

# The Freethinker

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IN VIEW of the extensive publicity afforded to the Vatican Council, the English translation of a book written on the subject by a Swiss professor in the German University of Tübingen, is of more than passing interest. For Dr. Hans Kung, a professional theologian and a liberal Catholic, must be regarded as the mouthpiece of the moderate party at present apparently dominant at Rome under the pontificate of Pope John XXIII, and his book *The Council and*

*Reunion* (Sheed and Ward, Stagbooks, 14s. 6d.) has been received with widespread enthusiasm in reforming circles both inside and outside the Roman Catholic Church. Two cardinals, the Archbishops of Vienna and of Liège, contribute enthusiastic forewords, whilst a review cited on the cover quotes the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Fisher of Lambeth, as stating—presumably to an Anglican audience—that he had never read such a book in his life. A number of extremely favourable reviews both Catholic and non-Catholic, similarly praise Dr. Kung's book in unmeasured terms. Clearly, he is accepted in influential circles again both Catholic and non-Catholic alike as the theoretician, and as the semi-official spokesman of what presently appears to be the dominant ecclesiastical party within the Roman Catholic Church. Presumably if this liberal wing of the Catholic Church remains in the ascendant (despite the fact that the Vatican Council appears to be making rather heavy weather) and if Pope John is eventually succeeded by another liberal pope, we shall probably hear a lot more about Dr. Kung and his little book.

## Little Real Change

Actually, when one gets down to the serious task of analysing the precise content of Dr. Kung's essay in reconciliation (as we may term it) it seems a little difficult, at least when considered upon its own merits—and apart from its predisposing circumstances—to understand what all this furor is about. For our Swiss author offers little that is new or positive for the present and future consideration of his readers. His book, whilst indisputably eloquent and learned in its special spheres of Church history and theological controversies, has very little that is concrete to offer to its readers, whether in or out of the jurisdiction of Rome. Whilst, for example, it is full of appeals for greater love and mutual understanding between the Catholic and non-Catholic Churches of which, as it has to concede, there has not been too much evidence in their past mutual relationships, Dr. Kung does not actually propose in any way to alter the rigid dogmatic structure of the Church. Indeed, it would be impossible for him and even for Pope John, whose infallibility is, as Dr. Kung himself insists, limited at every turn by previous and also infallible decisions of popes and councils, to do much in this direction. The nearest that this latest Catholic apologist comes to the advocacy of doctrinal change for the purpose of ultimately effecting reunion with "our separated brethren" in the non-Roman Churches, is a timid sugges-

tion that the cult of Mariolatry, such a stumbling block to Protestants past and present, might usefully undergo some restraint with regard to its present and future development. However, in view of the indisputable fact that neither Dr. Kung himself, nor even Pope John (who has no power to alter any established dogma of the Church) can do anything about the already existing dogmas about Mary (Immaculate Conception and bodily

assumption into Heaven) our author's cautious criticisms of the present luxuriant expansion of the Marian cult as an obstacle to future Christian reunion, sound very much (to quote the Gospels themselves) like "straining at a

gnat and swallowing a camel". For even the most liberal of Catholics must nowadays believe that Mary ascended *bodily* through the stellar galaxies to a *place* (so far unidentified) named Heaven! Surely anyone who could accept that, could accept anything. As I have suggested before in these columns, in view of modern developments (in the technical sense of the term as defined by Cardinal Newman), the only kind of reunion at all practicable, and the only kind that can conceivably emerge from this Council, is bound to be a very one-sided affair, as must always surely be the case when one party is by definition infallible and the other side is not.

## Rome and the Reformation

Perhaps the most important, certainly the most erudite, and I found it the most interesting part of Dr. Kung's little book, is to be found in his attitude to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Here, he certainly makes some very frank admissions which, incidentally, would probably have caused him to be burned alive by the Inquisition at the times he describes. For he admits that, at the time of the Reformation the Catholic Church was extremely corrupt, and that what Luther, Calvin *et al*, said (and did) about it then was, at least largely, justified. As he points out with much erudition, the Catholic Church itself was at first divided on the issue, since there was a reforming party within the Church that advocated compromise with the Reformation, much as Pope John (and Dr. Kung) today advocate compromise with non-Roman Christianity. (Today also, there appears to be a conservative faction derived from the late Pius XII, but temporarily submerged under Pope John.) Our Catholic author agrees with me (as I had already stated in my own little book, *Pope John and the Cold War*) that the crucial turning point in the relations between the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation came in 1555, when the leader of the die-hard fight-to-a-finish party within the Church, Pope Paul IV, narrowly defeated the Englishman, Cardinal Pole (later to be the last Roman Archbishop of Canterbury under Mary) leader of the liberal party within the Church, who wished to compromise with the Protestant Reformers. It was a black-letter day in the annals of Europe, since it began the horrible era of the Wars of Religion that culminated in the terrible

VIEWS and OPINIONS

## The Vatican Council and Reunion

By F. A. RIDLEY

Thirty Years War (1618-48). Dr. Kung clearly holds that it was a black year for Christianity, too, since it made Christian reunion a mere dream for the next three centuries.

### The Council in Perspective

The Council of Rome is, in 1962-63, seeking belatedly to revive the question of Christian reunion, and Dr. Kung's little book derives its importance from the fact that it is to date, probably the best-known Catholic publication to be written specifically from this special point of view. Reformation, insists our Catholic author, is not a Protestant monopoly; for, in so far as even the infallible Church of Rome consists of human beings and therefore of sinners, it also stands in need of renewed reformation from within. Perhaps the passage in Professor Kung's book that has attracted most attention outside his own Church, is where he suggests a public confession by the Council itself of the Catholic responsibility for the past and present

divisions of Christianity. We have however, not yet heard that Pope John *et al* have donned sackcloth and ashes in public! Personally, I must repeat that I do not think that any general scheme of Christian reunion is likely to emerge from the Council of Rome. However, the idea is in the air; probably the present tendency to minimise theological differences and to concentrate on what are now the major enemies of Christianity, Atheism and Materialism, will continue in both the Catholic and non-Catholic camps. As to date, probably the ablest and most publicised expression of this eirenic point of view from the Catholic side, this little book of Dr. Hans Kung assumes permanent importance as representing a presumably influential tendency. Non-Christian critics can study it with advantage, both on account of its own considerable literary and scholastic merits and still more because of its undoubtedly representative character in connection with an important contemporary religious tendency.

## Free Will and Religion

By G. L. SIMONS

AN ESSENTIAL PART of Christianity is belief in judgment—celestial by God, terrestrial by his worthy representatives (who assure us that they are acting upon his behalf). With the idea of celestial judgment go the notions of redemption, salvation, heaven and hell; with the idea of terrestrial judgment goes the notion of sin. In order that judgment (of either variety) can be made to seem reasonable two conditions have to be fulfilled. Man has to have the opportunity to choose right from wrong, and he has to have free will. However, the meaning of "free will" in this context is obscure, and I contend that the theological interpretation of this notion is completely meaningless.

In the phrase "free will", "free" must be defined in a way that is compatible with either of two possible ways in which human choice occurs. For human acts, of which human choice is an example, are events in the universe, and as such are *either caused or uncaused*. All events must be one or the other for the same reason that all men are six feet tall or not. Examining each of these two possibilities it can be seen that in neither case can free will be given the connotation that the theologian requires.

If an event, e.g. human choice, is caused then it depends upon previous events. We all assume this sort of thing in everyday life. When, for example, we operate the light-switch on a dark morning we are confident that the room will become illuminated. The caused event depends in its entirety upon events which have already occurred. In a sense it is determined by them. If they had not occurred neither would it have occurred unless, by coincidence, a different causal chain had led to the same conclusion.

It is clear that there is no sense in which such an event can be free in the way that the theologian requires. If human choice is such an event then we are akin to exceedingly complex machines which react (in a purely predictable way if we knew all the laws which govern human behaviour) according to stimuli from within the mechanism and from without. We are comparable to electronic computers which behave according to the way they are put together, and the information that is fed to them. Most modern computers have a "decision" facility which enables them to choose between alternatives. Theologians seem reluctant to admit that computers have free will. Yet if it is admitted that human choice is caused then we have no more claim to the possession of free will than any high-speed digital or analogue machine with a decision facility.

Theologians have often noticed the force of this argument and in consequence have tried to show that not all events are caused. Such scientific notions as the Heisenberg Indeterminacy Principle are invoked in an attempt to rescue moral freedom from what appears to be a universe of cause and effect. About this two points need to be stressed.

In the first place the Heisenberg Indeterminacy Principle (which states that the position and momentum of a moving, sub-atomic particle cannot simultaneously be measured with accuracy) in no way invalidates the notion that all events are caused. It merely shows that human measuring techniques, since they affect the measured object (of whatever size, the affect being negligible for macroscopic objects) have an inherent limitation. (Theologians have been understandably eager to clutch at any scientific doctrine which appears to support their position. This eagerness is born of desperation.) Similarly the so-called random transitions of orbital electrons from one shell to another may in fact be caused. That scientists have not discovered the cause of a particular event never entails that no cause exists. In the second place, in shying away from causation, religious apologists rarely realise the nature of the world which they think they would like to see exist—which brings us to the second possible way in which human choice occurs.

If an event is uncaused it has no relation to the past. It is independent of previous events and springs into existence *for no reason*. Such an event is free in the fullest sense of the word. But as far as morality goes, such an interpretation of freedom is an empty notion. For over this sort of event, human beings can have no control whatever. For the idea of moral responsibility requires that human choice can be governed in a *causal* manner. And indeed a world without cause would be a curious place. As Bertrand Russell characteristically observes in *The Scientific Outlook* (p. 112): "The principle of causality may be true or may be false, but the person who finds the hypothesis of its falsity cheering is failing to realise the implications of his own theory. He usually retains unchallenged all those causal laws which he finds convenient, as, for example, that his food will nourish him and that his bank will honour his cheques so long as his account is in funds, while rejecting all those that he finds

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# Recent French Criticism of Christianity

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

THERE IS A TENDENCY among Freethinkers in this country to fancy that, because they themselves have rejected certain religious dogmas as untenable, religious problems are "dead horses", and that the flogging of such is of no further value. This attitude is sometimes taken to a further stage, and an ostrich-like position adopted, implying that not only is there no further need of discussion but that anything in the nature of criticism of orthodox belief is "aggressive". If "Jack" is all right, then nothing can improve this best of worlds, and sleeping dogs (or dead horses) should be let lie.

This attitude is not infrequently adopted toward criticism of the Bible, and such a fosterer, awaking from torpor and recalling the days of his alert youth, may declare roundly in a letter to the Editor that nothing has been done for fifty years past, and that the hasty fancies of Drews, Smith and Robertson have all been dropped and should be kindly-wise forgotten, pace Mr. Cutner.

They do things better in France. There the voice of the critic has not been stilled for a moment. The great scholars of between wars, Turmel, Alfaric and Couchoud, may be dead, but their work is carried on without a break. The Cercle Ernest Renan, founded by Professor Prosper Alfaric, produces regularly its monthly *Bulletin* and its quarterly *Cahier*; the Union Rationaliste, founded by Henri Roger, Professor of Medicine, and Paul Langevin, Professor of Physics, issues its monthly *Courier* and its *Cahiers*. The former limits its labours to the study of religious origins; the latter is wider in scope. Nor must one forget the work of André Lorulot and the *Fédération des Livres Penseurs*, who have recently celebrated fifty years of unbroken Freethought publishing. Note that "unbroken" covers two world-wars, in which France was invaded and part occupied.

I recently had the privilege of translating from the French *Cahier Rationaliste* 193, published in January, 1961, *Analyse des Origines Chrétiennes*, by Georges Ory. I have in front of me three later publications of the Union Rationaliste; one deals with the first three chapters of Genesis, the erudite and mordant author is Louis Roussel; the second with the Bible as a guide to the development of Christianity, *Clartés sur la Bible*, by Jacques Rennes; and the third is a series of essays on Christian doctrine by Robert Joly, *Propos pour Mal Pensants*.

M. Roussel's little book sent me to *Genesis* by Charles Bradlaugh, and I have found it very interesting to compare my grandfather's 139 pages on the same three chapters with the 125 of M. Roussel. Each takes a verse and comments on it word by word. M. Roussel gives us the Hebrew text and the Greek (Septuagint) text transliterated so that it may be followed more easily by a reader unaccustomed to Hebrew and Greek. If I may be allowed a word of criticism here, I would say that the learned author has been too exact in endeavouring to represent variations. The reader capable of appreciating the fine detail which he gives would be himself a sufficient scholar to read the text in the original script. Bradlaugh took the Authorised Version; when he wished to refer to the Hebrew, he gave the word in Hebrew script followed by a simple transliteration.

Bradlaugh eighty years ago pointed out that until 1864 no Anglican divine dared to question Genesis and its authorship, yet at the time he was writing (1880) even Christian Evidence lecturers admitted that "it required no great scholarship" to see that the chronology of Genesis

at least had "suffered in transmission". The later student has therefore been spared much controversy, though M. Roussel laments that there are still "millions of people who believe with a mystic ardour in these poor puerilities". Presumption, says he, is the appanage of credulity; hence the claim that "sacred" texts can be interpreted by the priest alone.

Bradlaugh was able to say on page 129 in Notes on Chapter 3, "This chapter contains the very basis of Christianity. It is impossible to reject it and yet to accept Jesus Christ. It must be taken as the literal truth, or else the entire scheme of redemption must be abandoned. If this narrative of the fall is legend, myth, allegory, then the whole foundation for the atonement falls away." M. Roussel concludes: "in the Genesis stories there is nothing divine, nothing sublime. The whole is but mythology pure and simple, recounted on the whole with little skill". M. Roussel adds to his learned comments sparks of Voltairian wit. Genesis is not only uncout, it is absurd. Equally absurd were the explanations of theologians such as were cited by Bradlaugh.

*Clartés sur la Bible* ("Beams of light on the Bible"). How necessary they have been! How many have brought their little lamps to bear on this hotch-potch of folk-tale and myth strung together on a weak thread of history! Too often the lamps have been just gleams of fancy, and the light of reason is all the more welcome. M. Jacques Rennes, the author of this little book of 240 pages, was led to the detailed study of his subject from a study of Pascal. His light has shown him not merely the element of myth running through the Bible in Old and New Testaments; the stories the Bible contains are not told, he discovered, simply, but with the intention to deceive. The priestly interpreter has constantly claimed that the words of the Book are inspired by God himself. And on this dupery the Church is founded. An Israelite characteristic was hatred; the Hebrews hated the Amalekites, the Midianites, the Canaanites, the Chaldeans; a positive liberality of hatred; and the Christians inherited this quality, for the good disciple hates his father and mother and wife and children (Luke 14, 26). The Bible is a masterpiece—of mystification. Children brought up to believe stuff of this kind grow into adults incapable of judging with any accuracy of the truth wherever their preconceptions are impinged on.

Genesis justifies the doctrine of absolute obedience to the divine will, which means to the will of the priest. This is the teaching which runs through the heterogeneous components of the Bible.

From the first chapters of Genesis onwards, the Jewish priesthood emphasised the requirement of absolute obedience to the will of their god. They remained blind to poison which they thus spread.

In the Old Testament, though M. Rennes distinguishes three inspirations, the common theme is that Israel is a bad servant, who must be punished. In the New Testament the problem is somewhat different. "Not only because the original texts have been lost, but also because a cloud of copyists and editors descended on these texts, all are unreliable and tendentious". The task of sorting out the various elements is extraordinarily difficult. Jesus Christ is a compound figure in which M. Rennes considers Messianism and Paulinism to be the main factors, though he admits Essenian, Simonian and other characters. Paul

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## This Believing World

It was most interesting in the ITV interview with Lord Fisher of Lambeth (in the series, "I Believe") to watch Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge's expression, as he vainly tried to pin the ex-Archbishop of Canterbury down to something piously tangible. For example, Dr. Fisher was asked whether he believed in the Devil, and with a heavenly smile, he said of course, "as a kind of shorthand", and poor Mr. Muggeridge almost collapsed. Did Dr. Fisher believe anything whatever? With another cherubic smile, Dr. Fisher said that he believed everything—though Mr. Muggeridge was quite unable to disentangle any beliefs during the interview.

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The fact was that Lord Fisher was far too wily to be caught in the net of Mr. Muggeridge's cynical scepticism. You mustn't ask an Archbishop leading questions about his religion—he knows only too well it would be giving the show away, for them to be truthfully answered. Lord Fisher was, as is always now the rule, ready to talk *ad lib* about "our Lord", for there is nothing easier than to "pass the buck" to Jesus, especially as to what he said—in English. The discredited Authorised Version of the Gospels is still quoted as if every word and comma were Divine, and no one was ever more ready to do so than Lord Fisher of Lambeth in this interview.

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Now that England, so to speak, is the Mecca of all members of the Commonwealth, we must expect those who are only too pleased to live in a Welfare State to bring their religion with them. On October 28th, Britain's first Buddhist Monastery was inaugurated at Haverstock Hill, Hampstead, with priests in yellow robes uttering prayers—though we are far from clear to whom or to what. The head priest is a Canadian named Bhikku who was once trained to be a Baptist minister, and among the treasures he brought with him were a water strainer, a begging-bowl, and a needle and thread—the begging-bowl being of course indispensable.

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Mr. Bhikku has one clear intention—he wants to make the monastery "the centre for the teaching of meditation". But surely this requires no teacher? All one has to do is to sit on a fallen tree trunk in the depths of a forest, and contemplate one's navel. This should give time for as much meditation as any Buddhist finds necessary. However, Mr. Bhikku has discovered that Buddhism is no longer some prehistoric superstition from the East, but a scientific religion "in line with our age". Roman Catholics in particular talk like that.

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A BBC television discussion on religion the other Sunday appears to have brought a large number of protests from the faithful who called some remarks of Dr. A. Vidler (as the *Daily Express*, November 9th, reported) an "insult to the Church". Mr. G. Goyder, chairman of the Church Assembly's information committee, "swung the attack to Dr. Vidler who is the editor of the magazine *Theology*". And the *Church Times*, as befits a very High Church journal, is generally very angry at the damage to the Church caused by the BBC's present religious policy.

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Well, we hope there will be a great many more angry protests so long as the BBC recognises, not merely that there is no unity among Christians as to what exactly is their religion, but also that some of the "nonconformists" (who are not all Christians) should be allowed to say so from time to time. Getting angry does not answer what they

have to say. All sections of the community, if they have some vital objections to religion or politics, are entitled to air their views; for too long has the BBC been nobbled by the Churches in particular.

### FREE WILL AND RELIGION

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inconvenient. This, however, is altogether too naive a procedure".

Hence if human behaviour is caused it is, in principle, predictable and cannot be said to be free in the religious sense. It must happen just as it does. If human behaviour is not caused it is unpredictable, and cannot be controlled by any means whatever. In neither case can free will be interpreted in a way that justifies divine judgment, everlasting hell and all the rest of the metaphysical paraphernalia invented by the pious to give satisfaction to their cruel and vicious traits. In the last resort human beings behave as they do because they are what they are. It is the statement of the theologian that a man can *control his actions in a way that does not involve the condition that his actions are caused* that makes his case wholly meaningless. And anyway whenever a man sins, the priest or clergyman always believes that there is an immoral reason for it, thus surreptitiously admitting the causal nature of human behaviour. (It is significant to note that all religious propaganda and indoctrination assumes that all religious propaganda and indoctrination assumes that human behaviour can be conditioned in a causal manner.)

As far as the theologian is concerned "free will" may be defined as "the meaningless, popularly-sanctioned notion associated with morality which enables me to cause those who disagree with me to feel guilty and forsaken". As far as the Atheist is concerned there are three classes of conditions that must be fulfilled if the will is to be free in the fullest sense. Man must have knowledge and know how to use it, i.e. he must be rational, he must be free from inhibition, fear and neurosis, i.e. he must be emotionally adjusted, and he must be free physically, i.e. he must be economically secure. When these conditions are fulfilled, man can embrace freedom defined in the only way that has real significance. Interpreted in this way freedom is relevant to many aspects of life—not least to those concerned with education and penal philosophy.

If a man furthers human happiness, he may be said to have moral responsibility. The degree of moral responsibility is determined by how the person behaves. It is nonsense to say that because all men have moral responsibility those who do wrong should be made to suffer, to "pay their debt to society". There is no mystical "moral responsibility" behind a man's actions. His moral responsibility is an attribute of his actions. This means that the only justification for penal action is its deterrent value. Penal action which has been shown to have no deterrent significance (such as capital punishment) is preserved merely for the satisfaction of those who enjoy inflicting retribution. This is a sadly inadequate justification for causing men to suffer. The only legitimate reason for punishment is to deter the offender and other potential offenders. Until morality, free will, penal action, etc., are viewed rationally and humanely, wrongdoers will continue to fall into insensitive hands, whose owners disguise their cruelty and irrationality by calling them "righteousness", "uprightness", and "piety".

### WITHOUT COMMENT

"Let's face it—I'm the most unpopular man in the village."  
—The Rev. Paul Smythe, Vicar of Horningssea (*Daily Herald*, 12/11/62).

## THE FREETHINKER

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### Lecture Notices, Etc.

#### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (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 NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday evenings.

Mercyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

#### INDOOR

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, November 27th, 7.30 p.m.: LUIS VARGAS, "The Dramatist: Propagandist or Entertainer".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 25th, 6.30 p.m.: PERCY DOWNEY, "The Case Against Vaccination".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Scymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, November 25th, 7.30 p.m.: ERIC KINTON (Editor, *South London Press*. "The Churches and the Press".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, November 25th, 11 a.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A., "Public Order and the Citizen".

### Notes and News

IN HIS "Recent French Criticism of Christianity", Charles Bradlaugh Bonner says of one French author that he is not boring. The same might, we suggest, be said of Mr. Bonner's own article, though it fills more than three pages in this issue. Far from it; and we believe readers will be pleased to have this remarkable resumé by the President of the World Union of Freethinkers in its entirety this week.

VATICAN CITY RADIO seems to have been singularly restrained in its condemnation of Mme. Suzanne Vandeput, possibly because it sensed the strong popular sympathy for the Belgian mother who was acquitted by a Liège jury of the murder of her thalidomide baby. Anyway, there was little or no screaming denunciation, such as one might normally have expected. During the trial, the Radio found it "impossible to understand the subjective folly of a mother who kills . . . impossible to justify her action . . . absurd to class it in the category of love" (*The Irish Times*, 8/11/62). And it was, of course, "rebellion against the law of nature, the law of God—of God who is love".

After the trial, the Radio announced that the verdict had "breached the dam protecting the weak, the fragile, the old, the suffering and the disabled" (*Daily Telegraph*, 13/11/62). The court, it declared, had failed to realise that within the child's deformed body there was a soul, a human being crying out for justice against those who

had denied her the fundamental right of staying alive. Such a soul as is here posited might rather have cried out for justice against the God "who is love", yet apparently allows deformed babies to be born.

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TRUE, THE ITALIAN Christian Democrats' paper, *Il Popolo*, compared the Liège jury decision with "the barbaric law of ancient Sparta, which killed its deformed children", but it, too, introduced a note of restraint. The verdict was "disconcerting" and "struck in a rather serious manner at those spiritual values on which rest the essence of a civilisation—or which at least pretends to call itself a civilised nation" (*Daily Herald*, 12/11/62). Still, it was refreshing to read the *Herald's* own view on the same day. This was, it said, a "merciful verdict" that would be greeted with relief by "the overwhelming majority of people". Certainly people of all ages and types flowed into THE FREETHINKER bookshop to sign the petition for mercy for Mme. Vandeput and her fellow-defendants. And we agree with the *Daily Herald* that the thalidomide tragedy strengthens the argument for a reform of Britain's abortion laws. Let us hope that Parliament will treat Mr. Kenneth Robinson's next bill better than it did his last.

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PHILOSOPHY STUDENT Ann Brackenridge, daughter of the Rev. J. C. Brackenridge of Erskine Church, Dunfermline, was married to medical student Robert Blomfield at Haymarket Register Office, Edinburgh, on November 10th (*Scottish Sunday Express*, 11/11/62). Mr. and Mrs. Blomfield are agnostics, and neither wanted a church wedding.

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THE Roman Catholic Church is certainly in great difficulties in South America, one of our readers says, in connection with our extract from the American magazine *Look* (9/10/62), printed in our issue of November 9th. He cites the English Catholic *Universe* (13/4/62) that the Church loses a thousand of its members to the Protestants every day, and the American Catholic *Ave Maria* (9/1/60) that unless something is done quickly to check the rate of desertions, half of the South American sub-continent will be lost to the Church by 1990. It is indeed gratifying to realise that anti-clericalism is spreading so rapidly in Latin America; that the people are beginning to see through the frauds and follies of Romanism.

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THE SECRETARY of the National Secular Society would be pleased to hear from readers who are interested in forming a branch of the Society in the Birkenhead and Wallasey districts.

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WE HAVE NOT yet read Conor Cruise O'Brien's *To Katanga and Back* (Hutchinson, 35s) but have read a number of the reviews with interest. Not least, that by John Stonehouse, MP, in *Tribune* 16/11/62), from which we extract the following: "One year the Irish decided to vote for the discussion on the question of the representation of Communist China. They told the United States delegation at 11 a.m. Within an hour the Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Spellman, phoned the Irish Consul-General in New York asking whether Ireland was 'going to vote for Red China'. He had been told by Miss Irene Dunne, the film star who was a member of the American delegation, and Cardinal Spellman made the position clear. 'If you vote Red China', he said, 'we will raise the devil'. These attempts happily did not succeed, said Mr. Stonehouse. But we must agree with him that, "They throw a rather sinister shadow over the way political decisions are made in the delegations at the United Nations".

## Recent French Criticism of Christianity

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was the disciple of the Gnostic Good spirit, whose emanation sought to save all mankind from the yoke of evil, to free unhappy creation from the Law, from Sin, from the false god who held them in bonds. The Messiah was, in M. Rennes's opinion, the dominant part in the composition of Jesus Christ; the liberating king of the Jews. He also opines that for such a myth a person must have been originally there. However he does not consider that the existence or not of a man Jesus affects his argument. For him the Synoptics present a clear cut ethic—and a story which ends in disillusionment. The fourth gospel tells a different tale and offers a Theologian's Divinity, giving as a prize eternal life, through the divine intermediary Jesus Christ. The writings ascribed to Paul have been edited and interpreted till they become a basis for the dogmas of the crucifixion, of the resurrection, of the second advent, of whatever might be thought to attract converts.

Both Testaments, the author considers, show an evolution dependent on the evolution of the milieu in which they were moulded—as might be expected. The Sermon on the Mount is often taken as the finest expression of Christian ethic (though, as Robertson and McCabe showed long ago, there is not a word in it that was new); Renan called it a "*coup de maître*" but M. Rennes sees in it a colossal mystification, confusing voluntary poverty and pauperism, tending to deify the professional mendicant, who, priest or not, is a detestable parasite; humbugging the unfortunate and, far from inspiring a hope of liberty, providing a catechism for slaves. As Job said of God, "He will laugh at the trial of the innocent". And Christ came "not to bring peace, but a sword".

As all Freethinkers know well, it is not difficult to find conflicting words in the Bible. It has always been a puzzle to me that intelligent people should indulge in verbal acrobatics to persuade themselves of the "truth". Having been brought up to believe, they find themselves forced to "explain away" difficulties. Simple people are ready to accept the mutually contradictory as "gospel truth", and do not argue. It is interesting to find that today, it is considered worth while writing such a book as *Clartés sur la Bible* and that the French Rationalist Union thinks it worth while to publish it. Evidently in a Catholic country this is no "dead horse". Perhaps it is not either in a Protestant kingdom. Of course, it is hard to admit that what one has been taught to believe is not so; it is harder still to admit that one has also been humbugging. It is when he suggests this that the inquiring Freethinker is termed aggressive.

*Propos pour Mal Pensants*—a witticism difficult to turn into English—"Thoughts for Bad Thinkers" ("Only the Believer is a Good Thinker"). The first half of this book is taken up by a study of religious toleration. Our author makes his lively way from the days of Socrates to the present time, or at any rate to 1948, which is near enough. To many Freethinkers religious toleration is an oxymoron. Nevertheless it is possible to quote a Catholic writer as saying, "Among the sentiments which constitute our modern conscience none has an origin more clearly Christian than toleration". This startling declaration quoted by Bouché-Leclercq serves M. Joly as a starting point for his essay. For the well-known French historian Fustel de Coulanges, Christianity was the first religion to separate religion from government. From the refutation of these statements our author is led to a consideration of Pagan

persecutions, which, despite the gruesome stories related by later Christian authors, were—as McCabe showed—relatively mild. It was when the Christians came into power that they demonstrated what persecution could really be, especially of other Christians. Intolerance and persecution received their seal from St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. M. Joly gives good reason for claiming that Augustine's intolerance was based on essential doctrine, and was not, as has been so often claimed, merely a reaction against the Donatists. The intolerant and persecuting spirit of the Early Church once in power, particularly perhaps in Africa, was outstanding.

When Julian became emperor, he introduced a spirit of tolerance. Perhaps, suggests W. H. C. Frend, in *The Donatist Church*, because he knew that the rival Christian sects would then endeavour to destroy one another. In any case Julian's laws were a marked contrast from those of Theodosius and greatly to the former's honour. That the State should suppress sects and schisms by force was argued by another African Christian, Optatus of Milevis. If this suppression takes a cruel turn, that, Optatus declared, was the fault of the heretic, who should be ready to rejoice in the unity of the Catholic Church. (Present day partisans of Church unity might note Optatus's views.) The Donatist Petilian declared on the contrary that "men must not be led against their will to truth", and again that it was against his conscience that any man should be made by force to change his faith. Anyhow the Donatist ambition was to be a martyr.

In Africa Catholic and Donatist went down before the Arian Vandal, but Augustine's doctrines became the justification of medieval persecution. It may be noted that it was not until the 12th century that the Church openly reclaimed the death penalty for heretics, though the Decree of Gratian (c. 1150) defined heresy as a criminal sacrilege and a moral murder, which would imply a death penalty. Anyhow, that would be left to the secular powers. The first act was to hunt out the heretics. For this the Inquisition was established officially in 1231. It must be understood that from the days of Charlemagne, Church and State were at Rome looked on as closely united; the two swords in a single sheath. Hence it was the duty of the State to defend the Church. It had long been accepted that an accused could not be punished till he admitted his crimes. Once he had been "persuaded" to make this admission, he was required to agree that his confession was made of his free will and not under threats or constraint. If after that the heretic was so ill-mannered as to deny that confession, he was declared "relapsed" and handed over to the secular arm with a request that no blood should be spilt. Even if he held to his confessions, his goods were confiscated; he would be subjected to some penance, such as a pilgrimage, or flagellation. If the secular arm failed to carry out the punishment expected, a threat of excommunication would be made and would usually be enough.

There were some bishops who were opposed to any form of violence, and a number who disliked the death penalty. St. Thomas Aquinas summarises the orthodox point of view, "Heresy is a sin for which the heretic deserves not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication, but to be excluded from the world by death".

It should be noted that to some extent the Inquisition was established in response to a popular demand. On several occasions before its establishment heretics had

been burned at the stake. The reader may also like to note that Pagans were not to be forced but persuaded by enlightenment to adopt Christianity. The enlightenment brought by, for example, Charlemagne, would seem to be in the nature of force.

The question of toleration was emphasised in the days of Luther, Calvin and Henry VIII, and the home fires kept burning. Debate ever since the time of Constantine had been largely seasoned with invective. With the Renaissance, languages became more modern, and the invective more and more intemperate. The Jesuits were masters of the art.

M. Joly's chapter on the 16th century is largely devoted to the consideration of a *History of Toleration in the Century of the Reformation* by a Catholic professor which appeared in 1955, a remarkable work, in which the author makes considerable attempts at impartiality, not always successfully, as when dealing with our Tudor queens or again with the Dutch. Smithfield under Elizabeth I, he declares, excited far more interest throughout Europe than did the massacre of St. Bartholomew; and the Protestants in Flanders were left in peace as long as they gave no trouble.

The learned author of this History, Father Joseph Lecler, proudly announces that the only two countries to make toleration legal were France and Poland, both Catholic, though he does note that in the Grisons (Switzerland) Catholics and Protestants agreed to live in peace (after much bloody fighting). He forgets that in France Henri IV had been a Huguenot and that immediately the Catholics were strong enough the Edict of Nantes was revoked; in Poland the tolerant rule of Bathory was opposed by the Catholic bishops and on his death his policy was reversed through Jesuit influence.

In Calvin's first edition of *L'Institution Chrétienne* he wrote that it was criminal to kill heretics, and that to cause them to perish by fire was to deny humanity; but he changed his mind and the text later. The reader will recall the fate of Servetus.

Luther also declared in 1522 in his second Sermon at Wittenberg, "I shall preach, speak, write, but I shall force none, for faith must be accepted willingly without any constraint". Yet in 1555 the Peace of Augsburg allowed freedom of religion to Princes alone.

Erasmus, the prince of Humanists, opposed to all violent persecution, would have at least legal toleration, although he saw no objection to burning a notorious heretic; and Thomas More although his Utopians tolerated religious variation, thought later that heretics must be persecuted and burned.

Generally the heretics themselves were against persecution and burning, e.g. Sebastian Franck, Menno, Socinus, Böhme.

The XVII century turned from burning heretics to burning witches. Catholic humanism, by the pen of St. François de Sales, taught gentleness, provided that zeal for divine goodness included "to hate, flee, hinder, detest, reject, combat and overthrow all that is opposed to God, i.e. to his will, to his glory and to the sanctification of his name". Bossuet requires his Prince to use the utmost rigour against believers in false religions, such as Muhammedanism, Judaism and Atheism.

Bishops and Saints held that, when gentleness did not succeed in converting the heretic and false religionist from his evil ways, then he should, as required by Holy Writ, be broken and reduced to dust. It was from the ranks of the heretics that there came calls for toleration. Spinoza, who knew what persecution was, rejoiced in living "in a republic where every man enjoys perfect freedom of

thought". John Locke in England and Pierre Bayle in France reasoned for toleration; and these lead us to Voltaire, Diderot and the *Encyclopaedia*.

What of today? Burning has gone out of fashion. Toleration remained for the Vatican "this false and absurd maxim . . . what death more dreadful for souls than liberty in error, as said St. Augustine" (Gregory XVI, encyclical *Mira*, 1832). Pius IX in the *Syllabus*, 1864, condemned "that any man is free to embrace and profess the religion which he thinks is true according to reason". Leo XIII held (encyclical *Libertas*) that freedom of thought "took from man the holiest of his duties; it is not freedom, but deprivation of freedom".

A Belgian Jesuit Vermeersch published at Louvain a work on *La Tolérance* in 1912, in which he emphasised that toleration was a pejorative word, that only bad things can be tolerated; he regarded civil marriage as an infraction of religious liberty, and maintained that the Inquisition was justified in its ways.

In 1939 a Canadian bishop Villeneuve published a little book on the *Christian Notion of Liberty and Toleration*; he also held that only bad things are tolerated, and that "the further the conditions in a State are removed from perfection the more evil has to be tolerated". "Would you wish me to allow to a church which I think false, to any religion other than Christianity, to any system of morality or society not based on God the same rights as . . . the Roman Church? Do not ask me to be so illogical."

In 1948 the Jesuit Father Cavalli published *Civiltà Cattolica*, said to be regarded as authoritative, in which he states that "in a state where the majority of the population is Catholic the Church requires that no legal recognition can be given to error, that minorities of other religions cannot be permitted any scope for spreading their beliefs". On the other hand "where dissidents are in a majority Catholics must demand full religious liberty for ALL".

These may express extreme views, for there are today many Catholics who agree that "as faith springs within us as the free action of God, then intolerance shows a wish to substitute our personal influence for that of God" as is set out by ten writers in *Tolérance et Communauté Humaine*, 1952.

M. Joly's essay demonstrates how moral ideas evolve, and how an institution such as the Roman Church can sway with the prevailing winds of thought. This essay is, however, only one of an excellent series. How often do we hear charity claimed as a Christian virtue! M. Joly demonstrates that "the transcendent superiority of Christian charity is a fable like many another; it has limits which pagan charity had not . . . it is moreover dangerous since for nineteen centuries Christian charity has not known toleration in its fullest sense".

Our author lets himself go in his most lively manner when he writes of monastic literature, which he finds one of the greatest curiosities of Christianity and an upside-down edification. Equally curious is surely the teaching of St. Aquinas that "the saints will rejoice at the torments of the damned" in his treatise on the Love of God. St. Augustine said much the same, as did St. Cyprian. Evidently the life hereafter in Paradise needs livening up. Tertullian promised himself an enjoyment surpassing any gladiatorial show when he would laugh and exult to watch the impious philosophers writhing in the eternal flames.

Of late years Hell has been harrowed indeed, and it would seem that today there must, according to many, be little to watch and little pleasure in the watching, if Hell is just a state of mind.

(Concluded on next page)

M. Joly on his farewell page says, "Ever on the alert, the historian never becomes bored". Nor boring, certainly not M. Joly.

These three volumes were all published by L'Union Rationaliste, 16 rue de l'Ecole Polytechnique, Paris 5me; the first in 1961; the others this year.

In 1959 appeared *La Passion de Jésus*, published by Dervy-Livres, Paris, by Marc Stéphane, a historian led to the study of the trial of Jesus after reading Alfaric's posthumous work *De la Foi à la Raison*. Till then Stéphane had accepted the conclusions of Guignebert that Jesus was a historic character. Alfaric had come to the opinion that Jesus Christ was just myth and nothing more; and moreover in 1946 considered that Christianity had derived from Essenism. After painstaking study Stéphane has rejected the historicity of Jesus and come down strongly on the side of the mythicists.

His starting-off point is the examination of the opinions of Loisy and Guignebert, both historicists. From that he patiently works his way through external and internal evidence, arriving at the opinion that Christianity is the progressive humanisation of a purely religious conception. If this were generally accepted, M. Stéphane thinks that religious peace might be possible, for the non-Christians would no longer have a figure to attack, and the Christians would recognise that this creation of the imaginations of Jews, Greeks and Romans had produced "one of the most splendid creations of human genius".

Personally I am not of this last opinion. As M. Rennes argues, the thread that links together the contradictory jumble of the Testaments is *la volonté de domination des castes sacerdotales*, the will to power of the priestly castes. That is what the Freethinker must strive against.

(Concluded)

## CORRESPONDENCE

### CANCER RESEARCH CHRISTMAS CARDS

Readers may like to know that when I expressed my disappointment to the Imperial Cancer Research Fund at the design of this year's Christmas cards (see Notes and News 9/11/62), I received the following reply from the Appeals Organiser: "Your comments pertaining to our Christmas cards are very much appreciated, and we shall bear them in mind when considering a design for next year's cards". P. FOSTER (Mrs.).

### THE MARY CELESTE

In his article of November 9th, Mr. F. A. Ridley apparently accepts the statement that the ship's boat was found intact on the deserted vessel, but this is demonstrably incorrect. The American Consular Reports dated December 13th, 1872 and January 21st 1873, both read to the effect that "Her papers and boats were missing", facts which are supported by the proceedings at the Admiralty Court. This, of course, demolishes the solution advanced in the book under review, but what matter!

Throughout the years, mystery-mongers have indulged in fantastic theories over the Mary Celeste and their fabulous "solutions" have cropped up regularly in literary journals on both sides of the Atlantic. No doubt they will continue to do so.

E. W. HENSTRIDGE.

Mr. Russell's theory that poisoned flour caused the collective and instant suicide of the crew of the Mary Celeste is disproved, *inter alia*, by the facts that other ships' stores would have been replenished from the "warehouse full of food not fit for pigs" and that the "provisions which remained in ample supply" would have been re-sold or returned to stores for re-issue without the dire consequences he suggests.

Through the years many theories have been advanced—mostly by landsmen—to account for the mystery. The late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle elaborated an explanation in the best Sherlock Holmes style which was published in *The Strand Magazine*. As a piece of fiction it was brilliant, but as a matter of fact it was absurd.

About 20 years ago a great Liverpool shipmaster and seaman, Captain J. J. Alston, related to me the story of the Mary Celeste

as told to him by a surviving member of her crew. The facts of the case left no doubt whatever in his mind or in mine (I, too, had experience in sail) that it was indeed the true solution of the mystery. I entreated Captain Alston to record the facts for publication and posterity. This he promised to do but, alas, failing health intervened and Captain Alston died—carrying with him the true secret of the Mary Celeste.

After this lapse of time I cannot now trust myself to record the details of our conversations on the subject, but—I can say that of all the theories advanced not one bore the slightest relation to the facts—least of all Mr. Russell's! WALTER RIDLEY.

### CREATION

Six days,  
we were told,  
was the number  
in which the world  
was made,  
moulded, contorted  
shaped and twisted  
to a plan  
for an  
idiot.

—K.F.

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