

The Freethinker

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WE NOTED RECENTLY in the press that the Vatican Council (now temporarily adjourned) was the scene of an apparently acrimonious dispute between the liberal and conservative (or traditionalist) parties in the Roman Catholic Church. The particular aspect of Christian theology that provoked this apparently rather stormy session of the Vatican Council, was the suggested report on "The Sources of Revelation", drawn up by that staunch traditionalist, Cardinal Ottaviani, the administrative head of the Roman Holy Office (the old Inquisition), traditionally entrusted with the preservation of Catholic orthodoxy, who represents the extreme right wing of the College of Cardinals, which is alleged to have fiercely opposed the election of the present comparatively liberal Pope, John XXIII. Apparently this report, as one would have expected from its author, represented a stiffly conservative point of view, being presumably based upon the *ipsissima verba* of those major authorities in Catholic theology, St. Thomas Aquinas (13th century) and St. Robert Bellarmine, SJ (16th century). We learn however, that the more liberal cardinals who represent—as one would naturally expect—the more socially advanced lands like France and Germany within the orbit of the Catholic Church, protested strongly that this document was purely medieval in tone and took no account of modern critical objection and/or scientific discoveries. What was really wanted, they evidently felt, was a document of more modern inspiration that would attempt to present the Catholic faith in a form that at least would make some attempt to meet its critics upon an intellectual terrain common to both disputants.

Apologetics
This problem of "evidences", of Christian apologetics, is probably the most important question that the Vatican Council will have to discuss. For the 20th century has seen a phenomenal growth of atheism, and unless Christian apologetics can evolve some more satisfactory "proofs" of at least the existence of God, the primary dogma of all supernatural religion, there does not appear to be much hope for the continued existence of Christianity (or for that matter, of other religions also) much beyond the confines of the present century. Some kind of an intellectual defence and justification of theism, the essential prerequisite of Christianity as of any and every other religion that claims to be founded upon divine revelation, represents today undoubtedly the most urgent need of the Roman Catholic Church and of Christianity in general. For unless the primary existence of God can first be demonstrated as certain or even probable, the whole elaborate structure of Catholicism, from the Trinity to Our Lady of Fatima, must inevitably come crashing to the ground.

To do it justice, the Vatican has long recognised this fact, as has been evident from numerous papal pronouncements, and most recently by its inauguration of a professor of atheism in the Vatican. We hope that this reverend and learned expert reads THE FREETHINKER and its Con-

tinental equivalents regularly, for therein he will certainly get a better idea of what atheism actually implies than in some religious publications upon this subject. For since the first Vatican Council of 1869-70 which issued an authoritative decree upon the mutual relationship between faith and revelation on the one hand and human reason upon the other, it is a dogma of the Church that the existence of God (as also that of human immortality) can be demonstrated without any need for revelation and by the normal and natural exercise of human reason. For the Vatican Council banned "fideism", the view that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated by reason but can only be

known by an act of blind faith. Prior to which decree, many Catholic intellectuals had adopted the irritating custom of separating faith and reason altogether, and then going on to embarrass the Church by declaring to all and sundry that "they believed as Christians but doubted as philosophers".

In 1870, Rome put a final stop to this awkward habit by making it a compulsory article of faith that (in the ecclesiastical phraseology) "the existence of the One and True God can be known to human reason and can be demonstrated solely by the unassisted human reason". (This only refers to theism *per se*, and does not include the doctrine of the Trinity, which is held to be beyond the scope of human reason and which is only known through divine revelation.) Since 1870 fideism is a technical heresy in the Roman Catholic Church.

"Natural Theology"

A course in "Natural Theology", described as "Apologetics" in the Protestant Churches, always forms a necessary part of the curriculum in all Roman theological seminaries. Neither revelation nor the Bible can be invoked for the purposes of this preliminary course, which relies (at any rate officially) solely upon human reason and secular philosophical proofs. The late Joseph McCabe, who had studied under Msgr. (later Cardinal) Mercier, one of the ablest modern Catholic philosophers, has given a lucid and very fair and objective account of this theological system in his monastic autobiography, *Twelve Years in a Monastery* (in particular in the last chapters). And McCabe, indicates that the views held by so many anti-Catholic critics that Rome *rejects* human reason out of hand and relies solely upon blind uncritical faith is not true—at least officially—though it no doubt derives much concrete support from the practice of so many sheer superstitions in the everyday practice of the average Catholic. For that matter, Rome has always known how to practise a kind of double book-keeping. She has one religious cult, a highly intellectualised one, for her educated members, and a popular cult comprised chiefly of priestcraft rituals and sheer superstition (often cemented by naked religious terrorism) for the illiterate masses.

As is generally known, the present very elaborate philosophical and theological system of the Church of Rome,

VIEWS and OPINIONS

St. Thomas or St. Teilhard?

By F. A. RIDLEY

is primarily based upon the voluminous (if not invariably luminous) works of the 13th century Dominican friar, St. Thomas Aquinas (1227-74). St. Thomas has been a pillar of orthodoxy for so long, that it is not now always realised that he was regarded and duly denounced by the theological conservatives of his day as a dangerous "modernist". As such, he was denounced by the then Archbishop of Canterbury (a long-forgotten cleric named Bradwardine) and was actually condemned as heretical by the University of Oxford which, even then, seems to have become already "the home of lost causes". For the major contribution made by Aquinas, was to combine the traditional structure of Catholic theology with the rationalistic philosophy of the Greek (and Pagan) Aristotle.

In effecting that revolutionary intellectual change, Aquinas became in particular, the founder of Natural Theology. For it was he who laid down the basic distinction between revelation and reason in Christian theology. The now officially adopted Thomist theology claims to prove the basic dogmas of Christianity purely by the use of reason, the view later adopted at the first Vatican Council of 1870. In particular, St. Thomas produced his famous five proofs of the existence of God, which not only remain authoritative at Rome, but actually probably still represent the most ingenious and elaborate attempt ever made to establish theism upon a purely rational basis.

However, whilst St. Thomas was undoubtedly one of the ablest and most learned of Christian thinkers, he was after all, a man of his time. As such, he knew nothing either of say, the heliocentric theory, or of the Biblical criticism evolved in a later age. Like all medieval theologians, he took the gospels, miracles and all, as literal facts. Had he not done so, he would himself probably have perished at the stake, the fate which he himself recommended for heretics. In particular (as a recent Catholic biographer admits) he not only knew nothing about modern theories of evolution, but his whole system is based on immutability of species and as such, is flatly opposed to evolution (cf article Thomas Aquinas in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*). As a direct result of this, the "Angelic Doctor" has become (if we may use this rather irreverent analogy) a "white elephant" to his present theological successors. For in an era like ours, when all living thought tends to be evolutionary in substance, the Thomist theology bears about as much relation to modern thought as his contemporary medieval knights in full armour do to contemporary nuclear scientists.

St Teilhard?

Today, apologetics (both Catholic and Protestant) are looking for a new intellectual basis for theism; one that at least recognises the existence of modern evolutionary thought, and the growing influence of the Jesuit scientist, the late Pierre Teilhard de Chardin may perhaps mark him out as the Thomas Aquinas of the 20th century. For Father de Chardin, a palaeontologist of eminence, who *inter alia* discovered the Peking man, developed what purports to be an evolutionary system of religious apologetics. At least it recognises the existence of and pays lip-service to modern evolutionary theory. It is true that de Chardin is, at present, in bad odour in Rome, and that several of his books have been condemned. However, as we noted above, this, or something like it, also happened to Aquinas. Will (St.) Teilhard de Chardin eventually succeed St. Thomas Aquinas as the future pillar of Catholic orthodoxy? Certainly Christian apologetics urgently need a new intellectual basis, and the theory of the Development of Christian Doctrine, as expounded by Cardinal Newman and now recognised by Rome, may eventually result in the creation of a new evolutionary species of Christianity

of which St. Teilhard de Chardin will be recognised as the founder. For certainly, unless the Church can produce a more plausible defence of theism than the ingenious but now outmoded medieval "proofs" of St. Thomas, the future both for theism and for Christianity would appear to be decidedly dark.

Conscience Freedom and Quebec Laws

FOUR QUEBEC PRIESTS whose writings have already had salutary effects on Quebec's political and social morals now advocate legal changes that would permit civil marriage in this province and allow non-believers to be competent witnesses in the civil courts as they are in the criminal. It is an important piece of advocacy, based as it is on the ecumenical spirit to which they appeal, and on the need for facing social reality in Quebec.

Abbés Dion, O'Neil, Duval and Hamelin are not the first to raise the issue of competence of non-believers to be witnesses in civil action. Judges and lawyers have already raised it and the commission studying revision of the Code of Civil Procedure a year ago urged on the Attorney-General a change that would permit non-believers to make an affirmation in the civil courts as they can now do in criminal cases. Nothing has been done about it and the Quebec clerics take the view that further delays may create "an unhealthy and painful climate and threaten unnecessary irritation".

The difficulty about the oath of non-believers stems from a difference between federal and Quebec law. The Canada Evidence Act under which oaths are administered in criminal cases is a federal statute; the Code of Civil Procedure applies only to Quebec civil cases. The offending paragraph in the latter is this:

Before the witness is admitted to be sworn, he may be examined by either of the parties as to his religious beliefs and he cannot take the oath or the affirmation, or give evidence, if he does not believe in God, and in a state of reward and punishments after death.

The provision is rarely invoked. Lawyers rarely ask witnesses about their religious beliefs. But they can be asked and, if by reason of non-belief they are barred as witnesses, injustice may be worked on litigants. The Quebec clerics make the further trenchant point that denial of the right to testify may interfere with that freedom of conscience which is everyone's natural right.

Marriage in Quebec is both a civil and religious rite. For while only ministers of religion may perform the marriage ceremony, their right to do so derives from the civil authority. Yet there are many people who would prefer a civil ceremony alone. The Quebec clerics think this a legitimate claim in a pluralistic society, again on grounds of respect for freedom of conscience and recognition of the separation of church and state.

[Reprinted from *The Montreal Star*, 30/1/63.]

League Against Religious Coercion in Israel

WE ARE GLAD to learn of the revival of the League for the Abolishment of Religious Coercion in Israel (Headquarters, PO Box 200, Jerusalem). The League is independent and non-party, open to people of all faiths and none, so long as they favour the separation of religion from the state. It is a terrible irony that Israel and Nazi Germany should be the only two countries in this country where a Jew is not allowed to marry a Christian, while Israeli citizens who do not belong to a "recognised" religious community are unable under any circumstances to marry. But a public petition for civil marriage recently got its 10,000th signature.

The Catholic View of Evolution

By COLIN McCALL

ST. THOMAS OR ST. TEILHARD? asks F. A. Ridley in Views and Opinions this week. It is an intriguing question, and it might be a useful corollary to consider how far official Catholic theology has yet gone towards an acceptance of evolution.

The governing encyclical is *Humani Generis*, issued by Pope Pius XII in 1950, translated into English by the late Ronald Knox under the title, *False Trends in Modern Teaching*, and published by the Catholic Truth Society. This is a typically casuistic document, regretting the tendency "to interpret the historical books of the Old Testament with overmuch freedom", but leaving it to "the further labours of the exegete to determine" in "what exact sense" the first eleven chapters of Genesis "come under the heading of history". The infallible Pius, in fact, "leaves the doctrine of Evolution an open question, as long as it confines its speculations to the development, from other living matter already in existence, of the human body". Souls, of course, "are immediately created by God"—that is dogma, as is original sin "committed in actual historical fact, by an individual named Adam . . .".

Now, in the February issue of the Maltese Roman Catholic paper, *The Faith*, Monsignor J. D. Conway (whom I take to be an American) purports to tell us "what the Church's stand on evolution is". He begins by separating evolution and religion. The former is a scientific theory: the latter "deals with man's relationship with God". They are, therefore, "in different fields", and "there should be no conflict between them if each stays where it belongs". Which sounds simple enough. Yet the Monsignor realises there is more in it than that; for evolution and religion often deal with the same subject, "particularly with man". Ah, but "neither sees the whole of him. They view him with different lenses; so they get divergent pictures". And "It takes careful study to see how these pictures fit together".

Presumably the Monsignor considers himself qualified for the task, and I propose to follow him in his exposition. But not without noticing the retreat of Catholic theology implicit in the last two quotations, where religion is relegated to a collateral position with science; merely one view of man and not *the* view. Moreover, there is no suggestion that the evolutionary "lens" distorts. Evolution, it is admitted, "rests on scientific evidence—facts which have been carefully observed, studied and evaluated". Religion, on the other hand, "comes largely from revelation: its primary interests are in God and man's soul, in sin and redemption, in faith and salvation . . .".

Monsignor Conway is careful to add that these religious interests are "things with which science has no concern", but the main admission continues: "Not only is evolution a reasonable theory, which seems to explain the facts: it simply cannot be ignored by anyone who wants to be a scientist today. A biologist could explain nothing without it; the anthropologist and geneticist would be lost, and even the social scientist would have to revise all his thinking".

The Monsignor realises, we may be sure, that evolution cannot be ignored by the Church either. And so, while preserving his vital dual-view theme, he begins to minimise the differences between the two. Seventy-five years ago, he says, "the appearances of conflict were heightened by the exaggerations of the two extreme and opposing camps" (my italics). "On the one side were the eager atheists who

saw in evolution a devastating weapon against all religion . . . On the other side were those literal interpreters of the Bible who were dedicated to the desperate defence of every native notion they had read into its message. The earth had been created in six days of 24 hours. Adam had been moulded from moist clay, and the Lord had huffed and puffed to breathe life into him".

This would be amusing if it weren't so shameless. Seventy-five years ago, if you like; and blame for the Christian opposition to evolution put, by implication, on the Protestant fundamentalists. As though there haven't been any Catholic fundamentalists!

Then we get the usual "poetic" or "symbolic" angle. "The first two chapters of Genesis teach some truths essential to religion, but they do it in a poetic and popular manner, which has nothing to do with evolution". These biblical "truths" are that "God made all things; and then He gave his special attention to man, forming him in His own image. Then man committed sin and separated himself from his intimate life with God". In one sense it is true that this has nothing to do with evolution: it is a pre-evolutionary conception. But in another sense it has a very great deal to do with evolution. And it is no use Monsignor Conway suggesting that the evolutionary and creational views can co-exist. They can't. Either the world and man have evolved or they were specially created. It is a case of naturalism or supernaturalism, with no possible amalgam.

The Monsignor has to admit that, "If evolution is true, then God did not create the world as the finished product we find it today". And presumably this is more than just a recognition that man has made his imprint, for it is followed by a reference to the geological age of the earth. But then, we are asked, "Who ever told us that it was practically new anyway?" To which the obvious reply is, certainly not the evolutionists. "If man's body was evolved", the Monsignor goes on—as if there were room for doubt—"then we will have to forget those 6,000 years that many biblical mathematicians had counted from Adam to the atom bomb". In review, anyway, none of the stories of Adam's sons and so forth are "essential to our religion", nor are they "required by a sensible understanding of the Bible". Indeed, if "these figurative non-essentials are cleared away the basic truths emerge more clearly".

In general, it may be agreed that the disposal of "figurative non-essentials" is useful. In the case of Genesis, however, it involves a ticklish operation. "The notion of creation remains intact under a theory of evolution", we are blithely told, "God created man by a special act", though not, apparently, by making a clay statue and breathing life into it. That must be figurative: "'slime of the earth' would mean that man's body was material like the earth, and that God formed it by ages of fond nurturing".

But Monsignor Conway must know that this won't do. The Genesis story of the creation of man is not a story of "ages of fond nurturing", but of a specific act. And not, as he tries to argue, just a spiritual act, but a physical one. Here, in fact, the failure of the Monsignor's impossible effort is patent. Despite all his artful dodging he finally illustrates the incompatibility of the evolutionary and creational approaches. No matter what evolutionary process man's body went through, he says, "he was not man

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

The Obituary in "The Times" of the late Dorothy Kerin was by the Bishop of Coventry, and was far more remarkable for what it did not say than for what it did. Although nearly all our national newspapers have given Miss Kerin full publicity about the 28 doctors who failed to cure her, and the way Jesus either personally or in a "vision" cured her, as well as a full account by TV describing the way in which she followed her own cure by getting Jesus to cure other people and so on, were hardly referred to in the obituary. The Bishop said that "many hundreds of people all over the world could testify that they received spiritual help and in many cases physical healing through her ministry".

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We have never been very clear as to the real meaning of "spiritual help", and we were given no details of the "physical healing". The Bishop also did not mention the visits Jesus made to Miss Kerin personally or in "visions". Except for pointing out that her church was dedicated to "Christ the Healer", the Bishop never mentioned Jesus at all—surely a strange omission when we consider that Miss Kerin devoted all her life to "our Lord"?

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Who exactly initiated "baptism" as a religious rite we do not know, but there is little doubt that it comes from a desire to wash by people who otherwise would have been dirty. However, it has long been the initiatory religious rite for Christians sacred to Jesus; so to see it "debunked" by a parson came quite as a shock. The Rev. J. Bowers, vicar of St. Peter's, Loughborough, is quoted by the *Daily Express* (January 28th) as saying, "Baptism is one of the most distressing services priests have to take. Sometimes I think that if I read the service backwards in Chinese, no one would even notice, let alone comment". Perhaps we might follow the example of the parson in *The Bedsitting Room* and replace the "old square version" with a reading from a bestseller.

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Plans are taking place which it is hoped will unite the Methodist Church and the Church of England but which, says the *Sunday Express* (January 20th), will cause fierce discussion at the Church conferences, as they involve questions like the validity of the orders of Methodist ministers. How can a Methodist parson be one truly if he hasn't been touched by an Anglican bishop? A happy arrangement may however solve the difficulty. The bishop may touch the Methodist, and the Methodist may touch the bishop, and everybody—including Jesus—will be satisfied. Lots more theological difficulties might be settled amicably in the same simple pious way—just saying "yes" to each other.

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According to Mr. A. Cornell of Cambridge, 15 Russian scientists with whom he has talked are experts in parapsychology which is, according to the *Daily Express* (January 21st), "the study of six senses". These Russian scientists are "convinced that telepathy is a proven fact". They do not of course believe it has anything to do with ghosts or spirits, but they "have shown that telepathy is due to the utilisation of electro-magnetic radiation by the brain".

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Their special object is however to use telepathy "for communicating with submarine commanders and astronauts". But it is strange that Mr. Cornell did not try them out

with a very simple test. This is to give one believer a pound note, and ask him to convey its full number to another believer *mentally* in another room. If this succeeds easily, say, dozens of times, then telepathy will be proven so far. Whether this means that full instructions can be given telepathically to a submarine commander from Moscow at the North Pole is another matter. For some of us it would be far easier to put one's trust in radio.

THE CATHOLIC VIEW OF EVOLUTION

(Concluded from page 51)

until God had given him a spiritual soul, with intellect and will—which evolution could never produce". One could argue forever about a "spiritual soul", of course but that evolution could never produce intellect is contrary to all the evidence.

There is not the slightest doubt that man's "intellect" is rooted in his brain and is inseparable from that organ. Nor can there be any doubt that the human brain is a product of evolution. In that invaluable work, *Man and His Gods*, the late Professor Homer W. Smith aptly described man as "an anthropoid whose development in certain respects has not only been greatly slowed but arrested at an early stage". "The most important consequences of this retardation", Professor Smith went on, "are that the time during which the cranium remains plastic and the brain has an opportunity to enlarge is greatly prolonged and that the young are cared for over a longer period during which time they remain amenable to education and enjoy an opportunity for the transmission of cultural experience from one generation to another".

No act of God there. Unless Monsignor Conway credits the Almighty with the retardation of man's cranium closure.

LEEDS UNIVERSITY DEBATE

On January 30th, during Christian Mission Week at Leeds University, the Union debated the motion, "That this House believes God is man-made". Mr. F. J. Corina, Chairman of the West Riding Humanist Society and Vice-Chairman of Bradford Branch of the National Secular Society, put the motion, the opponent being the Rev. Dr. Vincent, of Rochdale, one of the Mission speakers. Mr. Tony Pritchard seconded the motion and the debate lasted well over the usual time, with many contributions from the floor. As one might expect, especially in the emotional feeling aroused among believers by the Mission Week activity, the motion was defeated, but the vote of 114 against 114, with 63 abstainers, must have been something of a shock to those campaigning to "win the University for God". It should also encourage the students who are endeavouring to form a Humanist Group at the University.

DON'T TELL DAVID SHEPPARD!

But God doesn't care a twopenny toss whether England or Australia win the Ashes.—The *British Weekly's* comment on an Australian cricketer's claim that God helped him score a century (*Daily Express*, 31/1/63).

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 57th ANNUAL DINNER

Followed by Dancing
Chairman, MRS. E. VENTON
Guests of Honour: MR. & MRS. F. A. HORNIBROOK
SATURDAY, MARCH 2nd, 1963
at The Pavlovs Arms, Page Street, London, S.W.1
RECEPTION 6 p.m. DINNER 6.30 p.m.
Vegetarians catered for Evening Dress Optional
TICKETS 21/- from the Sec., 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1

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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

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, February 19th, 7.30 p.m.: REGINALD HORNSEN, MP, "An Eye Witness on Modern India".
Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, corner Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, February 19th, 7.45 p.m.: PAUL CRELLIN, "The Development of Humanism".
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, February 17th, 6.30 p.m.: C. SHUTTLEWOOD, "Astronomy and Astronautics".
Marble Arch Branch (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, February 17th, 7.30 p.m.: BRIAN POLLITT, "Underdeveloped Countries—the Irrelevance of the West".
North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, February 15th, 7.15 p.m.: A MEETING.
Nottingham Branch NSS Discussion Circle (People's Hall, Heathcote Street), Thursday, February 21st, 7.30 p.m.: R. MORRELL, "Religion and the State".
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Educational Centre, Heathcote Street), Sunday, February 17th, 2.30 p.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, "Free Speech or Public Order?".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, February 17th, 11 a.m.: JOHN BURROWS, "Voluntary Service—Yesterday and Today".

Notes and News

THE NEXT two meetings of Marble Arch Branch of the National Secular Society should be especially lively. This Sunday, Brian Pollitt, the first Communist President of the Country, will be speaking about "Underdeveloped Countries—the Irrelevance of the West", while on February 24th, there is to be a debate on the highly emotional topic of experiments on live animals. Mrs. Muriel Wood (for) and Charles Slatter (Assistant Secretary of the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection, against) will no doubt try to keep the discussion below boiling point, but we can't say we envy the chairman!

IN HIS tribute to the American poet Robert Frost, who died recently at the age of 87, Robert Graves told a rather nice story (*The Sunday Times*, 3/2/63). Frost was once visited by a well-known Southern American poet, who had

been converted to Catholicism. With him came a dapper young Irish priest. Frost looked at them askance, and asked the priest: "Say, are you a convert, too?" "No, Mr. Frost, I'm not." "Shake," said Frost. "Neither am I!"

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ONE DOESN'T expect precision in sermons, and the Rev. Eric Saxon's letter in *The Guardian* (6/2/63) was essentially a sermon on "good" and "bad" plumbers, shepherds and Christians. We don't want to be too hard, then, but we can't overlook the remark that, "The real atheist is the man without morality or any standards in his profession or trade". The identification of atheism with immorality is an old and disreputable Christian practice that we hoped had been abandoned in face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Mr. Saxon may plead that he was using "atheist" metaphorically. In fact he was twisting language—and facts—to suit his purposes and to bring him to his final foolish question: "Is it really possible to describe a bad plumber as a good Christian?"

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"TAKE UP the Bible and turn to the New Testament and find Paul's letter to the Romans. Start at chapter one and slowly go through it." This type of Christian correspondent is particularly irritating with his schoolmaster-to-child attitude, and we are tempted to answer him rudely. Invariably, though, as we dutifully wade through his dozen pages of Jesus said this, Paul said that, and this proves so-and-so, sorrow displaces anger and we shake our head as we drop the epistle gently into the waste paper basket.

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ANOTHER PROSELYTISER recently exhorted us in time-honoured(?) fashion to "Look at the trees and flowers. Look at a mountain like Everest and then down at a fly". And, he said exultantly, "every single snowflake is different". Well now, supposing every single snowflake had been alike, what would that prove: that they were made by God?

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A MAN who threw caustic soda over an 18-year-old girl and her mother was sentenced to four years' imprisonment at Devon Assizes on January 12th. The defence counsel said that Marcus Joseph Mahoney's motives for the attack came from an extraordinary mixture of religious beliefs—"perhaps in the more primitive elements of the Old Testament Gods of Vengeance" (*Daily Herald*, 15/1/63). Whatever your religious beliefs", said the judge, "the crimes to which you have pleaded guilty were appallingly wicked".

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THERE HAS been a good deal of controversy in Australia over the special 5d. Christmas stamp, which was first issued on October 17th, 1962, and is apparently still on sale (or, at least, still on letters that we are receiving). It shows the Madonna and Child in an early 16th century Spanish carving, and has been described by the Protestant magazine, *The Rock*, as "an effective billboard advertising the RC Church". The usual 5d. stamp with the Queen's head remained available if specially requested.

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IT LOOKS as though London and Thetford will soon have statues of Thomas Paine. We have just heard from Joseph Lewis, Secretary of the Thomas Paine Foundation, and President of the Freethinkers of America, that the London County Council has officially accepted the Foundation's offer to erect a statue to the great English revolutionary, and Mr. Lewis hopes to visit this country in April or May to make final arrangements regarding site and sculptor.

In Defence of Myself

By G. I. BENNETT

TWENTY YEARS AGO, as a result of reading mainly the works of 19th century thinkers, the last shred of the faith I had been brought up in dropped from me and I became an atheist. I was 17 then. I believed at that time what I have believed ever since—that a man's attitudes to life must be analysed by reason and modified, if necessary, in the light of experience. I was an individualist at 17; I am an individualist now. The idea of "ganging up" has never appealed to me. I dislike political parties and pressure groups, and I associate with movements usually for what I conceive to be humanitarian ends. Honesty and fairness matter a great deal to me. Whatever the creed or beliefs of a man, I would support him against all opposition if I thought him to be right in any particular stand. One of the points about my sort of intellectual independence is that I am not swayed by considerations for the fortunes of battle in the way that makes Mr. D. H. Tribe see people in terms of friends or foes.

Two letters have appeared in THE FREETHINKER vehemently critical of the moderate but definite views I have expressed. The author of one of them is my old opponent, Mr. F. H. Amphlett Micklewright. We have crossed swords before on sexual and other questions. Apart from his spirited disagreement with me (which is very evident), it is difficult to disentangle his ideas from fustian. But some answer to Mr. Tribe's assertions is called for. Here is a man who sees himself as a soldier in a camp facing an enemy of considerable strength. Unity is paramount to him, and he resents what seems like stubborn non-conformity on my part. Hence his remark about freethinkers having enough on "coping with the misrepresentation of our enemies without having to deal with that of our supposed friends". But I must object. I am against misrepresentations. The truth is everything to me, and I will defend the religionist against misrepresentation just as readily as I will a fellow-freethinker. It is also important that I defend myself. I should be interested to know how, by saying what I think—and I will never say less—on various matters, I have misrepresented freethought? If in arguing a case I have implied that there are other freethinkers who hold similar views to mine—all right, what of it? Over the years I have corresponded or discussed with not a few like-minded people of freethought sympathies, and it is reasonable to assume that there are others.

Looking through Mr. Tribe's letter I am amazed at the number of things he implies I said that I did not in fact say. I will let pass his opening statement that I "denounce premarital sexual intercourse". The word *denounce* is emotive and means something stronger than my temperately-worded demurrer could be taken to mean. But I did not say, as Mr. Tribe suggests I did, that I would rank chastity above charity. What I actually said was: "... Some of us do not look upon chastity as 'much less important than charity' (although charity to me means so much)". Which is rather different!

In nothing I have written can Mr. Tribe find justification for "the bland jingoistic assumption that the heathen Chinese is peculiar and the primitive Samoans are simple barbarians". And with the anthropological interest my critic sees in the latter I was not concerned. I simply stated that no comparison between their society and ours is possible—implying that their *mores* are not to be taken as a model for our own.

When he goes on to say, "Then there is a depressing preoccupation with the negative virtues . . .", my retort is, "What are you talking about? Civilisation means restraint, I said. As for the rest, you've dreamt it!" If he replies that he intended this remark to relate to the "19th century British characteristics" with which he burdens me, then I say he does not make this clear. In any case, I consider that this method of discrediting an opponent is unworthy because unfair.

When I pointed out that a rejection of Christianity does not and cannot mean a rejection of morality I never added, nor implied, a "rider that anyone who pleads for tolerance is *ipso facto* immoral". In fact, this would have been a complete travesty of anything I have said, or might have said, on the subject. As for his saying that, in my ethical Valhalla, "justice, understanding, generosity, spontaneity, and compassion do not, it seems, obtrude", once again my critic goes beyond his last. Has he read anything I have written on any of these things in past years that he could quote against me? If he hasn't, what warrant has he for imputing to me—even allusively—qualities that are their negation?

And then to cap this rather astonishing catalogue of misstatements, Mr. Tribe thinks it "outrageous that I should indict modern freethought for 'moral nihilism'". Did I so indict modern freethought? Well, these are my words: "I strongly repudiate the idea that moral nihilism and freethought go together".

All these charges or innuendoes in a letter! Had the letter been expanded into an article, what else would this ingenious man have concocted to put in it! If there has been misrepresentation, I leave readers to decide for themselves from what I have quoted whence the misrepresentation comes. But I have not quite finished. If Mr. Tribe dissents from my sexual ethics, perhaps he will tell us what his are. I get tired these days of hearing people sophisticated enough to wish to be in step with the intellectuals, talk about sexual conduct being relative in time and place, as though that exempted them from seriously thinking further about it. It doesn't. Those who would demolish must have clear blue prints for rebuilding.

One final point. Will Mr. Tribe please tell us what are the scientific principles he refers to by which to "adjudge" ethical values in "an evolutionary society"? And does he mean *evolutionary* or *evolving*? The only conceivable place that ethics have in evolution concerns survival. In all other respects, ethics and evolution have different impelling forces and directions, and are at war.

In my letter I asked the question: "Of what quality is love if a woman gives her body freely and experimentally to others?" It is not because I am a soured Puritan that I wrote this. It is because I do not want to see the woman relationship, which should be something fine and precious, cheapened into mere farmyard activity. There are forces in our society today that would make it exactly that, calling it "emancipated" and "enlightened" (formerly euphemisms!). I say, and I say again, that freethinkers men and women have a duty to set their sights, so far as they can, on what, for human beings, is good, right, and true. We who are without theology should bear our standards high. Being a freethinker does not absolve one from moral responsibility. It makes the acceptance of that responsibility a matter of prime importance.

God

By H. F. HAAS (USA)

THERE IS SCARCELY another word in the English language which has been more abused and misunderstood than the word "God". Of all stimulus words, "God" is without doubt the most baffling and illusive. Certainly the most widely diffused, whatever be the intention, whether to convert, to accommodate or to counterfeit. Demagogues, charlatans and rabble-rousers soon learn how to use this magical word as a means of persuasion. Policy-makers preparing for war always seek to invoke the sanction of God to their cause. There have been few exceptions. So, we had better be on our guard, for as long as leading politicians imagine they are engaged in a "Holy" crusade, just so long will they endanger peace.

Our present concern is to find out whether or not we are actually predisposed to invest the "supernatural" with a Personality. Whilst anthropomorphism is thoroughly condemned in Scripture as a gross degradation of the "divinity", it would be dangerously self-deceptive for a Bible-believing Christian to imagine he is wholly immune. It is not by a process of reasoning that children arrive at an early concept of God, but through a kind of emotional identification with parents and teachers whose habitual reactions the child is compelled to observe and respect. It is seldom realised that after constant repetition people will respond automatically to words and symbols that propagandists employ as stimuli.

It is easy to understand how one who thinks of God as a Being endowed with human attributes, feelings and emotions, will see the Bible in a different perspective than one who looks upon God as a product of our childhood impressions. The former will have a predisposition to clothe the Scriptures with an aura of "sacredness" or "infallibility", perhaps too much so for proper evaluation educationally. The latter will be less bound by cultural norms and therefore less stereotyped in his thinking.

This thesis does not assume there is no God of any sort. It does assume, however, that belief in God as a phantasmal Creation, such as we read about in Genesis, is not founded upon any knowable realities. If we interpret the First Commandment correctly, Jehovah had plenty of competitors but being a "jealous God", with no inclination or disposition to proselytise on equal grounds, chose instead to destroy all competing systems.

When the child is old enough to grapple with abstract metaphysical problems, then it is well to put the Bible into his hands. Whilst the mere privilege of private interpretation does not insure a mature understanding, neither does it dogmatically impose religious dogma without critical inquiry and questioning. It is easy to see how a Bible teacher who has been trained in the rudiments of standardised and accepted patterns of religious instruction, will be one of the last to see any need for improvement. This is because the desire to conform, or to make "divine" real achievement. It will be just because the individual has no cultural norms behind which to take refuge, that he will be free to challenge outworn methods and suggest something new.

What does the word "God" mean to you? The following answer is from Sir Julian Huxley's book, *Religion without Revelation*:

One of the major results has been the realisation that God is one among several hypotheses to account for the phenomena of human destiny, and that is now proving to be an inadequate

hypothesis. To a great many people, including myself, this realisation is a great relief, both intellectually and morally. It frees us to explore the real phenomena for which the God hypothesis seeks to account, to define them more accurately, and to work for a more satisfying set of concepts and symbols to represent them in our mental organisation.

A final remark would seem to leave no doubt in the mind of Dr. Huxley that the Author of our Being is not a Personality. "A Personal God", he says, "be he Jehovah, or Allah, or Apollo, or Amen-Ra, without name but simply God, I know nothing of. And what is more, I am not merely agnostic on the subject . . . I disbelieve in a Personal God in any sense in which that phrase is ordinarily used".

Here is a fragment from the writings of Albert Einstein (1879-1955):

In their struggle for the ethical good, teachers of religion must have the stature to give up the doctrine of a Personal God, that is, give up that source of fear and hope which in the past placed such a vast power in the hands of priests. In their labours they will have to avail themselves of those factors which are capable of cultivating the good, the true, and the beautiful in humanity itself. This, is, to be sure, a more difficult but an incomparably more worthy task.

Theodore Schroeder (1863-1953) genetic and evolutionary psychologist:

Some of us are beginning to feel that none of our urgent economic, industrial or international problems will find their better peaceable solution, until the mystic religionist's emotionalism, its underlying immature desires and mental processes, and the resultant primitive moral valuations are all outgrown, and humanity achieves a habitual, conscious use of quite mature intellectual methods.

Whilst these quotations may be matched by statements of opposite view from eminent scholars and scientists of the present time, I see no harm in comparing opinions so long as reason is left free to evaluate them. In any case, the freest possible discussion is a necessary condition to the progressive elimination of error.

We suggest that the First Commandment together with all its symbolical attributes, must never, never be embodied in concrete personifications—not only because an anthropomorphic God appears to be a vain solution of any infinite life-giving process, but primarily because the cult of "Personality in God" tends to create an artificial breeding-ground for irrational emotions. Moreover, we think it would be silly to advocate pious devotion to "God's will" when without a body and nervous system the meaning of "God's will" becomes nonsensical. This is one of many theological dilemmas which suggests that "God's will" is too often seen to be just what the propagandist wants for himself.

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

THE NATIONAL Council for Civil Liberties, mindful that most people are probably unaware of the exact extent—and limitations—of police powers, has published a small shilling booklet, *Arrest*—a guide to the citizen's rights. It is available from the NCCL, 4 Camden High Street, London, N.W.1, or from THE FREETHINKER Bookshop.

The January *Bulletin* of the Council contained a statement on "Religion and the Law" dealing with discrimination against those who have no religious beliefs. The statement was reprinted in *Peace News* (1/2/63), and we also hope to reprint it in the near future.

Abortion

ON FEBRUARY 6TH, the popular BBC programme, Z-Cars, concerned a Salvation Army captain who threw vitriol at those he thought had harmed his daughter. "Vengeance is mine . . . saith the Lord", he quoted as he was arrested. But the programme was notable because one of his victims was an abortionist, though never actually called such. We do well to recall that in 1939 the Government Inter-departmental Committee on Abortion accepted a minimum of 48,000 illegal abortions each year, and between 411 and 605 deaths each year associated with abortion.

Those figures were cited by Dr. Peter Darby in a letter to the *Church Times* (19/10/62) and are reprinted in the first issue of the Abortion Law Reform Association *Newsletter* (January, 1963) which Dr. Darby edits in association with Mrs. Madeleine Simms. "But for the Catholic all human life . . . is equally sacred . . . That is why the Church declares homosexual practices, fornication, adultery, birth control, artificial insemination, abortion, mercy killing, to be perversions, defilements, pollutions . . ." Surely when she was writing that in *The Universe* (14/12/62), Erika Fallaux should have looked up some more synonyms in her *Thesaurus!* Inquiries about the ALRA *Newsletter* should be addressed to Mrs. Simms at 68 Uphill Grove, London, N.W.7.

CORRESPONDENCE

OMNIPOTENCE

In his review of *The Rationalist Annual* (p.38), G. L. Simons speaks of an argument which neglects the possibility of God being benevolent and omnipotent, but not omniscient. It would be a blessing if somebody could tell us what omnipotent does mean. Christians are for ever asserting that their God is omnipotent and almost before the words are out, they go on to enumerate this, that and the other that God cannot do. Surely if omnipotence is absolute it must include omniscience. If it is not absolute, then it isn't omnipotence. To suggest a limited omnipotence seems to me sheer nonsense.

REGINALD UNDERWOOD.

BURNS

The 25th of January reminded me of the day I took my school-age daughter to Burns's Cottage in Ayr. Instead of being delighted as I expected, she was terribly disappointed. Shuddering as she looked around at the bare walls, she said to me in a voice full of sympathy, "Was Rabbie really born here?"

I assured her he was, and taking her by the hand, led her to the poem by Robert Green Ingersoll. Explaining that she was by no means the first to be touched by the poverty of the place, I read this excerpt to her:

'Tis but a cot roofed in with straw,
A hovel made of clay;
One door shuts out the snow and storm,
One window greets the day.

And yet I stand within this room,
And hold all thrones in scorn;
For, here, beneath this lowly thatch,
Love's sweetest bard was born.

WILLIAM MOFFAT.

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OBITUARY

By the death of Harold Day on January 26th, Bradford loses one of its leading Freethought propagandists. Mr. Day had been a member of the Bradford Branch of the National Secular Society for twenty years, and during most of that time had partnered Mr. F. J. Corina in the outdoor speaking on the old Broadway Car Park, and latterly on the Forster Square site. For the last five years or so he had been President of the Branch, and despite the handicap of chronic illness he endeavoured to play an active part in its affairs. When the West Riding Humanist Society was formed last year he became a founder member, and was co-opted on to the committee. His last public appearance was a debate under the Humanist Society auspices in October, with a minister, on "Is Christianity True?"

He was also keenly interested in amateur dramatics, and was an active member of the Social Credit movement. In World War I he served as a commissioned officer, but by 1939 he had become a pacifist, and when recalled for service he engaged in pacifist activity among the troops, and was finally cashiered after a court martial. It is interesting to note his reversal of the usual procedure of being pacifist at the age of service and non-pacifist when that age has passed!

A secular funeral was held at Scholemoor Crematorium on February 4th. Mr. Day was aged 71, and was predeceased by Mrs. Day about two years ago.

F.J.C.

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