

# The Freethinker

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CHRISTIANITY IS IN a state of fragmentation, very largely because of the errors made during many centuries by the Vatican, whose man-invented dogmas and superstitions have disgusted the better types of Christians. 1962 found the Vatican in dire difficulties, confronted with such problems as—the shortage of clergy, monks and nuns, the growing number of lapsings, the increasing apathy of “the flock”, the advance of Atheism and anti-clericalism.

After the two disastrous reigns of Pius XI and Pius XII, the more human John XXIII has found it necessary to make some efforts to reassemble the broken fragments of Christianity. It is a parallel case to that of Humpty Dumpty:

“All the King’s horses and all the King’s men  
Couldn’t put Humpty Dumpty together again.”

Stern necessity, however, had led John XXIII to attempt the task.

## Causes of Christian Division

About the year 1000, Christendom was comparatively undivided and was centred upon two focal points, Rome and Constantinople. Then the misbehaviour of the Roman popes—and the unscriptural innovations which they were introducing—began to disgust the clergy at Constantinople. There were frequent quarrels, and in 1052 Pope Leo IX excommunicated the Eastern patriarch owing to differences of opinion about the Nicene creed. Thus was originated the Eastern Orthodox Church. As the centuries rolled by, the Vatican Court continued with its immorality, resulting in further bodies of honest Christians breaking away in disgust:—the Albigenses (France and Italy), the Waldenses (Italy), the Lollards (England), the Hussites (Bohemia), the Hugenots (France), the Moravians (Bohemia).

About 1500 came Luther’s body-blow, when several millions in Britain, France, Germany and Scandinavia deserted the so-called “Holy Catholic Church”, owing to the scandalous behaviour of the “Holy Fathers” and the cardinals; who often lived openly with their mistresses and children, and brazenly sold bishoprics and indulgences at a fixed tariff.

## Why Unity Now?

The desire for Christian unity now is undoubtedly due to force of circumstances and to the unhealthy state into which the Roman Catholic Church has drifted. It is certainly not due to any benevolence on the part of the Vatican, whose clergy—as recently as 1961—were openly sneering at the non-Romanist “heretics”. In 1961, for instance, Archbishop Heenan of Liverpool referred to Britain as being “a Missionary territory” (*Daily Mail*, 4/10/61).

Pope John is undoubtedly a better man than his two autocratic predecessors, and he has realised that an attitude of hauteur, dictatorship and disdain does not pay dividends today. So a papal somersault has been performed—and now benevolence (outward benevolence at least!) is being purveyed to mankind—and especially towards non-Romanists—who are now referred to as “our separated brethren”, “heretic” being temporarily out of

fashion! The present Pope is undoubtedly well qualified to portray the role of a sort of clerical Mr. Pickwick, apparently registering kindness to all and sundry. But we must not forget the Catholic ambition of supremacy.

This fact should be obvious. Yet surprisingly enough, such eminent persons as Archbishop Lord Fisher and Doctor Craig (Moderator of the Church of Scotland), have both made (regrettable) visits to the Vatican. If the Protestants and Orthodox Churchmen should be foolish enough to follow these payers of “courtesy calls” to the Vatican, they will be committing religious suicide. For, in the doubtful event of “Christian unity” materialising, Protestants

and Orthodox Churchmen would—in the words of Byron—be “Butchered to make a Roman holiday”.

## The Vatican Somersault

It is obvious that orders went out from the Vatican in 1961 to their bishops all over the world, telling them to “soft-pedal” their customary contempt towards non-Romanists. Here are two concrete examples. Up to 1961, Archbishop Heenan of Liverpool had been noted for his extreme views. Yet in 1962 he has (outwardly, at least!) become a sort of reformed rake; and he now unctuously leads the campaign for “unity” with the very Protestants whom he used to deride! His sudden change of attitude will deceive no sensible person. It was dictated to him by the Vatican for temporary expediency.

In Australia, there have been memorial services on Anzac Day, but the ceremonies have always been conducted by Anglican, Non-conformist and Jewish ministers. The Roman clergy have abstained on the grounds that they could not lower themselves to participate in a religious service with clergy whose ordinations they do not consider valid. Yet, strange to say, Cardinal Gilroy of Sydney was, in 1962, present for the first time (*The Rock*, Australia, 10/5/62). No intelligent person should be taken in by such belated attempts to appear friendly, and the President of the English Baptist Union spoke for millions of honest Britons (whether religious or irreligious) when he said “Very few Baptists agree with Lord Fisher’s remark that the Roman Catholic Church is now our friend” (*The Guardian*, 1/5/62).

## Infallibility

The “Low” portion of the Church of England agrees with the Baptists, but the “High” (or Anglo-Catholic) portion is supporting the attempt at “unity”. However, it seems doubtful if this will ever materialise as the Roman Catholic Church is inflexible about dogma. Pope John is handicapped by the infallibility theory instituted in 1870 by Pius IX. He cannot make any religious concessions without giving the implication that his “infallible” predecessors have been in error.

The best that the Roman Catholic Church can expect from the Vatican Council when it reassembles in September 1963, is that more broadmindedness will be exercised. Such topics as cremation, divorce and birth-control may be considered, and less contempt may be

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## The Futility of Christian Reunion

By ADRIAN PIGOTT



recommended towards non-Romanists. The "Holy Church" may also decide to show some interest in reducing the illiteracy and social degradation which exists in countries where it is dominant.

The well-meaning Protestant "observers" who attend the cumbrous council have been merely wasting their time. The Anglican Bishop of Ripon (who was one of them) has emphasised that the Papal prelates consider the Anglican clergy to be laymen, because in 1896 the infallible Pope Leo XIII declared that their ordinations were "utterly invalid and altogether void" (*The Guardian*, 31/10/62). Intelligent people realise that anti-clericalism and Freethought are on the up-grade. Even so it is tragic

that some of the non-Romanist clergy are debasing themselves by attempting to associate with the reactionary Roman Catholic Church.

It is doubtful whether anything effective will emerge regarding Christian unity. Under pressure from its more "liberal" wing, the "Holy" Church will no doubt do a bit of well overdue "spring-cleaning" on its own behalf, and will try to present itself to the world as peace-loving and benevolent, but I doubt if there will be any successful "unity". The rank and file of non-Romanist Christians are too sensible, and they will be unable to swallow such Roman Catholic enormities as Mariolatry and papal infallibility.

## The Devil Worshipers

By "AKIBA"

INTERSPACED, HISTORICALLY and structurally, between the great world religions, there have sprouted religions which have attracted little attention. The reasons for the neglect are not hard to seek. The world religions—well-established and in no mood for seeking further problems other than those provided by their respective historical rivals or the advance of reason and tolerance (the greatest of all dangers)—steer clear of the smaller unsuccessful or half-successful ones. The Yazidis, sometimes spelt Yezidis, are a small community numbering about 50,000, scattered from Mosul to the Caucasian regions (districts of Mossul, Van Diarbekr, Bifis).

They call themselves Dasni and speak a Kurdish dialect. The head of the community is a Khalifah, who is a descendant of Sheikh Adi, one of their original great saints. Under him are Sheikhs, kavvals and fagirs. Priesthood is hereditary; it is said that their morality is above the average for this part of the world; that they are brave and shrewd. Their temperament is said to be cheerful and calm. The women are not veiled, and may receive strangers.

Being largely illiterate, their traditions have been handed down orally. Their great festival is on August 10th, when a procession of flagellants takes place in the village of Ba'adri, where their great saint, Sheikh Adi ben Musafiv, who died in 1155, is buried. They have been persecuted by the Turks, who tried unsuccessfully to force them into the Turkish army during the days of the Ottoman Empire. They successfully resisted the pressure and remain a religious community up to the present day in modern Iraq.

The origin of the word Yezidi has been much disputed. It was given to them by their Christian and Mohammedan opponents, to associate their religion with devil-worship, although the word may have its origins in the Persian expression for God, Yazdan. The priesthood is of the Mohammedan type—probably closer to the Shiah than the Sumi branch—and they recognise Mohammed and Abraham as prophets. Yet they are not Muslims or a Muslim heresy. The suggestion that they are Nestonians can also not be countenanced, even though they practise baptism and regard Christ as an angel in human form.

The religion appears to perpetuate various admixtures of the Magian type, combining Iranian and Assyrian elements. Their cult of fire is Iranian. They profess that the devil is a creative agent of the Supreme God, inasmuch as he produced evil. He, therefore, deserves adoration. In this, Zoroastrianism has left its impress on this otherwise religious amalgam of elements of Christianity and Islam.

Zoroastrianism regarded the worship of the evil spirit (Ahriman) as an abomination, but this did not apply to all the Iranian sects. The devil-worship, in reality, is no different in essence from the sort of Gnostic Christianity which struggled half-successfully to leave its mark on the mainstream of Christian theology and Church doctrine. Here, in the Gnostic Universe, the Creator-God, the Demiurge, was an "evil" or "negative pole" in the scheme of things, while the Christ was the "good" spiritual pole.

The doctrine of the Yezidis is contained in their sacred book, the Yalvah. The Yezidis are reluctant to reveal their sacred writings to their Gentile inquirers. The charge of devil-worshipping has no more substance in fact than the charge laid against many Christian and Muslim heretical sects. As R. H. W. Empson pointedly remarks in his book, *The Cult of the Peacock Angel*: "The popular appellation of 'Devil-Worshippers' is rather a misnomer, however, as they are not in fact, so much worshippers of the Evil One, as his propitiators".

Their theology is well summed up in this interesting book as follows:—

As usually understood by civilised people the Yezidis have no religion and no God, but they have a creed and form of worship of the Principle of Evil, which is more propitiatory than eucharistic. They definitely recognise that all forms of "bad luck" are instigated by a deity whose very name they are forbidden to mention, and they believe that Shaitan is endowed with great power in this respect. They therefore conceive it their duty to ward off danger by a careful avoidance of anything likely to cause offence to the Evil One. As their great object is to secure and retain the capricious favour of this Deity, their conciliatory attitude towards the Devil is thus governed rather by fear than love.

They, for the most part, believe that the Devil is a fallen Angel, but God reinstated him in heavenly rank and forbade the angels to scorn him; mankind should not therefore treat the power of evil lightly.

They do not deny the existence of Jesus and Mohammed, but their full power in the world they regard as limited. These two are therefore relegated to the position of prophets. God is considered to be a remote Being, and not of this world. The Yezidis have always been regarded as outcasts by their Muslim neighbours, being held to be less than beasts in much the same way as witches and the "communities of witches" were looked upon by the Christians during the Middle Ages.

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### THOUGHT FOR THE YEAR

Did Mrs. Grimes see the Virgin Mary through her Kitchen Window?—Headline in the *Sunday Pictorial* (9/12/62).



# Cathedrals in The Secular State

By F. A. RIDLEY

I RECENTLY had the unexpected and much appreciated opportunity to inspect—if that is the right word—two of the most majestic and impressive church buildings in Great Britain, Durham Cathedral and York Minster. Whatever view one may hold with regard to the use—or lack of use—to which these stately edifices have been devoted, it cannot be disputed by anyone who is not a complete Philistine (in the cultural sense), that the great cathedrals erected all over Western Europe during the so-called Ages of Faith, represent a deeply impressive spectacle even today in our so vastly more technically developed age. Only compare, for example, Cologne Cathedral with its vast mass towering up in the light of the sunset, or Durham so majestically towering over city castle and river (like an epitome of the theocracy of the Middle Ages) with say, those architectural monstrosities and offensive eye-sores, those triumphant creations of the Age of Progress, Euston or St. Pancras Stations, looking like mortuaries, or Paddington looking like a vast decrepit cowshed. Certainly technical evolution does not always keep in step with aesthetic appreciation.

What are commonly described as ages of faith (more precisely theocratic ages, usually dominated by a religious cult and its clerical representatives) appear to have successively alternated with ages dominated by a secular policy and by a more or less rationalistic and this-worldly culture. The most conspicuous example of this alternating sequence is to be found in the classical and modern cultures, both predominantly secularist and rationalistic in character, and in the Middle Age between them which itself was a theocratic age, an Age of Faith. Or, in brief, each successive civilisation seems to be more like the one before the last than its *immediate* predecessor.

It would no doubt be true to add that from the point of view of the Middle Ages themselves—if they were capable of evolving such a coherent philosophy of history—that the classical civilisation of Greece and Rome ("the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome", as Edgar Allan Poe so neatly summarised it) itself represented a kind of "middle age" between our Middle Ages and the pre-classical, also theocratic, culture of the god-kings of Egypt and of Mesopotamia—the Pharaohs and their kind. For both the pre-classical culture of the ancient East and the medieval Christian Ages of Faith were theocracies. Both were dominated by religious cults and by socially dominant priesthoods. Both also survive in time chiefly by means of their colossal religious monuments: the Pyramids of ancient Egypt and the cathedrals of medieval Europe, both of which probably represented the supreme creations of their respective cultures.

In Britain for example, by a rather curious coincidence, the temples of two great religious cults are to be found today within a few miles of each other. For from points of vantage on Salisbury Plain, it is still actually possible to see simultaneously rayed in the light of the setting sun, the spire of that loveliest of English Cathedrals, Salisbury (that most exquisite product of the Christian Age of Faith upon English soil) and the still weirdly impressive circle of stones at Stonehenge, temple of some pre-historic religious faith lost in the mists of time long before the Romans (or the Druids) first set foot in Britain. Actually, the mental processes of these alternating cultures were (as noted above) probably much more similar to each other than to the intervening ones. We understand Epicurus or Cicero, much more easily than we do say, Thomas

Aquinas or the Alice-in-Wonderland religious speculations that were common to both the priests of ancient Egypt and to the hair-splitting scholastic metaphysicians of medieval Europe, albeit that these medieval theologians were much nearer to us in chronological evolution than were the classical sages of Greece and Rome. Salisbury Cathedral was erected during the first half of the 13th century: Stonehenge seems to have originated about 1700 BC. A much longer interval therefore separated the priests of the Pagan solar cult on Salisbury Plain from the Christian bishops of the Middle Ages who built Salisbury Cathedral than separates the builders of Salisbury Cathedral from us.

The splendid crop of medieval cathedrals of which Durham, York and Salisbury all represent outstanding examples, no doubt represent the major cultural achievement of the Catholic Church during the medieval age—the "Golden Age" or, more literally, the Stone Age of both the Age of Faith and of cathedral building. Practically all the examples quoted above, plus such equally impressive and/or lovely examples of ecclesiastical architecture as say, Cologne, Notre Dame, etc., date from this heroic era of ecclesiastical architecture. It is obvious that this astonishing production throughout Christendom (as it was then appropriately styled), constitutes a profoundly significant and impressive achievement. Moreover, it throws a great deal of light upon the generic characteristics both of the medieval social order itself, and more generally of the generic relationship that then existed between the Church and science.

Clearly to erect such gigantic edifices, implied not only architectural skill of a very high order, but equally a very high degree of social organisation, as was also and equally obviously the case with the Pyramids and their Asiatic and American counterparts. Neither Salisbury Cathedral nor the Taj Mahal bears the stamp of barbarians! This surely constitutes an unanswerable proof that the societies which erected these incredible—and often incredibly lovely—edifices were not only deeply religious—a fact which is surely common knowledge—but were also highly civilised, a fact that has been often and (in my opinion) rashly denied.

The fact seems to be that these old theocratic civilisations, whether of Pagan antiquity or of the Christian Middle Ages, were not so much inferior, as different from ours. They laid emphasis upon different values. Certainly their techniques were inferior, but it is surely arguable that they did more with them. Similarly, it is clear that this dazzling medieval fluorescence of cathedrals, churches and castles under the medieval social order, also throws much light upon the then current attitude taken up by the all-powerful Church. For historically, it would surely be true to say that the past (and present?) attitude of the Church towards its contemporary science is, shall we say, selective rather than indiscriminate? Thus, whilst the Church fiercely opposed novel sciences inimical to its interests (Copernican astronomy and Darwinian biology represent obvious examples), it ardently encouraged such sciences as were favourable to its own growth: Medieval architecture along with Renaissance painting and modern music from Palestrina to Elgar. One can, in fact, say that the Catholic Church is never *ipso facto* either pro- or anti-scientific; it is only and always pro-Catholic. The great cathedrals of the Middle Ages surely afford perhaps the

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## This Believing World

It may come as a surprise to some readers to learn that Charles Bradlaugh once said that he was far more bitterly attacked for his "neo-Malthusian" propaganda than for his Atheism, by angry Christians. They did their utmost to blacken his character because he advocated "family planning", which was in his day a subject which no "decent" citizen—at least no Christian—would touch with a barge pole. And what is the case now? Here we have the Bishop of Derby—yes, a real live Bishop—telling the world, "It's right to plan a family".

★

In other words, the Bishop believes in contraceptives—a horrid word in Bradlaugh's day—but, thank God, in perfect order when used by a Bishop. We are grateful that the Right Rev. Geoffrey Allen has come round to Bradlaugh for, in saying it was right to use contraceptives, it proves how right was the great Iconoclast and how utterly wrong were the Christians who attacked and libelled him.

★

When it comes to boosting up the Roman Church our popular national newspapers can hardly do it quickly enough. For example, the case of a young girl who had leukaemia, who was given up by doctors at the age of nine, and who is alive and well at the age of fifteen, got some splendid publicity, with pictures and full details. It may not have attracted such notice, but it just happens that she went to a shrine, people said prayers, and hey presto—she was cured!

★

But surely all this depends on the original diagnosis? After all, doctors can make mistakes, and have given wrong diagnoses—they are not infallible. If the young girl got better, it was because she did *not* have leukaemia, no matter what the doctors thought at first. But this would never do for our newspapers. The girl was cured because she went to pray at a shrine, and because people prayed for her, and had faith in the Roman Church. What humbug!

★

Oxford, the home of religion, is certainly not what it was. Its 'varsity magazine had a sly dig at the Virgin Mary the other month for she was depicted as saying of Jesus, "I haven't told his father yet"—a piece of outrageous blasphemy. If G. W. Foote had printed this the Roman Catholic judge who gave him a year's imprisonment (for far less) would have been tempted to have him burnt at the stake, if it could have been done. However, the prosecutors have told the editor—no more copies. We trust however that this little spot of blasphemy will not be the last in Oxford.

★

The Ecumenical Council has been suspended until next September, but the Pope appears to be delighted with what has been done, that is, if anything really has been done. However, he has hopes for a "New Pentecost" which he said "will cause the Church to renew her interior riches", whatever that means.

★

Almighty God depicted on the stage as completely black is naturally too much for white Christians, but a painting (admired by Canon Collins) has been allowed to leave South Africa and can now be seen by the public. It depicts Jesus on the cross as a negro, surrounded by white Roman soldiers featuring among them Dr. Verwoerd and Mr. B. Vorster as the villains of the show. In other words, it is the coloured Deity who is divine and the whites who deserve Hell for their crimes. Turning the tables?

## THE DEVIL WORSHIPPERS

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Empson's general conclusions regarding the origin of this religion are that the beginnings of the "worship of the Devil" by the Yezidis, sprang from Zoroastrian ritual. There are many resemblances between Yezidism and Zoroastrianism, including the veneration of fire and the sun, the worship of mulberry trees(!) and a horror of the Evil Eye. The Persian Manes, a disciple of Zoroaster, added beliefs of his own to those of Persian dualism, moulding them to give Satan precedence over all other heavenly bodies.

The Yezidi name for God is the Persian and Turkish appellation, Khudā, Lord. The other gods are known as Yezid, Sheikh Adi, and Sheikh Shamsu'ddin, Fakhru'ddin, and Sheikh Hesān al-Basri. There are also of equal power and therefore consequence, Melak Tā ūs, the Lord Peacock, or Peacock Angel (after whom they are descended as followers of the cult of the Peacock Angel), and Shaitan, Satan or the Devil.

The syncretic character of the religion is apparent—for the Muslims they are connected with the hated Caliph Yazid and branded as heretics. For the Christians they are Nestonians who have fallen into evil ways. The truth absorbs all these views in characterising Yezidism as a syncretism of Zoroastrian, Christian and Muslim beliefs.

Further researches into their sacred writings and parallel researches into other "inter-religious" sects such as the Mandeans and the Druses, may well shed light on the impact of Christianity and Islam on Zoroastrianism and their respective reactions\*. Much work has yet to be done to uncover the historical foundations of the great and small religions. As the truth is uncovered, reason stands triumphant and superstition lies defeated.

\* The rise and fall of that other great Pretender to the title of world religion—Manicheism—has yet to be unravelled in this connection.

## CATHEDRALS IN THE SECULAR STATE

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most effective demonstration of this permanently recurring fact. The Church which, in one age, welcomed Aristotle, and in another condemned Galileo, obviously had a constant attitude towards its contemporary scientific knowledge that was empirical rather than principled in character.

Meanwhile, we must thank God for the cathedrals! For these most impressive relics of a forever vanished age were built at a time when faith was still a real and living force. What is to be done with them when religious belief has crumbled away to a point where the rites performed within their walls, and the priests who perform them, will have become as meaningless and as irrelevant to the context of modern society as the Druids or the Egyptian hierophants of Amon-Ra? For a time comes when every decaying creed must surely disappear; must (in the words of Lewis Carroll) "softly and suddenly vanish away and never be met again". When that iconoclastic and perhaps not very remote day does eventually arrive, we hope at least that the secular states of the future will avoid the Cromwellian vandalisms that have left still-existing traces in the many venerable piles, and will preserve these glorious relics of the past, not merely as ancient monuments, nor even as museums for the study of extinct religions, but will preserve and continue to honour them as one of the ever-memorable traditions of our race and of the evolution of civilisation and of the aesthetic sense in England.



## 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. 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.

Merseyside 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

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, December 30th, 6.30 p.m.: NEW YEAR SOCIAL.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, December 30th, 11 a.m.: DR. HELEN ROSENAU, "Myth and Art" (Illustrated with Lantern Slides).

### Notes and News

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY protested to Bonn "against the recent—and it seems increasingly—undemocratic behaviour of the West German Government, as demonstrated in the case of *Der Spiegel* and now in the attempt to proscribe the Association of Victims of Nazism (VVN)". "We view with alarm [the protest went on] the practice of any government to silence even its most vehement and outrageous critics. It is surely an indication of inability to answer such criticism. And we should have thought that Germany had suffered more than enough—as well as causing horrific suffering among other peoples—from authoritarian rule to allow any party (under any democratic guise) to proscribe its opponents. Our bitter memories will not allow us to regard the occupation of the offices of *Der Spiegel* and the intended proscription of VVN as internal matters. Indeed it seems terribly significant that this step should be contemplated against an Association of Victims of Nazism. If the step should be taken, the West German Government will forfeit the right to be considered democratic, and will incidentally confirm the worst of the charges made against it by *Der Spiegel* and VVN. In contrast, news that the proposed case had been dropped would, we are sure, be greeted with acclaim by democrats and liberals everywhere".

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CANON STANLEY EVANS, Chancellor of Southwark Cathedral, an outspoken cleric who has addressed Marble Arch Branch of the National Secular Society, recently caused a disturbance in Church circles by criticising the Royal Family. When the Royal Family attended Holy Communion, said the Canon, they didn't come to the rails with the rest of the congregation, but Communion was taken to them privately (*Sunday Express*, 9/12/62). The Canon said that they thus took priority over the Holy

### The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

Previously acknowledged £295 18s. 8d. W.R.S., 4s. 6d.; F. Pearson, £1 11s. 10d.; J.S., 1s.; J. Coffey, 5s. 6d.; R. Brownlee, £1 1s.; Anon, 1s.; Mrs. N. Henson, £2; M.L., 4s. 9d.; S. C. Merrifield, 3s.; J. W. Challand, 4s.; J. Buchanan, 5s.; Anon, 6s. 6d.; E. Slater, 10s.; O. Grindahl, £1 5s.; J. Wilson, £3; Anon, £2; A. Addison, £1; J. Bellamy, £1 1s.; W. Wilkie, 15s.; Anon, £10, W. Hawks, £1 19s.; A. Georgetti, £3 2s. 6d. Total to date, December 28th, 1962, £326 19s. 3d.

Please help us to make it more in 1963.

Communion itself, and "if this unhappy practice did not overthrow the nature of the sacrament, it certainly frustrated its purpose".

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"WHAT DIFFERENCE does it make to a baby whether I am a Jewess or anything else", a lady wrote to the (London) *Evening News* (3/12/62), "as long as it is being cared for, fed, and shown affection?" The writer, Ivy Gonsky of Finsbury Park, London, is a nurse who looks after children daily, and is registered with the public health department as a child minder. Her last foster child was with her for 11 months, and Miss Gonsky recently replied to an advertisement in a nursing paper, "Foster mothers urgently wanted". A children's officer who came to see her told her that "it was doubtful if I would get a child, not because I wouldn't look after it, but because I happen to be a Jewess".

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A 33-YEAR-OLD Ballyclare (Northern Ireland) woman was granted a divorce from her husband, Alexander Schofield, who, she said, had given up his job and spent all his time reading the Bible. He believed that the Lord in his goodness would look after him (*The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 8/12/62), and she had had to get a job in order to keep things going. He had attacked her and on two occasions had ordered her out of the house. One night she had to stay with a neighbour and when she got back "he asked her if it was not about time she got religion as in his opinion she was not a Christian". In granting the divorce, Lord Justice Curran said he was satisfied that this unfortunate woman had been driven from home by her husband's conduct.

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"AS YOU KNOW, we inaugurated our new studio this week and it was felt that a local programme in which the guest was such a well-known figure as Capt. the Rt. Hon. Terence O'Neill, DL, MP, was appropriate to the occasion". Ulster Television Ltd. may be right. Possibly many Ulstermen were dying to see and hear Capt. O'Neill "Looking Back". There must have been many others, nevertheless, who were looking forward to seeing and hearing Professor A. J. Ayer in the series "I Believe". None of the other Malcolm Muggeridge interviews has been cancelled for new studio inaugurations or the reminiscences of a Capt., the Rt. Hon. MP. The substitution was preposterous and unjustifiable, and we commend reader James Hendren of Belfast, and others, for protesting against it.

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MR. HENDREN has had letters from the Publicity Manager and the Programme Controller which are not altogether consistent. The former, for instance, wrote on November 29th: "We are at present arranging to transmit the 'I Believe' programme in question within a matter of weeks and I will write to you once a date has been confirmed...". On December 4th, however, the Programme Controller was only "looking into the possibilities of obtaining the programme concerning Professor Ayer for transmission at some later date". And, he added, "No doubt you will notice the inclusion of this in the *TV Post* if I am able to obtain the programme for this purpose".



## Irenaeus and Justin

By H. CUTNER

THERE MUST BE a few readers (interested in the problem of these two Church Fathers) who remember a Roman Catholic reader challenging me a few years ago to give him the exact chapter and verse from Irenaeus where it is said that Jesus died an old man. He was acute enough to see that if it were true, then Jesus could not have been crucified under Pontius Pilate, for that Roman procurator died or disappeared about 36 AD. The real point to note here is that there is no mention of any Crucifixion in the passage describing the death of Jesus as an old man.

However, my opponent—like Mr. Ridley—triumphantly showed that in other passages in his dissertation, Irenaeus did mention the Crucifixion, which is really not surprising for he is the first eminent Christian Father who mentions by name the four Gospels. Of course I knew this quite well. I was only concerned to show how thoroughly confused Irenaeus was, and to show the mistake the Church made in letting such a nonsensical passage exist—as Godfrey Higgins pointed out in his learned *Anacalypsis*.

If I am asked, have I read Irenaeus in his *entirety*, I am happy to say I have not. In the old FREETHINKER offices, we had a complete set of the *Ante-Nicene Library of the Church Fathers* translated into English by very competent Christian scholars. I used to dip into these volumes every now and then, but there was so much sheer nonsense in them that I had to turn with relief to other books. There was no fable or superstition that these Fathers did not whole-heartedly believe in—so long as it could be connected with Jesus—and sometimes even when it could not.

But let me add a few words about Irenaeus which are not known as well as they should be. First, we know practically *nothing whatever* about him except what he himself says in his own books. We do not know when he was born for example. Some "authorities" give the date as 97 AD, others after or about 140 AD; and so a compromise had to be arrived at—about 120 AD. And it will perhaps come as a surprise to some readers to learn that, except for a few fragments in Greek, we have *not* the original work of Irenaeus, but a rough translation made in the fourth century, in Latin. I suspect that it was made up of more than one work, hence the silly talk—if the Gospels are true—of Jesus dying an old man *not* crucified by Pilate.

We learn nothing of any historical character from the writings in Greek or Latin of Irenaeus. In his pamphlet on Irenaeus, J. M. Wheeler quoted a curious work by George Reber, *The Christ of Paul*, in which our Church Father is castigated as a liar and a knave. But, as in so many things connected with early Church history, we have a right to ask—was there ever such a person as Irenaeus at all? That great Victorian Freethinker, Thomas Scott, who published so many notable pamphlets known as the Scott series, produced one by an anonymous author who categorically denied that "there ever was such a person" as Mrs. Prig said to Mrs. Gamp in a celebrated, though fictional, quarrel about Mrs. Harris. He claimed that Irenaeus "was a purely mythical personage", his name meaning "peaceful", and the writings ascribed to him being meant to bring about a little peace in the ranks of the then quarrelling sects of Christians, who had in those far-off early days of Christianity, perhaps less "unity" than they have now. His arguments seem to me unanswerable.

In any case, George Reber says, "As we read whole pages in Irenaeus, charging his adversaries with forgeries

and false interpolations, we smile at the impudence of the man, who has done more to pollute the pages of history than any other . . .". Possibly Reber had in mind the beautiful story of Jesus dying an old man.

Coming now to Justin, I am almost sure that there never was any *single* "dialogue" as described in the *Dialogue* with Trypho. I am more and more inclined to believe that we have in this a synthesis of talks with Jews, for the picture we get of them is so true. Justin found Trypho courteous to a degree, as were indeed some of his Jewish friends; but they could not help laughing at some of Justin's arguments—and modern Christian evangelists, who so earnestly and solemnly try to convert Jews, know that kind of laughter perfectly well.

All that Justin could say in reply to Trypho's contemptuous dismissal of the story of Jesus as an "invention" was to compose a chapter headed, "The Christians do not give credit to idle stories", in which Justin says, "I will now demonstrate to you that we do not give heed to vain and idle stories, nor to discourses void of proof, but to those full of the divine spirit, and of power, and abound with grace". It was at this that Trypho's companions laughed so heartily that Justin angrily got up to go away, though Trypho begged him to continue. (Incidentally I am quoting from the translation given in Bickersteth's *The Christian Fathers*.)

It must be said that the whole dialogue is very vividly written, and is far too long to have taken place at one time; but that does not mean that some such discussions did not take place between the "unbelieving" Jew, and the credulous and superstitious Christian.

Justin is of importance because, though writing about the year 150 AD, and constantly mentioning Jesus, he knows nothing about our Gospels. His authority for his statements about Jesus are the "Memoirs of the Apostles", and he most certainly did not use any of the present canonical Gospels—which of course are not *memoirs* of the Apostles at all. He was quite unable to answer Trypho, whose Jewish friends laughed at Justin and his stupid arguments, as anybody who cares to sample him for themselves will see. Trypho himself kept his temper and courtesy.

But Trypho was absolutely right when he said that the Christians had *invented* the story of Jesus; and the desperate attempts to show that the Gospel stories are not inventions but may be true, prove how long-lived myths can be, no matter what arguments are brought against them. We do not believe the myth of Jupiter or Venus, but Jupiter and Venus are still with us, and will continue to be so long as stories such as theirs can interest humanity. Does anyone believe that the time will come when the story of Cinderella will cease to interest children?

I put the story of Jesus in exactly the same category as the myths of Jupiter and Venus, and as childish as that of Cinderella in many ways.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *With the publication of Mr. Cutner's article above and of Mr. Ridley's letter in our correspondence columns—and this being our last issue of 1962—we consider it appropriate to close the discussion on the historicity of Jesus, Trypho, Irenaeus et al. Some readers may like to be assured that Mr. Cutner and Mr. Ridley remain firm friends despite their disagreements.*



# Morality and Religion

By G. L. SIMONS

ALL RELIGIOUS organisations recommend moralities which they believe have divine sanction. Thus, Catholics believe that God resents contraceptives; Anglicans believe that God is offended at the remarriage of divorced persons; Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Almighty considers blood-transfusions immoral. Hence Catholics are urged not to use contraceptives, even if a conception would lead to the death of the woman. Anglicans are encouraged not to remarry, even if they are divorced from a partner who has congenital venereal disease or who is a drunkard. And Jehovah's Witnesses are exhorted not to permit their children to have transfusions, even if they would be certain to die through lack of blood. These few examples (which could easily be extended) indicate that religious morality is not necessarily in human interest, that such a morality is derived from biblical texts and priestly authority, rather than from an estimation of what principles will enable people to lead full and rich lives.

Religious people persist in their support of moralities which often lead to misery and suffering, because they believe that in so doing they will inherit eternal bliss. Human suffering they regard as an unfortunate necessity, which should not be reduced if this involves ignoring some ancient scripture written by an unenlightened pedant. Earthly suffering they view as of little consequence compared with the eternal misery to be suffered by those of little faith. (Indeed in *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche suggested that since science, subversive of religion, progressed in happy ages, priests make every effort to ensure that as many ages as possible are unhappy.) Religious people thus believe in an absolute morality which should not be subverted by impious suggestions that people have a right to be happy. But is morality an *absolute* thing? Or is it a changing feature of human relationships in society?

If one believes in God, in his moral inclinations, and in his occasional communication with sinful mortals, it is not difficult to imagine that there is only one true morality—that derived from the emotional disposition of the deity. If, however, one does not believe in God, the possibility of an absolute morality cannot be ignored. The English philosopher, G. E. Moore, for example, believed in the immutability of the "good", which he considered a pervasive feature of the universe, and which he thought could be intuitively perceived although indefinable (see Moore's *Principia Ethica*).

Similarly, ordinary folk who have no firm religious belief are still prepared to maintain dogmatically that particular moral principles are always right, and that anyone who disagrees is necessarily wrong. This sort of attitude is widespread because most people are mentally restricted to one historical time—the present—and one geographical area—the country in which they are born. When, however, an attempt is made to *understand*, not merely to *know*, the moralities of past and present societies other than one's own, it is easy to see that to define any morality as "true", implying the "falseness" of alternative moralities, can only be done on the most arbitrary basis. Men are misled into elevating their own moralities to pre-eminence merely because they have strong feelings that particular principles are morally right, and cannot conceive the possibility that other men may have equally strong feelings that the same moral principles are wrong. For conscience is a variable; if it represents the "word of God", then God must have a very fickle mind.

The Spartan children who were taught to steal no doubt had great qualms of conscience if they were unable to do so successfully. And yet a child who imbibed the social morality of nineteenth century England would be unlikely to derive a feeling of virtue from successful theft. Similarly, the savage whose conscience exhorts him to cannibalism is not likely to inspire modern civilised persons with a desire to emulate such interesting behaviour. The Eskimo who offers his wife to a friend for a period as a mark of respect has a different morality from the orthodox Methodist. The Islamist who feels comfortable with four wives but guilty with five, has a different morality from the Christian who feels comfortable with one but guilty with two. The priests who burned the heretics had a different morality from the heretics who burned the priests. And the Catholic who will not eat meat on Fridays has a different morality from the Jew who will not eat pork any day of the week.

Moralities have varied enormously. In the history of any society these changes can easily be detected. Even in the Bible, which was once thought to contain consistent recommendations for a social philosophy, there are some fine illustrations of how moral principles can alter with time, e.g. in Exodus 21, 23-24 we read: "And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot". Whereas in Matthew 5, 38-39 we find: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also".

The nature of any social morality is determined by certain social characteristics which can be scientifically examined. These characteristics (economic well-being, male to female ratio, geographical position, proximity to other communities, etc.) in the past ensured that only societies which adopted particular moral principles could last, whereas other societies perished. For example, if the male population of two societies was decimated due to war, the society which was prepared to adopt polygamy would be more likely to survive, other things being equal. Thus, initially, through natural selection, societies evolved which embodied principles favouring survival. But then, when the security of the society had been established, its moral principles were adopted by witch-doctors, sorcerers and priests and dogmatically entrenched in taboo and scripture. In this way aspects of morality persisted when they had outlived their usefulness. Today many such aspects are maintained by ecclesiastical authority, which perpetuates the superstition that these moral principles have been divinely inspired. It is quite possible that the earliest witch-doctors and priests were religious sceptics, maintaining a position of power (as is done today) by frightening the credulous masses with theological threats. Moses, for example, with a disorganised rabble on his hands, may well have realised that it could be controlled more easily if it believed that he had godly sanction for the morality he recommended. Hence the Mount Sinai adventure.

Thus morality is explicable within a social framework. Absolute morality is a notion devised by those who wish to establish their moralities above all others. But there is no reason to believe that such a morality exists. Because of this men should not be loath to alter morality when it is in human interest to do so. Only by a willingness to



examine (and if necessary to modify) current moral principles in the light of social change and scientific advancement can it be ensured that social reform does not lag a hundred years behind enlightened opinion, as it has done in the past due to apathy, conservatism and religion.

If we regard morality as absolute and unchanging it becomes man's master. If, motivated only by a desire for human happiness, we are prepared to adapt it to new circumstances it becomes his servant.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### ATHEISM

Mr. Raymond Poel accuses me (quite unreasonably since his remarks certainly do not follow from the quotation that he selected from my article, "Atheism—Its Nature and Value") of inheriting a "horrible man-centred dogma" from Christianity and states that "true compassion has no limits". I agree that a man-centred philosophy that completely neglects the suffering of other sentient creatures is a bad thing. But it does not follow that an attempt should be made to afford identical rights to all living creatures. (A consistent believer in a life-centred philosophy must make this attempt.)

An unwillingness to use antibiotics or to kill vermin where necessary seems to me clearly unreasonable. On the other hand I detest blood-sports, cruel methods of slaughter and brutal farm practices such as castration and docking without anaesthetic.

Thus it is misleading to say that "true compassion has no limits", since there is often a conflict between what is in human interest and what is in the interest of other animals. Compassion should be limited by an estimation of what is expedient within a certain moral framework. I hold that this framework should be built around two principles—that the suffering of any sentient creature is a bad thing, and that, despite this, human beings are more important than other animals.

In referring to the same article, Constance N. Airey asks, "what can he mean by 'Atheism values beauty, love and knowledge'?" and suggests that "it is simpler to define atheism as the attribute of an atheist and then formulate a definition of atheist".

In the first place the selected quotation is taken from the *second* half of my article. The second half was concerned with the *value* of atheism; most of the *first* half was concerned with its nature.

In the second place since a definition of atheist must be of the form "a person who believes such and such", and the definition of atheism must be of the form "the belief that such and such", they are equally difficult to define, the "such and such" being the same in each case.

I believe that to define atheism as "disbelief in God" is quite adequate for most purposes. But in my article I was using the term to refer to an overall basic philosophy derived from disbelief in the main propositions of religion. The religious corollary is where "theism" is taken to mean not only belief in God but also belief in a particular way of life. G. L. SIMONS.

### RELIGIOUS STAMPS

After reading "Religious and Scientific Stamps", by G. H. Bubeck of Toronto, in the correspondence columns of THE FREETHINKER (16/11/62), I recalled what I had read the night before in the December 8th-14th issue of the *Toronto Star Weekly*. On the first page of the section entitled "The Canadian Weekly", was a group of 15 stamps, only one of which did not have a religious theme—the Cuban one which had Santa on it.

The article inside, "The Christmas Story in Stamps" had 20 more illustrations, only 2 of which were not religious—a Canadian stamp commemorating the inauguration of penny postage, and another Cuban one with a turkey on it. Of 4,000 new stamps issued annually throughout the world, said the article, several hundred have religious themes. And, "the Roman Catholic countries of Eastern Europe had many stamps with a religious theme before World War 2. Since communist regimes have been established in these countries, there have been few stamps featuring religious paintings, works of art, or personalities. Among the exceptions are the stamps of East Germany and Poland issued a few years ago". WM. LEWIS.

(St. Catharines, Ontario).

### UNFORTUNATE!

Reader Mrs. Anne Calderwood appears—to judge from her recently published letter (14/12/62)—to consider my remarks in a recent article as "unfortunate". May I point out that the remarks in question occurred during a recent controversy between Mr. H. Cutner and myself upon the absorbing (and undeniably

important) subject of Christian origins. As in the course of this controversy Mr. Cutner attributed views (on the Crucifixion) to the early Christian father, Irenaeus, which are demonstrably erroneous, I, as an experienced controversialist, naturally "went to town" on this in the interests of my own point of view.

Mr. Cutner himself, in a similar position must have done the same to his Christian and/or Spiritualist critics on numerous occasions! Particularly as he is noted for his own hard hitting style.

I can, however, assure Mrs. Calderwood that, apart from the cut-and-thrust of literary controversy, no one has a higher regard than I have for Mr. Cutner and his truly remarkable record of service to Freethought and Secularism.

I therefore consider that Mrs. Calderwood's own contribution was "unfortunate", or at least, unnecessary. F. A. RIDLEY.

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