during their recent brief stay in London, we can report that this great American champion of Thomas Paine is as alert and alive as ever, despite his three-score years and ten—plus. As Walter Steinhardt said in these columns a fortnight ago, it is Mr. Lewis's fervent hope that a statue to Paine will be erected in London, and he was here for talks with London County Council representatives. From London, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis flew to Paris, where the Thomas Paine statue was in need of renovation. Then it was on to Rome, where Mr. Lewis intended to place a wreath on the memorial to Giordano Bruno. While in England, Mr. Lewis had hoped to call on Bertrand Russell, but the rail strike prevented this. Still, he renewed acquaintance with Mr. Steinhardt and—a much older acquaintance this—with Mr. Herbert Cutner. He also spent some time with Mr. Christopher Brunel, who shares his great admiration for Paine.

Two English Freethinkers, Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Collins have just returned from Rome, where they too, placed flowers on the Bruno statue. Or rather, had them placed there by obliging workmen who were repairing the plinth. The tribute caused a little publicity, Mr. and Mrs. Collins

tell us. Perhaps, then, other Freethinkers on holiday in Rome might make a point of paying similar tributes. Flowers may be obtained from the colourful market in the Campo de Fiori, where Bruno was burned, and where his statue now stands.

★

ON OCTOBER 8TH, Richard Dimpleby introduced BBC "Panorama" viewers to St. Peter's and, among others, to Cardinal Gilroy, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, in Rome for the Ecumenical Council. We can't say we took a liking to the Cardinal, but then, we were already acquainted with his prevarications in connection with the New South Wales schools dispute. When Roman Catholic schools in Goulburn were closed at the instigation of Dr. J. Cullinane, Auxiliary Bishop of Goulburn as a protest against lack of state aid, the Cardinal was interviewed by the *Sunday Mirror* (15/7/62). The closing, he said had "nothing to do with the Church". It was "a matter between the citizens of the State and the Government of the State". "The Church does not enter into the dispute", he continued. "It is just between lay people and the Government". Asked what was his opinion on the dispute, and if he supported the decision to close the schools, Cardinal Gilroy declared: "I have no opinion or stand".

★

COLONEL JEAN BASTIEN-THIERY, the devoutly Roman Catholic French Air Force officer accused of being the ringleader of the machine-gun attack on President de Gaulle, has caused a sensation in religious circles. "As you know, the Church recognises the killing of a tyrant in certain circumstances", the Colonel is alleged to have stated (*Daily Mirror*, 25/9/62). "We obtained the advice of a number of eminent clergymen [before the attempted assassination] and they considered that those conditions were more than fulfilled in this case". When this view was condemned in a church magazine, the Colonel's lawyers retorted: "The first duty of those who claim to preach brotherly love and charity is not to weigh down a defenceless Christian".

★

MENTION OF BROTHERLY LOVE reminds us of a Jewish *Chronicle* report (24/8/62) that "Dominican Fathers in the Limburg provincial town of Venlo continue to include in their prayers for the 700 Venlo victims of the Second World War not only Jews but also local members of the SS, who died fighting in the German Army". Six years ago the Fathers compiled a memorial volume of 700 names, and on the first Friday of every month they recite a mass for those named therein. They refuse to remove either the names of the Nazis or those of their Jewish victims, because it would be "contrary to the Christian teaching of brotherhood".

★

NAN FLANAGAN, the translator of the deservedly praised Portuguese novel, *The Sin of Father Amaro* by Eça de Queiroz, tells us that an American edition is expected early in the New Year, under the imprint of the St. Martin's Press, New York. We recommend this book to our American friends, and remind home readers who have missed it, to remedy the deficiency. The English publisher is Max Reinhardt.

★

TWO CONSECUTIVE FREETHINKER articles by F. A. Ridley—"Gods over Africa" (June 22nd) and "The Religious Struggle in Israel" (June 29th)—appear in condensed form in the September 1962 issue of *The Rationalist* of South Africa.

Christian Morality

By G. L. SIMONS

PEOPLE WHO are sympathetic to Christianity often attempt to defend it by suggesting that even though its dogma may be questionable (to say the least), it nevertheless provides a good social morality. Similarly, believing Christians are often reluctant to defend such things as the Dogma of the Trinity and the notion of Divine Grace, and maintain that the most valuable feature of Christianity is the morality which it recommends. In this way an attempt is made to divorce Christian dogma from Christian morality, and to maintain that though the former may not seem quite as reasonable as it used to, the latter remains sound and secure. But the situation is not as simple as some people wish to make it appear.

In the first place, having attempted to dissociate dogmas of belief and rules of behaviour, what justification has the Christian for maintaining that these rules are suitable for the good social morality? He can no longer justify them by citing the dogma from which they appear to be derived, for dogma has lost its old respectability. It seems that when the Christian affirms the value of Christian morality he is not always estimating this value according to the abstract dogma of his religion. How then does he recognise the good morality? Surely in one or both of two ways—either according to prejudices imbibed from the cradle or from later conscious thought about what constitutes the good life. In either case he is beginning to reflect in terms which the agnostic can recognise. For moral prejudice is essentially an emotional reaction to certain forms of behaviour, and conscious thought has no impact upon behaviour unless it evokes a corresponding emotional attitude to human activity. In either case it is *a feeling and not a dogma* which causes a person to embrace a particular morality.

As soon as this is acknowledged, a person is thinking like a rationalist and not like a Christian. For a Christian may *feel* that contraception and euthanasia are reasonable and humane, but may reject them because he *believes* that they contradict a moral principle which has been derived from dogma. Hence in attempting to justify Christian morality irrespective of the dogma from which it is nominally thought to be derived, the Christian has firmly placed one foot in the rationalist camp. But this is not intended to imply that the rationalist necessarily agrees with the Christian who says that Christianity provides a good social morality. About this, two points need to be stressed.

The first is that the Christian has a certain arrogance in attempting to monopolise desirable behaviour by calling it "Christian". Indeed before Christ many pagans recommended a social morality to which Jesus was later to subscribe. And it is not surprising that similar social moralities evolved in both Christian and non-Christian countries. This is because any society which did not adopt a morality with certain characteristics could not continue. Natural selection has been as powerful a force in the sphere of societies as in that of individuals; and just as the intelligent, cunning, strong or fleet individual survived in competition with his less well-endowed rivals, so societies which had a high degree of co-operativeness, sobriety and intelligence endured, while societies which were anarchic and dissolute perished.

Thus a social morality was a survival characteristic, and to a certain extent typifies all modern societies. For the Christian arbitrarily to define this survival characteristic

as "Christian" is as parochial and perverse as it would be to define vision as "mammalian" or egg-laying as "reptilian". The process actually happened in the reverse direction. Jesus, perceiving social morality, decided (for one reason or another) that it was good, and recommended it to his followers. But Chinese sages, Hebrew prophets and Greek philosophers recommended a social morality (in some cases a superior one to that of Christ) before Jesus was born; and just as a human being can possess a cerebral cortex without having to admit that he is an Englishman in consequence, so a Buddhist, an Islamist or an Atheist is entitled to embrace a social morality without being forced to admit that Christians own the patent for such a morality.

The second point is that Christian morality has defects when considered broadly. It is customary for Christians to remember favourable biblical passages and to disregard the ones which do not support the image they are trying to convey. In consequence Christ appears tolerant, wise and loving. It is forgotten that Christ was able to state that certain sins were completely unforgivable (Matthew 12, 32), and to suggest that people who did not like the idea of being ruled by him, be slain (Luke 19, 27). When instances of this sort are considered, Christ appears intolerant and wholly unable to consider views which do not coincide with his own convictions. Also in suggesting that the scribes and Pharisees were misguided in washing their hands before they ate (Mark 7), and in cursing the fig-tree because it did not bear fruit out of season (Mark 11), Christ appears slightly less than wise.

The "Christian" morality derived from St. Paul has similar anomalies. For example, in stating that the married state is morally inferior to celibacy (I Corinthians 7, 32-38) Paul recommends a morality which appears unnatural and perverse. And in cursing men who preach creeds other than his own (Galatians 1, 9), Paul exemplifies the intolerance of ideological competition which has characterised Christianity through the ages.

The conclusion seems to be that Christians wish to designate social morality "Christian" to salvage part of historical Christianity, and that they are short-sighted or hypocritical in believing Christian morality to be flawless. But I do not wish to decry the whole of Christian morality. To do so would be to sink into the reverse theology—to believe that all things Christian are unwise or unreasonable. Rather I wish to suggest that Christian morality has some defects (most of which I have not mentioned), and that it is desirable that these be recognised. It appears that no creed has a monopoly of wisdom, and that the various social moralities which have been proposed contain both good and evil. Where they agree they are often good; where they disagree they are often bad. To recognise this, men need to be rational and tolerant—qualities which do not come easily to the fervent Christian or the orthodox believer in any ancient system of dogma and morality.

WITHOUT COMMENT

Seeing a British Railways lorry parked in Greenhundred-rd., Peckham, an 11-year-old Peckham boy jumped on it and stole a box containing three tins of slimming pills.

At Lambeth juvenile court he pleaded guilty and was reported to have said: "I thought there would be something better in it". A probation officer said the boy had only just changed from junior to senior school, but refused to go there because it was a Protestant school and he wanted a Catholic one.

—South London Press (5/10/62).

Still More Light on Christian Origins

By P. G. ROY

THE CLAIM that Christianity originated in Palestine—and Galilee in particular—has been accepted by all and sundry as "Gospel truth", yet it is hard to see why the setting of a story which admittedly is mythological should be more reliable than the rest of the plot. The Romans believed that their ancestors were refugees from Troy; but this has been shown to be a pious myth, invented to claim descent from the Hellenic world. Christianity, a Hellenised hotch-potch of various messianic beliefs of the Near East, had to claim similar connections with that region of the world—the cradle of many saviour cults. Yet it was Rome where all those religions and cults met and blended. And again, it was from Rome that the new gospel could spread, not from the backwaters of a politically and culturally unimportant Roman province. At its inception, the Christian religion was not the result of some supernatural revelation, it was the product of Greco-Roman civilisation in decay.

When classical slave economy found itself in an impasse, society became increasingly responsive to the mystery cults of Asia Minor, begotten from the old magic rites. Mystery religions provided an ideological sheet anchor for the dispossessed peasantry, the slaves in general, and all the oppressed nationalities under the sway of Roman imperialism or Byzantine totalitarianism. The mysteries of Dionysos, the god of wine, offered union with god through intoxication and the ensuing "divine frenzy"; the Eleusinian mysteries promised their initiates immortality after death; the Orphics, Paradise, and so forth. The path of salvation consisted largely of magic rituals such as initiation and symbolic purification—through water or fire ordeals—preceding mystical rebirth.

In Rome, these views blended with the Levantine conceptions of the seasonal Messiahs, the agencies of the sun, periodically persecuted by the powers of Darkness, but finally resurrected in triumph and glory. The cultural pooling of all these manifold ideas could not take place anywhere else but in the metropolis of classical chattel slavery where a great portion of the slaves represented the best educated stratum of the population.

At first by word of mouth, then in writing, the coming of the Saviour—a mighty Lord who alone was powerful enough to smite the temporal lords—was given out as the rallying cry of the downtrodden in an effete and decaying society. And again, this last hope in the succour of a heavenly superman-redemptor was necessary in mighty Rome, but not in feeble, unimportant Palestine. However, owing to the fact that this medley of slaves from all over the antique world could never develop a nationally and socially united outlook, the redeemer had to come from a remote corner overseas.

Exposed to continuous influence from Syrian and Egyptian centres of Hellenistic culture, even backward Palestine could not remain untouched, with the result that spiritual movements—such as the local sects of the Essenes (whose influence the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has corroborated¹) had developed; but never could such local movements have spread their influence beyond the limits

of the Hebrew tongue. When choosing Jesus, i.e. Joshua, the old tribal hero and demigod of the Jordan valley, the authors of the new religion only emulated Virgil who, pretended descent from Troy for the Romans. In a similar way their scriptural epos claimed higher antiquity and continuity for their heroes through the trick of annexing their plot to an already Hebrew mythos, though re-setting and modernising the old mystery play. It did not matter to anybody that in this presentation historical events were confused and place names (such as Nazareth) invented, just as it does not matter that Shakespeare adapted older plays and invented places.

At first the followers of the new "message", concocted of Jewish theology and vulgarised Greek philosophy, expected the coming of the Redeemer hourly, for the need was pressing. Consequently there seemed no necessity for a stable organisation, an elaborate ritual nor a philosophical formulation of their creed. They lived in a near-communistic brotherhood of consumers², not caring for the morrow as they expected their deliverance by then. When, however, the coming of the Deliverer was time and again delayed, hope and expectancy gave way to a more morose and passive outlook; adjustments became imperative and hope had to be propped up through doctrinal bones. It was only then that the Pauline Church took shape: an organisation sprang up and began to proselytise. It strengthened the brethren to resist the temporal authorities—not economically, but with regard to worship of the Roman gods and the deified Emperors. Tolerant though the Romans were in spiritual matters, the masters and overlords of the ancient world could not submit to snubbing and civil disobedience. This was the only and sole reason for some punitive measures which, boosted up as religious persecution, created the climate of martyrdom and fanaticism in a circle of poor desperados, so far not too influential. The early Christian communities became welded together in mutual aid—in a common struggle.

But, what started as a kind of primitive communism, broke up into a hierarchy, undemocratically ruled. We see a similar development today in the new political ventures like Ghana or the Sudan, where the masses are far too uneducated and immature to develop a democratic form of government.

The Christian hierarchy was modelled on the Imperial administration system; a canon was edited incorporating current maxims attributed to Jesus the Christ or the mythical "Twelve", and all this was prefixed by the bulk of the Hebrew scriptures.

² So much had productive labour fallen into disrepute that nobody cared, at the same time, to produce collectively. Only seen in this perspective can one understand the "Sermon on the Mount" which otherwise does not make sense.

ABORTION LAW REFORM ASSOCIATION

A PUBLIC MEETING will be held in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C.1, at 7.30 p.m. on Tuesday, November 6th, 1962. Admission is Free.

Speakers:

KENNETH ROBINSON, M.P.

Subject: Abortion Law Reform in Parliament.

Chairman: Professor W. C. W. Nixon, M.D., F.R.C.S., F.R.C.O.G.

DR. PETER DARBY.

Subject: The Effects of Legal Abortion—Warsaw Conference, 1962.

Chairman: Dr. Glanville Williams, F.B.A.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

¹ At the beginning of this century already, long before the Qumram scrolls were thought of, Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) in a book on the *Origins of Christianity*, drew attention to the influence of religious sects in Palestine in general and that of the Essenes in particular. In this book, which was far more important than all his political writings and activities, Kautsky must have been the first to venture the theory that Christianity arose not in Palestine but in Rome.

Human Nature and Human Needs

By MARGARET McILROY

The Anatomy and Excellence of Human Nature by Dr. Macpherson Lawrie (C. W. Daniel Co. Ltd., Ashingdon, Rochford, Essex, 7s. 6d.) is not a book that is likely to make a strong appeal to readers of THE FREETHINKER. Dr. Lawrie, listing the inherent excellencies of human nature, includes "a natural and prevailing tendency in man to visualise and believe in the existence of a supreme supernatural power", and asks for "simple and straightforward" religious teaching "upholding the goodness of God, and the goodness of his creation". He continually refers to inborn tendencies as "provided", seeing every instinct as purposely implanted by God for the benefit of men. These views will not encourage freethinkers to take much notice of Dr. Lawrie's book, and unfortunately his style is a further obstacle to understanding, as he is given to endless long and repetitive lists of abstract nouns. I have seldom read a book in which it is so difficult to find one's place!

Nevertheless, Dr. Lawrie's main thesis deserves serious consideration. It strikes out against the doctrine of original sin—one of the most damaging doctrines traditionally propagated by Christianity—and it is one of those rare books which may make one change one's own daily behaviour.

Dr Lawrie considers that human beings are naturally good, that man's inborn tendencies are valuable and god-given, and that the source of all wickedness is evil influences working on the young. Thus he firmly contradicts "Original Sin", which is fundamental to most systems of Christian theology, and on which so many spare-the-rod-and-spoil-the-child systems of education have been based; with the aim of checking and controlling and terrorising the child, to prevent him from growing up the monster which, it is thought, his sinful human nature inclines him to be.

This, freethinkers already know, but Dr. Lawrie's book makes some further points which are less commonly understood. He does not merely dismiss human depravity as a result of religious and political institutions, but lays bare the mechanism by which a baby predisposed to goodness may become one of the narrow-minded, mean, unloving and unlovable people we so often meet. He considers a number of harmful influences, but his most useful, and most original contribution is his section on the damage done by nagging criticism.

A fundamental human need is to be able to respect oneself and be respected by others. The effect of disparagement and lack of encouragement, particularly in childhood and adolescence, is devastating. The victim may accept this view of himself and give up hope, becoming incapable of initiative and effort; or, if he fights back, he may become aggressive and disagreeable. "We have only", Dr. Lawrie writes, "got to push depreciation, belittlement and disparagement to produce either a negative and spiritless mentality, or a distorted, bitter, vindictive and abusive personality".

From this viewpoint, let us glance at our education system. How much harm is done every day by sarcastic and discouraging teachers? How much harm is done by the Eleven-Plus Examination, which is deliberately organised to stamp the brand of failure on four-fifths of our children?

Praise, on the other hand, "is an influence as productive of good as depreciation is of harm". Most people "are in desperate need of appreciation, encouragement and praise . . . A more positive and deliberate handing out of praise and appreciation, would together do more to eliminate unpleasantness, hostility, misunderstanding and untruthfulness than almost any other educational, social or political endeavour". One may think Dr. Lawrie exaggerates here, but I have no doubt that here is a thought which every parent and teacher should constantly bear in mind, as in fact should everyone who deals with people, as a member of a family, of a working group—or even of the Freethought movement.

CORRESPONDENCE

ATHEISM

I accept the criticism that if anyone, like myself, has evolved a personal philosophy which might be described as theistic or pantheistic rather than atheistic, such a one should be careful to refrain from any use of the word god, as the use of such a word might seem to imply the acceptance of a traditional theology or creed, which has in fact been totally rejected.

No capitals this time, out of respect for Mr. Wappenhans.

PETER CROMMELIN.

I believe that the main reason for the incongruousness of Mr. Smelters' statements (p. 312) lies in the fact that he does not appear to know very well what the term "rationalism" stands for.

Whether atheism is true or not is entirely irrelevant to our argument. Quite to the contrary of what Mr. Smelters implies, rationalism and irrationalism do not refer to the kind of conclusion one reaches but to the way one reaches such conclusion. Even an irrational, i.e. intuitive conclusion may be true and therefore must not forcibly be either false or foolish as Mr. Smelters pretends. For an authoritative explanation of the distinction between rational and intuitive thinking I would refer Mr. Smelters to Bertrand Russell's *Mysticism and Logic* (pp. 18-20 in the Pelican edition).

All freethinkers and rationalists may (or may not) be atheists, but if they are atheists they are not so by definition and we even have read in THE FREETHINKER about members of the National Secular Society or sympathisers who are not atheists in the strict sense of this term. But all this is beside the point. What I contend is not whether all rationalists are or are not atheists, but that not all atheists are rationalists. There obviously is a difference between one contention and the other.

On page 104 I quoted 3 examples of notorious atheists, namely Nietzsche, Sartre and certain German Nazi leaders. Mr. Smelters passed these examples over in silence. May I therefore challenge him to state whether or not in his view these three prototypes are freethinkers and rationalists?

G. WAPPENHANS.

GOD

Mr. Colin McCall in THE FREETHINKER (28/9/62) stated . . . "the fact remains that the word 'God' means something [his italics] to some people. It unquestionably means different things to different people. Ideas of God are invariably vague and muddled."

Mr. McCall should be reminded that we cannot think apart from things that are known to exist. To most people, "God" is a magnified man, who is without body, parts or passions, whatever that means.

Since there is no evidence of this existence of "God", the word cannot mean anything to anybody. Nor can we have any idea of that which does not exist. Ideas emanate from objective reality; no object, no idea; but perhaps Mr. McCall has an idea of nothing.

JAMES HUMPHREY.

REPLY

I am afraid my friend Mr. Humphrey's reasoning is—like ideas of God—"vague and muddled". It isn't true to say that because there is no evidence of the existence of God, the word cannot mean anything to anybody, any more than it is to say that because there is no evidence of unicorns or fairies, these words have no meaning. Quite clearly they do. If I talk about a unicorn, Mr. Humphrey will have a conception of the "beast", though neither of us believes in it. Ideas "emanate" from the brain, and may be stimulated by many internal or external factors.

COLIN MCCALL.

WANTED

Joseph McCabe's *The Tyranny of Shams*; Max Nordau's *Conventional Lies of Civilisation*, new or secondhand.—Box 269LS.