

The Freethinker

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By THE DESCRIPTIVE term atheism, I imply simply the non-recognition of the existence of a personal god. I do not necessarily use the word in the apparently exclusive sense of formally denying the existence of a supernatural being. Personally speaking, I do not think that it is either possible or desirable to try to prove (or for that matter, disprove) a negative proposition: viz. that God does not exist. For what after all is God but an idea that appears at various stages in human mental evolution and under varying forms? Consequently it is, I think, safer to define atheism in the sense of the original Greek: an Atheist is one who is "without God", one who knows nothing about any supernatural being or beings and orders his life and thought upon this assumption. If he thinks about "God" at all, it is only as a philosophical, or as an historical idea in other people's minds. But the Atheist is not convinced by the arguments of the Theists or by their alleged "proofs" that the idea of God itself conforms with some external supernatural reality by the visible scope of observed phenomena.

Natural or Supernatural?

Whilst however, Atheists, as well as such categories of unbelievers as Agnostics and Positivists, who for the purpose of this present discussion may be regarded as indistinguishable from Atheists, themselves order their lives without reference to any supposedly existing super-riding deity, it must of course be recognised that they have normally and numerically only represented a minute fraction of human beings. This fact itself does not (at least from the atheistic point of view) constitute any valid argument against atheism, as some religious apologists argue; contrarily it constitutes rather an admission of human immaturity.

However, the fact that Theists (including both monotheists and polytheists) have constituted, and in many areas of the world even today constitute, the immense majority, has for its necessary corollary the admission that the moral and even legal codes by which successive human societies regulate their affairs, were mostly evolved under the direction of Theists and usually presuppose theistic beliefs, often indeed as something that is fundamental to the systems of thought which they are supposed to have inspired. This fact is particularly evident as and when we come to consider those beliefs usually demonstrated as moral beliefs. For it appears to be universally true that all the earlier moral codes by the light of which man guided his footsteps within the framework of his given social order were originally conceived as emanating from some supernatural and extra-terrestrial being or beings.

"Thus saith the Lord" forms the almost unvarying exordium to all the early pre-classical moral and legal codes. In early society the dividing line between moral injunction and legal codes is thin, often to the point of indivisibility. Whether we take the Babylonian Code of

Hammurabi, the Ten Commandments, or the Hindu Laws of Manu, and their Egyptian and other equivalents, both the orders that they issue, "thou shalt not" do this, that or the other, and the propitiatory precepts are conceived as emanating from a god, from a higher power, from a supernatural sanctifying source. From *which* god is immaterial as long as it is *some* god. This supernatural origin of moral beliefs and of moral sanctions might appear self-evident almost as much so as the also apparently self-evident fact that the sun encircles the earth, for can we not with our own eyes actually see it doing so, rising in the east and sinking with monotonous regularity in the west? And even proverbially is not seeing believing?

Social Requirements

However the still so widely-held belief in the supernatural origin of moral codes, however plausible upon any cursory examination, turns out ultimately to be false, just as the deeper probing into the constitution of the universe which Galileo's invention of the telescope first made possible, effectively disproved the old geocentric (earth-centred) theory, despite the apparently irresistible arguments derived both from common sense and common vision that were previously held to prove as self-evident the sun's daily journey round the earth. For a closer examination of moral and legal codes will indisputably reveal that the supposedly divine injunctions that such codes contain can be proved invariably to correspond with both actual social requirements of the period and society amid which they originated and usually, at any rate with the mental and technical level of such societies.

Natural History of Morals

For example, no god ever saw fit in his divine wisdom to reveal a social and moral code suitable to an industrial community like ours in pre-industrial times. Contrarily, God and his prophets *always* speak in terms suitable to the social requirements and mental level of the age to which their revelation and its accompanying moral sanctions are addressed. Gods act usually like good committee men in that they rarely exceed their appropriate terms of reference. The same general observation incidentally, also extends to the dogmas propounded by theological codes. To take a single obvious and still current example: Jesus Christ is daily transubstantiated as bread and wine on Catholic altars. Why bread and wine? Clearly because this was the staple diet in first century Palestine. But had the dogma been born in say, a modern working-class community that chiefly subsisted on fish and chips, in what precise dietary form would the Catholic god have been devoured by his modern proletarian worshippers? Clearly, it is a case of a natural evolution of morals embracing the supernatural, rather than *vice versa*. Human society came first and its needs of ever-increasing complexity as civilisation appeared and developed were met at successive stages by successively evolving moral codes. The gods who were supposed to have evolved these codes

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Atheism and Moral Sanctions

By F. A. RIDLEY

in actuality were themselves evolved along with them. Obviously so, since the later gods are more moral as a rule than the earlier ones: viz. some gods, e.g. the Biblical Jehovah, undergo an obviously civilising process within the covers of a single book! As and when viewed from an objective—that is, an atheistic point of view—to ask whether the progress of moral sanctions was due to gods, necessarily implies the further question: to what were the gods themselves due? And the ultimate answer is simple: any and every organised society of necessity requires an operative moral code, and one neither too far behind, or equally necessary for its effective functioning, neither too before the exact degree of mental and social evolution at which it has evolved. In all cases the gods who reveal this moral code will be found on the same general level as their worshippers. From which the conclusion obviously follows: it is human society, it is the human race itself that is the ultimate creator of both the moral codes and the gods who themselves appear to have created them. Only, being more long-winded than the creator in Genesis, social evolution has taken a good deal more than seven days even to reach our present still very imperfect moral level.

Atheism and a Humanist Ethic

As and when surveyed accordingly from the standpoint of an atheistic critique, the statement that moral sanctions cannot exist without religion, that hoary chestnut so beloved at and by, Broadcasting House is obviously false, even if in certain Ages of Faith it might claim some empirical justification in the everyday workings of some still rather primitive societies like say, those of medieval Europe or present-day Afghanistan. Correctly stated, the various moral codes which humanity has evolved at sequential stages of his long evolution ultimately emerge from the same "first cause" as do their allegedly divine creators: that is both the moral sanctions and the gods who are alleged to be their creators both emerge from the same workshop, that of their common creator mankind. That man made God in his own image, or rather in his so often variable images, represents a necessary corollary of the atheistic view of moral evolution. That (to paraphrase Alexander Pope) "an honest god is the noblest work of man", represents an equally obvious deduction from any such humanistic ethic, though one perhaps not often met with in the chequered evolution of gods!

In short, one can relevantly add that the more completely morals and moral guarantees shed their primitive theological swaddling clothes and then proceed to stand upon their own feet, the more genuinely moral do they then become. For as Lucretius pointed out 2,000 years ago, a morality (or so-called morality) based upon fear of the gods, often reinforced by fear of after-death punishments as, say, in the Catholic hell, is not really moral at all. One can indeed conclude this brief dissertation by noting as it is very germane to this discussion, that we should end by noting that morality *per se* does not really begin in reality until it parts company altogether with its fictitious theological basis. An atheistic, a humanistic, a secularist ethic begins as it ends, with mankind its creator and with his real as distinct from his fictitious needs. Moral sanctions can only be said truly to begin when they part company with the gods, with all gods, when they at long last stand upon their own secular and atheistic feet.

(The above is the substance of a lecture given at Conway Hall on Tuesday, March 12th.)

Religious Beliefs of Students

ON MARCH 31ST, 1963, *The Sunday Times* reported a survey of religious attitudes among undergraduates by two social psychologists, Pamela Poppleton and G. W. Pilkington of Sheffield, which had "uncovered some fascinating trends". The psychologists devised an "attitude scale", from 40 for the strongly anti-religious to 136 for the very religious, and applied it to a representative sample of students in all years and faculties, though whether only at Sheffield University was not stated.

The general beliefs of the students were predictable: about 22 per cent of very active religious students with a mean score of 116, a similar minority of very anti-religious students with a mean score of 60, and a solid centre group with mixed feelings of belief and doubt. "It was when the psychologists got down to comparing the attitudes of the undergraduates with their chosen subjects that they made their most striking discoveries", said *The Sunday Times*. "Students in both arts and pure science, for example, are significantly less religious by their second year at university than when they came up. But among the arts students the decline is reversed in later years and arts students who stay on to do research are among the most intensively religious of all".

Meanwhile, the science students—in *The Sunday Times* words—"go from bad to worse". Their religious beliefs decline with each successive year, and by the fourth year their score is 78 on the psychologists' scale, compared with the arts students' 104. This is, in fact, a reversal of the position at the time of entry to university, when the scientists are more strongly religious, averaging a score of 100 compared with the arts students' 83. And the psychologists report that "the much popularised science versus religion conflict is still a real one for many science students".

"The highest pro-religious scorers", we learn, "were medical students in their final years and students training for teaching".

Are there signs of a religious revival then? This was what the psychologists set out to discover, and they conclude that the scores would have to be "much higher" before it could be claimed that religion is generally important to students. Only 23 per cent attend church once a week, and only 16 per cent are members of university religious groups. "But, for all that, no less than 63 per cent of the students held beliefs strong enough to make them say 'private prayers'".

Swaneng Hill School Report

To the Treasurer, The Humanist Council. 22nd March, 1963.
Dear Mr. McCall,

Thank you—once again—and this time for a very generous cheque for £600. It is no exaggeration to say that our opening was only made possible by the helpfulness of Humanists in Britain. But we are doubly grateful for the Humanist generosity, because it was also timely. I don't think I can express my thanks more adequately than to have said this. But for the money we have had from you, we would be sitting here, building maybe, but not teaching.

We have very responsive pupils, who are extraordinarily understanding and appreciative of their good fortune that they are at a secondary school—a rare prize indeed here. As one of the "projects" they undertake as part of their English course, the boys and girls have been investigating all the facts about this school—background, my own history, objects, sources of money, and so on. They have learnt, in consequence, who the Humanists are. They will learn much more yet, by precept, rather than by indoctrination . . .

Yours very sincerely,

PATRICK VAN RENSBURG.

The First Cause Argument

By G. L. SIMONS

CATHOLIC THEOLOGIANS are committed to the dogma that the existence of God can be proved by reason. They hold that this can be achieved in several ways, one of which is according to the First Cause (or cosmological) argument. This argument apart from being favoured by Catholic philosophers, is the one most frequently invoked by ordinary folk who wish to give what they think are logical grounds for their belief in a deity.

The First Cause argument is concerned with the origin of the universe, and is intimately associated with the idea of a "Prime Mover". Beholding the universe, First Cause philosophers reason thus:— "Every event which comes into existence owes its origin to a previous event which is said to have caused it. However it is unreasonable to extend this process indefinitely into the past without coming to an initial cause which instigated the whole sequence. This initial cause, the Great First Cause, is God. Similarly, motion exists in the world. But everything that moves is moved by something. Therefore there must have been a prime mover which first set the universe (or part of it) in motion, enabling this initial motion to be communicated to different objects. This prime mover is God".

The Greek philosopher, Anaxagoras, who lived in Athens about 450 BC, was the first known thinker to consider the theory of the First Cause. Drawing an analogy with human beings, he posited Mind as the initial cause of the universe; just as a man's mind is responsible for the motion of his body so Mind is responsible for the motion of the universe. Aristotle adopted the idea of the First Cause, analysed it carefully, and laid the foundation for what was to become part of orthodox Catholic theology. In the thirteenth century St. Thomas Aquinas, much of whose philosophy is derived directly from Aristotle, used the First Cause and Prime Mover arguments as two of his famous five proofs of God's existence. Because of a rescript of Pope Leo XIII in 1879, Aquinas is taught in all Catholic educational institutions as the only current philosopher. Hence the First Cause argument must be believed by every pious Catholic irrespective of what modern criticism is levelled against it. But this criticism has a force which cannot be ignored. There are several important objections to the First Cause argument of which the following are typical.

In the first place a careful examination of the idea of "cause" shows how confused is the theological interpretation of the notion. In the past, causes and effects were thought to be discrete entities, independent and self-sufficient, although connected in some way. Today, however, to call a particular event a "cause" or an "effect" is only useful in certain circumstances. In physics, where the idea of cause is most sophisticated, it is no longer realistic to discuss events as discrete causes and effects but merely to talk of change, and in particular, change over very small periods of time, which is why differential calculus is such a valuable tool for the physicist (a differential equation relates infinitely small changes occurring in infinitely short periods of time). Thus the old idea of causality has given way to a more detailed notion which is amenable to mathematics. The relevance of this to the First Cause argument is as follows:— Today a proper interpretation of cause and effect consists in labelling one event "cause" and a later event (which is connected with the first) "effect". These events can be of different durations, but what they all have in common is the way in

which they are built up. For each event comprises a configuration of elements (in the case of the material world a configuration of particles of matter). Thus to say of one event that it is a "cause" and of a new event that it is an "effect" merely signifies that the first event is one arrangement of elements, and the second another. This interpretation is scientifically accurate and fulfils all that is required by the popular use of the words "cause" and "effect". This means that to say "God is the cause of the universe" is identical to saying "We will call one arrangement of matter 'God' and a later arrangement 'the universe'". Clearly this is not what religious thinkers intend to say, but it is what they must say if they invoke "cause" to justify their belief in God. Causality has a clear scientific meaning and only by ignoring this meaning can theologians give the First Cause argument a superficial plausibility. The argument can be interpreted slightly differently to divorce it from its association with causality. It can be stated, for example, that although God did not *cause* the universe (in the scientific sense), he did *create* it. This brings us to the second objection to the First Cause argument.

The argument rests on the assumption that an infinite sequence of events (i.e. causes and effects) is logically impossible, i.e. that it is impossible for the universe always to have existed. Concerning this two points need to be stressed. Firstly there is no logical impossibility about an infinite sequence. It is difficult for some people to imagine the universe having lasted *for ever*. But the mathematician has no difficulty in conceiving an infinite series, e.g. the series of natural numbers 1, 2, 3, etc. Thus the First Cause argument is more plausible to those people with poor imaginations. Secondly even if the universe did *begin to exist* this does not logically entail a *reason* for its sudden existence. In short an event *need not* be caused and matter (having begun to exist) need not have a creator. That there is no *necessary* connection between cause and effect was first convincingly shown by David Hume in his *Treatise of Human Nature*. This shows that even if the universe started (which we have no reason to believe) the conclusions desired by the theologians do not follow. As far as the scientist is concerned he has no reason to believe that matter suddenly comes into existence. (The Continuous Creation theory in astronomy has a misleading title since it does not posit the origin of matter where formerly there was nothing.) Also when the idea of "beginning" is analysed with care it can be seen that it is different from the notion of "creation". The world is said by religious people to have had a beginning, but this is an unusual use of the term. Babies, submarines and violins have beginnings but what is meant in every case is that *available matter has taken on a new form*. In no case do we witness the *coming-into-existence* of matter, although it is inter-convertible with energy. Thus we have no reason to believe that the universe had a beginning in the religious sense, and even if it did, a creator (of either the personal or impersonal variety) is not logically implied. (Despite Hume, Kant believed that the principle of causality could be perceived *a priori* and had a certain logical necessity. But Hume and modern science have indicated that this is not so, and modern physicists, in their willingness to admit that changes in the atom may be fortuitous have indicated that there is no logical impossibility about the occurrence of an uncaused event.)

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

After the Cosmologists, we had the opinions of the Flying Saucerites or Saucerists) on TV recently with the appearance of people like Mr. Desmond Leslie saying what his co-saucerite, Mr. Adamski, thinks, as well as what other fervent believers in these and other flying machines from other worlds think. On the other hand, we had the opinion of Miss Marghanita Laski speaking as a confirmed reader of space fiction, and calling the idea of visitors from other planets in flying saucers a supreme example of sheer "dottness". The truth may well be that people who can swallow the Gospel story of Jesus flying to Heaven to sit (on a cloud?) with God "up there", have no difficulty whatever in believing in flying saucers and Martians speaking perfect English. Perhaps the visitors from Pluto speak perfect German?

★

But there is nothing to beat the vagaries of religious believers. Here we have that very famous film star, Doris Day, a Roman Catholic, married to a Jew, Marty Melcher, according to the *News of the World* (March 24th) and both changing their religions for the twaddle of Christian Science. They now claim that they are still very religious, for they believe in "doing good". And Marty points out that if you "take out one 'o' from good, you've got God. To do good is to prove God". Whether this wonderful piece of logic will appeal to our theologians we don't know, but what happens if you add an "h" to El—the Jewish (and Bible) God—does this prove "Hell"?

★

The same newspaper gives details "of an evil from the past" known as "Black Magic" which some people still believe in. They wanted a few bones for a "devilish" ceremony and got them from the remains of a girl dying in 1770 from smallpox. The bones were later discovered near the church, and re-interred after "a short private ceremony" by the Rev. L. Barker, Rector of Clophill, Bedfordshire, who said afterwards that he "laid poor Jenny to rest once more". That is, burying the bones was laying her "to rest". What this actually means we do not know. Surely the poor girl was, in Mr. Barker's opinion, already at rest for eternity, safe in the arms of Jesus "up there"?

★

And talking about "Black Magic", we are certainly surprised that an author of Denis Wheatley's reputation, "strongly advises that no one should get tangled up in witchcraft. It is really dangerous". Why? Is there really such a thing as witchcraft? That there are idiots who actually believe in it is understandable; there are people who believe in Mother Eddy's twaddle. It is just as idiotic to believe in her conception of "matter" as in the stories of witches flying in the air on broomsticks.

★

On TV the other Sunday, the Archbishop of Canterbury was to have told us all about "God heard and unheard", but that was really asking too much of Dr. Ramsey. He was first shown a film in which lots of people were asked what they really believed about Christianity, and most of them said either "not much" or "not at all"—though they all appeared to believe in God or a Supreme Being. For the rest, the Archbishop "dodged" most of the questions bluntly put him by Kenneth Harris, though he refused to agree with the Bishop of Woolwich of course. God may not be actually living "up there" but how poetic and beautiful is the Conception!

A Challenge to Maurice Barbanell

In *Psychic News* on March 23rd, 1963, Maurice Barbanell wrote:

Naturally it was to be expected that the so-called "Free-thinker"—"Loose Thinker" would be more appropriate—would make capital out of the BBC dramatisation of Trevor Hall's attack on Sir William Crookes.

H. Cutner, spreading himself over more than a page, chortles with glee as if the result is that Spiritualism has received its final crushing blow. I am surprised that he has the temerity even to refer to the subject.

After all, I have twice publicly debated with him, and even his supporters volunteered that he did not get the best of the argument.

I found in Cutner, so far as Spiritualism is concerned, a man not only with a chip on his shoulder but with a load of fish as well.

Well now, Mr. Barbanell. You say you have twice publicly debated with Mr. Cutner. Perhaps you will give us dates, since we only remember one such encounter. Could the other have taken place only in your imagination?

Second, you say that even Mr. Cutner's supporters "volunteered that he did not get the best of the argument". Can you have imagined this too? If not, please let us have some names; some objective facts, not your own fancies.

Third, even though in his eighties, Mr. Cutner is still willing to make it two encounters if you are. Then at least you could rightly say that you had twice publicly debated with him.

THE FIRST CAUSE ARGUMENT

(Concluded from page 115)

The third objection to the First Cause argument is that it is equally applicable to God. If the universe needs a creator why does not God? Religious folk seem unable to imagine that the universe has always existed, and yet have an apparent ability to imagine the eternity of an imperceptible being (for whose existence there appear to be no satisfactory arguments). But this is an inconsistent position which theologians seem unable to clarify.

The fourth objection is that if God is unchanging he must always have had the same inclinations, feelings, disposition, etc., which means that if he had had a purpose in creating the universe he must have had this purpose an infinite time ago. Being omnipotent he must have created the universe as soon as he wanted to, i.e. an infinite time ago. Hence the universe must be as old as God. This conclusion follows from the religious axioms that God is unchanging and omnipotent. The conclusion derives indirect support from another point which follows from religious thought. God is said to be "timeless" (whatever this means). Thus the ordinary terms which are used to discuss time, as mortals perceive it, are inapplicable to the deity, which means that it is nonsense to say that God existed before the universe, which he would have had to do if he created it.

A final point is that even if the First Cause argument is valid (which it almost self-evidently is not) it could not serve to assign attributes to God, who would thus remain an empty being whose existence was proved but whose "character" was unknown.

Hence it appears that the First Cause argument contains a remarkable number of fallacies and non sequiturs. Were it not for the control which the Catholic Church has had over education this argument would have gone the way of phlogiston, alchemy and astrology. The advocates of the First Cause argument stress their belief in logic, but show their hypocrisy when they refuse to accept what reason shows to be the case.

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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.

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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

Hornchurch Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, corner Gubbin's Lane and Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, April 16th, 8 p.m.: D. H. TRIBE, "A Humanist's View of Progress".

Notes and News

"I'LL BLESS you from above. Try your best to get in touch with Mr. Gardner now and again, and do your best for my children. God bless you and yours". Gentle words, but in fact the closing sentences of a letter written by the Indian Dr. Buck Ruxton from the death cell at Strangeways Prison, Manchester to his counsel, Lord (then Mr. Norman) Birkett (*The Sunday Times*, 31/3/63). Mr. Gardner was Ruxton's solicitor, and it was he who forwarded the letter to Lord Birkett. Ruxton was found guilty of murdering his wife and his children's nursemaid.

★

ANOTHER MURDER: this time the shooting of Dennis Hurden during a raid at the Mitcham Co-operative milk depot, for which George Thatcher received the death sentence, and for which three other men, including Phillip Kelly, were sentenced to life imprisonment. At Thatcher's appeal, Father John Keogh, Roman Catholic chaplain at Brixton Prison, London, said that Kelly's (non-sacramental) confession to having fired the shot "posed a problem". Kelly sought the priest's advice and Father Keogh told him, "I would have to think over what his obligations were". At first, Kelly said, he had played the innocent and told the police that Thatcher had fired the shot. "I told him first of all", said Father Keogh, "that since he had misled the police about Thatcher, that in the event of Thatcher being condemned to death, that Kelly should confess" (*Daily Mirror*, 2/4/63). "But I told him, as Thatcher had not yet been found guilty, he could delay his confession until such time as he saw what happened to Thatcher. I decided that if he confessed at that stage he was leaving himself no chance of escaping the death

penalty and I thought he was entitled to that". We can only say that Father Keogh's confession is more astounding than Phillip Kelly's.

★

MURDER AGAIN, at least in Roman Catholic eyes. Cardinal Wyszynski, Primate of Poland, had no need to think over his obligations in connection with Government policies to curb the population increase. Birth control was murder, he declared in a 50-minute sermon in Warsaw on March 31st (*Daily Telegraph*, 1/4/63), and he compared an official abortion policy with German wartime genocide. "We cannot forget what one nation in the West did to us", said the Cardinal. "What a terrible machine of death, if extermination was created. But at the same time obstetricians and gynaecologists are being released from their specialist work because they do not have work to do—only murder".

★

STILL ON the crime note—or its prevention, *The People* (31/3/63) found it "surely a little disturbing to learn that only 1,000 of all our policemen set out to do their jobs according to Christian principles", and hoped that membership of the Christian Police Association would "grow by leaps and bounds". One member, PC Cecil Gillian of the London Metropolitan Police, described his conversion in time-honoured Christian fashion: "Eight years ago I was a really tough copper. I wouldn't hesitate to pinch teenagers for loitering. I did all kinds of things to build up cases and add to my reputation in the force". But, now he sees things quite differently. He tries to help the youngsters and earn their respect, and although "some of the young tearaways call him 'softie'", he believes that a policeman's job is to prevent crime and that "the Bible, not the rule-book, gives the formula for doing that".

★

AFTER PILOT Ralph Flores and his passenger Helen Klaben had spent fifty days in the snow following a plane crash in northern British Columbia, "God must have decided it was time for us to be saved", said Miss Klaben. Flores, a minister of the Mormon Church, said he had faith that he was going to be found. "Yes, I had faith because I have faith in the Lord" (*Montreal Star*, 26/3/63). Nor did Miss Klaben lose hope. The only thing she couldn't understand was "why the Lord was keeping us so long". Now she has a belief in God that she never thought possible. "Ralph and I both needed time to think over our lives", she said. "He was wonderful . . . His faith set the example for me to follow all my life". All the same, "the Lord" did leave it rather late. Although "Miss Klaben's gangrene was not as severe as first feared", Dr. Nesta James of Whitehorse (Yukon) General Hospital said she might lose one or two toes.

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THERE IS something almost obscene, it seems to us, in the way spiritualists claim to have been in touch with persons recently dead. According to *Psychic News*, Hugh Gaitskell returned in a seance to speak to a London medium who waits at table in the members restaurant in the House of Commons.

★

ON JULY 20TH, 1962, we reprinted one of Charles Bradlaugh's *Doubts in Dialogue*. Next week we are printing eleven critical "observations" on the dialogue, submitted to us by a Very Rev. Monsignor of the Roman Church, together with a reply by the Editor.

Priesthoods of the Establishment

By PAT SLOAN

(Concluded from page 112)

LET US NOW TURN to the New Testament. It soon becomes clear that, as a whole, this is no doctrine of revolt against prevailing social conditions. Caesar's rule, slavery, and the subjection of women are all energetically supported. But it is revolutionary in the purely religious field, offending against the rules of the Establishment in plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath, driving money-changers from the temple, and consorting with publicans and sinners.

But so long as the early Christians were a persecuted minority sect, they "had all things in common." (Acts, 2, 44-45; 4,32.) And if they did not loyally hand over the proceeds from the sale of property, they were threatened with the fate of Ananias and Sapphira, who each in turn deceived Peter only to be struck dead on the spot. (Acts, 5.)

Though there had at first to be community of goods, a new hierarchy rapidly began to develop. In I Corinthians, 12, 28, we read of "apostles, in the second place prophets, thirdly teachers; then miracle workers" and so on. Subjugation to the lay Establishment is advocated in the form of prayers for "sovereigns and all in high offices, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life." (1 Tim., 2, 2.) And "bishops and deacons" appear in Phil., 1, 1. True, it is enjoined that a bishop should be a good husband and "no lover of money." (1 Tim., 3, 2-3.) In 1 Tim., 3, 8-12, we also find that it is urged that deacons must be faithful husbands "ruling their children and their own houses well." There is also a general warning against riches: "Instruct those who are rich in this world's goods not to be proud, and not to fix their hopes on so uncertain a thing as money . . . to be ready to give away and share." (1 Tim., 6, 17-18.)

But side by side with these pious injunctions slavery continues to be supported, the main concern of the New Testament writers being to ensure that among Christians there shall be a properly preserved master-slave relationship. This was clearly stated, for example as follows: "Servants, accept the authority of your masters in all due submission, not only when they are kind and considerate, but even when they are perverse." (1 Peter, 2, 18.)—No unofficial strikes! And again: "All who wear the yoke of slaver must count their own masters worthy of all respect, so that the name of God and the Christian teaching are not brought into disrepute. If the masters are believers, the slaves must not respect them any less for being their Christian brothers. Quite the contrary, they must be all the better servants." (1 Tim., 6, 1-2.)

Thus, already in the New Testament itself (irrespective of what occurred later) a class-divided society is accepted and upheld, and a religious hierarchy of bishops and deacons begins to emerge, which becomes more and more a parallel structure to the lay Establishment.

Before 200 AD the Christians had recruited a number of rich adherents, no doubt slave-owners themselves, in Rome, and Origen boasted that rich men and high-born ladies were listening to Christian teaching. In 325 AD the Christian Church became a State church, under the patronage of the Emperor Constantine. Constantine's earthbound court contained the following ranks: gloriosi (consuls), nobilissimi, patricii, illustres, spectabilis, and clarissimi (famous). At Constantinople in 553 AD the Second Council of the Church arranged Heaven to match, with Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, dominations, virtues, potestates, principates, archangels and angels (the last being

the archaic name for the humble courier of today, or messenger).

With the imperial hierarchy around them and the heavenly hierarchy above them, the priesthood naturally developed its own property-owning hierarchy from within its own ranks. After a few hundred years more, the Church at Rome had begun to stink with its own corruption. And the development of the selling of indulgences to sinners can be closely compared with the appropriation of sacrificial offerings by the priests of the Hebrews.

The same cycle came to be repeated again following the Reformation.

The words of the hymn are recalled:

"The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate,
God made them high or lowly, and ordered their estate."

While there have always been poor priests (are they earthly "angels"?—these lowest forms of ecclesiastical life), they have in the main tended to share the rich man's dinner (the Levite that is within thy gate) rather than wait outside with Lazarus for the crumbs. And so on down to the modern Ecclesiastical Commissioners, one of the largest property-owning corporations in Britain today.

In this article we have been concentrating on the development of priestly Establishments, both before Christianity and since. It would be quite wrong, however, to assume from this that there have been no anti-Establishment trends as well. In the Old Testament we find them in the words of a number of the Prophets. Nehemiah objects to usury, Micah attacks the seizure of land and houses, oppression and exploitation. Habbakuk cries woe to profiteering landlords, builders with blood, and those that make their neighbours drunk, Jeremiah rages against corruption, Zechariah (7, 9-10) calls for brotherly love and adjures not to oppress "the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart". And it is in the First Book of Samuel, Chapter 2, that there first appears what is now known as the Magnificat of Mary, sung by Hannah, with such revolutionary phrases as "He lifteth up the needy from the dunghill, To make them sit with princes . . . The bows of the mighty are broken, And they that stumbled are guided with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread: And they that were hungry have ceased". In the New Testament this ancient song is paraphrased in the mouth of Mary, and is sung today in the Anglican Church every Sunday by prosperous congregations without the slightest awareness of the revolutionary implications of their song.

Then we have Amos the herdsman, who openly denounces priestly practices: "Thus saith the Lord . . . I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies". (Amos, 5, 21.) As to the rich, they "trample down the poor and squeeze load after load of corn from them". (Amos, 5, 11.) Here we have the voice of rebellion against the rich.

Turn now to the New Testament, to James: "Let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate; and the rich, in that he is made low". (James, 1, 9-10.) "Do not the rich oppress you, and themselves drag you before the judgement seats? Do not they blaspheme? . . . Did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him. But ye have dishonoured the poor

man . . . Go to now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you". (James, 2, 6-7; 5, 1).

It would not have been out of context to have concluded: "We will bury you".

It is in this tradition, of some of the Prophets, of two or three of the sayings of Jesus and especially of James, that in the religious age revolutionary movements, as well as the Establishment, found their inspiration in the Bible, the Anabaptists after the Reformation and the Christian Socialists of today. The names in English history of John Ball, the Levellers and Thomas Paine will all equally live in the record of the struggle of the people against property and the established priesthood, even though they claimed religion as the basis for their criticism. It is significant that although in his day Tom Paine was regarded as a revolutionary (which he was) and an atheist (which he was not) his main aim in writing *The Age of*

Reason (which can in some ways be regarded as the foundation of freethought in this country) was to deter the French Revolution from becoming altogether atheist. He ruthlessly exposed the Establishment of his day and undermined the literal acceptance of the words of the Bible, but he still proclaimed the following creeds: "I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life . . . I believe in the equality of man". And this is just such a profession of faith that the established priesthood could never accept.

Today belief in man no longer requires to be bolstered up even by the God of Tom Paine, that "one God . . . the great mechanic of the creation, the first philosopher, and the original teacher of all science". Today the undermining of all established priesthoods has passed to materialists, rationalists and humanists; and of private property relations, to socialists.

I'll Be Damned!

By J. A. MILLAR

Now THAT Christian apologists are attempting to discard dogma and cancel creed, it is worth taking a perfunctory glance at the evolution of ideas that has so startlingly reversed the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, whose motto "*Semper Idem*" leads them still to proclaim, "the same, yesterday, today and forever—always and everywhere, the teaching of the 'One True Church' remains the same". To which we might add (with apologies to *TWTWTW*), "or not, as the case may be".

According to a number of Imprimatur-bearing Catholic works, St. Cyprian taught that "if a man could escape who was outside the ark of Noah, then he may escape who is outside the Church". The implications of this statement are anything but subtle, and St. Athanasias succinctly reiterated this view in his celebrated creed which is part of the normal church service to this day:

Whosoever wishes to be saved, must, before all things, hold the Catholic Faith. And unless a man shall have kept this Faith, entire and undefiled, he shall, beyond all doubt, perish everlastingly.

And that, "beyond all doubt", ought to settle that "everlastingly". That it does not, I need hardly add, since Freethinkers are well used to the morass of verbal sewerage to which Catholic apologists descend in ludicrous attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable. As late as 1863 the "faithful" were cautioned; "It is necessary, dear sons and venerable brothers, to remember again and to condemn the very serious error into which some Catholics miserably fall, who think that men who live in error and are strangers to the Catholic faith and unity can reach eternal life. This of course is contrary to Catholic Faith in an extreme degree (maxime)." (Pius IX, "great bull"—no comment!—*Unam Sanctam* in his *Quanto Confiaciamur*), and precisely the same views have been expounded from the time of the inception of the Church by every pope, bishop and apologist, down to almost our own day.

Admirably lucid though these expositions of the imbecility of their doctrine are, it is now denied, by the Catholic Church that this teaching means that "outside the Church there is no salvation" (Pius V—*Regnans in excelsis*—1570), and we are informed that non-catholics and even atheists, may be saved. There is not sufficient space to examine this *volte face* in detail in the length

of this article, but Atheists will know the arguments of "Baptism by Desire", and the "Universality of the Church", which briefly, states that we are *all* members of the Catholic Church, regardless of whether we know of it, or want to be. From this it is tortuously argued that even if we are born so stupid that we study Catholicism to a degree of understanding that excels that of the priesthood and still reject the Church, we may be saved, because God may take the view that we would have desired baptism and followed the "faith" had we possessed the capacity to know how stupid we were being.

Intellectually it might have been regarded as a "good try" by the apologist, were it not for Catholic teaching regarding baptism. After all, if those who live and die in ignorance of the "faith" and those who consciously reject it, may be "saved", it is difficult to see how an all-loving god can condemn what must surely be a far more deserving class—i.e. the still-born child of the grief-stricken devoted Catholic parent, and those wide-eyed innocents, who die before a Catholic priest can perform his mumbo-jumbo over them. They say God "moves in mysterious ways" but in this case He is being ridiculous. "It is an article of faith that those who die without Baptism cannot enter heaven" (*A Catholic Dictionary*), and "Children who die unbaptised are 'lost' in the sense that they are shut out from heaven" states The Most Rev. M. Sheehan, D.D. (*Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine*, p. 143), whilst St. Augustine taught that "unbaptised infants are consigned to eternal fire (*Serm.* 294 Pl. XXXVIII, 1337), or, as the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Vol. 9) puts it, "St. Augustine and the African Fathers believed that unbaptised infants share in the common positive misery of the damned", and then goes on, "Moreover, there was the teaching of the Council of Florence, that, 'the souls of those dying in actual mortal sin, or in *original sin alone* go down at once into hell, to be punished". Then, later in the same work we are told: "Abelard was the first to rebel against the severity of the Augustinian tradition on this point. According to him, there was no *guilt*, but only *punishment*", and "It should be noted however, that this *poena damni* [note the use of Latin which obscures meaning to many people and is quite unnecessary, J.A.M.] incurred for *original sin*, implied . . . a certain degree of spiritual torment".

That the present attempt to reverse this teaching in the face of the continued contention that articles of faith

can never change is a quite deliberate fraud on the part of theologians is quite clear. After all, how can one reconcile "Let him be accused that asserts that the Roman Pontiffs and ecumenical councils have wandered outside the limits of their powers, have usurped the rights of princes, and have even erred in defining matters of Faith and Morals", of Pope Pius IX (*Multiplices inter*, 10/6/1851) with "But there was a natural repugnance to the belief that those who had committed no sin should be tortured in hell, and this difficulty led theologians to adopt various theories as by way of escape" (*A Catholic Dictionary*, Am. Edn., Vol. 9)? Only by claiming that the teaching stands but the conclusion fails, but this can only be done by crudely stretching the teaching of the Church and the words used, hopelessly away from their context, and distorting their accepted meanings to almost their opposites. Clearly no theologian could accept these conclusions without being either ignorant or dishonest. Anyway, I personally resent being told that I may be "saved" despite my atheism. Surely I'll be damned?

CORRESPONDENCE

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

"HONEST TO GOD"

It was sad to read the extract from the Bishop of Woolwich's book in *The Observer*, sad because Christianity can so destroy men of otherwise integrity, that they can twist, prevaricate, dissemble and re-assemble their entire belief on the razor edge chance that it will still survive, and that they—the parsons—will still be needed. All this with the self-delusion of ethical integrity.

The Bishop says, with quiet conviction, "And the exciting thing is that it is not being forced upon the Church from outside but is welling up from within". This ties beautifully with a previous statement in the same article "But now man is discovering that he can manage quite happily by himself, he finds no necessity to bring God into his science, his morals, his political speeches".

Now what the Bishop fails to state clearly (or to see clearly) is that this latter quote applies to those outside the Church. Those inside have no such conviction. But in order to bring in the outsiders, the insiders are forced, reluctantly, to try to compromise on any terms short of complete annihilation. What the Bishop really says in toto is "we quite realise that the people have been duped from the start, but as they have found us out, we must try a new tack and hope it will last as long".

When the Bishop and his fraternity appreciate that truth is unqualified then will understanding begin and verbiage cease

JAMES HENDREN.

If Dr. John Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich should apply for membership of the National Secular Society, I would vote for his acceptance. Is it not pleasing to see how the intellectuals of the Church of England are gradually coming round to our way of thinking—or nearly so?

MARTIN McCALPIN.

"SPARTACUS"

What a remarkable book *Spartacus* is. Writing in his usual scholarly and lucid style, the inimitable F. A. Ridley has, so far as is humanly possible at this late date, and at so little cost, produced the most authentic story of the great Slave Revolution and its courageous leader yet written. In fact, this is the sort of historical textbook which I would like my child to read in school. I know Mr. Ridley is planning to write another book (much bigger), but if it is only half as good as *Spartacus* is, then it will be well worth buying. I wholeheartedly recommend this book to all students of history—genuine history, that is.

JOHN W. TELFER.

MILITANT ATHEISM

I would like to answer Mr. W. E. Huxley's letter of 29/3/63 re my "loose thinking". When Mr. Huxley says, "We are never angry with children or adults", I presume he must mean all Atheists. This is a generalisation which surely indicates loose thinking on his part. The same applies to the other things that he says "we" do. You cannot fight a religion or a thought as though it were a thing: if you want to fight you must fight the people who hold the idea, in this case, Christians of various denominations.

KATHLEEN TACCHI-MORRIS.

OBITUARY

"A grand man and a grand Freethinker." That is how J. G. Burdon describes his friend and fellow Lancastrian, Frederick Houghton of Blackpool, who died on March 28th at the age of 78. It is a judgment we can confirm. And Fred Houghton was lively in body and mind despite his years. A photograph he sent us last Christmas shows his alert eyes and countenance. He had been in hospital only a few days when Mr. Burdon visited him and found him apparently much improved. He died the next day.

Mr. Burdon conducted the secular service at Carleton Crematorium on April 2nd.

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