

The Freethinker

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It is ASSUMED by many people in many countries that religious instruction is desirable, that it fosters a sound morality, and that only people who are immoral and wicked will question its value. When, however, it is examined in an unemotional and rational manner, religious instruction seems not only to have little value but also to be positively dangerous.

It is interesting to reflect that it is largely the social elements of reaction that stand to gain by extensive religious instruction. Nineteenth century English capitalists professed firm religious belief, for religion, if appropriately manipulated, could be utilised as a tool of the property-owner, by teaching the ordinary people sobriety, honesty, the virtue of poverty, and satisfaction with one's lot. Bernard Shaw indicated (in *Major Barbara*) how useful religion was to the man who employed labour. Similarly a reactionary government, concerned only with the preservation of the status quo, is often prepared to support orthodox religion to the extent where Church and State are unified. This is noticeable in Catholic countries, where the Vatican has given direct support to fascist autocrats. For example, Mussolini, Hitler, Franco, Salazar and Peron have all been directly assisted and encouraged by the Vatican. (See *The Catholic Church against the Twentieth Century* by Avro Manhattan.)

Two Aspects

Similarly in democratic countries, the greatest insistence on the value of religious instruction derives from the most reactionary and old-fashioned institutions. For example, in England there is much more emphasis in the public schools on the value of religion than in the ordinary state schools. I quote from the headmaster of a preparatory school: "... the school chapel should take pride of place above the sixth form room, the laboratory, the music school or the cricket pavilion ... the chaplain's is by far the most important appointment that a headmaster has to make".

It seems therefore that religion is rightly regarded by certain people in authority as a means of preserving the established social order. Thus religion supports the opponents of reform and enlightenment merely to consolidate, and if possible to enlarge, its sphere of influence. But all this is very general. What of the effect of religious instruction in the lives of those who have experienced it?

Is some sort of religious instruction desirable or inevitable? For our present purposes religious instruction may be considered to have two aspects—moral and intellectual. In neither case does it appear that religious instruction produces the best possible results. The moral aspect (which is often regarded as the more important from a religious point of view) can be investigated in three possible ways. The first is to examine the lives of famous men who have explicitly rejected religion to see whether or not they display a unique depravity not to be found in religious folk. The second is to examine the moralities

disseminated in religious communities to see whether they are desirable and worthy of reasonable human beings. The third is to investigate the nature of moral impulses to see whether they primarily derive from a fear of the supernatural, or from gregarious and social tendencies in the individual. Whichever of these approaches is adopted, it seems that religion fails to establish adequate credentials for the education of the young.

Firstly there have been highly moral individuals who have either been brought up by freethinking parents or who have rejected religion at a later age (e.g. David Hume, Charles Bradlaugh and Jeremy Bentham). There have also

been excessively immoral persons who were very religious (e.g. Torquemada who organised the Spanish Inquisition and Pope John XII whose life was, according to one Catholic writer "a tale of impiety, debauchery, simony, cruelty . . . crude self-indulgence and vice". See *A Dictionary of Popes* by Donald Atwater). Secondly, prevailing moralities in religious communities are sometimes a little strange, sometimes excessively cruel. For example, the religious community founded by Pythagoras held, as one of its main precepts, the sinfulness of eating beans. (See Lucian's *Satirical Sketches*, page 149 in the Penguin edition.) This curious principle would not be thought wholly reasonable today. Also the moralities disseminated by the Catholic Inquisitors and Cromwell's Protestants (who burned some Irish Catholics) are less than satisfactory. In modern times, with its harsh and bigoted attitude to divorce, contraception and euthanasia the Catholic Church is guilty of undeniable cruelty (in some cases of an extreme kind). Thirdly, there seems little evidence that man's moral inclinations derive from a fear of the supernatural, but much evidence to suggest that they are founded in gregarious tendencies.

Moral

Professor Thouless denies that religion is necessary for morality. In *The Psychology of Religion*, Chapter IV, he says "The moral conflict (between immediate desire and the requirements of morality) is not dependent on religious faith in such a way that without religious faith it would disappear. It is often stated that it is, but I have never heard any reason given for this opinion which seemed sufficiently strong to outweigh the empirical fact that in the minds of persons who have lost their religious faith, the moral conflict is found to exist after the loss as it did before". Similarly Margaret Knight in her charming little book *Morals Without Religion* (based on radio broadcasts) suggests as a psychologist that morality is derived from society and not from any supposed supernatural prohibitions.

In addition to these relatively detailed considerations, there are some general reasons why a morality grounded in religion is likely not to be a good thing. In the first place, if one thinks that one's own morality is the one recommended by God, it is natural that one should be-

IEWS and OPINIONS

Education, Morality and Religion

By G. L. SIMONS

come less tolerant of other moralities. The history of religious persecution is an illustration of this point. The inclinations of the bigots to persecute and condemn, gains divine sanction and allows them to give expression to their vicious traits, not only with a clear conscience but with a feeling of self-righteousness. In the second place, if a morality is founded in religion, its elements are defined authoritatively by priests who are only concerned with an interpretation of ancient sacred texts and the preservation of priestly power. Human happiness is low on their scale of priorities. In the third place, if a morality is thought to be derived from God, its disciples will be reluctant to modify it as science advances and society changes. Since God is thought to be changeless, so it is thought by pious mortals that the morality recommended by him should not be subject to modification. In the fourth place, if a morality is tied to superstition, as it must be to be taught through religion, then as soon as the superstitious elements in the creed are realised the morality will suffer. If, for example, a child is taught not to steal because it is against God's will, then as soon as the child begins seriously to doubt the existence of God (as it will if its mind has not been wholly crippled by indoctrination) it will have no reason not to steal, except the fear of being found out. (This is not a good reason since it induces lack of moral responsibility. The less external restraint on a person's behaviour the better, which means that internal self-discipline should be encouraged). All these points are powerful objections to the principle that a morality should be founded in religion. The intellectual effects of religious instruction are equally undesirable.

Intellectual

If religious instruction is to be successful, it is essential to create an unquestioning frame of mind in child or student. Independence of mind is fatal to what the religious educator is trying to achieve. The Roman Catholic has always recognised this, and has insisted that children be taught the catechisms from the earliest possible age, that it is sinful for Catholic children to attend non-Catholic schools and that, in certain cases, it is sinful to discuss religion at all. In short, thought must be discouraged. A Catholic priest recently said that Catholic students would be guilty of mortal sin if they attended Trinity College, Dublin, adding that a student of university age is not mature enough to be exposed without danger to the environment of a neutral or Protestant university.

Inquiry is discouraged in religious instruction. It is a sign of irreverence to ask certain questions, to doubt certain assumptions. Thus the instinctive curiosity of the child is discouraged by making him feel guilty when asking certain questions. (I know this to be so from recent personal experience.) The child feels then that it is wrong to query certain beliefs, that an unfettered curiosity is sinful. What could be more damaging to the mind of a healthy young child than to cripple the faculty which makes the world seem such a fascinating place? One essential purpose of education should be to preserve the spirit of inquiry exhibited by every healthy child. Only in this way can people be created who find life stimulating and full of interest. But a wholly free spirit of inquiry is totally incompatible with efficient religious instruction which aims at the surrender of individuality and the unquestioning acceptance of certain intellectual propositions and moral principles. Such an attitude is completely inimical to full, rich lives or intellectual achievements. In his *Freedom and Catholic Power*, Paul Blanshard shows, carefully quoting statistics and other facts, how destructive of original scholarship and scientific research is the fervent religious mentality that can only function

within rigid terms of reference.

In the world today, where so much is known about education and children, where there are the means to enable so many more people to lead rich and satisfying lives, where Professor Tyndall has shown how curiosity can be stimulated, where Madame Montessori and Mary Macmillan have shown what rational, kind education can achieve, where Spencer, Dewey and Russell have written immaculately with simple brilliance on how children should be educated to lead full, rich lives—in short where there is so much available wisdom—religious instruction and all that it implies is nothing more than an anachronism, unsuited both morally and intellectually to life in the modern world.

Voyage of Discovery

I cannot refrain from concluding with some beautiful sentences from *On Education* by Bertrand Russell—

"What is important is the spirit of adventure and the sense of setting out on a voyage of discovery. A generation educated in fearless freedom will have wider and bolder hopes than are possible to us, who still have to struggle with the superstitious fears that lie in wait for us below the level of consciousness. Not we, but the free men and women whom we shall create, must see the new world, first in their hopes, and then at last in the splendour of reality.

"The way is clear. Do we love our children enough to take it? . . . A thousand ancient fears obstruct the road to happiness and freedom. But love can conquer fear, and if we love our children nothing can make us withhold the great gift which it is in our power to bestow."

Religion in The Dock

AMERICAN LAWYER Vincent Hallinan, who was brought up a Roman Catholic and now calls himself a "roaring atheist", has sought a court order to compel Archbishop J. T. McGucken of San Francisco "to answer 38 questions including the precise location of heaven, hell and purgatory" (*St. Catharine's Standard*, Canada, 25/1/63). Hallinan alleges that David F. Supple, who died in 1907 aged 81, was induced "to prepare his way to heaven" by making gifts to the Roman Catholic Church, and that those who taught Supple that this was his "moral obligation . . . are guilty of fraud". Andrew Burke, lawyer for the Archbishop, argued that US and Californian constitutions "prevent any court from sitting in judgment on religious beliefs", but Mr. Hallinan replied: "Advances in human knowledge in science and technology make all beliefs subject to challenge", and he cited cases in which the courts had investigated questions of religious belief. Superior (Court) Judge Byron Arnold decided to "confront the template awhile" (*Daily Telegraph*, 28/1/63) by deciding whether to order the Archbishop to answer Mr. Hallinan's questions.

Judge Arnold may possibly have noticed a news item from Miami a few days earlier. A preacher who offered "guaranteed blessings" for a £3 10s. donation had been arrested for fraud (*Daily Sketch*, 22/1/63).

Submarine Life

The Polaris Men Sing and Pray.—Headline in the *Daily Herald* (23/1/63).

"Lead us not into temptation . . ."

NEXT WEEK

ST. THOMAS OR ST. TEILHARD?

By F. A. RIDLEY

International Law and The Conquest of Space

By F. A. RIDLEY

IT APPEARS PROBABLE that this present decade, the 1960s, will go down to posterity primarily as that which witnessed the invasion of space by *Homo sapiens*. For beginning with the ascension to Heaven of Major Gagarin of the USSR Air Force—an ascension much better authenticated than were those of any of the gallant major's remote biblical predecessors, mankind has continued to go from strength to strength in his exploration of outer space. For at the very moment when these lines are written, the first-hand information obtained in such a spectacular manner by the American space-ship, Mariner II and subsequently radioed to earth by means of remote terrestrial control from the space-ship, is being decoded by American scientists, with perhaps sensational results for our knowledge of the solar system and its potentialities.

Not to be outdone by the USA in the cosmic race, America's great scientific as well as political and economic rival, the USSR has another space-ship *en route* as I write these lines, for the red planet, Mars. According to the most recent information, this space-ship is dead on course and according to signals received, is scheduled to pass somewhere within the vicinity of Mars in May, the distance involved considerably exceeding that involved in the American space trip to Venus. Already we are informed that the Russians will probably be able to take colour photographs of Mars, which (as I have suggested before in these columns) should finally clear up the much controverted problems connected with the alleged existence of the "canals", along with the much-discussed question of whether living matter exists on Mars. Currently, the project of landing a man on the moon is said to be taking shape hourly in the space-laboratories of both the USA and the USSR, and may probably be expected to eventuate within the next few years.

We can assume then, that mankind stands today upon the very verge of physical contact with at least three of our celestial neighbours, the moon, Mars and Venus. Whether this list is at all likely to be added to on the visiting cards of humanity is decidedly more dubious, in view of the environmental conditions of extreme heat to be encountered on Mercury, or extreme cold to be met with in our more remote giant neighbours beyond Mars, Jupiter (1,300 times the size of the earth) and company.

However, our three nearest neighbours in space are enough for a start! What is going to happen when the romantic speculations of fiction give way to the harsh and probably hostile realities of science; as and when we make contact with alien worlds where nature has evolved in perhaps widely different ways from what we know of her evolution upon earth? Such conjectures lead us away from the romantic world of fiction and even of science-fiction. A new branch of international law may well become very important after the next few years, with the successful continuation of space-travel. At the current rate of progress in space, a new international law will be urgently required; what we may perhaps term, space law.

Assuming, with at least reasonable probability, that the space-ships of the great powers succeed eventually in landing upon the moon, Mars or Venus—all of which landings are possible within, say, the present century—what would be the legal position be in international jurisprudence? Will America annexe Venus as a result of her prior right of occupation, always assuming that there are no insuperable obstacles to be overcome, and the Soviet Union

similarly colonise Mars and/or the moon by the same right of prior-occupation? And—a point of crucial importance—would the occupying power, at present presumably either Russia or America; perhaps China tomorrow—have the unrestricted right to do what it pleased with its own under the old right derived from Roman Law of *utendi et abutendi*, i.e. of use and abuse?

Since, upon general deductions from scientific probability, men in Mars (or women in Venus) do not appear to be very likely occurrences, it may be argued that this particular aspect of the interplanetary problem is not actually very important. But in the event of any significant human settlements being established in any body in outer space, two certainly urgent problems are sure to present themselves. The entirely extra-terrestrial problem of what imported substances from earth may or may not be fatal to existing forms of life on either Mars or Venus—the moon is entirely devoid of any and every form of life.

And, a problem of human politics: how will it be practicable to avert the future expansion of the current political struggle for supremacy over *this* earth to any future human settlements upon extra-terrestrial bodies? How is it currently possible to devise a system of internationally-observed space law that will prevent say, a Russo-American military clash over lunar rocket bases, or perhaps even eventually an armed "Yellow peril" from overflowing from the over-crowded earthly Pacific into the canals of Mars? In case this last suggestion sounds a trifle fantastic, we already have expert authority for stating that human settlement would be viable on Mars. One might even suggest not too extravagantly, that a Malthusian emigration *en masse* from the earth, due to the famous "pressure of population upon the means of supply", may end by causing the transference of all sorts of international problems (and rivalries), to the terrain of other members of the sun's family.

One initial difficulty is bound to be encountered by the pioneer legislators who are seeking to construct a viable system of internationally valid space law. The jurists of the United Nations are already turning their attention to this novel subject, and Mr. Khrushchev has already submitted a draft list of proposals to the UN for detailed consideration. No such extra-terrestrial problems have ever cropped up before in human annals.

The record of human exploration and occupation of the previously unknown continents of America and Australia by European Imperialism, does not make agreeable reading. Whether one takes as an example the Spanish conquest of the Americas or the British conquest of India, or the opening up of Africa and China (in which most of the contemporary European powers participated) they transmitted terrible diseases (smallpox in America, syphilis in Europe, etc.) which resulted from these unhappy contacts and literally decimated the populations hitherto immune from these scourges. The essential prerequisites of any viable future system of interplanetary space law, is surely the prevention of both national monopolies in outer space, and the rigorous supervision of all articles exported to any human settlements in outer space so as to avoid perhaps irreparably damaging physical contacts to alien organisms. We wish neither for Imperialist aggrandisement in outer space nor for the indiscriminate destruction of whatever forms of living matter nature may have evolved

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Although Christianity dominates TV and radio, there are still parsons who are not satisfied. For example, there is the Rev. Donald Mills of St. Barnabas, Gillingham, Kent, who recently complained that, in spite of church bells ringing on a Sunday morning, Christians prefer staying in bed or cleaning a car or painting the house or even "pottering around", thus setting the children "a bad example". In fact, good earnest Christians are being badgered about because they prefer anything—anything to listening to what are so often boring sermons, or imbecile hymns.

★

And it is not we who charge sermons with being mostly boring. In the *Sunday Express* the other week, the Rev. Martin Sullivan asked, "Does a sermon ever send you to sleep?" And he sadly admits that preaching a sermon "is a tricky business". Mr. Sullivan even quoted a friend—"You stand in the pulpit and give of your best, and they gaze at you with a look of rapt and reverent inattention". Still, he has a sovereign remedy.

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It is simply to preach the Christian Gospel as the priest or parson "has experienced it and knows it"—and he "can be certain that 99 per cent out of 100 of his listeners are with him". The operative word is "certain" of course, but is it certain? No matter what a parson says—is it true that he or his fellow parsons have experienced anything whatever of the Christian Gospel which can be explained or justified? That is, something which is not just pure delusion?

★

Some sociologists firmly believe that the best way to meet the rising tide of juvenile delinquency is religion, more religion, even all the time religion. The *Daily Mail* (January 26th) gives over half column to a "holy terror" who has been sent to Borstal, and who seems to have had just that amount of pious teaching. He came from the Church of Holy Innocents—which probably accounts for his sobriquet "Holy Terror"—and he had been a choir-boy, altar server, and youth leader of the church; and he admitted that he had half murdered a man from whom he stole £160. Naturally, his vicar was taken by surprise. "It was completely out of character", but this does not seem to us quite good enough. If he had had religion pumped into him as much as is admitted to be the case, why did he not develop forthwith a Christianlike character?

★

ATV staged one of its "reconstructions" on January 27th—a "spy tribunal" ordered by Tiberius which was advertised as the conversion to Christianity of "a senior Roman officer". But did we get it? Most of the time was spent on "a certain Jesus of Nazareth" who popped up on every possible occasion—not of course in person but in the discussion at the tribunal. Poor old Pontius Pilate did however appear as a decrepit cripple suffering hell because he had ordered the execution of Jesus. It used to be "the Jews" who killed Christ but nowadays Pilate gets the blame. As pieces of boring nonsense, we can heartily recommend these "reconstructions"—though we doubt whether anybody but an idiot could believe they could ever have happened, so naive and infantile are they as presented to us.

★

"The big freeze-up continues to upset communications and get wires crossed", wrote Cassandra (*Daily Mirror*, January 4th) and he reported a "nice piece of confusion"

over his laundry. Instead of his "usual shirts and pants stuff" he received "a beautifully laundered parcel containing Nun's clothing".

THEATRE

The Bedsitting Room

Before the start of *The Bedsitting Room* at the Mermade Theatre, London, the Temperance Seven, with union jacks on their music stands, play "There'll always be an England". And there still is an England of sorts after the "nuclear misunderstanding" and the shortest war on record—"2 minutes 28 seconds, including the signing of the peace treaty"—in this comedy by John Antrobus and Spike Milligan.

Things aren't quite the same, though. Mr. Macmillan has changed into a parrot (to be duly scoffed by Mr. Milligan), while Lord Fortnum of Alamein first changes into the bedsitting room of the title and appears as God. Whereupon Mr. Milligan leads the cast in "For he's a jolly good fellow" and shouts, "God save me and I'll give up being an atheist!" Religion comes in for a good deal of ridicule, in fact, as do other irrationalities. Money is worshipped to the tune of the Hallelujah Chorus, and a couple are married at a portable altar, complete with cash-register. At first the parson reads from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, but it seems they prefer "the old square version", so he reverts to the prayer book service. Then its ready, set, go, and the couple sprint for the bed, with the vicar focusing his telescope.

Zany, then, but basically sane and uproariously funny. *The Bedsitting Room* can't really be described; it should be seen. C.M.C.

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE CONQUEST OF SPACE

(Concluded from page 43)

in those parts. It must be the major aim of any future system of international law in space, to protect living forms of matter both here and—where necessary—elsewhere, from any future repetition of such man-made horrors.

The progressive creation of such an international viable system of space law belongs to the future. It will, we hope, keep step with the progress of future interplanetary expansion. But one initial contribution calls for immediate implementation: that is, the transference of contemporary space plans (and budgets) everywhere from military to civilian control. For today, all space projects are run on a military basis. They are financed and controlled by the military authorities, and their representatives in space, in both Russia and America, from Gagarin on, have been soldiers. Space-travel today is run as a military project, directed and executed by soldiers. It is high time, and it would constitute an invaluable first step (proverbially the hardest) towards an eventual extension of a viable system of international law to outer space. If all space projects were to be run in future by civilians—that is, as scientific exploration and not as at present as military conquests. One can perhaps relevantly add that Freethinkers, due both to their freedom from professional politics and from theological presuppositions regarding the universe, are particularly suitable for initiating the demand for this urgently needed change in humanity's approach to its now so nearly achieved entry upon the unpredictable paths of interplanetary exploration.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 57th ANNUAL DINNER

Followed by Dancing

Guests of Honour: MR. & MRS. F. A. HORNIBROOK

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Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Inquiries regarding Bequests and Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

Lecture Notices, Etc.**OUTDOOR**

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MCRÆ 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

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, February 10th, 6.45 p.m.: R. COONEY, "Christianity and Society".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, February 12th, 7.30 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "The Ethics of Abortion".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, February 10th, 6.30 p.m.: MISS GILLIAN ROMNEY, BA, Dept. of Philosophy, Leicester University). A Lecture.

Manchester Branch NSS (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street), Sunday, February 10th, 7.30 p.m.: J. R. HAMMOND, "H. G. Wells and Religion".

Marble Arch Branch (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, February 10th, 7.30 p.m.: J. A. MILLAR, "Gospel Truths".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, February 10th, 11 a.m.: DR. MARY STOCKS, "A New Look at the Population Problem".

Notes and News

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY is beginning to build up a tape-recording library for use by branches or members, and it has already proved valuable. A talk on "Atheism" by Len Ebury formed the basis of sixth form discussions at the King's School, Macclesfield recently, and when F. A. Ridley was unable to speak at Glasgow on January 26th, a recording of F. H. Amphlett Micklewright's "Historical Secularism and Modern Problems" saved the day. Indeed, Glasgow Secular Society report a very good meeting with a demand by the audience for another on February 24th, though this time with a live speaker. The young new President of Glasgow Secular Society, John W. Telfer (whose article, "A Miracle Goes to Rome" appears on page 47) and Hon. Secretary Joseph Dempster also plan to hold outdoor meetings starting in April. They have been immensely encouraged by the support of old and new GSS members, and we wish them every success.

★
ON JANUARY 21ST, the General Secretary of the National Secular Society seconded a motion at the London School of Economics, "That this House has no confidence in God". The motion was proposed by the former Communist MP, William Gallacher, who was in his wittiest

form, and was opposed by the Rev. W. W. Simpson and the Rev. Bill Sargent. The counting of votes was far from accurate, but it was obvious that the majority abstained, many no doubt on the grounds that the motion (chosen by LSE) more or less implied the existence of God. Still, it was a lively evening.

★

THE INDEFATIGABLE Kathleen Tacchi-Morris, in between visits to the USSR and Japan in the cause of peace, hopes to form a women's study and discussion group in Taunton and would welcome inquiries from readers. There will be no subscription, but members will be expected to show an interest in national and international affairs. Further details may be obtained from Mrs. Tacchi-Morris, at North Curry, Taunton, Somerset.

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WHAT HAS happened to the great monuments to the past at Senlis (in the Oise, NE of Paris) which survived the destruction of two world wars? asked the French *Le Figaro* (11/1/63). The stained glass windows of the cathedral have not all been replaced, while some of the other churches which fell into private hands after the Revolution are apparently used in a "regrettable way". Thus, the Church of St. Peter, founded in 1029 and reconstructed in the 18th century, with a façade dating from 1516, has been a covered market since 1884; St. Aignan has been turned into a cinema, the Church of Charity a public assembly hall; while St. Frambourg is a garage. *Le Figaro* showed photographs of the market and the garage.

★

IT IS impossible, of course, to assess the part that religion plays in a tragedy such as that of Mrs. Mary McGinty, sentenced at Edinburgh High Court on January 23rd to life imprisonment for suffocating her three children aged 4, 14 months and 6 weeks. "The High Court was told that Mrs. McGinty was emotionally unstable because she did not know whether her husband really loved her" (*Daily Express*, 23/1/63) and that on December 5th they had quarrelled over a £6 maternity grant. When Mr. McGinty returned home at lunchtime he found the children dead and a suicide note from his wife, saying: "Your very last words to me this morning were that you wished you didn't have a family. Now you haven't. This is the only way for a Catholic to be free". Mrs. McGinty was stopped from hurling herself from the top of the Scott Monument.

★

"DID YOU know that the first Christmas was not celebrated until about 350 years after the birth of Jesus Christ?" Not perhaps a very startling question to ask in THE FREETHINKER, but something of a surprise, surely, to find in the *King's Norton Parish Magazine* (December, 1962)! It was followed by some details of the Roman Saturnalia and: "As a matter of fact, no one knows the exact date of the birth of Jesus and not all countries keep Christmas on the same day. Even in Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, everyone does not keep Christmas at the same time. Some keep it on December 25th, others on January 6th, and yet others on January 18th".

★

WHEN SISTER DULCE, one of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (intriguing title!) went to the United States on a begging mission, pleading the poverty of the Roman Catholic Church in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, tourists who had been there were a bit startled, said *Church and State* (January 1963). "Recalling the lavish wealth and splendour of the gold encrusted interior of the Convent Church of Sao Francisco . . . they wondered if the nun had looked for gold at home before coming to the US".

Why Not Militant?

By H. CUTNER

EVER SINCE it was possible to organise Freethought (in England and France at least) the movement has been divided roughly into two camps. One was decidedly "militant", the other preferred gentler ways. Both had as their ideal the propagation of the view that religion—and this meant all religions but particularly Christianity—was not true. That it was based on ignorance, credulity, and superstition. The real difficulty was to get religious people to admit that the Freethought criticism was right. And, looking back upon the history of the movement, I often wonder whether it is best to be militant or not? What have we gained anyway?

I think it would not be unfair to say that the great "militants" of the eighteenth century were Thomas Woolston (1669-1731) and Voltaire (1694-1778). Both mocked Christianity, both had remarkable sales of their pamphlets, and no doubt both made many converts in their day; but I suspect very few people these days have read Woolston—perhaps partly due to the great rarity of his publications.

The great militant Freethinker of the period just after these two was Thomas Paine (1737-1809) and in some ways he can be regarded as the great apostle of militancy. Though actually a Deist, I doubt whether any other Freethinker has ever been attacked with the malignancy and foul vituperation which Christians have poured out on him and his famous *Age of Reason* (1793-4), undoubtedly a masterpiece, not merely of analysis as because of its contemptuous rejection of Christianity. Although a number of "replies" to him were published, they are quite dead, for a very simple reason. Most of the criticisms he made against the Bible in the *Age of Reason* are now commonplace and accepted in cultured Christian circles. Look at the one time "prophecy" of the Virgin Birth which Paine examined and demolished. The Revised Version and the New English Bible have both dropped it; and even the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, while still championing it, has been forced to admit that "modern theology" claims that Matthew was mistaken!

Who were the great militants of the nineteenth century? Charles Southwell (1814-1860) was decidedly militant. He had little use for any other way of attacking Christianity. Robert Taylor (1784-1844) was bitterly attacked while he lived, both by Christians and Freethinkers. He committed the quite unpardonable crime of maintaining that there never was a Jesus Christ at all. If Woolston relegated nearly all the Gospel stories to a world of allegory, Taylor did the same, with the difference that he found nearly all the allegories in sun-myth and star lore.

John M. Robertson's estimate of Woolston was that his pamphlets "were indeed well fitted to arouse wrath and rejoinder. The dialectic against the argument from miracles in general, and the irrelevance or nullity of certain miracles in particular, is often really cogent, and anticipates at points the thought of the nineteenth century". And of Taylor he said that, in spite of his exuberance and extravagance, these do not nullify "his stringent attack alike on the gospel records in respect of *their* history and on the whole body of their narratives". The reader must decide for himself whether Woolston's and Taylor's militancy were after all so bad a thing.

Holyoake (1817-1906) in his younger days was certainly not afraid to call himself an Atheist, but he later tried his best to "soften" such a "harsh" name by inventing the

word "Secularism"—a clear and unequivocal term which subsists to this day. But he settled in the end for "Agnosticism". Here again I have found it difficult to decide whether Holyoake was militant or just in between. Bradlaugh was certainly militant, but few (if any) could put the case for Freethought or Atheism so clearly, so decisively, and so courteously. And in this he was closely followed by G. W. Foote.

The National Secular Society was their creation, and it sturdily upheld "militancy". For doing so, it incurred the wrath of two famous women novelists—George Eliot (1819-1880) and later Mrs. Humphrey Ward (1851-1920) who had in her day a not inconsiderable success with her novels *Robert Elsmere* and *David Grieve*. A niece of Matthew Arnold, Mrs. Ward found it hard to subscribe to the current view of Christianity—just like George Eliot: and the reader who is curious and interested should read these two novels and see how "militancy" affected her. She hated it.

But she was not alone. During the nineteenth century there were always a number of unbelievers who deprecated any frontal attack on religion as such. Oh yes! Christianity for example, was not exactly true—but look at its wonderful works, its cathedrals and churches, its music and literature, its assiduous help for the poor, its hospitals, its scholarship, and so on. The fact that almost every one of these statements could be successfully challenged was beside the point. Millions of Christians genuinely believed, and their religion made them happy and contented—what more could one want? It was a crime to take away from anyone a belief which could bring them so much happiness . . . and so on.

I am not sure what, for example, a cultured writer like Sir Leslie Stephen actually believed, but it could not have been much, for one of his best known books in the Rationalist camp (the word "Rationalism" was at one time considered a much more "cultured" word than Secularism or Atheism) is *An Agnostic's Apology*; and I never discovered whether he had to apologise for calling himself an Agnostic, or because he was no longer a believer. But he is a good example of a champion of what I like to call "reverent Rationalism". The outspoken attack on the Bible by Thomas Paine he bitterly criticised in his *History of English Thought* in the eighteenth century and he had no use either for Anthony Collins and John Toland.

But if I were to single out the most reverent Rationalist of my time, I think it would have to be the late F. J. Gould—always charming, courteous, and absolutely non-militant. In his *History of Freethought*, J. M. Robertson mentions him once, in a note, by name. Yet Gould was a prolific writer with no belief in Christianity whatever, but very anxious to impress moral lessons on children.

And what is the upshot of all this? How should Freethought be propagated is the problem, and has always been the problem—and exactly where are we now? I have made it my business to listen to the radio and TV on religion and as far as Christianity can be championed on these media, I insist that where the average parson, priest, and bishop is concerned, we are still in the world of Paley (1743-1805) that is, the world before Paine wrote his *Age of Reason*.

Whether it is Bradlaugh the Iconoclast, or Gould the gentle unbeliever, or the encyclopedic scholarship of

John M. Robertson, or the contemptuous laughter of Chapman Cohen—where can we find the compelling and unanswerable attack which will in the end force our religious authorities to recognise we have a case to be answered?

Should we be "militant" in the sense of ceaselessly attacking the miracles, the devils and angels, and the hopeless nonsense of such drivel as the "Second Advent" with all the force we know—or should we forever plead the sweet reasonableness of our cause with no desire to hurt anyone's pious feelings, but all done in the holy desire to get at the truth?

When I look back to the beginning of this century with G. W. Foote and Robert Blatchford almost hacking their way through the sorry mass of superstition, credulity, and ignorance then called "true" Christianity, I wonder whether we have advanced a pace towards our goal, our contemporary Christians are perhaps far more *apathetic* than their fathers or grandfathers, but they still believe in

"something", they still want to be married in church, and even like to send their children to Sunday school. In other words, for them, apathetic or not, God is still "up there" in Heaven, and no doubt whatever, Jesus is on his right-hand side. Is it not a fact that even some members of Parliament with no religious belief take the oath?

For myself, let me make it quite clear—I am all for the militancy of our great Freethinkers, and have no use for "sweet reasonableness" unless it is clearly and unequivocally *not* on the side of the angels. Do many of us these days remember Byron's famous lines in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*?

Even gods must yield—religions take their turn:
'Twas Jove's—'tis Mahomet's—and other creeds
Will rise with other years, till man shall learn.
Vainly his incense soars, his victim bleeds;
Poor child of doubt and death, whose hope is built on reeds.

We must force the gods to yield—*without* religions taking their turn.

The "Miracle" Goes To Rome

By JOHN W. TELFER

WHEN A SAINT is canonised the hierarchically-approved "miracles" for which he or she is responsible are represented on large canvasses hung for the ceremony. For the canonisation of Peter Julien Eymard (1811-1868), French founder of the Congregation of Priests of the Most Holy Sacrament, which took place on December 9th, 1962, in St. Peter's Basilica, one of the approved miracles was the cure of Mrs. Mariadora Christina Bartels of South Caulfield, Melbourne, and a canvas showed her rising unaided from her sickbed. So, on December 21st, *The Universe and Catholic Times* devoted most of a page to Mrs. Bartels, a middle-aged housewife whom it described as a "woman of abundant energy very different now from the invalid who lay for years in bed".

Mrs. Bartels was specially flown to Rome to witness the elevation to heaven of her favourite saint and, according to *The Universe*, this flight must have recalled for her memories of another air journey made between Sydney and Melbourne in October, 1946. For, as the report has it, "Since her late teens she had suffered the symptoms of a weak heart". And, "During the flight to Sydney she had a coronary occlusion and was rushed from the plane to hospital. When two months later she returned to Melbourne, it was as an invalid". Her condition gradually worsened, and she spent the next year in bed suffering from constant head, chest and shoulder pains.

News of Mrs. Bartels's affliction reached Father McKenna, the superior of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers in Melbourne, who paid her a visit and left her a relic of Blessed Peter Julien Eymard. "After the evening Rosary", the report goes on, "the family would kiss the relic, but Mrs. Bartels always prayed for her five children not for herself". Till on April 19th, 1949, "it occurred to her to make a novena for her own cure", news which delighted her husband, who was "enthusiastic and gave the children a talk on the efficacy of prayer".

At this stage, Father McKenna said he would ask for prayers from every house of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers throughout the world, while the parish priest promised the prayers of local schoolchildren. From July 26th till August 3rd a formidable assault was made on heaven by these adherents of statue-worship, followed by a series of contacts which spread the novena further afield. The

Benedictine monks of Belmont Abbey, the Sisters of Mercy in Liverpool, a community of nuns in Bonn, and distant relatives all joined in.

In face of such a powerful barrage of prayer, surely no celestial magician could refuse his assistance! Alas, however, Mrs. Bartels, who had no doubt that she would be cured by the final Mass on August 3rd, found that her condition had deteriorated during that morning. She reported that "her lips were violet, her chest felt as though it were gripped in a tight band, her hands and feet were blue and frozen, her head ached and was 'Fuzzy'" and "she struggled for breath". By lunchtime that day, Mrs. Bartels could only drink a cup of tea. Then, suddenly at about 2.30, she noticed it was sunny outside and felt she would like to get up.

"Her head had cleared", *The Universe* tells us, "the pain had left her arms, her back no longer ached . . . She went into the kitchen, made a cup of tea and then made a pudding for the family's dinner". The following morning, after sleeping "like a top", she "jumped out of bed, dressed, made the beds and was shaking a heavy lambs-wool rug outside the door when her husband heard her". He immediately phoned the doctor who, when he arrived, found "her heartbeat normal and that she had even recovered muscle tone (normally restored after a long illness only by a lengthy convalescence) and he declared that she could now lead a normal life".

When Rome was first notified of the "cure", the investigating committee replied to Fr. McKenna that it did not seem worthy of inquiry. Undaunted, however, Fr. McKenna sent Mrs. Bartels a series of questions to answer. Instead, she wrote out her medical history from the age of eighteen, and this served as a leading document in the subsequent investigation.

Her doctor testified that she "had suffered an attack of coronary thrombosis in October, 1946; that she was suffering from angina pectoris and myocardial degeneration on July 29th, 1949; that she was relieved of all signs and symptoms of a pathological heart condition on August 4th, 1949; that the cure was not temporary, but persisted; that the heart disease had been organic, not functional, and that the cure was not the result of medical treatment". This then is the "evidence" sufficient to convince a group

of medieval Vatican clerics that a woman had been cured of an organic disease through the intervention of an apotheosised priest.

Unfortunately, as is so often the case with miraculous cures claimed by the Church of Rome, the doctor's name is not given. Nor is there any indication of this lady having been examined either before or after her alleged cure by other medical men. Important questions spring immediately to mind. Was her doctor a Catholic? Could he have been wrong in his diagnosis; that is, is he positive that the disease was organic and not functional? How thorough was his examination and what tests did he make? Who can corroborate his evidence?

Did this anonymous doctor make allowances for psychosomatic factors in making his diagnosis and in announcing the cure. Assuming the trouble was functional, that is induced by abnormal mental disruption in something like the same way as shell shock, its rapid dissipation could have a rational and natural explanation. We will never have the answers to these questions, because the Church never provides sufficient information for its miraculous claims to be satisfactorily investigated. But one thing is, of course, certain, millions of gullible Catholics throughout the world will be supplicating this latest addition to the Calendar of Saints—Peter Julien Eymard.

CORRESPONDENCE

FATHER VAN KILSDONK

The Guardian's Rotterdam correspondent (THE FREETHINKER, 18/1/63) suggests that the Jesuit Father van Kilsdonk, who opposed the Roman Curia in a speech delivered at Rotterdam on September 30th, 1962, has not been punished at all for his temerity. It is true further measures against him were left to the Bishop of Haarlem, and the latter will not dismiss him as student chaplain, as the Curia had asked for at first. But the correspondent did not mention that the Curia mitigated decision "in view of the measures already taken by the Netherlands ecclesiastical authorities". The exact nature of these measures is not known, but may refer to the interdiction to speak in public imposed on Father van Kilsdonk by his superior.

The Guardian supposes the Roman Catholic authorities were so moderate because they realised their grip on their adherents is lessening. However, it is probable that the Catholic hierarchy wanted to calm the excitement aroused among Protestant and other sympathisers with Catholicism. Therefore it mitigated the form of its judgment in a way that at least limits the Father's activity a great deal.

The Guardian is far too optimistic in believing that Catholic power is lessening in the Netherlands. Indeed, there is—and there has always been—inside the Catholic community an anti-clerical opposition to the omnipotence of the clergy. In recent years some democratic tendencies have become visible. However, up to now these weak and timid currents have never been able to impose their views on the predominant reactionary circles in Church and (Catholic) Party.

The recent very reactionary Education Act moved by a Catholic Minister of Education against the will of many, if not most, Catholics, has been unanimously supported by the Catholic members of the Second Chamber.

For the time being there is no reason for any optimism about the evolution of Dutch Catholicism. A. M. VAN DER GIEZEN (Middelburg-Holland).

AFFIRMATION

It seems that our predecessors in the Freethought movement fought in vain for affirmation rights, at least as far as Scotland is concerned. My story is as follows:

I had a dispute with a points policeman and was eventually charged with a breach of the peace. At my trial on January 28th, the two policemen who had been present perjured themselves, saying that I had used obscene language and had challenged them to fight. There was perhaps nothing unusual in that, as I had no witnesses.

When however it came my turn to give evidence, I said that I would affirm. The Baillie had no idea what I was talking about

and tried to force me to take an oath. I refused, saying it was my legal right to affirm. Eventually he was advised that this was so, but he again tried to make me change my mind. "Do you know what you are saying?" he asked. And when I stated that affirmation was equally as binding as an oath, his reply was: "That may be your opinion, but it is not the opinion of this court".

After this, of course, I had no chance of winning my case. If that is not an instance of religious prejudice and magisterial incompetence I should hate to see one. All these facts can be verified, as I had four friends present in court. W. BAXTER.

TWO HEAVENS

The quotation last week from Mr. K's recent East Berlin speech—"We communists are not interested in the Kingdom of Heaven"—We are, however, interested in a Socialist's Heaven on Earth—illustrates the universal and infantile craving for a Heaven at all costs. Both the Christian Heaven and the Socialist Heaven are of course future states, and like the Christian, the Communist is willing to create hell in the process of achieving his Heaven, since both the Communist and the Christian believe in suffering for their principles—they have the principles and other people do the suffering.

Belief in a Heaven, by the workers, is very useful to the ruling class, and it is immaterial to the ruling class whether the heavenly future state believed in is Christian or Socialist, just as, to the ruling class, it is immaterial whether the workers touch their caps to the boss or to their Union leaders—so long as they do touch their caps.

The French have a few words for it—*plus ça change plus c'est la même chose.* W. E. NICHOLSON.

GERALD MASSEY

I am collecting the works of Gerald Massey, and was wondering if any reader possesses a photograph of him or knows the whereabouts of one. If not for sale, I could always get it copied. I should, of course, be prepared to pay for any expenses incurred.

I shall also be interested to hear of copies of Massey's works that are for sale. D. SHAW.

7 Upper Chyngton Gardens, Seaford, Sussex.

OBITUARY

It is with great sadness that I write on behalf of Western Australian Secularists to tell you that our friend Veronica (Vern) Roberts died in hospital on January 17th after a long and painful illness. We are relieved that her travail is over, yet we mourn her loss.

Vern Roberts was kind and generous, and hated all forms of cruelty. She was particularly horrified at ill treatment of children, and devoted much of her time to combatting this.

COLIN COATES (Western Australia).
The Editor writes: *Our own last letter from Mrs. Roberts was written from her sick bed, yet was characteristically concerned about other people's suffering, not her own. The only reference to the latter was an apology for her shaky handwriting. "I have scarcely written a letter for several months", she said, "and shall have to start again on pot-hooks and hangers". We join Mrs. Coates and his colleagues in mourning the death of a fine and brave woman who was a credit and an example to the Freethought movement.*

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