

The Freethinker

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Liberal Pope

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE DEATH OF POPE JOHN XXIII at the age of 81 after a short but eventful reign (October 28th, 1958, to June 3rd, 1963), is an event of considerable concern, not only to the cosmopolitan Roman Catholic Church over which he ruled, but to the non-Catholic world at large. For Pope John, unlike his ultra-reactionary predecessors, Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli) and Pius XI (Achille Ratti), was quite definitely a liberal Pope, not only in theological matters but also in the much more important and practical fields of politics and sociology. Not only did he call together the Vatican Council for the express purpose of modernising the archaic structure of his still largely medieval Church and of making a beginning at least on Christian reunion—matters that primarily concern the Roman Church and Christianity—his actions in the broader fields of politics and sociology effected a sensible improvement in international affairs. Pope John, both in his general attitude and specifically in his recent encyclical letter on peace, appears to have definitely modified the intransigent attitude of his immediate predecessors towards the international situation in general and towards the Cold War in particular. Unlike the belligerent Piuses, who in and out of season preached a "Holy War" against atheistic Bolshevism and all its satanic works, he envisaged and encouraged a peaceful solution for the great ideological conflict of our time between the rival social systems of East and West.

Such a striking change of attitude in the head of what is, after all (however much we may dislike it) still one of the most powerful contemporary institutions in both the religious and secular spheres, must be regarded as a highly encouraging and progressive fact. For this, and for other similar reasons, Humanists will deplore the passing of this undoubtedly liberal pope, and will hope that the College of Cardinals (whether illuminated or not by the hypothetical Holy Spirit, who is supposed to make a speciality in presiding over papal elections) will have sufficient good sense to elect a similarly broadminded prelate as his successor, rather than another reactionary.

From Log Cabin to Vatican City

Pope John XXIII was born as Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli on November 25th, 1881, in a farmhouse in Sotto il Monte, near Bergamo, in the Po Valley in Northern Italy. Unlike his predecessor, Pius XII, who was a Roman aristocrat born in the purple of the princely house of Pacelli, Roncalli was of humble peasant origin, and his spectacular rise from peasant to pope bears a distinct resemblance to the traditional American presidential saga (which certainly does not apply to the present American millionaire President) from log cabin to White House. Perhaps, though, John's opposite number, anti-pope Nikita Khrushchev, of similar peasant antecedents, constitutes a more apt analogy.

Roncalli studied at the Bergamo Seminary and later at the Pontifical Seminary at Rome, "the nursery of Cardinals"

as it has been termed. Ordained on August 10th, 1904, and already a doctor of theology, he became secretary to his own diocesan Bishop of Bergamo, a position that he occupied until the First World War, in which he served as an army chaplain. During his residence in Bergamo, he composed several scholarly works, including a history of the diocese, a literary achievement that drew upon him the favourable attention of the Librarian of the Ambrosian

Library in Milan (and later of the Vatican Library), Monsignor Achille Ratti, who was to become Pius XI in February 1922.

It is rather intriguing to learn that during this period, the future Pope John XXIII was "vehemently suspected"

of heresy during the furious anti-Modernist drive then conducted by Pope Pius X. Roncalli had apparently been on friendly terms with another Italian clerical scholar, Ernest Buondiuti who was subsequently excommunicated as a leading Modernist. However, the Bishop of Bergamo stood by his secretary and the storm blew over. After World War One, Roncalli entered the papal diplomatic service and was successively apostolic visitor in Sofia from 1925-34 and then apostolic delegate in Istanbul. Simultaneously, he rose in the hierarchy to the successive ranks of bishop and archbishop *in partibus infidelium* (titular archbishop).

Red Cap from an Atheist

After the liberation of France by the Allied armies in 1944 and the downfall of the Vichy regime of Marshal Petain, General de Gaulle requested the recall of the then fascist-minded Papal Legate, Cardinal Valeri, who had collaborated too closely with the Petain regime, and Roncalli, who was evidently already regarded as a liberal, was substituted. On January 12th, 1953, Pope Pius made Roncalli a Cardinal and, three days later, Archbishop and Patriarch of Venice, a traditionally "papable" see (Pius X had been Archbishop of Venice before his election to the Papacy in 1903). It was noted at the time that in accordance with diplomatic protocol, Roncalli received his red hat as Cardinal from M. Vincent Auriol, the then French President who was a Socialist and (or so one of his former colleagues assured me) an Atheist.

Second Pope John XXIII

On October 20th, 1958, after an unusually long and stormy conclave, Cardinal Roncalli was elected Pope. It would appear to have been a fiercely contested election, during which the traditionalist (conservative) cardinals of the Roman Curia led by Siri (Archbishop of Genoa) and Ottaviani, Secretary of the Holy Office, made strenuous efforts to secure the election of another fascist-minded reactionary of the stamp of Pius XI and XII. However, times change, even at the Vatican. When the new pope chose the title of John XXIII, this change in title not only signified a simultaneous change in policy, but also occasioned some trouble to the editors of the papal chronology. For there was a notorious anti-pope who took that title; an ex-pirate who was eventually deposed by

the Council of Constance (15th century). Roncalli at 77 was also the oldest Pope to be elected for centuries.

Pope John and his Predecessors

As a modern ex-clerical critic (Dr. Lehmann) has aptly remarked, beneath its superficially monolithic facade two rival factions have always co-existed within the cosmopolitan structure of the Church of Rome. There has always been a "traditionalist", or ultra-conservative party, who abrogated all truth to themselves and to the one true Church to which they belonged; an ultra-montane party to whom in general the heretic was worse than the infidel, and to whom the Church was the sole authoritative teacher, and the outside world merely her docile pupil. Conversely, there has been a liberal section, which was willing to learn from the world as well as to teach, and which in practice limited the infallibility of the Catholic Church to faith and morals, outside which it was prepared to acknowledge human limitations and to move with the times. Both these rival factions have influenced and decided papal elections, and their rival points of view have been successively reflected in the policies pursued by respectively traditionalist and liberal popes. Liberal popes during this century have been Leo XIII (1878-1903), Benedict XV (1914-22), and his late Holiness, Pope John XXIII (1958-63), whilst a monolithic line of Piuses:

IX (1846-78), X (1903-14), XI (1922-39) and XII (1939-58), stood for integral conservatism in both the theological and political spheres. (Actually, Pius IX started as a liberal, but the Roman revolution of 1848 scared him into a die-hard reactionary!)

Modernist at Heart

The late Pope's encouragement of modernisation, and of Christian reunion in the sphere of theology, and his moderate and statesmanlike attitude towards such burning contemporary problems as nuclear war and Communism—so different from that of his immediate predecessors—stamp him as one of the more liberal and socially-awake popes. Perhaps after all, the Inquisitors of Pius X were not really so far wrong in suspecting the young Roncalli of being really a Modernist at heart!

Certainly Pope John, upon his evident record, may be regarded by non-Christian Humanists with sincere respect as a Christian Humanist. We may even recall the amiable tribute paid to an eighteenth century pope, Benedict XIV (1740-58) one of Pope John's most liberal predecessors, by "His Atheistic Majesty" Frederick the Great of Prussia: "The late Pope had not an enemy in the world, not even M. de Voltaire". Pope John XXIII, also, despite his short reign will no doubt go down in the historic record as a remarkable, perhaps even as a great pope.

On Not Taking Liberties

By D. H. TRIBE

YEAR BY YEAR the work of the National Council for Civil Liberties expands. Its publications *Arrest* (in association with the Albany Trust) and *Civil Liberty and the Police* have received widespread publicity. On a more limited scale, its statement "Religion and the Law" (reprinted in *Peace News* and *THE FREETHINKER*), provoked considerable discussion. An increasing number of cases of wrongful arrest, mental patients seeking release from hospital, miscarriages of justice, abuse of power by governmental and local authorities, unjustified limitation of the right to political protest, and racial dissension are referred to Headquarters (4 Camden High Street, London. N.W.1) throughout the year.

Some three hundred visitors and delegates from a wide range of local and national organisations and trade unions attended the 1963 Annual General Meeting on May 25th under the Chairmanship of Mr. Malcolm Purdie, and overwhelmingly supported 22 motions representing the scope of Council interests.

The extension of security procedures, without parliamentary authority, to industry, trade unionism, and social contacts with foreign officials was deplored. Four motions were passed on Race Relations. Dissatisfaction was expressed with the current facilities for restoring mental health; and the recommendations of the NCCL to the Council on Tribunals, concerning the mental health review tribunals, were endorsed. Homosexual law reform, as proposed by the Wolfenden Committee, was recommended, together with the need for adequate corroboration of alleged homosexual activities. An "old lag" in the person of Miss Margaret Turner, Secretary of the Prison Reform Council, which produced the thought-provoking *Inside Story*, was one of many who spoke feelingly of the hopelessness, inactivity, and degradation found in so many of HM prisons today.

The Council was asked to investigate the Law of Property to make it possible for "infants" over eighteen to buy, lease, or rent a dwelling place; and to submit to the

Home Secretary a memorandum on the structure of and facilities for juries. A welcome was given to a report of the Secretary, Mr. Martin Ennals, on conditions in Northern Ireland, with special reference to the disarming of police, removal of religious discrimination, electoral reform, a possible Royal Commission, and the abrogation of the Special Powers Acts.

Under "Religion and the Law" a National Secular Society motion noted with concern "the civil disabilities suffered, or likely to be suffered, by those without religious belief", and called for "repeal of the Blasphemy Acts, amendment of the 1944 Education Act, the 1958 Adoption Act, and Admiralty Regulation 1827, and removal of the right to inquire into the religious beliefs or observances of any candidate for positions (save statutory chaplaincies) with the public service". When my statement on "Religion and the Law" first appeared in the NCCL January Bulletin, there was considerable protest from certain sections of the membership. It was therefore, the more gratifying to observe that in what looked like a full vote on this motion there was only one dissident.

A motion on Freedom of the Press approved the conviction of but regretted the sentences imposed on the "silent" journalists at the Vassall Tribunal, and called for a strengthening of and lay representation on the Press Council, while one motion on the Official Secrets Act deplored its use to deal so harshly with Miss Barbara Fell. Another urged "upon HMG the need to distinguish between political protest and espionage" and declared "that the remanding in custody for seven days of persons charged with obstruction or other minor offences is contrary to the accepted principles of British justice".

The existing arrangements for adoption were declared "unsatisfactory" by an Executive Committee (NCCL) motion which was passed nem. con. It regretted that natural mothers can impose religious conditions on adoption, and that suitable prospective adopters without re-

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What Is Life?

By H. LEVY

"WHAT IS MATTER?" we ask the scientist. In reply he points to other things—other pieces of matter—or talks about its hardness, or its fluidity, or its ductility. If you press him still further, asking—"Yes, but what *is* matter?" he will patiently explain that it depends on the kind of matter. If it is water—it can be broken down into Hydrogen and Oxygen—two other kinds of matter. Unsatisfied, you ask again, despairingly, "Yes, but what *is* matter?" "Oh, matter," he replies airily, "of course that is basically electricity", and proceeds to tell you all about protons and neutrons and electrons, as if the proper way to explain the familiar—*matter*—is in terms of the strange and unfamiliar—*protons* and *electrons* which are little more than words to you. Who has ever seen, heard, smelt, or tasted a proton? How can that explain what matter is, when in fact the latter is precisely what we *have* seen, and smelt, and tasted.

It looks as if the process of explanation proceeds in two opposite directions. For the layman it passes from the unfamiliar back to the familiar; for the scientist from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Actually, this is false. The layman, philosopher, scientist have no option but to explain or describe the strange, the peculiar, the unfamiliar, in terms of the familiar. They do this when they talk of "elementary particles" behaving in certain circumstances as "waves". The language of explanation is what we have inherited, and added to in the past, and it is the form in which our thoughts are contained. It holds the imagery of past experience. The criterion that two people are thinking in the same way about any situation is seen, or rather heard, in the fact that they both describe it in the same words. They say they mean the same thing, by using the same words; but of course since each of us is unique in our personal experiences there is no possible way of verifying this sameness except through the fact that, acting on what we call the same assumptions, we do what we call the same things. When a scientist talks about "elementary particles", the image in his thinking called up by the words is simply that of a small bit of some *thing* with all its particularity and discreteness, so that when he adds that, in certain circumstances, it behaves like a wave, violence is done to our imagination, to our experience, to our thinking. We are being asked to reconcile two apparently conflicting concepts—continuity and discontinuity. At this stage the sceptic, shrugs his shoulders and says—"I suppose the scientists know what they are talking about". Like the Fundamentalist the sceptic has resorted to an Act of Faith, to rescue himself from the dilemma posed to him by his restricted normal experience. The very fact that a language grows at all, arises from the need to translate our new and gathering experience into words, and therefore into the imagery essential to our thinking. Just become accustomed long enough to the use of the word *Wavicle*, and you will begin to wonder what all the bother was about.

After all language has been playing tricks with your thinking ever since you were in your cradle. You begin with "Your mother's milk", a very particular thing that was yours and yours only. It then became "Your milk in your feeding bottle"; then "More milk" unspecified; and finally simply milk as such—a class of entity with certain properties that affected your sight, and senses of taste and smell. You have always experienced *particularised* milk, not milk in general. You never see Man,

only a man, walking down the street. Does Man, in general, exist in any other form than as a thought? Does Matter exist in any other form than as a thought? In asking such a question how difficult it is to pose it without someone immediately charging one with suggesting that this piece of paper on which I am writing is merely a thought. Our "common" sense, our individual thinking expressing itself in our "common" language, assures me that it—this piece of paper—is here; but, when I talk about "paper in general" is it only a manner of speaking, is it a convenience in thinking, is it descriptive of our mode of organising our thinking about the actual things we encounter in the actual physical world? I have inserted the adjectives "actual" and "physical" to underline the "reality" of the world. It is a fact that the whole of our language, like the whole of our thinking, is peppered with abstract terms, terms of a general nature, terms that indicate classifications. If language consisted only of words for discrete objects, it would not be a language at all, but a mere substitute for pointing to the object if such an object can be pointed at. Some words belong to the limbo of mythology. The passage from babyhood to the adult stage corresponds, in speaking and thinking, to the passage from the concrete and particular to the abstract and the general. A fully grown adult also rids himself of pseudo referents like God and after-life.

If it is true that abstractions and generalisations are man-made—after all, language is man-made, and thinking is one of our qualities—a whole series of questions immediately press to the fore. Can Man—note the generalisation—make them as he likes (if this means anything more than that he likes what he makes), or does the physical world give him no option? Are so-called Laws of Nature man-made in this sense? Has the scientist any option but to generalise the way he does? It seems clear that once one becomes at all critical of the role of language in terms of which we do our thinking about the world, one's whole approach to everything has to be reconsidered, because words and their meaning are the bricks of any edifice we construct; and the nature of the building will depend on the kind of bricks at our disposal.

Whatever be the answer to these questions, it seems clear enough that our power to think in abstract terms and to have words to express and to communicate these abstractions to others, is one of the most significant distinctions between ourselves and other animals, because it enables us to analyse the world around us, it enables us to see the general in the particular and so makes the individual experiment meaningful, and leads us on to Science, Technology and to the control of our environment. All this constitutes a fundamental characteristic of self-conscious living matter. In some respects we are like the sheet of paper or the table. We are matter. In other respects we are like the ant or the dog—*living* matter which however does not know it is an ant or a dog. At any rate it is clear that the degree of "self-knowledge" among living creatures varies enormously, and would justify us in talking of levels of living matter.

Do *consciousness* and self-consciousness exist? There are confusions inherent in using a general term like *Matter* to embrace some common properties of a wide variety of different particular objects; but if we use that word with care and circumspection (hadn't we better say—carefully

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This Believing World

Here is the Rev. R. Gordon, vicar of St. Peter's Church, Birmingham, telling us that for "most would-be worshippers traditional church music is an almost unknown tongue", while on the other hand, Dr. G. Knight, director of the Royal School of Church music, strongly opposes modern attempts "to jazz up" music for the Communion Service and the Lord's Prayer (*Daily Mail*, May 10th). Dr. Knight thinks "more and more young people take a keen and intelligent interest in serious music". Well, we often get young people on the radio and TV yelling their approval for "pop" singers, making almost as much noise as a Wembley football crowd.

★

A curate at Lyme Regis sees no reason why God himself couldn't go wrong sometimes—a comment on the Lord which brought an angry disclaimer from his vicar—"God cannot sin". The curate was accused of rank heresy, which upset his father, Major General Sir B. Rowecroft who immediately resigned from the parochial council. As for the Bishop Suffragan of Sherborne, he is taking no action against the heretical curate. Surely *he* cannot believe that Almighty God can sin?

★

A correspondent to the London "Evening News" has given heavenly proof of the striking efficacy of prayer. He is a Road Traffic Supervisor, and he is beaming with joy that at last there is going to be a day of prayer for road safety. In 27 years of service in his district of Romford, Essex, no fatal accidents occurred, and only a few involving personal injuries. And why? At every turn of duty he "prayed earnestly for freedom of accident". What have unbelieving infidels to say to that?

★

A new biography, "The King of the Lags" by David Ward recalls the notorious burglar and murderer, Charles Peace, now more or less forgotten. But some of his claims to fame were his "suburban respectability, pacifism, piety, and religion", as Kenneth Allsop points out in his review of the book (*Daily Mail*, May 30th). In fact, Peace was so respectable that he supplemented his earnings with Sunday school teaching. But his devotion to Christianity did not prevent him from being an implacable and murderous criminal.

★

Mr. Peter Sellers, whose latest film "Heavens Above" is a more or less mocking satire on religion, is to give his views on the question in a TV religious programme; but it is interesting to note that he calls himself "a Jewish-Christian" (*Daily Mail*, June 3rd). He had a Jewish mother, a Protestant father, and was educated in a Catholic school—surely enough to make him an unbeliever. He will be interviewed by Malcolm Muggeridge who insists he himself really is a Christian. We hope the matter will be sorted out to everybody's satisfaction, including the three rival Churches—Jewish, Roman, and Protestant. But will it?

★

But where stands the Church of England on the 39 Articles. Canon Carpenter and a layman, a Mr. Craig, tried to thrash the problem out in ATV's "About Religion" on June 2nd, the Canon asserting that most of them were now quite out of date, while Mr. Craig wanted them all retained *intact*, as part and parcel of true Christianity, every word of 'em and probably including also all the commas and full stops. It's a square world—or is it now still round?

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ligious beliefs may not get babies and suitable babies may not find adopters.

To improve relations between the police and the public, it was suggested that the Home Secretary be approached to establish "a system of tribunals to investigate complaints against the police" and to open "the recruitment of police to all sections of the community". The final motion expressed concern at the administration of the High Commission Territories of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland, which seem to be subject to pressure from the South African authorities.

In addition to practical work on behalf of individuals, the NCCL is anxious to do increasing research and educational work on such matters as the rights of minorities and freedom in the modern state. For this purpose it has established the Cobden Trust (named after the statue in front of Headquarters), and launched an appeal. All who value the work of the Council can assist with authoritative information, by becoming individual members, and by inducing organisations with which they are associated to affiliate.

WHAT IS LIFE?

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and circumspectly) are we not treading even more dangerous ground if we now talk about conscious and self-conscious matter as *possessing* Consciousness and Self-consciousness, as if these existed independently of the pieces of matter concerned? There is no danger, provided we remember that we are not talking of an independent entity that has its own being.

In the same way when we distinguish between living and non-living matter, if we were to say, as one so easily does, that the one has Life and the other is devoid of Life, we slip almost immediately into the fallacious question "What is Life?" as if it were a self-subsistent entity instead of a mode of behaviour of a particular level of matter. How these various levels of material objects exhibit these properties rather than others is the problem for the scientist to unravel, but he does not tackle it by posing to himself the fictitious question "What is Life?" A living thing is concrete. Life is an abstraction. It does not exist except as a man-made thought. If the question were accepted directly in this form the scientist would be faced with the impossible task of describing "Life", which by definition would not be matter, in terms of the only thing available to him for such a description, viz.: Matter.

These are some of the questions posed and analysed in an excellent book *La Vie n'existe pas* by Professor Ernest Kahane who is the Professor of Biological Chemistry in Montpellier University, and is the General Secretary of the French Rationalist Union, of 16 Rue de l'Ecole Polytechnique, Paris. Written by a scientist steeped in the biological tradition it poses the problem of the nature of living organisms, stripped of all the metaphysical wool that has been gathered around it on the linguistic side. It then becomes clear why Professor Kahane, a very lively being, entitles his book, *Life does not exist*.

DANCING GIRLS IN CHURCH

Girls should be more careful about headscarves they wear in church. Some that have been in front of me have included scenes of dancing girls, bullfights and boxers. They are most distracting.

—Letter in the *Daily Herald* (30/5/63).

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.
London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. A. MILLAR.
(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.
Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday evenings.
Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.
North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY
Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, June 16th, 6.45 p.m.: MARION LARGE, "Apartheid: Is It Our Business?"
Ilford Humanist Group (Friends Meeting House, Cleveland Road), Monday, June 17th, 7.45 p.m.: MRS. J. MACASKILL, MA, "Religion and Liberty".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, June 16th, 11 a.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT
MICKLEWRIGHT, MA, "Divorce Law Reform in 1963".

Notes and News

IN VIEWS AND OPINIONS this week, F. A. Ridley rightly says that non-Christian Humanists may regard the late Pope with "sincere respect". One cannot help deploring, though, that this genuine "Pope of Peace"—as opposed to his so-acclaimed predecessor—was not allowed to die a little more peacefully, without the bellowing of headlines and type describing his hour-by-hour decease. There were, we feel sure, many non-Christians who regretted Pope John XXIII's death, but who regretted also the Vatican's vulgar dramatisation of it.

★
SIMPLICITY, as *The Guardian* said (4/6/63), was one of the late Pope's great qualities, and the paper expressed the hope that "simplicity may erode tradition". But the rock of St. Peter is not easily eroded. And so, the body of the "simple", "humble" peasant-Pope was duly arrayed in full vestments and displayed to provide a Roman holiday.

★
VULGARITY—AND MORBIDITY. These surely characterised the public exhibition of the Pope's corpse to the thousands in St. Peter's Square and then in the basilica itself. Even the crowds in the square—not, one imagines, the most sensitive of human beings—shuddered when they saw the face. And hardly surprising, since it was described by *The Guardian* (5/6/63) as "fixed in suffering and the colour of brownish slate". Mr. Evelyn Waugh, who so caus-

tically satirised American funeral practices in *The Loved One*, could have found an equally promising subject in Rome, were he not a Catholic.

★

"WE DO NOT believe in rushing things of this kind," said the *Daily Mirror* (28/5/63), in an editorial on the Thirty-Nine Articles, "but we cannot think that the Church leaders can much longer resist an inquiry into revision of the Articles". Neither can we. Four hundred years is hardly rushing things.

★

IT IS often hard to understand the clerical mind. Did the World War II chaplain who wrote in the *Chicago Tribune* (26/5/63) really believe that "there are no atheists in foxholes"? Will he stop repeating the silly assertion now that one of our American readers, Leon Arnold Muller, has publicly rebuked him? We doubt it. However, in a letter to the *Tribune*, Mr. Muller, an infantryman in World War II, pointed out "atheistic, agnostic, theistic, and other battle-front combatants" showed "heroic character" and "moral stature".

★

THE CLAIM for rating exemption for the Mormon temple at Newchapel, Godstone, Surrey, was rejected by the House of Lords on May 30th. The Court of Appeal had ruled that the temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints did not qualify for exemption because it was not a place of public religious worship, and the Lords agreed. "The Temple was not to be confused with regular church meeting houses where public worship was conducted", said Lord Pearce.

★

IN A recent book, Sir Richard Acland, former Labour MP for Gravesend, attacks what he calls the "out-of-date approach" of much religious teaching in schools and "the inadequacy of a purely scientific interpretation of the meaning of life" (*Daily Telegraph*, 30/5/63). Sir Richard, who is now a lecturer at St. Luke's Teacher Training College, Exeter, might consider prescribing *Honest to God* as a text book for his students.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

At the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society held in the Conway Hall, London, on Whit Sunday, June 2nd, 1963, Mr. David H. Tribe was elected President and Mrs. E. Venton and Mr. L. Ebury, Vice-Presidents, while Mr. W. Griffiths was again elected Honorary Treasurer.

Resolutions carried were: "That this Conference calls on members to put the principle of secular education before the public and as many MPs as possible before the next election"; "That this Conference protests against the action of the Governments concerned in the persecution of certain religious and political parties and anti-fascist organisations and individuals, notably in Spain, Portugal, Greece and West Germany"; "That in view of the evidence submitted in the Vassall case, and in the interests of national security, this Conference calls for the immediate implementation of the Wolfenden Report regarding homosexual behaviour between consenting adults"; "That in view of Mr. F. A. Ridley's long and valued service as President of the National Secular Society and his regrettable resignation, that the Society should support a testimonial gift to be organised by Mr. John A. Millar (27 Maybridge Road, New Malden, Surrey) as a token of appreciation".

The Executive Committee was also asked to inquire into the cost of providing a small pansy badge without wording as an alternative to the present one.

The Conference was preceded by a reception in the Conway Hall library (by kind permission of the South Place Ethical Society). Two early Chaplin films provided entertainment, while Mr. R. Sproule and Mr. R. Murray of Marble Arch Branch of the Society provided the excellent refreshments.

Christianity and Dean Inge

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

FAME, IT COULD BE SAID, is being known to those who don't know you. That is probably why tags, loosely supposed to sum up a character, so often become attached to famous names. Such tags are always invented by critics who, though familiar with a name, know no more than a superficial point or two about its owner. Such critics cannot distinguish between a character and a characteristic. That is why labels may so easily become libels. And that is why libels are not so easy to repudiate.

Exactly how or why the name of Dean Inge became saddled with the label "gloomy" is uncertain. What is certain is that he thought it something of a libel. He protested that it was completely undeserved. He had done no more than face up to reality as he saw it and to speak the truth as he found it, which he did in a manner that I always found more pungent than gloomy. The Dean would hardly have allowed himself to be called a freethinker, but he was unquestionably a very free thinker compared with the majority of either lay or professional religionists. Moreover, as he justly pointed out, the epithet gloomy could have been applied with greater pertinence, not to say impertinence, to quite a number of his eminent contemporaries.

Every now and then, it seems, the Church throws up a rebel who in turn occasionally throws up the Church to seek a more congenial sphere. But not always. Sometimes, as with that stormy petrel Bishop Barnes, this rebelliousness takes the form of what is regarded as pulpit sedition. Sometimes, as with Dean Inge, it is expressed through both preaching and journalism. And sometimes it comes to a head in an eruption like that just produced by the Bishop of Woolwich in his book *Honest to God*, which of course has already been widely countered and condemned by the incurably orthodox as altogether dishonest to God.

There is never any lack of these angry critics ready to pounce on every supposed heresy and to demand that the heretic be summarily expelled. But heretics are notoriously tough. Dean Inge rebelled and remained. To the end of his long life he was officially an Anglican clergyman although there were times when it was jested by those who apparently forgot about many a truth being spoken in jest, that he had ceased to believe in anything, least of all in Christianity, or that he preferred his Christianity without Christ. He himself expressed the mordant opinion that Christianity might have been a good thing if it hadn't been for the Christians, an opinion with which many Christians, always with other Christians in mind, fervently agreed.

In acknowledging congratulations on his ninetieth birthday, the Dean said in a letter to Bernard Shaw: "The good lady who, many years ago wrote to tell me that she was praying for my death, must have had her faith in the efficacy of prayer sorely tried". It would be perhaps rather extreme to suggest that the Dean's sorely tried fellow clerics ever went to such a length, but there is no doubt that for many years he was a thorn in the flesh of all the ecclesiastical die-hards and time-servers who would accept anything, believe anything and preach anything rather than utter a word that might endanger their comfortably assured positions or jeopardise their large and largely unearned incomes. In his later days Dean Inge admitted that he had never been easy about the Church of England or of himself as Dean of St. Paul's. He said

that if he had his time over again, which heaven forbid, he should not choose the Church as a profession.

It was in 1911 when the true-blue Tory, William Ralph Inge, was called to the Deanery of St. Paul's by the Liberal prime minister Mr. Asquith. The appointment was a tribute to two sagacious minds which could share higher interests than politics. Very soon the Dean began to thunder forth unpopular truths, almost inviting and certainly receiving the accusation of pessimism. Yet what of it? It is a dry old axiom that a pessimist is somebody who has to cope with an optimist. It can be a new wry axiom that an optimist is somebody who never copes with a pessimist. Professed optimists are too taken up with professing their optimism to do much coping with anything. They prefer the ecstatic contemplation of a god made, if not in their own image, at least in their own imagery.

There is often a good deal of this airy optimism about. The Dean, who found it hard to suffer fools either gladly or sadly, although he must have suffered considerably from them, had no patience with such nonsense. But two world wars had the effect of knocking most of it on the head as well as severely knocking about the "God" who inspired it. Each time, the Gloomy Dean came, so to speak, into his own. In a letter to me dated December 1940, he wrote: "I have just got a letter from Dr. L. P. Jacks who says that he is fast reverting to an opinion of his youth, that either God made a terrific blunder at the Creation or else the Devil must have had a hand in it. I find it easy to agree, for I cannot believe that the God who made Adolph Hitler is the same God that created my wife".

In 1922 he published among other *Outspoken Essays* a "*Confessio Fidei*". Needless to say such a book from such a source aroused high expectations. Sad to say, these expectations were not fulfilled. The *Confessio* was to be an explanation and justification of the Dean's religious beliefs and disbeliefs. It was a brilliant attempt to interfuse his philosophy with his theology. But in the end he had to fall back upon what he called the testimony of the mystics, while admitting with engaging candour that he himself had never undergone any mystical experience. Like all such attempts it succeeded in explaining very little and justifying less. It neither convinced the head nor satisfied the heart and presently it came in for such a devastating onslaught by that powerful adversary William Archer, that, if it was not exactly shattered, it was irreparably damaged in the minds of all intelligent and impartial readers. What the Dean thought of it is not known, but it seemed as if from then onwards, he moved, often distressfully, nearer and nearer to the virtual agnosticism with which his life closed.

When he was well over ninety, very frail, very deaf, but still very mentally alert, this formidable old cleric opened a Modern Churchman's Conference at Cambridge. He was soon lashing out right and left at all manner of religious absurdities, especially those of the discredited Romish Church. He condemned out of hand what he called the horrible blasphemy and shocking devil-worship of the doctrine of hell-fire and eternal torment, which nevertheless is still officially a part of Christian teaching. "And can you," he scathingly demanded, "expect intelligent men to come to church to sing 'I will think upon Rahab and Babylon', or listen to such gibberish as the

thirtieth verse of Psalm 68" I am told that the correct translation of these words is 'Rebuke the hippopotamus', yet our church-goers would sing this with equal unctious if they had it before them, just as fashionable ladies cheerfully sing the Magnificat, which is more violent than the 'Red Flag'."

Three years later, widowed, lonely, sad, disillusioned, he drew near to the end of his days. "I have done my best," he said not long before he died, "but I can't think the world is any the better for having had me in it. All my life I have struggled to find the purpose of living. I have tried to answer three fundamental problems: the problem of eternity, the problem of human personality, the problem of evil. Yet I know no more now that when I started. I believe no one will ever solve them. I know as much about the after-life as you—nothing. I don't even

know if there is one, certainly not as the Church teaches. I have no vision of Heaven or of a 'welcoming God'. I do not know what I shall find. I must wait and see".

Thus to the last, this grand old fighter, in his time the most outstanding intellect in the Church of England, still had the honesty and the courage to refuse all pretence of knowledge he did not possess, although his refusal almost implied an indictment of the Christianity he felt he had failed to uphold, just as maybe, he felt it had failed to uphold him. Seemingly gloomy and aloof to those who knew only his famous name, he was generous and lovable to those who knew him and who were able to testify that he did indeed but speak the truth as he found it. Could any secularist, could any Christian even, ask for a better epitaph?

Tragedy in Relation to the Bible and Marxism

By R. SMITH

I THINK I SHOULD be correct in saying that all men are aware of tragedy. But although this is true in regard to real life, it is not true in regard to some great works of literature, and world views of life. For instance, tragedy is alien to the Judaic world view, and the Bible is anti-tragic in its outlook.

There is plenty of material for tragedy in the Bible, but it is not written in a tragic manner.

Jehovah is the pillar of justice and goodness at all times, even when He totally destroys cities and massacres the innocent along with the guilty. All the destruction and havoc caused by Jehovah is merely looked upon as but a passing instant in his divine purpose. It is therefore taken for granted that Jehovah's purpose is essentially good and just, and that all will turn out right in the end. Accordingly, there is no tragedy in the Bible.

Even when the psalmist is driven by the experience of life to protest at the injustice of innocence cast down, and wickedness exalted, he has no doubt whatever that all will be well in the end. There is no note of woe in the Psalms, and Jehovah's justice is never questioned.

The nearest the Bible gets to tragedy is the book of Job. Yet in the epilogue Job is rewarded by God for his agonies, and therefore Job cannot be classed as a tragedy. It is true that Job questions God's justice, but he submits to it willingly. He abases himself before the very power he questions, and in doing so, resigns himself to his fate. This is religious submission, not tragedy. Tragedy glorifies human resistance to necessity, religion praises submission.

The Jews believed that their God was always working things out for the good, and that they had only to believe in Him, love Him, fear Him, praise Him, and obey Him, and all would be well. The Old Testament is one of the most optimistic books ever written; there is no room for despair in it.

Marxism is characteristically Jewish in its optimism and anti-tragic spirit. Marx and Engels repudiate the entire concept of tragedy. "Necessity", they said, "is blind only so far as it is not understood". Tragedy arises from the opposite view to this. According to Marxism, tragedy arises because men do not understand the laws which govern history. If men only understood the laws of history, and applied them, tragedy would cease to be. The Marxist world view, therefore, like that of the Bible, is anti-tragic.

Lunacharsky, the first Soviet Commissar of Education, proclaimed that one of the defining qualities of a communist society would be the absence of tragic drama. Stalin was perfectly consistent with the aims of a communist society when he demanded that all plays and novels should have a happy ending. All this goes to prove that Marxism is inimical to tragedy.

The philosophy of Marxism is based upon the false belief that men can win the world, and by doing so become masters of their lives. There is no room in Marxism for despair. The march forwards towards a classless society is inevitable, for history is on the side of progress and the working class; final victory is therefore as certain as the coming of the seasons. The working class has only to understand the laws of history, and apply them, and all human misery will vanish from the earth. History works itself out in a dialectical development, from primitive communism to scientific socialism. The dialectical laws of historical development operate independently of men's wills, and socialism is certain of ultimate victory.

Dialectical Materialism therefore has no faith, no hope, no despair attached to it. The first law of dialectics, "the unity and struggle of opposites" is at work in capitalist society. The thesis is capitalism including its opposite, socialism. The capitalist class and working class manifest themselves in the class struggle. The antithesis is interpretation of opposites; the working class gaining power and becoming the ruling class with the overthrow of capitalism. The synthesis of the change from a class-dominated society to a classless society. The state will either wither away, or be abolished in one stroke. The government of persons gives way to an administration of things. The hopes of humanity will then be realised, and life will become a joy for all instead of a burden. All have the means to enjoy a happy life; envy, hatred, malice, jealousy, murder, suicide, abolished from the face of the earth, the lion lie down with the lamb, the millennium dawn. This is the happy ending story of Marxism.

In tragedy, however, there is no happy ending, or salvation. Tragedy presents to us the terrible side of life; it is enough for it to present the problem, not solve it. And this is better than shutting our eyes to it by pretending that it does not exist. Soviet censors look on tragedy not only as bad art, but also as a sort of treason against the state.

(To be concluded)

CORRESPONDENCE

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

INTERESTED LAY READER

I thank you for gratuitously sending me a copy of THE FREETHINKER, dated 24th May, 1963. I suppose this is on account of my letter in last Sunday's *Sunday Express* (26th May).

As a Lay Reader in the Church of England—we assist the clergy to a limited extent—I decided to glance through your paper, but I soon became very interested!!

Most of the adverse criticism of the Bible in general, and of Christianity in particular, is based on half-baked knowledge of the subject; and, in some cases, no real knowledge at all. The Bishop of Woolwich's book, *Honest to God*, merits most careful reading, largely because the Bishop is also a profound theologian.

Incidentally, your contributors know their Bible far better than the vast majority of today's "Christians"!

As an example of loose thinking, take the phrase mentioned in the article "Crucifixion"; the phrase—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". The majority of "surface-thinking" Christians think that Jesus was referring to the men, who, with their hammers, were causing Jesus (as you put it) "excruciating (physical) agony". But those "hammerers" knew full well what they were doing, and, what is far more significant, those men needed no "forgiveness", simply because they had no choice in what they were doing. The people who needed God's forgiveness were those who had brought Jesus to his crucifixion.

PERCY B. RIES.

[Mr. Ries must have received his copy of THE FREETHINKER from a reader. None was sent to him officially.—ED.]

DOGMAIC ATHEISM

If it be loose thinking to assert that non-existence is rightly inferred from lack of valid proof of existence, then I am a loose thinker and proud of it. The Adam and Eve story is not and never was true. But in far off days when people were uneducated and not trained to make logical deductions they could hardly be condemned for believing what priests said.

Dr. Duhig was always careful to keep within the bounds of veracity. But he smote religion lustily. In the obituary notice of him Mr. McCall rightly tells us that Dr. Duhig knew the harm that Catholicism does and his detestation of it was too great to be expressed mildly.

The death of Dr. Duhig has robbed Freethought of a valiant champion whom it will be almost impossible to replace. Let his honoured memory live on!

Atheism always has preserved intellectual honesty. That is its *raison d'être*. The assertion of Mr. G. L. Simons to the contrary is sheer bunkum.

W. E. HUXLEY.

WITHOUT COMMENT

Mrs. Phyllis King told a court yesterday that her husband Vincent—accused of four murders—offered to baptise her before he tried to gas them both.

"He is a Roman Catholic," said 21-year-old Mrs. King. "He spoke of this after he turned on the gas and offered to baptise me as a Roman Catholic."

—Daily Herald (31/5/63).

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OBITUARY

It is with very deep regret that we report the death, on June 1st, of a veteran Staffordshire Freethinker and a good friend, William Morris.

J. W. Hawthorne, Secretary of the North Staffordshire Humanist Group writes: "It was through my joining the National Secular Society that you kindly introduced Mr. Morris to me nearly eight years ago. I have spent four or five hours each week with him, and I have always found him a staunch and loyal Freethinker. And he it was who was instrumental in my starting the North Staffs Humanist Group. He would have been 87 in a month's time. I shall miss him very much."

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