

The Freethinker

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"WE EXPECT all hell to break loose when we win," declared Madalyn E. Murray in April. Well, now she and her son Bill have won their long fight to show that the practice of Bible reading and prayer recitation in the public (state) schools of Maryland (USA) is unconstitutional. As we announced last week, and as Mrs. Murray prophesied immediately after the United States Supreme Court hearing, the judges were 8-1 in her favour, and in favour of the Unitarians, Mr. and Mrs. Edward L. Schempp and their two children, who challenged similar practices in the state schools of Pennsylvania.

Has "all hell" broken loose? It is really too early to say, but the indications seem otherwise. Last year's Supreme Court decision that the New York state non-denominational prayer was unconstitutional must surely have prepared most people for the Maryland and Pennsylvania decisions. First reactions showed, not surprisingly, that progressive Protestants, as represented by the National Council of Churches, and Jewish groups had hailed the ruling, while Roman Catholics and Protestant fundamentalists condemned it, and the bulk of the population was indifferent.

For The National Council of Churches, a federation of most of the major Protestant denominations in the United States, received the decision in the best Protestant tradition. It served as a reminder to all citizens that "teaching for religious commitment is the responsibility of the home and the community of faith (such as church or synagogue) rather than the public schools. Neither the church nor the state should use the public school to compel acceptance of any creed or conformity to any specific religious practice". And two leaders of the United Presbyterian Church, Dr. Eugene Carson Blake and Dr. Silas G. Kessler issued a joint statement that the decision had "underscored our firm belief that religious instruction is the sacred responsibility of the family and the churches". Rabbi Uri Miller, President of the Synagogue Council of America, representing Orthodox, Reform and Conservative Judaism, expressed a similar opinion, as did the New York Board of Rabbis, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and other Jewish groups.

Against In contrast, Monsignor John J. Voight, Secretary for Education of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, deeply regretted the Court decision because: "it will bring about the complete secularisation of public education in America, which to me represents a radical departure from our traditional and historical religious heritage"; and "it completely disregards parental rights in education and the wishes of a large segment of America's parents who want their children to participate in these practices in public school". In which connection, it is pertinent to remind the Monsignor that compulsory Bible reading in New York City schools was (in

the words of the *New York Times*) "a major Catholic grievance" in 1840 because his Church insisted that religion must be taught "by authority" and not by the public schools, which it considered were run under Protestant principles.

Parents and Education Association

Harold Siegel, speaking for the United Parents Associations of which he is Executive-Director, disagreed with Monsignor Voight. "Secular religious devotions have no place in the public schools", Mr. Siegel said, "and all Americans owe a debt of gratitude to the Supreme Court for so ruling". And Dr. Frederick C. McLaughlin, Director of

the Public Education Association concurred. Implementation of the decision, he said, "will free the schools of one more source of division and dissension".

Dissenting Senators

On June 17th, the day the Supreme Court announced its decisions, the *New York World-Telegram* quoted three dissenting senators, but they need not be taken as representative. It is hardly surprising, for instance, that Senator Frank Carlson (Republican, Kansas) should "regret" the decision, since he "heads" the International Christian Leadership Movement and regards prayer and religious services as "fundamental in the nation's history". And it is surely an admission of one's own limitations to say, as Senator Allen J. Ellender (Democrat, Louisiana) did, that he couldn't "understand" the decision. It is perfectly "understandable", whether or not one agrees with it. But then, Senator Ellender considers the members of the Supreme Court, or rather those who gave the majority ruling as "eight silly old men". (We do not know the Senator's age.) The third senator, George A. Aitken (Republican, Vermont), was reported as declaring "bitterly" that "if it is illegal to quote the Bible or read the Lord's Prayer in public schools it's illegal in Congress, too". Senator Aitken might have a point, though the Court had dispelled the idea that it was striking at governmental religious practices.

Mild Reaction in Congress

On the whole, though, Congressional reaction was mild. Much milder, according to the *New York Times* (June 18th) than after the New York State prayer case. Though (to quote a Washington report dated the previous day), "Most of those who commented did not favour today's decision, and there was some talk of a Constitutional amendment that would permit Bible reading and prayers . . . missing were such phrases as 'unmitigated blasphemy', 'outrageous edict', 'shocking', and 'most tragic', which welled up in Congress in June, 1962". A Baptist Democrat from South Carolina, Senator Strom Thurmond, did however declare that the decision was "another major triumph for the forces of secularism and atheism". And Senator Thurmond's state apparently intends to ignore the decision. "It's rather regrettable that the matter has come up", said the State Superintendent of Education,

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Bible Banned in US Schools

By COLIN McCALL

Jesse Anderson. "South Carolina will continue to feel free to do in each school or classroom the normal thing which the teacher feels should be done". The state itself has no law or directive requiring prayers, but Mr. Anderson said that many schools did in fact say prayers.

How long Mr. Anderson will be able to defy the Supreme Court's ruling remains to be seen. The majority of the states will, as the *New York Times* pointed out, be affected by it, some thirty-nine at present permitting religious exercises in schools. A New York City by-law requires that "the regular assemblies of all schools shall be opened by reading to the pupils a portion of the Bible without comment", and the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Calvin E. Gross, sent a telegram to the State Education Commissioner in Albany: "Request immediate instructions concerning cessation of Bible reading in public schools, as just voted by the US Supreme Court". (New York State does not permit Bible reading.) The Commissioner, Dr. James E. Allen, replied that he could not comment specifically until he had had a chance to study the ruling, but he added that, "The decision of the Supreme Court must of course be obeyed". And although there may be specious arguments that Bible reading and Bible study come under the heading of literature and history rather than religion, there is little doubt that, in Dr. Gross's words, "the handwriting is on the wall".

The Decision

In presenting the Supreme Court's majority decision, Justice Tom C. Clark had said:

Surely the place of the Bible as an instrument of religion cannot be gainsaid, and the state's recognition of the pervading religious character of the ceremony is evident from the rule's specific permission of the alternative use of the Catholic Douay version as well as the recent amendment permitting non-attendance at the exercises.

None of these factors is consistent with the contention that the Bible is here used either as an instrument for non-religious moral inspiration or as a reference for the teaching of secular subjects.

The conclusion follows that in both cases the laws require religious exercises and such exercises are being conducted in direct violation of the rights of the appellees and petitioners. Nor are these required exercises mitigated by the fact that individual students may absent themselves upon parental request, for that fact furnishes no defence to a claim of unconstitutionality under the establishment clause.

Further, it is no defence to urge that the religious practices here may be relatively minor encroachments on the First Amendment. The breach of neutrality that is today a trickling stream may all too soon become a raging torrent and, in the words of Madison, "it is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties".

It certainly might be said, Justice Clark continued, that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities,

But the exercises here do not fall into those categories. They are religious exercises, required by the states in violation of the command of the First Amendment that the government maintain strict neutrality, neither aiding nor opposing religion.

The First Amendment

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". The Supreme Court had, said Justice Clark, "decisively settled" that these two clauses in the First Amendment to the American Constitution were made applicable to the states by the 14th Amendment, and he cited cases back to 1940. Both clauses, he said, enforce government neutrality on religion.

So ruled Senator Ellender's "eight silly old men", who included a practising Presbyterian (Justice Clark), a Roman Catholic (Justice William J. Brennan, Jr.) and a Jew (Justice Arthur J. Goldberg). Even the ninth, Justice Potter Stewart, agreed that religious ceremonies in state

schools could violate the constitutional rights of dissenters, but he found the record in the Maryland and Pennsylvania cases inadequate, and would have sent them back for further hearings.

Madalyn Murray

And Mrs. Murray? Since she filed the case with the US Supreme Court she and her two sons have, as she said in a newsletter, become "untouchables". She lost her job in Baltimore and found it impossible to get another. Some of her "harassments" (as she called them) have already been reported (*THE FREETHINKER*, April 26th), and there have been many more since, including a sharpened wooden spear, like a javelin, thrown at the porch, electric wires disconnected, and relatives' cars tampered with. But Madalyn Murray, Bill and Garth have gained a great many friends throughout the United States and abroad. For ten months, Mrs. Murray told them in April, "you have supported us, and I mean food on the table, a roof over our heads, clothes on our backs". And, she added, "there is no way, ever, we will be able to show our gratitude and appreciation for what you have done". We are sure that Mrs. Murray's supporters feel exactly the same about her.

Another Clerical Error

AN AMUSING "howler" was printed on the front page of the *Universe* of June 14th. It stated that the primate of Hungary, Cardinal Mindszenty, was "a 'prisoner' in the American Embassy in Belgrade", and that he was unlikely to attend the conclave in Rome for the election of the new pope.

Quite apart from the fact that Belgrade is in Yugoslavia, it is incorrect to represent His Eminence as being a "prisoner", even in inverted commas. If he so desired, he could leave his "prison" tomorrow. It is only his obstinacy that keeps him in the American Embassy in Budapest (not Belgrade!) where he has been an unwelcome visitor ever since 1956.

It may appear strange that a Prince of the Church should have become a refugee in a heretic embassy. However, in 1956, the Cardinal had supported a rebel political faction which was defeated.

Rather than face the consequences of his political misjudgments, he took to his heels and fled for safety to the American Embassy. His Eminence thus emulated the behaviour of the immortal Duke of Plaza Toro in *The Gondoliers*—

But when away his regiment ran
His place was in the fore-o.

The Cardinal could have attended the conclave. He could leave Budapest tomorrow. The Hungarian Government would be very glad to see the last of "this turbulent priest"—and so would the officials of the American Embassy. But he refuses to leave his sanctuary until his own arrogant demands are satisfied.

A.P.

CATHOLIC MODESTY

Sister Catherine, the nun who last week banned a nine-year-old girl from wearing a sleeveless blouse in class because it showed bare arms, yesterday received the backing of the school managers. The Reverend Norman McCarthy, chairman of the managers at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic School, Nympsfield, Gloucestershire, said: "Sister Catherine is very reasonable. It is a good thing for a girl to have a sense of modesty, even at that age."—*Daily Herald*. (17/6/63).

Exit Saint George!

By F. A. RIDLEY

LOYAL ENGLISHMEN now face the demotion and threatened disappearance from the celestial roll-call of their national saint, St. George. For amongst the certainly long overdue reforms initiated by the reforming zeal of the late Pope John was an apparently pretty drastic revision of the Roman calendar. As a result of this, several formerly revered saints have been expunged *in toto* from the Calendar, either, it would appear, because modern critical research has effectively cast doubts on their moral worthiness, or simply because no proof can be provided that they ever actually existed! Perhaps the reverend inquisitors will eventually get down to the critical examination not only of the *bona fides* of saints, but of gods.

Those reverend and learned examiners to whom the late Holy Father entrusted the painful task, have presumably gone through St. George's record and have published their findings that, whilst England's patron saint did apparently exist, very little is known about him and that consequently while his name remains so to speak, by courtesy on the roll of the celestial hierarchy, Catholics in future are to regard him apparently as a quite minor heavenly personage to whom they may, if they so wish, pray in their spare time.

And this is the end of St. George for Merrie England, the chivalrous slayer of the dragon famed in song and story. It is enough to make Shakespeare turn over so rapidly in his tomb as finally to solve the problem of perpetual motion. Had Pope John and his dry-as-dust inquisitors never heard the stirring battle cry of Harflour, "God for Harry, England and St. George"?

Being like all true Englishmen, deeply concerned at the demotion of our national saint, I searched my miscellaneous library until I found the volume whence the required information could be obtained: *St. George of England*, by G. J. Marcus, a very readable little volume which affords an admirable summary of all that is possibly known about our national saint, or at least all that was positively known a generation ago (1929), when the book first appeared.

Mr. Marcus is a Christian (I should imagine an Anglo-Catholic) and a fine scholar who has obviously gone deeply into the genealogy of England's patron saint, and has produced a scholarly summary of the probable origins and subsequent evolution of the historic cult of St. George the Martyr. Who was St. George? Who was the dragon? And why and how did the originally Asiatic cult of this probably also Asiatic saint eventually suffer a sea-change into St. George for Merrie England? To all these successive leading questions, Mr. Marcus supplies learned, and in the main at least, convincing answers.

We can now summarise the evolution of the cult of St. George, as also its successive transmigrations West from Asia Minor where (according to the researches of our author) it started in the 4th century, to Windsor and to the Order of the Garter, of which St. George is the patron.

In the first instance, Marcus quotes and rejects Gibbon's assertion—which, however, he quotes at length—that the original St. George was a dishonest bacon contractor to the Roman army, who eventually became the Arian bishop of Alexandria and in this capacity, was eventually murdered after the Pagan Restoration effected by Julian the Apostate (361-3). Marcus maintains that "Gibbon got hold of the wrong man", adding that this can definitely

be proved to be the case since modern archaeology (long after Gibbon), has deciphered an inscription in a basilica in Ezra (Syria), dating from 346 AD and dedicated expressly to "The Glorious Victor, the holy martyr George".

If this date is correct (which however, Marcus admits is open to doubt) it of course proves conclusively that, whoever the original George may have been, it could not possibly be Gibbon's bacon-merchant-turned-bishop, who was still alive in 346. In any case as Marcus aptly comments, it appears very unlikely that, in an age when religious passions ran high, an Arian martyr would eventually become the hero of one of the most popular Catholic cults. His own theory is that George (or Nestor as the saint is sometimes called in early votive inscriptions) was a high-ranking official in the Emperor Diocletian's body-guard, who tore down the imperial proclamation affixed to the gate of Diocletian's palace at Nicomedia which announced the opening of that Emperor's persecution of the Christians in 303 AD. For this bold act, George suffered martyrdom as a Christian.

This ascription, argues our author, explains not only the origin of the cult of George the victor over both death and the imperial power of the Pagan empire, but equally that of St. George's perpetual associate, the dragon, the personification of the persecuting Pagan empire. Or more precisely, of the ringleader of the last great Pagan persecution, Galerius Caesar, whom the contemporary Christian writer, Lactantius, in his pamphlet, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, describes as a dragon.

Assuming the above explanation to be at least approximately correct, it is obvious that St. George was an Asiatic saint. In point of fact, though he is actually mentioned by the Venerable Bede as a martyr, it was not until the era of the Crusades (c. 1100-1300), that the cult of St. George became nationalised in England. If the Crusaders exported Christianity to Palestine, they also imported St. George (and the dragon) into England.

As a result, by the middle of the 14th century when the Order of the Garter was established by Edward III (1349), St. George had definitely superseded Edward the Confessor (the last pre-Conquest king) as England's patron saint. As such, he received the homage of Englishmen everywhere and had his name and fame immortalised by Shakespeare in splendid, if somewhat bombastic patriotic verse. In 1504, Mr. Marcus informs us, Henry VII and his entire court went down to Greenwich to receive a holy relic, the right leg of St. George. The arrival of the relic was then celebrated by a gargantuan banquet, in which "a stuffed wild boar" figured largely; after which "the choir sang 'O George'"—as well they might!

As late as the 18th century, Richard Johnson's best-seller, *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, kept alive the name and fame of St. George of England.

So much for our national saint. But now that he appears to be on the way out, who is likely to succeed him? One can suggest all kinds of people. Shakespeare, of course, already a national idol. Perhaps Winston Churchill (with Hitler in place of the dragon), but on the whole we think that Dr. Johnson would probably fill the bill best. A great Englishman and a good Christian. Moreover there can be no doubt about his historicity; James Boswell has seen to that. Saint Samuel of England! I confess to liking the idea.

This Believing World

A new explanation of the parting of the waters on the Red Sea to allow the "Jews" to pass when they were pursued by the Egyptians after the "Exodus" is propounded by Professor Galanopoulos, who is a leading authority on earthquakes. The pious Professor is quite sure that the incident is *historical*, and claims that the Jews were saved through a volcanic explosion 500 miles away which created tidal waves 5,000 feet high. The clouds of smoke, volcanic debris, insects and animals rained down and turned the Nile red. Apart from the fact that there were *no* Jews—the Bible calls them Israelites—the Professor's explanation is quite as good as any other by Christians doing their best to save a silly myth because it is in the Bible. It occurs nowhere else.

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Although it is true that intelligent bishops, parsons and priests prefer talking about the "creation" of the world as recorded in Holy Writ as a beautiful poem—or not talking about it at all—there are of course hundreds of millions of earnest Christians all over the world who regard it as God's special revelation to sinful man. But here comes Dr. Craig, who is Curator of Fossils, Reptiles, and Birds at the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, declaring that some footprints discovered near Swanage (London *Evening News*, June 14th) have remained buried there for 140 million years

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These footprints belong to a flesh-eating reptile, Megalosaurus, weighing seven tons or more, and reaching a height of 20 feet, the gentle habits of which (implanted naturally by a benevolent Deity) were attacking its prey "with merciless fury". Other footprints nearby "were almost certainly made by Iguanodon (three-toed bipeds) at a much later date". Lovers of design arguments should explain the "creation" of these and similar animals, and the ages in which they lived.

★

The Bishop of Woolwich is not the only bishop who is impatient with so much of modern theology. There is the Bishop of Guildford for instance, who recently attacked (*Sunday Express*, June 9th) "tedious discussions at meetings of the Church Assembly and convocations". He pointed out that at a recent Church Assembly "one debate turgidly droned on for some forty minutes". And in addition, he insisted that "the Church needed better clergy". Better clergy! Does the good Bishop mean that there *could* be better clergy? What about himself? Just as one example, could he or any bishop or parson in the country answer Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*? It would need better clergy to produce an answer to this "infidel" work written 170 years ago.

★

Lord Home, mixing a little anti-theology with politics, said recently at Edinburgh when addressing the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland that "its teachings are overlaid by doctrine and dogma" and added—heavens above!—"against which the intelligence revolts". He wanted the people to be taught "the simple teachings of Christ". But what exactly are the *simple* teachings of Christ? Those enshrined in the unintelligible Gospel of John? Or the devastating simplicity of Luke 14, 26? Does Lord Home know what he is talking about?

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"Blessing of animals" services must be trying at the best of times. When, in addition to barks, mews and squeaks, the parson has to contend with human interruptions, his plight is unenviable. This happened at St.

Paul's Church, Covent Garden, London, on June 23rd, when Mr. Edmund Macmichael, Director of the Performing Animals Defence League protested that it was "cruel and blasphemous" to allow a golden retriever to bark 12 times in answer to the question, "How many Apostles had Our Lord Jesus?" (*Daily Herald*, 24/6/63). Fortunately, the Rector, Prebendary Clarence May, and a 6 ft. 2 in. sidesman were able to escort Mr. Macmichael from the church and the service continued while Mr. May's mynah bird "wolf-whistled and talked".

Rationalist Challenge to Soothsayers in Ceylon

SINCE THE AMERICAN John Scarne's famous challenge to extra-sensory perceptionists is not at all known to people in Ceylon, writes Abraham T. Kovoor, President of the Ceylon Rationalist Association, "I have thrown out a similar challenge here". And though the newspapers are generally reluctant to publish articles by members of his Association, Mr. Kovoor informs us that the challenge has received considerable publicity. It appeared, for instance, in the *Times of Ceylon* on June 15th and the *Ceylon Daily Mirror* two days later. It reads as follows:

From an investigational survey made in three isolated areas we have arrived at the alarming discovery that 97.5% of the people of this country are believers in occultism and psychic phenomena. Surprisingly, in the 92% gullibles found in an urban centre there were one minister of state, two parliamentarians, one civil servant, two university dons (both PhDs), three advocates, one of them a Queen's Counsel, two medical specialists, one super-grade school principal and one managing director of a flourishing business concern.

About 60% of them have consulted soothsayers at one time or other, and some of them were vehement in defending the mysterious powers of the occult.

As superstitions thrive best on the ignorance and credulity of people, the only and easy way to wean out the gullible mass from the exploitation of such diviners is to challenge them to come forward and prove their miraculous claims in public.

I, therefore, challenge all fortune tellers, card readers, astrologers, palmists, necromancers, spiritualists, light readers, premonitory dream interpreters, demonologists, charmers, hypnotists, cowrie casters, telepathists, clairvoyants, extra-sensory perceptionists, precognitionists, psychic mediums, "kattadiyas", tumbler talkers, table-talkers, planchettists, numerologists, oracles and all other types of soothsayers to face a simple test in public.

I am prepared to wager an amount above Rs. 1,000 and below Rs. 25,000 against an equal amount that no person, whatever his mystical powers may be, can call correctly the serial number of a ten-rupee currency note I will place and seal in an envelope. If the person accepting my challenge claims to be a telepathist, I will allow one of the judges to set the number on the currency note in question in order to give him an opportunity to transmit his thoughts to the so-called telepathist in another room.

Any person who is prepared to accept my challenge can do so by depositing his part of the wager (any amount between Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 25,000) in the Mercantile Bank Ltd. or the Bank of Ceylon Ltd. An equal amount to cover the wager will be placed by me within twenty-four hours.

The General Manager of the Mercantile Bank Ltd., the General Manager of the Bank of Ceylon Ltd., and the Chief Editors of the English, Sinhala and Tamil newspapers of Ceylon are acceptable to me to act as judges if they agree.

So, all you soothsayers of diverse kinds, come forward and claim this big award at one shot instead of extracting fives and tens from a few gullible persons. There is no time limit attached to this wager. It will remain open till my death as a challenge to any one in any part of the world. It is also open to those exponents of the so-called parapsychology like Dr. Joseph Banks Rhine, his wife Dr. Louisa E. Rhine and their collaborators of Duke University, North Carolina.

I have a request to the public. In future, if and when you feel like consulting a soothsayer, please verify whether he or she is one who has proved his or her ability by winning this wager; if not persuade him or her to take up this challenge. In the event of any reluctance or refusal, do not part with your money.

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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. BAKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. A. MILLAR.

(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BAKER 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

Hornchurch Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, corner of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, July 9th, 8 p.m.: PANEL OF CHRISTIANS, "What Christians Believe".

Ilford Humanist Group (Lambourne Room, Town Hall), Friday, July 5th, 8 p.m.: D. H. TRIBE, "The Case Against Religious Indoctrination in Schools".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, July 7th, 11 a.m.: DR. JOHN LEWIS, "The New Theology: Christianity Without Religion".

Notes and News

HERBLOCK, the *Washington Post* cartoonist, was at his excellent best in dealing with the US Supreme Court decision on Bible reading and prayers in schools (see Views and Opinions). In a cartoon reproduced in the *Daily Telegraph* (25/6/63), he portrayed an irate father waving the morning paper ("Supreme Court Ruling") in one hand and pounding the breakfast table with the other, to the alarm of his wife and children, and shouting, "What do they expect us to do—listen to the kids pray at home?"

"ONE OF the greatest mistakes still made today, is to tie morals with supernatural religion," said Margaret Knight, when interviewed with three other people by the *Sunday Times* (23/6/63). "When people give up, say, Christianity—and there is a definite decline in such religious belief—some people are apt to give up all else as well. The remedy to this is not to step up religious propaganda, but to base morals on a firmer, more realistic foundation. Morals, anyway, are caught not taught".

THERE IS still, according to another item in the *Sunday Times* (23/6/63), "a measure of truth" in the description of the Church of England as "the Tory party at prayer". The paper cited Professor A. H. Birch's study of Glossop in Derbyshire, *Small-Town Politics*, which found that "religious affiliation is the key to the relative Conservatism of the industrial workers". Workers who were active Anglicans voted Conservative by a margin of nearly two to one, while those who had no religion were two to one in favour of Labour. In *Marginal Seat*, a study of Bristol

North-East in 1955, R. S. Milne and H. C. Mackenzie reported that 62.4 per cent of Conservative voters identified themselves as Anglicans compared with 42.2 per cent of Labour supporters.

IN A LETTER in the *South London Press* (21/6/63), the "publicity-minded" Bishop of Southwark is challenged over his comment on the Profumo affair—"It's time for a clean up". This could very well apply to the Bishop's own profession, asserted William Bates of London, S.E.17, who asked Dr. Stockwood: "Can he explain why a certain London prison with a population of 700 prisoners has among them some 100 clergymen of all creeds, denominations and ranks?" They are in there, Mr. Bates said, "mainly for sexual offences". We shall be interested to see if the Bishop takes up Mr. Bates's challenge.

THE DECISION of David Gosling, 23-year-old Manchester University physicist, to give up his career in nuclear research in order to study for the Church of England ministry, would seem partly attributable to overspecialisation. It would be hard otherwise to explain Mr. Gosling's remark that the time had passed when scientific discoveries resulted mainly in the betterment of mankind and that the "chances now are that they will be used for a bad purpose" (*The Guardian*, 26/6/63). Mr. Gosling is reported to have turned down a well-paid scientific post in the United States, which might well have had military significance, but to generalise from this is foolish. Foolish even about physics, let alone other sciences. Mr. Gosling, in fact, already speaks like a theologian.

"WE REALLY DON'T WANT to say anything about this. After all, the girl is no longer in our care." This was the statement of a sister at the Convent of the Good Shepherd, at Blackley, Manchester, in connection with the case of a 16-year-old girl, Pamela Carter who was before the Royal Court in Jersey as in need of care and protection. But if Pamela's story is true, very much more should be said—and done—about it. When she was at the Convent, aged 15, she was allegedly kept in solitary confinement for nine weeks because she refused to work the washing machines in the school laundry (*The People*, 23/6/63). During that time she saw only the girl who brought her food, said Pamela's solicitor, Mr. W. R. Stone, and he added: This is worse than the treatment meted out to people in prison."

ON PAGE 212 we print a challenge by the President of the Ceylon Rationalist Association to the spiritualists and extra-sensory perceptionists of his country, among whom, he says, are parliamentarians, civil servants and university dons. It is pleasing to record simultaneously a remarkable scientific experiment by a Ceylonese biochemist, Dr. Cyril Ponnampereuma, working at the University of California. With a mixture of methane, ammonia and water, Dr. Ponnampereuma simulated the conditions on earth before the advent of life. He then shot a beam of high energy electrons (cosmic rays) through the mixture for 45 minutes. A careful chemical analysis then revealed the formation of adenine, one of the five bases of the nucleic acids that control reproduction and heredity in living organisms.

WE HOPE there will be a good attendance this (Friday) evening in the Ilford Town Hall, when the new President of the National Secular Society, Mr. David Tribe, will put "The Case Against Religious Indoctrination in Schools". The meeting is being organised by the Ilford Humanist Group.

To Put on Immortality

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

IN THE DAYS when cremation was only just beginning to displace the Worms as the Last Assembly, an enterprising undertaker, who had at least a mind of his own, used to advertise in the local paper, "Why live and be miserable when you can be comfortably buried for thirty bob?" Although at first that may seem merely a bit of pawky commercialism, it can nevertheless be taken to imply a caustic comment on, and a bluff answer to, the famous pronouncement: "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery . . ." and so on with the same Prayer Bookish portent. However true all that may be, the very terseness of the advertisement is a sly dig at churchy verbosity. Moreover it very pointedly insinuates that finality which religion has always done its best to contravene with an array of fine words.

The Burial Service is a signal example. As we read or listen to its imposing phraseology, it soon becomes clear what Wittgenstein meant when he warned against the bewitchment of the understanding by means of language. And he was not referring to the language of magic, he was referring to the magic of language, a much more insidious danger. Only somebody completely insensitive or virtually illiterate could remain entirely unmoved by those august sentences. And it is easy to see how minds, naturally more credulous than critical, could readily be seduced into accepting as truths the most incredible sentiments thus majestically expressed. Translate those sentiments into the speech of the street and as likely as not their purport will at once appear as little better than a commonplace facetiousness. Perhaps the most impressive of them are those attributed to St. Paul. Apart from the ideas, then so novel, now so stale, which they expound, it would (in passing) be extremely interesting to learn how, nearly two thousand years ago, that fanatical little tent-maker of Tarsus came to have such a mastery of Jacobean English prose. We know of course that Paul was greatly given to visions and it may be . . . but perhaps it will be as well not to be too inquisitive.

Visions or no visions and notwithstanding all the piously unscientific assurances all the burial services, with or without Paul, have ever given, it still remains a highly debatable matter whether or not, when man shuffles off this mortal coil, he forthwith puts on immortality—much as he might put on a clean shirt after shuffling out of a soiled one. But there can hardly be much debating about the immortality of the debate itself. For ever since primitive man began his primitive speculations, man's thinking has been almost as much exercised by what may happen to him after he is dead as it is concerned with the everlasting worries that plague the life out of him as long as there is any life left to plague. And no doubt such vain speculating will go on as long as there are curious and anxious minds to speculate.

But though from its interminableness, this debate has put on an immortality of its own, it cannot be said to have put on a corresponding incorruption. No subject ever discussed has remained more crudely corrupt. No subject is so steeped in false sentiment, arrant humbug, gross superstition, and downright fraud. Especially is it bedevilled by that bane of all honest enquiry, wishful thinking, which means of course a great deal of wishing and precious little thinking. A little more thinking might chasten the wishing. For whatever recondite meanings may be given to Eternal Life, it is

commonly and indeed inevitably conceived as a never-ending duration of the "maddening maze of things" in which our temporal life consists. To think of that as going on for ever and ever is not only fantastic to the last degree, it ought to be enough to cure anybody of immortal longings except perhaps children and morons.

Both wishing and thinking have produced an extraordinary diversity of proofs of personal survival, as well as a bewildering variety of explanations of what death really signifies. Yet that should and could be a gratifying state of affairs but for the trifling default that none of the proofs has ever proved anything and none of the explanations has ever explained anything. For all their pretensions they leave us as sadly ignorant as they found us. Death and its aftermath remain as inviolable as they are inevitable. Death's door is a door that is slammed in every face. Nobody has ever been able to reopen it. Nobody has ever been able to make more than a patently bad guess at what, if anything, is resolved on the other side.

We probably know as much as we want to know of death as it appears from this side. It presents no engaging picture. To jibe, "O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory", is the neurotic bravado of delusion. Anyone who has suffered a severe bereavement, anyone who has helplessly watched the agonised dying of a loved one, knows beyond contradiction the bitter reality of a sting and a victory that can hardly be said to encourage much hope of some happier state to come. We know that death is the cessation and dissolution of our organic life and "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting" becomes therefore merely a mechanical profession of that blind credulity which so desperately poses as faith.

Heaven or Hell, Paradise or Purgatory, the Life elysium or Limbo and even the old-fashioned Bliss or Blisters, together with all their heathen counterparts, cannot possibly be anything more than the inventions of human, and all too often inhuman, imagination. They are evolved from a whirlpool of human emotions uncontrolled by sense and in conflict with reason. But, still unshaken, denying and defying them, against all the asseverations of the mystery-mongering historians, the mystagogic theologians and the mystifying necromancers, stands the familiar homely dictum: nobody has ever come back to tell us. St. Luke in his Wonderland can no more establish the contrary than Alice could in hers. No sufficient reason has ever been found to suppose that the Resurrection on which the Christian claim to survival depends, is any less fabulous than the resurrection of the Phoenix.

To minds untrammelled by creed and dogma, Sir Arthur Keith's analogy of the phenomenon of death is perhaps as apt as any. With death, he says, our personal life is extinguished in much the same way as a candle flame is blown out. The elements that combined to cause such specific manifestations as flame and personality, may themselves be indestructible, but immediately the combination is disrupted both flame and personality as such are annihilated. They simply disappear. They cannot persist as entities in themselves any more than the grin of the Cheshire Cat can persist without the cat. And although there have been many ingenious attempts, both philosophical and theological, to say nothing of the occult, to circumvent this apparently unwelcome conclusion, none has so far succeeded. If it had, there could be no further occasion for contending about it.

As it is, any endeavour to negate the still surprisingly widespread belief in various preposterous hereafters, seems to be looked upon, often by both unbelievers and believers as being as pointless and dreary as a dry sermon on a wet Sunday. Devout believers are impervious. They turn deaf ears. Too many unbelievers are bored. They turn unresponsive ears. One world at a time they protest. We have enough to cope with in this life without bothering about some hypothetical life to come. Exactly. But it is well to remember that no outrageous shibboleth religion and its votaries have ever cooked up to serve their own advantage, stands more menacingly in the way of bettering this life than the fear of that looming after-life with its dread Day of Judgment waiting to pronounce unutterable doom on all unrepentant offenders. Belief in so vindictive a threat must be completely destroyed. Until it is, we cannot give our undivided and successful attention to the humane and humanist abolition of those numerous barbarities which all religions foster. Christianity in particular. From birth control to euthenasia, it would be easy to compile a formidable list of reforms frustrated by Christian and especially Catholic opposition. Secularly instituted, they could make life ten times more scientifically sane, mundanely enduring and socially acceptable.

Nobody of course can say with absoluteness that when we are dead we are done for. But if, by the remotest of chances, there should be any extension of individual consciousness beyond this life, its form is also beyond all human conception. The nearest we can get is to recognise the hoary advice to wait and see. There is no doubt whatever that we shall have to wait. There is every doubt that we shall ever see.

Nuclear Novels

The Man Who Would Be God—by Haakon Chevalier (Seven Seas Publishers, 5s.). *The Descent*—by Gina Berriault (Seven Seas Publishers, 2s. 6d.).

THERE IS A very loose "nuclear" connection between these two books, but whereas Haakon Chevalier's is a good story and completely readable as such, Gina Berriault's reminds me of *A Cool Million*, with its philosophy that things can only go from bad to worse. Here we have an idea set in the future, in fact next year, 1964, and displaying the author's full cynicism towards politicians. One never feels really sympathetic towards Arnold T. Elkins, the Secretary for Humanity, and it is difficult for the reader to fully identify himself with this "hero's" problems. The strongest personalities are found in the fringe characters with whom Elkins comes in contact during his journey across the United States. I feel more could have been made of the build-up as this so-called "Secretary of Humanity" gradually becomes an embarrassment to the existing administration.

In *The Man Who Would Be God* we have a very strong portrait of the central character, Mark Ampter, and of the way in which he gradually identifies himself with the man he has been set to spy on. Whilst this is the better of the two books, I do not agree with the sleeve notes that it is outstanding. To me it is typical of many post-war American novels. Both books are, however, controversial in their own way, and I would recommend you to read them for yourself.

TONY SHAPPS.

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A Courageous Catholic

By MARGARET McILROY

Life International Magazine recently published a most interesting interview with Dr. John Rock of Boston, a pious Catholic, actually a daily communicant, and a specialist on problems of birth-control and sub-fertility. He is the author of a new book entitled *The Time Has Come*, which advocates (1) that the United States Government finance a vast programme of research into family planning, and (2) that the Roman Catholic Church modernise its attitude on the subject.

Dr. Rock does not expect too much of his Church. He is not asking that it lift its prohibition of "artificial" means of birth-control. He claims, however, that the "Pill", which operates by preventing the release of the ova, is not artificial. He thinks the Church should not try to enforce its prohibition of contraception on non-Catholics (a particularly tricky point, in view of the Catholic theory of "Natural Law"); and he thinks the Church should inform Catholics more widely of its acceptance of the principle of family limitation by the rhythm method, as there are still many priests who think it their parishioners' religious duty to have as many children as possible. Dr. Rock's main hope is for a perfect method of dating ovulation, so that the approved rhythm method can be used with safety.

It will be interesting indeed to see what success this courageous Catholic has in his attempt to change some of the major attitudes, if not the actual doctrines, of his Church. It is certain that he will not be without support inside the Church. It is sometimes suggested, both by Catholics and non-Catholics, that the motive for the prohibition of contraception is a wish to increase the proportion of Catholics in the population. In the more advanced countries, however, its policy is certainly a grave handicap to the Church. In Britain, where family limitation is widely practised, the Catholic birthrate, though higher than the average, is closer to the normal British average than to the enormous birthrate of backward countries—except among recent immigrants, still profoundly influenced by the customs of their countries of origin. One cannot know how many British and American Catholics actually use contraceptives, and how many regulate their families by abstinence and the safe period, but certainly many Catholics do use contraceptives, and the policy of the Church on this must lead to the lapsing of considerable numbers, besides making the Church look at once oppressive and ridiculous to non-Catholics.

There is some ludicrous Catholic literature on the subject, such as the pamphlet by an American Jesuit, published in 1930, which states that the Church has cleverly provided against any danger of over-population by asking the large families it encourages "for a generous supply of priests, monks and nuns who would vow themselves to continuous chastity". The introduction to a Catholic Truth Society publication, revised 1955, refers to birth control as "this nauseous subject", and the author goes on to parade his Oedipus complex by remarking, "We might well retort upon the advocates of the so-called modern devices: Would you like to think that your own parents lived as you would have us do?" This is revealing as to the mental balance of some of the priests put forward as advisers to married people. These examples are perhaps amusing, but it is horrifying to read in *Instructio Pro Confessariis* (American edition, revised 1960) that confessors must refuse absolution to women who have practised contraception "panic-stricken to the

point of hysteria by fear for their lives from the dangers entailed by pregnancy", until "they have promised with evident sincerity what is required of them".

Intelligent Catholics must realise that their Church has been left behind by the modern world, and they would probably be delighted could a means be found to discard its teaching. Unfortunately the Church's claim to divine inspiration and infallibility make it impossible for it officially to change its mind. It is hard to see how it can get around the categorical, and recent, statements by Pius XI and XII condemning contraception in the strongest terms as obviously contrary to the law of God. However, the Church has changed much more than it admits. St. Augustine condemned the rhythm method, and St. Thomas Aquinas thought marital relations sinful, though venially, except when motivated by a desire for children. The medieval Church also issued a long list of holy days on which intercourse was not permitted, and forbade it before communion. The present official viewpoint, which considers sexual pleasure a divinely appointed reward for breeding, and intercourse a proper expression of married love, allowable even before communion, and which accepts the rhythm method, at least when there is "good cause" for wanting to keep the family small, is actually an immense step forward.

For an organisation which claims to be "the same yesterday, to-day and forever", the Roman Church certainly has marvellous powers of adaptation, and while Dr. Rock is not likely to win quick or easy successes his campaign may be the beginning of a decisive movement. We live in a period of rapid change in every sphere of life. The past of the Church may be represented by the Irishwoman who recently allowed her fourteen year old daughter to marry a boy she had known for three weeks, and who told a journalist of her own happy married life—she had borne thirteen children and reared eight. This attitude is passing rapidly, even among pious Catholics, and the election of another liberal Pope is a sign that the future, if only the distant future, belongs to Dr. Rock.

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CORRESPONDENCE

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

THE "DAILY MAIL" AND THE US SUPREME COURT
 The *Daily Mail* recently (June 20th) recorded in its editorial the decision of the United States Supreme Court to ban religious services in state schools.

After an admission that the decision was "based on logic", the *Mail* records that it "will seem to many people to be carrying civil rights too far".

Let us hope that the *Mail* is wrong, and that the strange, and indeed dangerous, idea that civil rights can somehow or other be carried too far is confined to its editor.

R. D. LLOYD THOMAS.

[The US Supreme Court decision is the subject of our Views and Opinions this week.—ED.]

TRAGEDY

I cannot agree with Mr. R. Smith in his article "Tragedy in Relation to the Bible and Marxism" that "the Soviet censors look on tragedy not only as bad art, but also as a sort of treason against the state". Doesn't Mr. Smith know that all the famous plays of the tragic-poets, Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare, are shown on every stage in the USSR? Haven't the classic Russian authors Dostoevsky, Pushkin, and many others, written tragic novels and are they not read by millions in Russia? Neither is Judaism pretending that tragedy does not exist. The Jews have every reason to be pessimistic, and "by God", cannot even be blamed for seeing tragedy ahead of them all the time. When in Vienna, I happened to meet some Israelis who told me they are emigrating for soon, in their opinion, Nasser is going to destroy their country, and the rest of the world will not give a damn. I agree with the writer of the article that the Bible is not tragic—it's just comic!

E. FOGES.

Lenin spoke of "Marx-mutilating Communists", in Mr. R. Smith we seem to have the sublime example of a Marx-mutilating philosopher! Marxism is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. The very simplicity of the Marxian basis of Historical Materialism seems to preclude its ever being understood by a philosopher. Maybe Marx had a prophetic insight when he entitled a book *The Poverty of Philosophy*. The statement that "the Tool is the Dynamic of Social Progress" is the sole necessary axiom of Dialectical Materialism. It is as true today as it was in the 19th century, it is historically confirmed. Whether with the advent of nuclear fission it will remain correct, I doubt whether Marx himself could prophecy.

As to the remark quoted by Mr. Smith from that beloved of all pessimistic philosophers, Schopenhauer, it contains about as much nonsense as could be packed into so few lines. Can Mr. Smith tell us what is "The inner nature of the World"? Unless it is describing the fluid interior of the earth, it seems a meaningless phrase, and can he tell us what is a "philosophical knowledge of the world"? Comte said that, "no conception can be understood except through its history". Comte was correct.

EVA EBURY

OBITUARY

E. W. Henstridge, one of the most respected members of Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society, died in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital on June 22nd, four days before his 75th birthday. Mr Henstridge had attended a branch meeting the previous Sunday, and his death is a sad blow to all who knew him. At his request the cremation took place with no ceremony.

W.M.