

The Freethinker

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"WHAT I HAVE tried to say, in a tentative and exploratory way, may seem to be radical, and doubtless to many heretical," says the Bishop of Woolwich, John A. T. Robinson, in the introduction to his new paperback, *Honest to God* (SCM Press Ltd., London, 5s.). Dr. Robinson can hardly have been surprised at the commotion the book has caused, then, though there is little, if anything, in it that is novel—at least to those acquainted with modern theology. The much publicised "new image" of God will not be new to readers of Paul Tillich and, indeed, Dr. Robinson fully acknowledges his debt to Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and even John Wren-Lewis.

Nevertheless, it must come as a shock to ordinary members of the Church of England that one of their own bishops should so openly express his rejection of the traditional conceptions of God and Jesus Christ. The fact that Dr. Robinson is often vague and ambiguous, and that—as Professor Antony Flew has shrewdly remarked (*The Observer*, March 24th)—he "seems to want both to refuse his cake and have it", will receive little attention compared with his description of the Incarnation as God taking a space-trip and arriving on this planet in the form of a man. True, he says this is a "parody", but he thinks it is "perilously near the truth of what most people . . . have been brought up to believe at Christmas time". And he is right, for a very simple reason: that it is essentially the Christian story as told in the Gospels.

Impossible Task
What Dr. Robinson, like other modern theologians, is trying to do, is to adapt Christianity to the modern world. What none of them realises, or what none of them admits if he realises it, is that the task is impossible. One cannot "untie" Christianity from "the metaphysic of a pre-scientific age". And Dr. Robinson cannot disguise his dilemma that, as a bishop of the Church of England—or even merely as a practising Christian—he has to uphold much that he realises is quite unsupportable. Thus, "the whole notion of 'a God' who 'visits' the earth in the person of 'his Son'" may be "as mythical as the prince in the fairy story", but it is "on any count central to the entire Christian message". What is to be done, then? It can survive as myth, says Dr. Robinson, "to indicate the significance of the events, the divine depth of the history", and we shall be "grievously impoverished if our ears cannot tune to the angels' song or our eyes are blind to the wise men's star". He is concerned lest the nativity story should go the way of the pagan myths; be severed "from any real connection with history". But what "real connection" with history can there be when, in Dr. Robinson's words, "the whole schema of a supernatural Being coming down from heaven to 'save' mankind from sin . . . is frankly incredible to man 'come of age'"? For obvious reasons we are never told.

Yet God "vested himself utterly and completely in the man Christ Jesus"; "It is in Jesus, and Jesus alone, that

there is nothing of self to be seen, but solely the ultimate, unconditional love of God"; it is in Jesus's "utter self-surrender to others in love, that he discloses and lays bare the Ground of man's being as Love". "He is perfect man and perfect God . . . the embodiment . . . of the transcendence of love"; "the one in whom Love has completely taken over . . ." There are many objections to statements like these, but the most telling is probably the most straightforward. The Jesus of the Gospels, the only Jesus that we know, is simply not the "embodiment" of love (with or without a capital) and far from perfect. He displays and preaches hate on more than one occasion, but one occasion would be enough to shatter the "transcendence of love".

Reason Discarded

Not that this makes any difference to theologians like Dr. Robinson. Despite his reasonable pretensions he is prepared to discard reason any time that it suits him. As, for instance, when he defends "the Christian affirmation . . . not simply that love *ought to be* the last word about life, but that despite all appearances, it *is*" (italics his, here as in other quotations). One cannot argue against this, any more than one can with a person who insists that "despite all appearances" coal is white. And, indeed, although Dr. Robinson may be trying to be honest to God, his book is rather more a rescue operation than a search for truth. He knows that Christianity cannot—and does not deserve—to survive; that it is "crude" and "pre-scientific", or in plain words, false. Clearly, then, the right course (as the *Church Times* has implied) would be for Dr. Robinson to resign his bishopric. But instead of discarding Christianity, he is prepared to go to any (intellectual) lengths to save it.

He admits that it will seem to some that he has "abandoned the Christian faith and practice altogether". "On the contrary", he says, "I believe that *unless* we are prepared for the kind of revolution of which I have spoken it will come to be abandoned". In fact Dr. Robinson's proposed revolution, for all practical purposes, involves the abandonment of Christianity, retaining only some of its verbalism in even more ambiguous form. And when he maintains that casting Christianity in his "radically new mould" will "leave the fundamental truths of the Gospel unaffected", he comes dangerously near double talk. For his "fundamental truths" are very different from ones that Christians have believed in for centuries. His "concern" may be "in no way to change the Christian doctrine of God but precisely to see that it does not disappear with this outmoded view". But the Christian doctrine *is* this outmoded view.

Into the Depths

Dr. Robinson believes that by following Tillich and replacing images of "height" by those of "depth", in order to express "the truth of God", religious language can "appear more relevant". And "appear" is right, for

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

"Honest to God"

By COLIN McCALL

nothing is really gained—except perhaps a little respite for theologians—in describing God as “the infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being”, what is of “ultimate concern”, or “what you take seriously without any reservation”. When Christians have spoken of God in the past, they have certainly meant “another Being” such as Tillich rejects, and not “the ground of all being”. As for what is of “ultimate concern” and “what we take seriously”, these must mean different things to different people. Is there, then, a God for each meaning?

Dr. Robinson does, it must be said, distinguish the Christian from the Humanist or Atheist. “For, unless the *ousia*, the being, of things deep down is Love, of the quality disclosed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then the Christian could have little confidence in affirming the ultimate personal character of reality”. But this sentence is important in disclosing the essential ambiguity of Dr. Robinson’s writing. The “life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” have a certain meaning in the historical Christian context, and to retain them with a different meaning is misleading to say the least. Likewise, Dr. Robinson uses “revelation” in an ambiguous way, Christ being “the revelation, the laying bare, of the very heart and being of ultimate reality”. Not that Dr. Robinson knows anything about “the very heart and being of ultimate reality”. It is therefore never laid bare.

Theology or Truth?

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

THE PRESENT and, apparently, future tendency in modern thought is towards belief based solely on adequate evidence, so that it shall be demonstrable and verifiable. This is the scientific method, rapidly replacing theology, which is simply personal guesswork in support of faith. Faith is a belief in something for which there is no evidence, for if there were evidence there would be no need for faith. An example of an idea based on faith is the mathematical monstrosity of the Trinity, which nobody has ever been able to understand or explain. The indications are that in the near future there will be nothing left of traditional Christianity. Already the available evidence suggests:

1. The existence of the Judaeo-Christian god has never been proved; such a personality does not exist.
2. There is no after life and no such places as Heaven, Hell and Purgatory.
3. There is no such thing as a soul. No theologian has ever given a description of it.
4. Modern genetics makes freewill impossible.
5. The Biblical conception of the end of the world and a general resurrection are figments of the imagination.
6. The Gospel stories of Jesus Christ are not historically accurate.
7. The Star of Bethlehem could not be at the same time a planet and a fixed star.
8. There are no such things as angels.
9. The alleged Massacre of the Innocents never occurred.
10. Even if there was a crucifixion, there certainly could have been no resurrection, no ascension.
11. The mother of the alleged Jesus could not possibly have been a virgin.
12. The Gospels contain contradictions and are unworthy of belief.

In fact he lays very little bare, unless—if I may temporarily follow him into his world of double meanings—it is to describe prayer as “openness to the ground of our being”. What he does is to blur important distinctions in language and in life. Between the secular and the religious, for instance, claiming the former for his own especial “Christianity”. “In the light of the Incarnation”, he quotes George Macleod as saying, “nothing is secular”, which is a simple, if obvious sleight of hand for bringing everything under the aegis of Christianity. Dr. Robinson similarly manages to make Christians of Atheists by commandeering love and making it exclusively Christian. The Atheist may not recognise Christ in the “other”, but “in so far as he has responded to the claim of the unconditional in love he has responded to him—for he is the ‘depth’ of love”.

So must end our plumbing of the depths with Dr. Robinson. *Honest to God* is, it must be agreed, a courageous book for a bishop to write. At the same time its philosophy is unsound and it is hopelessly ambiguous. One can only assume that, while intellectually with the Atheists, Dr. Robinson finds it impossible to sever his emotional attachment to Christianity and chooses instead radically to change it. But, as he himself is aware, he has “erred in not being nearly radical enough”. The logical step is to atheism.

13. If the alleged mother of Jesus did exist she did not float up into space.
14. There has never been an authentic miracle. (The Lourdes “miracle factory” is now practically defunct: 5,000 miracles in 1858, 500 in 1900; 200 in 1930; 1 in 1950.)
15. A Catholic priest in fancy dress cannot change a wafer into a god.
16. Eating this fake god does nobody any good.
17. Petitionary prayer has never had any result; like some mail, it never reaches the addressee.
18. Holy water is a fraud; it is of no use.
19. The Rosary is a fake invented by an insane swindling monk 200 years after the death of the alleged founder.
20. Religion does not necessarily make for morality; all the evidence proves the contrary as Catholics, the most religious people on earth, are the worst criminals.
21. Christian “revelation” is a failure; 200 different Christian sects, all different in theology, prove that.
22. Christian history has often been bloody, a record of private assassination and public massacre.
23. Jesus did not tell Peter to found a Church; the relevant text is a forgery.
24. Peter never visited Rome; his alleged tomb there is a fake.
25. Celibacy is not a superior state to marriage.
26. Celibacy has been proved by overwhelming evidence to conduce to immorality and social irresponsibility.
27. Contraception is no more wrong or unnatural than shaving or having a diseased appendix removed surgically.
28. Christianity has promoted evil by opposing medical and other scientific progress.
29. Christians have never unanimously condemned war, capital punishment or conscription.
30. Catholics murdered millions of heretics and witches and contemporary clerics murdered many thousands of Serbs and Slovaks.
31. But Catholic clerics oppose necessary and legitimate abortion.
32. Religion often promotes hatred.

God's American Prophet

By F. A. RIDLEY

IN ANTIQUITY the Middle East ranked as the spawning-ground of religious cults that ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous. In modern times, the USA seems to have discharged a similar role. Not for nothing has it been dubbed as "God's own country". One can perhaps add that in modern American religious cults, the ridiculous has usually been more in evidence than the sublime. It is sufficient to recall such modern and peculiar preachers of such very peculiar gospels as say, Mary Baker Eddy, Billy Sunday and most bizarre, but historically most important of all, Joseph Smith (Junior), founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, more commonly described as Mormons.

In a just published novel, *The Devil's Rainbow* (Faber and Faber, 21s.), an American author, J. C. Furnas, has retold the life-history, including the terrible end of the founder of what has survived to become the most successful American religious cult of modern times, indeed perhaps the most successful of all indigenous religious cults that have appeared in the modern world. For despite its fantastic scriptures and incredible beliefs, viz. the Red Indians are descendants of ancient apostate Jews, the Mormon cult early spread beyond the confines of the USA. In Smith's own lifetime, Brigham Young, the later leader of the Mormon exodus to Utah, conducted a very successful English mission, and Mormonism is today an international cult, besides being firmly entrenched in the USA where it includes impartially, boxing champions and Federal senators amongst its members. It even seems a distinct possibility that the next President of the USA may be an elder of the Mormon Church.

To paraphrase George Borrow, the roots of Salt Lake City may be deeper than those of Rome. Evidently Joseph Smith and his Mormon empire have come a long way since the ragged and barely literate American prophet had that good fortune on September 21st, 1823, to find—under appropriate celestial guidance of course—the Golden Tablets in the Hill of Cumorah, hard by the Susquhanna River in the State of New York.

At any rate, Smith's Latter Day Saints, like their early Christian predecessors, had enough vitality to survive their founder's murder and again like the early Christians, to emigrate westwards, Brigham Young, playing a role not unlike that which Christian tradition ascribes to St. Paul. (n.b. The author, or at any rate editor of the *Book of Mormon*, appears to have been Sidney Rigdon, a former disciple of Robert Owen, and the original Mormon society seems to have been strictly socialistic. It is rather ironical to recall that disciples of Owen founded both the Church of the Latter Day Saints and the Leicester Secular Society.)

Except for a brief, but informative postscript, Mr. Furnas does not deal with what we may perhaps term the post-prophetic era of Mormonism. *The Devil's Rainbow* deals entirely with the life and death of Joseph Smith himself. "Uncle Joe" as he is referred to throughout the book. Written in the first person singular by a young contemporary and disciple of Smith named Joe Pomeroy, Mr. Furnas's vivid and intriguing story reads more like an autobiography or even like a frank and detailed case history than an orthodox novel. For from the moment that "Uncle Joe" comes walking out of the woods, until the final moment when, riddled with bullets in the courtyard of Carthage Prison, his spectacular life terminates in a spectacular death, we are taken by Joe Pomeroy step

by step through the whole bizarre Smith story: a story persistently dominated by what the publishers' blurb aptly describes as Smith's "enormous vitality".

Successively we are shown the finding of the miraculous golden tablets—written in "reformed Egyptian", the growth of the Mormon movement from a handful of ne'er do wells and cranks into a state within a state and headline news in the American press. Smith had already announced himself as a candidate for the Presidency of the USA when the hand of the law and eventually of death, intervened. Nor is Smith's private life—not that there was much that was private about it—any less bizarre or spectacular. Aunt Emma, Smith's first and legal wife who always obediently addresses her prophetic spouse as "Mr. Smith", is a kind of heroine in *The Devil's Rainbow*.

She has much to put up with from her polygamous—and prophetic—spouse. For Joe Pomeroy describes Smith's lecherous talk and conduct in the frankest of detail; it is indeed this weakness—perhaps obsession would be the more accurate term—with the fair sex—a weakness for which he could certainly have found many authentically biblical sanctions and prototypes—that ultimately brought the founder of Mormonism to his savage end at the hands of a lynching mob. One may well wonder how such a character could have come to exercise the despotic power over his followers that he did.

Perhaps authentic religious founders, before their followers have time to create legends about them, are in reality men of Smith's type. The founder of a far more posthumously successful religion even than Mormonism, God's holy prophet, Mohammed emerges from the earliest (and perhaps most authentic) Arabic records as lecherous to a degree! He too, practised plural marriage on an extensive scale and like Smith was ruthless towards his enemies, yet this has not militated against the enormous cosmopolitan expansion of Islam in later ages. Perhaps, also, Smith's environment on the American Western border was not so dissimilar in mental outlook from that in which Islam and Christianity successively emerged. Certainly Smith, as Joe Pomeroy depicts him at close quarters, was full of the most primitive superstitions. One of his pet theories, as recorded in *The Devil's Rainbow*, was that the serpent in the Garden of Eden walked on legs. But is this really any more grotesque than the Gospel narrative about the casting out of demons who entered the swine in so suicidal a manner?

Evidently—and this emerges with compelling force in our author's narrative—whatever else he was, Joseph Smith was a man of compelling personal magnetism, endowed with hypnotic personal fascination for his immediate entourage; an outstanding demagogue in his crude frontier society, though in no sense an intellectual. In our own lifetime we have observed the extraordinary personality of Adolf Hitler, also a great demagogue and very nearly also the successful founder of what was in effect, an authentic religious cult of the Aryan Latter Day Saints, the 20th century version of the "chosen race". Was Adolf Hitler after all (lechery apart—in which the puritanical *Fuhrer* apparently never indulged) so very different from Joseph Smith? Or were the historical founders of earlier religions before posthumous legend got busy upon them also so very different? The main difference actually between Mormonism and its Christian and Muslim pre-

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Whether "unity" means the Churches of Christ all speaking with "one voice" we are not quite sure; but in the Church of England we have at the moment two bishops who certainly do not speak with one voice. For example, the Bishop of Coventry—speaking in that Holiest of Holies, St. Paul's, saying that "history tells us on every page that when a nation or a civilisation has lost faith in its way of life, in God—that nation has collapsed and died. Faith is the backbone that makes a country great".

★

On the other hand, there is the Bishop of Woolwich whose book, *Honest to God* is the subject of our Views and Opinions, who is courageous enough but outrageous to "true" Christianity, who insists that many people have actually stopped believing that God exists "up there". And he thinks that they are quite right. "Suppose the whole notion of 'a God' who 'visits' the earth in the person of 'His Son' is as mythical as the prince in the fairy story?" A Bishop who can ask such a blasphemous or at least such heretical question is hardly setting a shining example of unity either in the Church or out of it.

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Needless to say, that champion of Apostolic Christianity, the first century brand, *The Church Times*, is furious, and quite rightly too. A Bishop who can think for himself for once should be fired. And it thinks that the Bishop ought to ask the Church of England whether he should continue to be a Bishop. But whatever he does, he has given the Faith an annihilating blow. What does the Bishop of Coventry think?

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In the meantime, the "Daily Express" (March 18th) has enriched its "leader" column with a stout support of Mormonism (the subject of Mr. F. A. Ridley's article on the preceding page). In Britain, it appears, Mormonism has trebled its membership since 1958—"a remarkable record of achievement", and the *Express* calls "the prejudice about the Mormons" a "foolish, intolerant attitude". What pleases the *Daily Express* so much is that Mormons "are willing to devote their energies and their money to winning converts". Fancy praising people who are doing just that to win converts to the drivel and the twaddle of the religion of Joseph Smith! It was always difficult enough to persuade real children and grown-up children to believe that God Almighty resided "up there", but to swallow the story of Joseph Smith as taught by all Mormons requires a faith surpassing all bounds.

★

The Roman Church is embarking upon a scheme, according to the *Daily Mail* (March 22nd), which is to compete with small shopkeepers in "cut price" business, and Portsmouth traders are quite furious. Naturally, few people have the courage there to attack such a powerful religious organisation, though it is true that the chairman of the Portsmouth Distributive Committee said, "I don't see why the Roman Catholic Church should get away with it". But it almost always does. In fact, a "junior official" of the Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce said it would be "most undesirable" publicly to condemn the action of the Roman Church. You bet it would!

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Dr. Ramsey himself has now entered the discussion on "chastity", but dodges the issue by declaring that "Christians have always held that love is the greatest virtue" though "only in lifelong marriage"; but he admits that this is an essential part of "Christian morality". In other words, love, chastity, and marriage, are *Christian*, to say nothing of justice, mercy, and all other human

qualities. They are the monopoly of Christianity. We wonder how nations who have never heard of Christianity, and who certainly practised the great ethical virtues, ever survived at all?

PRESS OMISSION

A LEICESTER vicar, the Rev. E. W. Carlile, has returned from a tour of the West Indies impressed by the "vastly greater" proportion of churchgoers compared with here, and wondering (in an article in the *Leicester Mercury*, 16/3/63), "Has God sent the West Indians to revive the faith in Britain?" The West Indians, he said, "may, in some cases, appear to have religion without morals", but he regarded this as "far better than the European way of trying to have morals without religion". Where there is religion, he argued, "there is always the hope of morals following after", but "where morals exist without religion it is not long before both have disappeared—as we are learning to our cost". Mr. Carlile's argument was challenged by C. H. Hammersley, Secretary of Leicester Secular Society. One or two, Mr. Hammersley wrote, "might be frightened into being good by the threat of Hell-fire or the promise of eternal life, but by and large I consider the morals of unbelievers, who can do the right thing without threats or promises to be far superior". When this letter was printed in the *Mercury* (19/3/63), however, the italicised portion was omitted.

TV REPARATION

On December 28th, we reported Ulster Television Ltd's totally unjustifiable cancellation of the interview with Professor A. J. Ayer in the Malcolm Muggeridge series, "I Believe". We now learn that the programme is to be transmitted on Monday, April 8th, at 11.04 p.m., a regrettably late hour, but better than not at all. Incidentally, the duplicated letter beginning "Further to our recent correspondence, I am happy to inform you", suggests that UTV received a good many complaints about the cancellation.

GOD'S AMERICAN PROPHET

(Concluded from page 107)

decessors, seems to be that the Church of the Latter Day Saints has not yet had time like its prototypes to have been civilised, or at least sophisticated by history.

When considered purely as a literary production, *The Devil's Rainbow* is certainly an unusually written and planned story. For example, the narrator, Joe Pomeroy's (presumably) American vernacular of the 1800s is not invariably comprehensible, but through this peculiar idiom, Mr. Furnas has managed to give us a vivid and intriguing picture, not only of the Mormon prophet himself, but of his equally bizarre environment and entourage. *The Devil's Rainbow* reads perhaps more like a case history (as already noted) than like the average novel. Were it only written in a more reverent tone, one might term it "The Gospel according to Joe Pomeroy" and a very American one! As such it is heavily (and the author assures us in his postscript) authentically documented even in its strangest details. Certainly no one interested either in Mormonism *per se*, or more generally in the aberrations of religious psychology (or pathology) should omit to read this vivid narrative, which somehow manages to combine the fascination of a novel with the information provided by a first hand record. History, in particular religious history, and perhaps very particularly American religious history, is full of strange characters and odd situations but rarely can an authentic character have trod the stage of history stranger or odder than was Joseph Smith Junior, God's American prophet.

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TELEPHONE: HOP 2717

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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, 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

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, April 7th, 6.45 p.m.: MR. BLYTH, A Lecture.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group (Arnold House Hotel, Montpellier Terrace, Brighton), Sunday, April 7th, 5.30 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "An Atheist's View of Humanism".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, April 9th, 7.30 p.m.: DR. JOHN LEWIS, "Freud and Marx".

Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, Room 7, Bath Street), Sunday, April 7th, 3 p.m.: JOHN W. TELFER, "Catholic Action Today".

Ilford Humanist Group (Friends Meeting House, Cleveland Road), Monday, April 8th, 7.45 p.m.: General Discussion on the International Humanist and Ethical Union.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, April 7th, 6.30 p.m.: A. R. WILLIAMS, "Superstition: 13 and all that".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, April 7th, 11 a.m.: DR. D. STARK MURRAY, "Medical Ethics in Affluent Societies".

Notes and News

IN VIEWS AND OPINIONS this week, Colin McCall reviews the Bishop of Woolwich's new book, *Honest to God*, which has caused such a sensation in Christian circles. On March 17th, a resumé of the book appeared in *The Observer*, and the following week a number of prominent clerics and Professor Antony Flew of the University of North Staffordshire, commented on the article. So, too, did *The Observer's* satirist, Michael Frayn, who made the telling point that the "average atheist . . . simply cannot see how there can be Love in, with, or under anything except in so far as there are beings doing the loving". But then, Mr. Frayn added, "the poor chap probably can't see how there can be Eating without eaters, or Talk without talkers".

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AT THE last count, Italy had 40,000 native-born saints recognised by the Roman Catholic Church, whereas the USA, the nation with the world's second largest Catholic population (Brazil has the largest) had none. But we are

assured by *Time* (22/3/63) that "one is in the making", Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, founder of the American branch of the Daughters of Charity. "If Rome's Sacred Congregation of Rites can find two new miracles that are attributable to her intercession before God, Mother Seton will become St. Elizabeth Ann Seton". And, said *Time*, "Her chances are good. Both Pius XII and John XXIII have been eager to reward US Catholicism with a saint or two, and have looked with favor on her cause". There is no worry about the \$50,000 it may take to finance the "investigations" that precede canonisation, since Mother Seton's "spiritual daughters" operate, some of the most successful American colleges and high schools for girls.

★

IT IS over a year since Roman Catholic authorities applied for free transport facilities for pupils attending St. Edmund's School, Dover, as "the nearest appropriate secondary school for Roman Catholic children living in Dover, Deal, Sandwich and the surrounding area" (*Kent Messenger*, 16/3/63), "appropriate" meaning, of course, of the right denomination. When the application was turned down by the local authority, the school governors took the matter to the Ministry of Education, which suggested that it would be in keeping with the spirit of the 1944 Education Act for the education authority to pay fares for all Roman Catholic children attending St. Edmund's, who had a journey of three miles or more. The Ministry did not, however, "go so far as to give a direction to this effect". The matter is now before Kent Education Committee.

★

THE GLASGOW Secular Society's "double feature" programme on Sunday, March 24th, proved a great success: full house, a number of new members and a demand for more meetings. It is to satisfy this last that an extra lecture has been arranged in the Central Halls, Bath Street, this Sunday, when the Branch President, John W. Telfer, will speak on "Catholic Action Today". Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society also reported a full house on March 24th, when the NSS Secretary, Colin McCall spoke on "Catholicism and Crime", the lecture being followed by a most thoughtful discussion.

★

ONE MAY well sympathise—as we do—with the Vatican's view that "at certain levels" professional boxing is "unlawful" and shows a "contempt of life" (*The Observer*, 24/3/63). But because it regards "life" as a gift from God, the Vatican newspaper *Osservatore Romano* absurdly castigates such "irresponsible social behaviour" as "forms of practical atheism".

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HAVE YOU got 25 minutes to spare? Then you should hurry along and make the Stations of the Cross. After all, it is Lent, and any Roman Catholic Church will welcome you almost any evening (Wednesdays only excepted in the one whose leaflet is before us now). Oh yes, and "there are wonderful indulgences to be gained".

★

THE ARIZONA House of Representatives has passed a resolution saying that "the use of currency without the inscription 'In God We Trust' gives aid and comfort to those nations which pursue the atheistic-Communist ideology" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 12/3/63). The US Government stopped printing \$1 silver certificates without the motto last September, when the printing plates were worn out, but there are still some 3,000,000,000 in circulation. The words "In God We Trust" started appearing on dollar bills in 1957, as a result of a 1955 act of Congress.

The Revolt of Spartacus

By H. CUTNER

Spartacus, The Leader of the Roman Slaves, by F. A. Ridley. 90 pages. 1963. Frank Maitland, Ashford, Kent. 7s. 6d.

ANY HISTORICAL event dealing with revolution is a subject after Mr. Ridley's heart, and the event of Spartacus is one upon which he is able to lavish some of his best writing. He quotes Voltaire—who hated war—"The war of Spartacus and the Slaves was the most just war in history, perhaps the only just war in history", a judgment no doubt justified, though unfortunately we know very little about it.

Mr. Ridley recognises this when he says,

... the detailed reconstruction of the Spartacus insurrection must be very largely a matter of conjecture and even of imaginative reconstruction since we have virtually no data beyond a barren (and sometimes a conflicting) list of places, battles, and personalities. The details of the military operations ... as recorded by such ancient authorities as Plutarch and Annaeus Florus are completely worthless ... being separated by centuries from the events they describe ... and are entirely without critical scientific spirit.

As far as possible then, Mr. Ridley has "reconstructed" the story of the revolt of Spartacus, and a fascinating one it is. He was a Thracian soldier captured by the Romans, and trained as a gladiator at Capua. This appears to be all we know of him before he escaped (in 73 BC) with a number of other gladiators and slaves, and began his attacks on the well-trained Roman army sent to quell his revolt. How many slaves and gladiators followed him eventually is not known, but one authority I looked up gives the number as 100,000—a number which seems to me to be ridiculously high.

There is no doubt that from the military point of view Spartacus proved himself a genius. Indeed Mr. Ridley considers him one of the greatest generals in history. He put up a stubborn fight even against such a general as Marcus Lucinius Crassus, though in the end Crassus not only defeated and killed Spartacus in 71 BC but put an end to what the Romans called the Servile Wars. There were three of these by the way—the first was in 135-132 BC led by a Syrian wonder worker at Enna in Sicily, the second also in Sicily in 103-99 BC, and the third the revolt by Spartacus. All three were defeated by the Romans.

Incidentally, one might well call the revolt in Palestine by Bar-Cochba a Servile War, for it also was a desperate attempt by the Jews to throw off their Roman masters. Bar-Cochba fought the Romans between 131-135 AD and had at first (like Spartacus) some amazing successes. It took Julius Serverus, the best general the Romans had then, to defeat him and it was no easy task.

It is not surprising that all these uprisings were defeated in the ultimate, for the Roman soldier was superbly trained. However, Mr. Ridley has given us a most eulogistic account of the way Spartacus fought the mighty power of Rome, interlaced with many digressions and opinions which a revolutionary like himself saw in the desperate struggle which the slaves of antiquity always had against the "boss class". In fact he has used the Spartacus rebellion as a "class war" there.

The modern objections to slavery were unknown to the nations of antiquity, and no doubt when we get the revolutionary Utopia Mr. Ridley so ardently wants (and thinks he foresees) our factories and workshops will be looked upon as hotbeds of slavery by future revolutionary historians writing and speculating about the "class war" existing still in 1963. I am afraid that on this question my own reading of history differs very considerably from this.

Even Mr. Ridley realises that many of the revolutionary movements merely meant a change of masters. "We cannot say", he maintains, "whether a slave revolt, had it been successful, could have transformed into a revolution ... capable of effecting fundamental social changes in the composition of Roman society ...". His answer to this is "Had Spartacus won, probably all that would have happened would have been that the Romans would have become slaves and the slaves Romans!"

Just one or two more criticisms. I have never been convinced by the exaggerated numbers given by ancient authorities. I have often read of the numbers of beaten slaves "crucified" on the Appian Way by the victorious Romans after the defeat of Spartacus, but I do not believe for a moment that there were 6,000 of them. The Romans were perhaps the most cruel of victors in world history not even excepting Hitler, but let anyone ask the simple question—how did the Romans get the crosses? Did they give the slaves the "simple" task of constructing them? And how long would it take to construct 6,000 crosses? Were the nails carried about with the soldiers in their baggage? I don't doubt of course that some of the unfortunate victims suffered the tortures of hell but I jib at the figure of 6,000. And I am not clear what Mr. Ridley means when he says that "there were occasions in which as many as 10,000 gladiators appeared in the Roman arena". Does this mean all at the same time? How in the world could the one with a trident get away from the one with a sword if there were 10,000 of them all jostling each other?

Finally, Mr. Ridley tries his best to connect revolutionary movements with Christianity, and he refers to a "little Jew from Tarsus" brewing "a powerful drug of spiritual opium under whose intoxicating spell and seeing rapturous visions of another world, the ancient civilisation finally passed away in its sleep". If Paul is meant by "a little Jew of Tarsus" there is no evidence that he was "little". There is no evidence either that his Epistles were "spiritual opium" for the early Church, for they were quite unknown until the second century; and when they became known, what was ushered in was the period known as the Dark Ages, which certainly killed "the ancient civilisations".

That Mr. Ridley has a fairly strong belief that there was a Jesus, we on this journal know very well; and he proves this again when he claims that "the first religion in social history" came to be known as Christianity "from the name of its titular founder; the Galilean mystic, preacher and, perhaps, agitator, in whom Eisler and others have seen a Jewish successor of Spartacus crucified for armed insurrection against the Roman Empire". Of course, anyone can see what he likes in any story, but there is not a particle of evidence that Jesus was "crucified" for any reason. But Mr. Ridley's little work is excellently printed and clearly and entertainingly written. It will probably be difficult to add anything more to the story of Spartacus.

"BIG BANG"

"Let there be Matter!"—

It seems He spoke it.

Then, with a clatter,

He dropped it and broke it.

A.E.C.

Priesthoods of the Establishment

By PAT SLOAN

AT THE END OF JANUARY the national Press reported that the Church Commissioners had sold properties worth about £4½ million. It was revealed by *The Times* that in the past five years the Commissioners had undertaken "to finance, partly or wholly, 27 development companies". If the Church and the Establishment (in the political sense) tend to have certain interests in common, this is not surprising. And while Church revenues from such unsavoury sources as prostitutes' premises in Paddington may have been curtailed in recent years, the Anglican Church as such still continues to be a branch of Big Business, even in a "Welfare State".

The history of priesthoods shows that priesthoods, property and power have always been closely connected, whatever short-period exceptions there may have been. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in our own Christian Bible, though this is not one of the lessons on which sermons are usually preached. In this article it is proposed to analyse what the Bible has to tell us about priesthoods, both in the Old Testament and the New. The parallels are striking and Christianity seems to have made precious little difference.

Of course we must bear in mind that most of the story is legendary rather than historical, but it has long ago been recognised that the development of legend can reflect vividly the progress of real events, even if not historically accurate by modern standards.

In the Genesis story, relations are described as being between man and God, with no intervention of priests. Adam and Eve, their children's "marriages", Lot, Noah and the rest all got along with God without the intervention of priests or rabbis. Cain and Abel offered their first fruits direct to the Lord, and the latter preferred the good red meat of the younger son to the vegetarian diet offered by the elder. He caused a lot of trouble by this discrimination. Abraham prepared Isaac for the slaughter, but God intervened just in time by providing a ram to be given back to himself instead. (Gen. 20, 2-13.)

While the primitive Hebrews were having these direct relations with their God, we read how, in Egypt, a priesthood already existed and enjoyed its privileged position. When Joseph bought up all the land in exchange for famine relief he got none from the priests, "for the priests had a portion from Pharaoh . . . wherefore they sold not their land." (Gen. 47, 20-22.)

Throughout Genesis there are direct personal relations with God, no sign of priests except among the Egyptians. We may take it then that Genesis is a legendary presentation of the purely tribal stage, while Egypt already had risen to a more advanced stage of development.

With Exodus the germ of a priestly caste appears. The Lord tells Moses that he has made him a "god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet" (Ex. 7, 1). Here, we note, begins a division of labour between the secular chieftainship of Moses and the priest-hood of Aaron. It is expressly stated that Aaron and his sons are to be brought into the "priest's office" with "holy garments" and shall have the priesthood under "a statute for ever". (Ex. 28, 1-3, 43.)

At first, as in the time of Abraham, sacrifice was entirely to God. But now detailed instructions begin to be issued regarding "sin offerings", "burnt offerings" and "heave offerings". Whereas, at first, the sacrificed victuals

were completely destroyed, as they were pleasing to God's nostrils, now there creeps in a contribution to the priests. The "breast" of a ram, a wave offering, "shall be thy portion", and the "thigh of the heave offering . . . shall be for Aaron and his sons as a due for ever from the children of Israel." (Ex. 29, 10-28.)

A nice portion of breast of lamb and a joint of mutton for the priests, the rest is still for God.

But once started, the creation of the priesthood goes on unchecked. Before we reach the end of Exodus we find it laid down that "Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram, and the bread that is in the basket, at the door of the tent of meeting." (Ex. 29, 32-33.)

In Leviticus there are more meticulous details and the theme that Aaron and sons shall get the left-overs is repeated (Lev. 2, 10; 6, 16). As to the "sin offering", the priests now get the lot: "The priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it." (Lev. 6, 26.) It is also added that "every male among the priests shall eat thereof" (Lev. 6, 29) and this point is reiterated in Chapter 7, Verse 7. It is now added that "the priest shall have to himself the skin . . . of any man's burnt offering . . . and every meal offering . . . shall be the priest's that offereth it." (Lev. 7, 7-9.) In the case of "peace offerings" it appears that "anyone that is clean" gets a share also. (Lev. 7, 11-19.) But again, special mention is accorded to Aaron and sons, for the breast and right shoulder of peace offerings shall go to them personally. (Lev. 7, 31-32.) Note that this was the case previously only with the wave and the heave offerings.

In Numbers we find the priests doing still better. For it is now laid down that if an aggrieved man has no kinsman to whom restitution for an offence can be made (we must assume that the grievance was that he had been murdered), "the restitution for guilt which is made unto the Lord shall be the priest's; besides the ram of the atonement . . . and every heave offering . . . which they present unto the priest, it shall be his." (Num., 5, 8-10.)

The priesthood is now greatly enlarged, Aaron and sons can no longer cope, so the entire tribe of the Levites is mobilised by the Lord for priestly service till the age of 50: "The Levites shall be mine . . . instead of the first-born . . . from twenty-five years old and upward they shall go in to wait upon the service in the work of the tent of meeting: and from the age of fifty they . . . shall serve no more. (Num., 8, 5-25.)

By now a priestly caste has been firmly founded. Not only do they appropriate a substantial share of all sacrifices, but also of all booty taken in war. After the defeat of the Midianites, for example, it would seem that even after "the Lord" had had a share, the priests were able to acquire nearly 7,000 sheep, over 700 beeves, about 700 asses, and some 320 "persons" who were, we are told, "women who had not known man by lying with him" and therefore been spared from slaughter for, we presume, a fate "worse than death" at the hands of the victors and their priests. (Num., 31, 26-35.)

Now the priesthood becomes so ubiquitous, it seems, that even a domestic service begins to operate. For, in Deut. 12, 18-19, we read that the people may eat freewill and heave offerings so long as they do it "before the Lord" and where he commands, including "thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gate . . .

Take heed to thyself that thou forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest upon thy land".

If we adopt a theistic approach, then this evolution of a priesthood must be seen as God's own work. But if we accept the view that man made God in his own image, we find that the Pentateuch is interesting, even if not strictly historical, in its portrayal of the emergence of religious institutions together with the evolution of society. We see the portrayal of this evolution from the days of the tribal magician-chief, Abraham or Moses, through a division of labour personalised in Moses and Aaron, to the rapid expansion of the priesthood as a distinct caste. At last the Hebrews have caught up with their neighbours the Egyptians.

Parallel with this we note the development of sacrifice: Human sacrifice gives way to animal sacrifice and circumcision, sacrifice at first is direct and wholly to God, then it increasingly develops into payments to a priesthood. And not only does the priesthood develop as a separate caste, but the rich in society employ their own private priests, "the Levite that is within thy gate".

(To be concluded)

CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor welcomes letters from readers, but asks that they be kept as brief and pertinent as possible.

PRESUMPTUOUS?

Regarding the article, "Presumptuous?" by Colin McCall in the issue of March 15th, 1963.

Firstly, the article, "Of God and Men", does not show I assume the role of the agnostic. The agnostic in the article simply felt logical enough to make a blast at his two opponents. But this is just a little mistake of friend Colin which can be ignored. I can let him call me an agnostic and still be friendly.

In the light of the modern science of our little world, planet Earth, Mr. McCall's article is highly cogent—and sincere, too. I congratulate him on this score. But the viewpoint of the agnostic happens to be philosophical and covers the unknown factor in nature which is a large part of reality. The latter's world is the infinite universe. If our sun will appear as big as a star at an astronomical distance, planet Earth will disappear from our sight—it will become smaller than a grain of dust. Planet Earth looks big, because we are here. Who can say it is really big? The seeming reality of things depends upon our viewpoints.

The arguments of friend Colin McCall are logical, because his world is finite planet Earth and he chooses to ignore the unknown. On the other hand, the reasonings of the philosopher-agnostic are logical, too, because the latter's world is the infinite universe which necessarily includes the unknown part of nature.

GONZALO QUIOGUE (Manila, Philippines).

MILITANT

For some time I have wanted to write to you and the stimuli for this have been first the correspondence, pro. and con. should we be "militant". Then came the last paragraph of *The Listener* transcript of John Beavan's Broadcast "Towards a Grammar School Culture". This reads "The new grammar schools I believe should consciously strive after Dr. Arnold's twin aims of moral and intellectual excellence—though today, in an age of religious doubt, the moral guidelines are less obvious than they were". Lastly your reprint of Mrs. Madalyn Murray's "Declaration of Faith", which is absolutely superb.

To be or not to be "militant": No and Yes. No with individual Christians unless they, as self appointed missionaries attack and then Yes with all we have and no punches pulled. Yes against the Establishment, the intolerant bigots in positions of power and control in Press, Broadcast, and TV. Yes, both collectively as via the National Secular Society and THE FREETHINKER—which is done, and as unknown individual freethinkers. And here I doubt if many of us do write as much as we ought to remonstrate against the Inquisition's successors.

The edifice of Christianity—and most religions—is falling down. Let us then go on with our demolition, but where, as I see it, we are lacking is in providing something constructive, hopeful, optimistic, dynamic (to use a common expression) such

as you so wisely reprint in Mrs. Murray's testament, to take its place.

But this is only a mere skeleton of what is needed. Surely one of your many erudite contributors who can write should produce a pamphlet or small book on the lines of the above only longer, fuller, bringing in on each point relevant bits of the writings of Bertrand Russell, Somerset Maugham, Margaret Knight, Barbara Wootton, Susan Stebbing, etc., etc.

Surely the spread of the Communist materialist religion (contradiction in terms is permissible) is largely due to the fact that they have Sacred Scriptures, High Priests, etc. As Lady Wootton puts it: "It is true that the Marxists (unlike the Christians) do not claim divine revelation for their doctrines, but in practice this makes very little difference: keeping in line with what Stalin says that Lenin said that Marx said is much the same as keeping in line with the Bible.

We do not want any sacred scriptures, but where have we a lucid, forthright and readable statement of our position, guiding principles and hopes in one small volume, pamphlet or whatever, that we can offer to Mr. John Beavan? E. NEWBOLD.

A MYSTERIOUS WAY

Parish magazines have contained many foolish items, but it would be difficult to beat a recent one by the Rev. Eric Lane in the magazine of a church in Leyton (reported in the *Evening Standard* of 21/3/63).

"God has sent us the coldest winter in living memory, in order to judge our false gods (which are Sport, TV, or homes, health and entertainment)" said Mr. Lane. But, "In his severity about the cold weather, let us notice that there is no spiteful delight on God's part. He did not do it to make us suffer—but for our own good". Mr. Lane added that God had prevented Britain from joining the Common Market.

It seems strange that the "Almighty" should take an interest in the Common Market, but is apparently not interested in the tragedy of world hunger. However, as the poet Cowper once wrote:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.

ADRIAN PIGOTT.

OBITUARY

We send our deepest sympathy to Mrs. Margaret Knight on the death of her husband, Professor Rex Knight, Head of the Department of Psychology at the University of Aberdeen. Professor Knight, who was Australian by birth, was 59.

The Westralian (West Australian) Secularists have suffered another loss, with the death of Frederick Arthur ("Dick") Law on March 17th, while his colleagues were holding a reunion in King's Park, Perth. Dick had only just retired at the age of 65 from long service as Shire Council secretary at Merredin, and was planning how to use his free time. Mr. Law was associate editor, with Collin Coates of the *Westralian Secularist*. and we send our deepest sympathy to his wife.

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