

# The Freethinker

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Dr. RONALD FLETCHER, author of *The Family and Marriage* ("Britain in the Sixties" series, Penguin Special, 3s. 6d.), will be known to readers of THE FREETHINKER for his "Humanist's Decalogue" (Views and Opinions, May 17th and May 24th). In his book, *The Family and Marriage*, Dr. Fletcher displays the sensible and sympathetic attitude to moral and social problems readers of the "Decalogue" will expect from him. In addition he gives a great deal of factual information about family life as it is lived in Britain today and has been in the past, and he draws from the facts some most interesting and hopeful conclusions which may surprise many people.

Dr. Fletcher explodes the arguments of those moralists—frequently churchmen—who make out that family life and morals are in decay. He gives horrifying historical facts to show the utter impossibility of any satisfactory family life for working people in the past, with long hours of labour for men, women and children combined with filth and overcrowding, poverty and insecurity to degrade family relationships. These evils were not simply the product of industrialisation, but were already present in domestic industry before the factory age. Hardly more satisfactory was the Victorian middle-class family. The wife was excluded from economic life, and the plentiful domestic servants left her with no function but to breed children and be a social ornament, so that the family was a complete autocracy.

**Revolutionary Change**  
Dr. Fletcher argues that, far from being in a state of decay, the family is more highly regarded and has more responsibilities than ever before. The general attitude of British people to the family is serious and responsible: divorce is thought of as a last resort; people enter into marriage seriously, looking for qualities of solid worth in their marriage partners, and take every care of their children. At every point the moral superiority of present-day customs and attitudes over those of the past is enormous. Most men today see their wives as partners with a right to share in making decisions for the family, and where the wife goes out to work, or has young children to care for, the husband expects to help in the home. The child's status has improved as much as the wife's, and the child's well-being is usually the first consideration with both parents.

An equally revolutionary change has taken place in the attitude of the State to the family. The ghastly work-house system of the last century ruthlessly broke up families, and pauper children were used as cheap raw material for the new factories. In our time modern psychology has conclusively shown the importance of the family for mental health, particularly among children, and society is increasingly accepting the psychologists' view. Today, keeping families together is accepted as a main concern of social agencies—how well they act on it is another matter. Many examples spring to mind; even

orphanages, except the most reactionary, try to imitate family life as far as possible, and the more enlightened hospitals permit mothers of young child patients to live in with them. Obviously this has not gone far enough, but at least what ought to be done is generally recognised. The Churches have always claimed that religion was the basis of morality, and that it was Christian teaching that made the child into a moral individual. In the past this claim has been generally accepted, but more and more people now realise that the child learns morality from its experience of human relationships inside the family, and in the absence of a satisfactory home-life, moral precepts are meaning-

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### *A Humanist Approach to Family Life*

By MARGARET McILROY

less to the child.

#### Home Centred

Christian moralists, particularly Catholics, often base their lamentations of moral disintegration on the number of divorces. Dr. Fletcher deals most firmly with this point. Large increases in the divorce rate are associated with the two world wars, and other increases with legal changes making divorce easier and cheaper. The present trend of divorce is downwards, and there is no sign that many people enter into marriage lightly—merely because there is more opportunity of escaping from a marriage that may prove disastrous. Anthropology shows that "the family is not rooted in marriage, but marriage is an institution rooted in the family", and Dr. Fletcher has no difficulty in exposing the unreality of Catholic theories of marriage.

Dr. Fletcher considers that the more alarming tales of teenage promiscuity are exaggerated, though there is certainly an important change in the behaviour of middle-class girls, who were formerly carefully chaperoned.

He sees our society as "home-centred". The rising standard of living has brought a new comfort into the majority of homes, and the public house is no longer the working man's only refuge from squalor. The maintenance of the home provides him with opportunities for craftsmanship which the factory denies.

#### Duties of Marriage

Shorter working hours have benefited the family enormously, giving its members time to enjoy recreation together, and enabling fathers to share in the upbringing of their children.

All this does not mean that Dr. Fletcher thinks the modern family has no problems. He sees danger particularly in an unhealthy intensifying of relationships within small families. The personal love on which modern marriage is based may become possessive and stifling, and the concentration of the hopes of two parents on a single child may cause anxiety in the child. (Probably most people realise this, and parents who opt for a single child are very much in a minority.) Dr. Fletcher considers it may be time for less emphasis on the satisfactions and more on the duties of marriage. He also emphasises that great as are the improvements in material standards, many

in the "welfare state" still lack essentials. The housing situation in particular causes dreadful damage to the life of many families.

### War and the Family

One point which Dr. Fletcher accentuates deserves special mention. "It has always seemed to me", he writes, "that the wars of the present century can explain *much*—both at the widest social level, and at the most intimate level of individual personality... Many people seem to forget the major disasters of their recent history, and go in for a kind of clinical dissection and moral denigration of individual souls". He mentions war as a cause of divorce and a cause of the geographical scattering of the wider family, since the war took young people away from home and led to many settling down at a distance from parents and brothers and sisters.

In one respect, certainly, the importance of the family has declined. Family background is not in the same way the determinant of status. Although there are many forces at work to shape the labourer's child into a labourer, our educational system—however inefficient—aims at permitting a child to become what his own talents and desires indicate.

### Exciting

*The Family and Marriage* is a very difficult book to write about, as there is such a wealth of facts and ideas in it that a reviewer cannot avoid leaving out many important points. I hope that this exciting book, which is, incidentally, written in a very clear and readable style, will be widely read.

[*The Family and Marriage* by Dr. Ronald Fletcher is obtainable from THE FREETHINKER Bookshop price 3s. 6d. plus postage.]

## Simone Weil

By "AKIBA"

A VERITABLE CULT has grown around the person and writings of Simone Weil, the French Catholic mystic who died in 1943 at the early age of 34. It is my intention to take a cold, hard look at some of her principal writings with the object of illustrating the historical origin of this cult. But first, a few brief words about her life.

Simone Weil was the daughter of a doctor, and was born in Paris in 1909. She took a keen interest in philosophical matters, and after studying at the Lycée Durny, and the Ecole Normale she passed her Agrégation in philosophy in 1931. Shortly after her appointment as Professor in the Lycée at Puy, she "became aware of the hardships suffered by the working classes". Before long, she had plunged herself in militant trade union activity, giving up her professorship to become a worker in the Renault factory. Some of her earliest writings are to be found in the *Revolution Prolétarienne* of that period. From there she was moved to defend her "ideal of freedom" by joining up with one of the extreme left fractions in the Spanish Civil War. It was during this period that she became prominent on the revolutionary left of French politics, provoking even the great Leon Trotsky to make some scathing remarks about her theoretical "pretensions". And it was Trotsky who said that she had, of course, a right to understand nothing, yet it was unnecessary to abuse this right.

She returned from Spain in October 1936, after experiencing the sufferings of the Republican army for several weeks at the front, and took up a teaching appointment, but her health broke down and she stopped working until the outbreak of World War II. On June 13th, 1940, she left Paris on account of her Jewish origin and settled at Marseilles. From there she was introduced to Father Perrin, and later to Gustave Thibon, who were both to play an important part in her "spiritual" development. In May, 1942, she left France to join up with the Free French, and she died in a sanatorium at Ashford in Kent on August 29th, 1943.

Simone Weil's "spiritual evolution" is contained in the collection of letters, essays and manuscripts which Father Perrin and Gustave Thibon were entrusted with during her period of friendship with these Catholic personages. Her four most important works are *Gravity and Grace*, *The Need for Roots*, *Waiting on God*, and *Supernatural Understanding*. She was profoundly influenced by Greek philosophy and literature, and her evolution towards

Catholicism has a distinctly original and intellectual trend. This intellectualism, together with her undoubted honesty, brought her to a concept of Catholicism which was far removed from the Catholicism of the Roman Church.

Following the well-worn path trodden by Christian—and particularly Catholic—mystics, Simone Weil was absorbed by the Crucifixion. "Every time that I think of Christ's Passion I commit the sin of envy", she wrote in *Waiting for God*. And: "I was far too little to wish for martyrdom. The Cross is immeasurably greater than martyrdom". One of her admiring biographers, Marie-Magdeleine Davy, remarks (in *The Mysticism of Simone Weil*) that:

The Cross of Christ seemed to her the only path to understanding. It would be possible to quote many further passages which express her search for renunciation and suffering. Their number is astonishing, even disturbing. Does this search for suffering betray a more or less discreetly veiled element of sadism, even of masochism?

This rhetorical question brings the unsatisfactory reply:

This is not really so. This openness to suffering is due to a great fund of compassion for others, and from an extreme sensitivity to their distress. She herself had had experience of misery and her understanding was born of knowledge.

A psycho-analytical study of Simone Weil's writings would no doubt yield interesting results, but this is outside my terms of reference. It need only be said that she was drawn to Catholicism and Catholic mysticism by her longing to participate in Christ's Passion and to become with Him "the Redeemer of the World". Curiously—or perhaps not so curiously—she found the Resurrection unconvincing; it was the Crucifixion that fascinated her.

But the worldly aspect of the Church repelled her. Indeed Rome and Israel were equally repugnant. The former was a "gross, atheistic, materialist animal adoring only itself", while the latter was a "gross religious animal". And, she said, "A gross animal is always repulsive".

The Roman Catholic Church was the—unnatural—symbiosis of the Roman and Christian principles, and she was forthright in her denunciation of it. We find, for instance, this interesting passage in *Waiting for God*:

After the fall of the Roman Empire, which was totalitarian, the Church was the first to set up an attempt at totalitarianism in Europe, after the Wars of the Albigenses. This tree has borne many fruits. The parties which have set up totalitarian regimes today have done so by means of a judicious adaptation of this technique. It is an aspect of history which I have carefully studied.

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# What is God?

By G. L. SIMONS

THERE IS MUCH TALK of God in both religious and non-religious circles. Some people affirm God's existence; some deny it. But common to all these people is an assumption that the word "God" has meaning, and that the entity which it denotes can be intelligibly discussed. However, I think that the situation is less simple than it appears at first sight, and that it is at least possible that "God", when used in most contexts, is a meaningless symbol. If this is so, it means that the religious case is even weaker than it appears to be, for, instead of being able to consider the certainty or probability of God's existence, the word "God" cannot be significantly used in any sentence.

If "God" is to have meaning it must be used to denote an entity to which attributes can be legitimately assigned. Religious people do this by using the "proofs" for God's existence. Each "proof" is capable of assigning a single attribute to the deity. For example, the First Cause argument gives God the attribute of being a creator; the argument from Design of being an Architect; the Ontological argument of being absolutely necessary. Thus, the standard proofs are used to arrive at what is supposed to be the character of the deity. But religious people seem to be unaware of, or to ignore, two immense difficulties.

Firstly, if we prove the existence of a creator and an architect how do we know that they are the same entity? It is possible that one entity created the universe, and another fashioned it. The arguments for God's existence are intended (despite Kant) to be independent. They are supposed to be various ways of establishing the existence of a deity. But if valid (I think they are all demonstrably false) all they prove is the existence of an entity fulfilling the requirements of the particular argument being used. To show that all the arguments lead to the same entity needs a further argument; this may exist but I have never come across it.

Secondly, even if all the proofs are assumed to be valid we do not arrive at the deity that religious people require. All sorts of attributes, e.g. omnipotence, omniscience, perfection, indivisibility, immutability, are assigned to the deity for the most arbitrary reasons. Some of these qualities are supposed to have been divinely revealed to men, but to me divine revelation seems to be one of the weakest bricks in the tottering theological edifice. Thus religious folk seem very eager to go far beyond what reason allows. It is not difficult to see why.

For it is essential for religious people that God be viewed as, in some sense, a person. Only as a person can God fulfil the task required of him. Only if God has emotions, knowledge, intelligence, etc., can he satisfy the people who wish to believe in him. If "God" becomes synonymous with "the laws of nature", as in Spinoza, or with the deepest aspects of human personality, as in Dr. John Robinson, he can no longer do for people what they wish of him. He can no longer comfort in times of adversity, justify an afterlife, judge one's enemies, reward virtue or, generally speaking, give meaning to human existence. No wonder Spinoza was called a heretic, and Dr. Ramsey didn't much like *Honest to God*.

That God is viewed as a person is quite clear from reading most religious literature. In reading of the Divine Plan and Divine Omnipotence the intelligence and knowledge of the deity is clearly suggested. And God is also assigned emotions. Thus, in an introductory booklet

to Catholicism, in answer to the question "Why did God make me?", we receive the illuminating answer "Because He liked the idea of me". Similarly in the Catholic catechisms, "sin" is defined as "something that displeases God". Clearly, God is visualised in the image of man. Where he is not, he is of significance only to esoteric cults, and not the broad mass of mankind.

But with the spread of science, the theologian soon realises that a merely personal God is something of a liability. If God is merely a person then science will remorselessly investigate him; therefore it is necessary to make God transcendental, metaphysical, etc., so that he cannot be got at by the enquiring rationalist. But the theologian does not realise the price he has to pay for such security.

Sir Leslie Stephen said, in *An Agnostic's Apology*, "The word God is used by the metaphysician and the savage. It may mean anything, from "Pure Being" down to the most degraded fetish". The idea of the fetish came first. Only when science got going did God become "Pure Being". The fetish is an empirical concept, understandable in empirical terms; "Pure Being" is a metaphysical concept and, I suspect, meaningless. This underlines the great religious dilemma which I believe cannot be solved. Either God is empirical or he is not. If he is, he can be scientifically investigated. If he is not, how can meaningful statements be uttered about him? I contend that they cannot.

If religious terms are not capable of an empirical definition I suggest that these terms are meaningless. Language has evolved in an empirical context and, where descriptive, cannot "transcend" the empirical. Religious folk have been forced into using metaphysical language simply because familiar language no longer supports their beliefs. As soon as religious terms, e.g. "God", "soul", etc., become independent of empirical connotation, e.g. where "God" is defined as "the forces of nature", and become metaphysical they become meaningless. This is easily shown if an atheist asks a believer what he means by "God" or "soul" and ruthlessly queries the words which the believer uses in his answer. As A. J. Ayer says in *Language Truth and Logic* (p. 116), "The mere existence of the noun (God) is enough to foster the illustration that there is a real, or at any rate a possible entity corresponding to it. It is only when we enquire what God's attributes are that we discover that 'God', in this usage, is not a genuine name". If my suggestion (that religious jargon, when non-empirical, is meaningless) is to be reasonable, one further question needs to be answered. How can religious people use religious jargon as if it had meaning, when in fact it does not? The answer is not difficult to see.

Instead of using words to describe an apparent reality outside themselves, they are merely using religious terms according to particular rules which are convenient for their purposes. These rules do not imply that the words which they govern designate anything at all. For example, when an atheist, criticising the First Cause argument, says "But if the universe cannot always have existed, how can God?", the religious believer replies "Simply because the universe is physical, whereas God is spiritual". The use of the word "spiritual", since it is used adjectivally gives the appearance of providing a description. It is only

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## This Believing World

From time to time appear whole page advertisements in the national press advertising the Moral Re-armament group, and often calling attention to the "Humbuggability" of John Bull. How right they are! Leaving aside the fact that the Churches have "humbugged" the dear man with "true" Christianity—so true indeed that Christians have been quarrelling for centuries about it—the M.R. people have managed to humbug him in sending "contributions" to them so that they can "revolutionise" Christianity, that is, to bring Christ in everywhere—into the Government, the Governed, into Parliament, Political Parties, Press and People; and it will be done if only everybody will pay up to do it.

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But to do it properly—with other people's money—God must be worshipped "with enough humility and intelligence to restore him to leadership", and the people to go to, to see this is done, "to let Him run the nations and the world" are the Moral Re-armament Group if only you sent your contributions to them. As a sample of the "humbuggability" of everybody except the M.R. Group, we are told that "the ordinary Pressman is more snake-like than the average Politician", and "the average Politician is more highly sexed than the ordinary Pressman". All the same, contributions from both classes will be gratefully received.

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The Archbishop of York if not quite as voluble as the Archbishop of Canterbury, does, thank God, let himself go every now and then. Some months ago in an article he considered that it was "one of the commonest errors about Christianity" that it was a recipe for "doing good"; while the truth really was that Christianity had "to tell a story"—the story. And he meandered on, on these lines through nearly two columns of the *Daily Express* though whether the hero was God or Jesus was not easy to discover. His article would have made a typical nineteenth century tract. And just as solemn and piously as voluble.

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After telling us for years that our miserable summer weather and, for that matter, our very cold winters, are not due to atom bomb explosions in the atmosphere, we now have Mr. Chapman Pincher, the *Daily Express* science writer, admitting that scientists "now suspect that H-bomb tests in space have upset the world's weather" and if continued will certainly do so. Upsetting what is called "the balance of nature" is not difficult as, for example, the use of insecticides on vegetables and fruit which kill off not only insects and honey-making bees, but also the birds which are the enemies of so many harmful pests. And in any case, where does God or Jesus or both now come in? Or are they ignored in these discussions because they never do anything one way or other?

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Whether people prefer to hear their parsons in person preach sermons, or take their spiritual nourishment from the radio and TV, is a problem very disturbing to a vicar who sees a very small congregation in his church. Some, like the Rev. G. Sansbury of Grantham, consider "TV sermons disastrous". They were having "a serious effect on the morals of the country". Well, the only people who listen to TV sermons are good and pious Christians, so it can be only their morals which suffer so disastrously. Are we to believe that the power and the glory of Christ Jesus never reaches them because they listen to sermons on TV? Shades of Lord Reith—this is not only unfair but too bad!

Adam Faith, we are told by the irrepressible Godfrey Winn, was deeply moved when he visited Coventry Cathedral recently. "If all churches were swinging like this", Mr. Faith declared, "the teenagers would be pouring in". "In actual fact, they ARE pouring in", commented Mr. Winn. "In the year since I attended the consecration of the cathedral as the personal guest of the Bishop, over three million pilgrims from all over the world have passed through the magnificent glass west door". What is more, "a surprisingly large number" of these "pilgrims" have been "teenagers, often in jeans and sloppy sweaters". And why not, Mr. Winn added tolerantly, "Our Lord never worried what clothes his disciples wore".

## From Spain

A SPANISH correspondent sends us two press clippings which he says will give us some idea of "what we have to put up with".

From Madrid it is reported that the Spanish Church has sent 600 priests to Latin American dioceses through the agency of Obra de Cooperación Sacerdotal Hispano Americana. The expenses involved in the education of the priests are estimated at 160 million pesetas (£950,000).

We give the second clipping in full, viz.:

La Valetta (Malta) 5.—The Spanish cruiser "Almirante Cervera" has sailed today from this port to Tarragona carrying on board an arm of the apostle Saint Paul, the holy relic for which the Cardinal Arriba y Castro, Archbishop of Tarragona, has asked the Pope on the occasion of the celebration in Spain of the arrival of the apostle at the Peninsula nineteen hundred years ago.

The holy relic is accompanied on board the Spanish cruiser by the metropolitan Archbishop of Malta, Monsignor Michael Gonzi and the auxiliary Bishop of Tarragona, Monsignor Lastán.

An enormous crowd gathered at the harbour of La Valetta to be present at the moment when the Monsignor Gonzi went on board carrying in his hand the holy relic which will arrive tomorrow at the imperial town.

## WHAT IS GOD?

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when the religious believer is asked to explain what he means by "spiritual" that it is seen to be an empty word with no literal significance. The word is used according to a rule of religious usage which in this context may be crudely formulated as "When an argument which limits God's nature appears to be valid, show its irrelevancy by stating that God is '---'". Several words could be used here, e.g. spiritual, other-worldly, transcendental, etc. I suggest that where religious terms are purely non-empirical, they are meaningless, and can only be fitted into a linguistic framework by applying a particular rule which does not entail the words having any literal meaning.

My conclusions, therefore, are that if "God" is to have meaning it must be capable of an empirical definition, in which case it falls within the province of science. It is not so capable it is a meaningless symbol, used according to rules of usage which govern its manipulation, but which afford it no literal significance. The existence of rules of this sort give such terms an illusion of meaning which disappears upon investigation.

Readers familiar with philosophy will recognise the above remarks as reminiscent of logical positivism. I am not a logical positivist, but I believe that what they have to say about religious statements is very reasonable. There is a difficulty here for religious people which I do not see how they can possibly start to overcome. Their unwillingness to face up to this sort of difficulty is some indication of the general untenability of their position in the modern world.

# THE FREETHINKER

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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 (Platt Fields), Sunday afternoon (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.

## Notes and News

THIS WEEK in Views and Opinions, Margaret Mellroy takes a look at family life with the aid of Dr. Ronald Fletcher's recent Penguin Special, *The Family and Marriage*, in the series, "Britain in the Sixties". Writing in the *Daily Telegraph* (12/7/63), Dr. Fletcher suggested that most of our worries about the disintegration of family life are displaced. "Most young people are well behaved", he said. "Most mothers work for their families, not to escape them. Most wives and husbands don't petition for divorce—they like being married, and they love being parents. And who says that mutual aid amongst relatives is at an end?" The family, Dr. Fletcher went on, "has become a scapegoat which we burden with the blame for everything we cannot otherwise explain". And, he said: "In my opinion the action of people who advertise cigarettes, knowing that they give high risk of lung cancer is far more inhuman than breaking-and-entering a house to steal money. Yet do they come from broken homes?"

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As *The Guardian* reminded us in its obituary of the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop O'Hara (17/7/63), his previous appointment as Papal Nuncio in the Irish Republic had been objected to by the American lawyer and author, Paul Blanshard. Mr. Blanshard filed a petition at the American Embassy in Dublin in 1953, calling for the revocation of the then Dr. O'Hara's American citizenship. Dr. O'Hara was, said Mr. Blanshard, serving as the diplomat of a foreign power and was violating the McCarran Act, which prohibited an American citizen from performing the duties of any office, post or employment under the Government of a foreign State requiring an oath of allegiance". The Vatican replied that Dr. O'Hara (born in Pennsylvania of Irish parents), who carried both an American passport and a Vatican diplomatic passport, "was acting entirely in a religious and ecclesiastical field".

ACCORDING to the July issue of the American Freethought paper *Voice of Freedom*, the Rev. Donald Soper, in a recent address to two hundred students at the University of British Columbia described the Bible as "a most dangerous document". It "says anything you want it to say, provided you look up the appropriate passages". And in answering questions, Dr. Soper said: "Christianity is the grandfather of communism; the only truly Christian society is a classless society; preoccupation with personal religion has corrupted Christianity; every Christian should be an agnostic—I am". We sometimes wonder if Dr. Soper isn't an atheist.

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ANOTHER "Christian agnostic", the Bishop of Woolwich, shows no signs of abandoning his critical role. In his contribution to the newly-published *Layman's Church* (Lutterworth Press, 5s.), Dr. Robinson argues that the work of the Church is vitiated by the lay-cleric distinction. This is most obvious in the Papalist tradition where, he says, "there is a kind of mystique, a divinity which hedges a priest, who is regarded in some sense as a higher species of humanity than the laymen". In the Church of England, the Bishop continues, it is more like membership of an exclusive clerical club, called Crockfords", while in the Reformed Churches "there is the build-up of 'the preacher' in his black gown, who stands, as it were, as the man who delivers the message of God to the rest". De-mystifying the ministry is dangerous, of course, but Dr. Robinson, whatever his faults, cannot be called timid.

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IN ITS editorial of July 12th, the *South London Press* took a look at the background to the "South Bank" religious revolt. The Vicar of Emmanuel, West Dulwich had announced that he was closing his church because he had found from a questionnaire that the people didn't want it. Perhaps this vicar is eccentric, said the *South London Press*, "but if other vicars put out the same questionnaire they would probably get a similar result". The religious dispute is confined almost entirely to theologians, the paper said. There was no religious revival except in the Roman Catholic Church, "where churchgoing is compulsory, and congregations in London have been swelled by an influx of immigrants from Ireland or the Continent". But "churchgoing is a social custom, not a religion in itself".

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"THERE MUST be freedom of worship, and rights for minorities—the yardsticks of any democracy", said Mr. Dom Mintoff, leader of the Maltese Labour Party and former Prime Minister, at the opening session of the Malta Independence Conference in London on July 16th. "There must be freedom of conscience at the most critical times—during elections—as well as in normal times. We must avoid the setting up of any dictatorships in Malta" (*The Guardian*, 17/7/63). Mr. Mintoff was, of course, referring to the Roman Catholic Church's interdict against the Maltese Labour Party, which almost certainly decided the last election. Dr. Herbert Ganado, leader of the Democratic Nationalist Party, rose to the defence of his Church which, he said, "rightly exercised great influence on the election", because "The main political fight was religious".

—NEXT WEEK—

CANCER "CURES" AT LOURDES

By COLIN McCALL

## "On the Trial of Jesus"

By H. CUTNER

SOME MONTHS AGO, Mr. F. A. Ridley wrote a highly eulogistic article on a work by a Jewish writer, Mr. Paul Winter, who may or may not be a "convert" to Christianity. There is nothing in the book, which is entitled, *On the Trial of Jesus*, and which was published in Germany, to indicate whether he is or not.

It was a pity that I had to read it in the British Museum reading room—as I always prefer a leisurely approach to any book, and particularly such a controversial work as this one. Having written the word, I am not quite sure the book is really "controversial", for Mr. Winter appears to swallow everything in the Gospels though not, of course, without a formidable array of "authorities". But let us see what he has to say.

He begins with a challenge. It is simply and forcibly, "Jesus of Nazareth was tried and was sentenced to die by crucifixion" and, "these are historical facts". If the trial of Jesus described in great detail by "historical" writers like Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, really happened, and if the supporting evidence was as strong as Mr. Winter claims throughout his book, it certainly did not require any other book to prove it. It is merely adding proof upon proof.

That the "evidence" really does want supporting is proven by the fact that dozens of books have been written on the trial, not quite as many as those proving the "existence" of God I admit, but just as earnest. Probably Mr. Winter sensed that most if not all his fore-runners had failed to prove the "historical" fact, and it was time somebody else had a try. All he appears to do is to vouch for this or that incident described in the Gospels, mostly because some eminent German theologian does so, or even a Frenchman like the ex-Abbé Loisy who was excommunicated by the Church because of his more than heretical views. Loisy gave up almost everything in the Gospels except one thing, and that was the crucifixion of Jesus. To give that up, he sadly declared, meant giving up the historicity of Jesus, and this he refused to do. He remained to the end, I believe, convinced that there must have been a Jesus because there must have been a crucifixion.

Mr. Winter insists that the "historical facts" attending the trial of Jesus are attested by Roman, Jewish and Christian authors, but he takes good care not to point out that whoever they were or whoever he means by them, *not one* is a contemporary, and in this connection only a contemporary means anything. What Jewish or Roman writer—there were no Christians at the time—who saw Jesus could Mr. Winter cite? There is one passage in Gibbon very well known—it begins, "But how shall we excuse the supine inattention of the Pagan and philosophic world . . ." the withering irony and contempt of which completely shatters the nonsense that the trial was attested by Romans. As for Jews, the one famous writer of the time was Philo in whose works occurs no line whatever that he had even heard of Jesus, let alone the trial.

Mr. Winter proceeds to say that modern Jews hate talking about the trial; they are ashamed of it and try to blame the "Sadducees" for it, which is just plain bosh. In the past, Jews spoke of Jesus with contempt for which they had to pay very dearly. They certainly believed in his existence, and therefore in his trial—living for centuries under Christian rule how could they do otherwise? As it was, they had to do their utmost to avoid Christian

fury—murder and torture were the pious methods used to bring the obstinate Jews to their senses—and so, wherever possible, they certainly avoided discussion. In these more tolerant times, the Jews have discovered that in actual "fact" Jesus was the greatest Jew that ever lived, and they even outshine Renan in their eulogies. Nothing tickles them more—privately—than to see, as Disraeli said, half Christendom worship a Jew as a God, and the other half a Jewess as a Goddess.

Almost like a Talmudist Rabbi, Mr. Winter discusses dozens of points relating to the trial to prove how faithfully the Gospel writers reported it, utterly regardless that no matter what one of them said, at least one of the others would deny it. The contradictions between the Gospels are of course notorious. They are hardly noticed by Mr. Winter.

In the Gospels, there are two trials—one before the Jewish Sanhedrim, the other before Pilate. The Jewish experts have almost always denied that there could have been a Jewish trial as described in the Synoptics for they claim that the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrim had ceased by 30 AD. Mr. Winter denies this, but the only authority is the Talmud, a work not compiled before about 500 AD. It is difficult to attest any "historical" statement made in the Talmud because dates and history (as such) were hopeless in its interminable discussions.

And dates are, if possible, carefully avoided by Mr. Winter. He never for example discusses the very important question of dates in connection with the Gospels. He does tell us as if it were an "historical" fact that Mark is the earliest Gospel, but he produces no evidence in support. He takes it for granted. In fact, he never tells his readers that the first mention of the Gospels by name was not before 180 AD. If this is the case, what were the documents used by the Gospel writers? Who wrote them, when and where and in what language? In other words, who reported the Trial and translated the original Aramaic (or Latin) into Greek? Not a word in answer comes from Mr. Winter. He believes just as fervently in that notorious work the Acts of the Apostles, completely unknown before the second century, packed with angels and miracles; and no matter what its title, a book which does *not* deal with the acts of the Apostles. It goes into detail of course about Peter and Paul, but its rubbish about "cloven tongues" and similar absurdities, especially the martyrdom of Stephen—all of which is "historical fact" to Mr. Winter—make his "faith" laughable.

The chief object, as far as I can make out from his book, is to show that the Jews were *not* really responsible for the crucifixion, but the Romans. It may still take centuries before that "historical" fact is settled. It is one of the many mysteries about the Gospels—for nobody can say for certain what Jesus was tried for—was it blasphemy, or sedition, for instance? And whichever it was, had he to be "crucified" in expiation? Were the two thieves also rightly condemned to be crucified just because they were thieves? And finally, why do the Gospels use the Greek word for "stake" and not the word for "cross", if Jesus and the thieves really were crucified?

I have in this article taken it for granted for the moment that "something" may have happened to support the story of Jesus, his trial and crucifixion. Let me make it clear that I do not believe a word of it. I am as certain as I can be that Jesus, like Ali Baba, never existed. He is one

of the many Gods handed down to us by the past and just as mythical.

Unlike Mr. Winter, I have not come across a particle of evidence that Jesus went through such a trial as described in the Gospels. I do not for a moment believe that the rabbis of the Talmud knew anything of him, except as a hopelessly confused account of somebody from the dozens of Gospels floating around in the first centuries of our era. Even Mr. Winter concedes that. The accounts, in the Talmud, he solemnly warns us, "confuse critical readers". How right he is! And the accounts in Pagan (Roman) writers are equally confusing.

In fact there is no "historical" evidence for Jesus, his trial, or crucifixion. It is all myth.

## SIMONE WEIL

(Concluded from page 242)

In other passages she goes so far as to accuse the Church of having succumbed to the Devil, to Antichrist. "Christ rejected the Devil's offer of the Kingdoms of this world", she said, "but the Church, His Bride, has succumbed to it. Have not the gates of Hell prevailed against her? Only the Gospel teaching, the Paternoster, and the Sacraments have not lost their redeeming power within the Church".

Simone Weil's earlier studies of the Upanishads and Hindu philosophy and thought had undoubtedly widened her religious outlook, and in her later writings a hint of what might well have become the starting point of a new line of thought altogether is given in her remark that: "In every sense we need a new religion. Either a Christianity which is so modified as to become something else, or something else".

Much of her writing is obscure. For example, we find in her metaphysical meditations on "Contradiction"—remarkably similar in construction to Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*—bizarre observation such as: "The demonstrable correlation of opposites is an image of the transcendental correlation of contradictories". Or: "Bad union of opposites (bad because fallacious) is that which is achieved on the same plane as the opposites. Thus the gravity of domination to the oppressed. In this way we do not get free from the oppression-domination cycle. The right union of opposites is achieved on a higher plane. Thus the opposition between domination and oppression is smoothed out on the level of the law in which is balance".

Father Perrin and other Catholic intellectuals are anxious to annexe Simone Weil to their Church, but he is forced to admit that some of her writings have disturbing parallels in the *Antitheses* of Marcion; the now lost work which can yet be reconstructed from Tertullian's refutations. Marcion counterposed the God of the Old Testament to the God who is manifest in the New. With Simone Weil, the Christ of the New Testament is counterposed both to the God of the Old and the "Church" of the New.

The Roman Church is now adjusting itself to the new realities of peaceful coexistence. New sources of intellectual obscurantism have to be tapped to provide the ideological fuel for the Church Universal. Heresy of yesterday is absorbed or twisted into the orthodoxy of tomorrow.

And, though all available evidence places Simone Weil outside, and in opposition to the claims of the Church Universal, and in opposition to those who have studied its ambidextrous policies to find Simone Weil canonised like her famous predecessor Joan of Arc.

## Dogmatic Atheism v Dogmatic Theism

By GONZALO QUIOGUE (Manila)

SOME MILITANT FREETHINKERS insist that the best way to fight dogmatic theism is through dogmatic atheism. This looks like fighting one foolishness by means of another foolishness. Dogmatic atheism, however, is usually rooted in empiricism and scientism. On the other hand dogmatic theism was founded on superstition, fear, and ignorance. An irrational primitive belief in God came first—then religious charlatans cooked up arguments to nourish such belief.

I usually regard the articles of G. L. Simons as cogent. However, some parts of his letter in the *Freethinker* of April 19th, 1963, captioned "Dogmatic Atheism" are out of this world. His letter gives one the impression that he is as complete an agnostic as Bertrand Russell. In effect Mr. Simons means that if the traditional arguments for God are invalid, it does not follow that there is no God; neither does it mean that there is God. This is a typical agnostic attitude. God is therefore neither in nor out; He must be sitting on a fence with the agnostic.

Mr. G. L. Simons said in the third paragraph: "If atheism is not to become dogmatic, as it obviously already has done in the minds of some *Freethinker* contributors, it must permanently retain an element of agnosticism".

But if atheism permanently retains an element of agnosticism, it will be near-atheism or agnosticism. For atheism is the complete denial of any kind of god or God.

The nothingness of empirical and scientific evidence for the existence of God is enough proof for thinking man to reject the God notion. It is inconsistent for finite earth-bound man to regard his world as the infinite universe, when actually it is finite planet Earth. Our World, however, may expand to include the solar system in the near future. It is likewise inconsistent for finite man to use "infinite arguments" in solving his finite problems on his finite world, planet Earth. Only "infinite beings" inhabit an infinite world like the universe. A disregard of these principles results in an academic reasoning such as Bertrand Russell's paragraph before last, Chapter 2 of the book, *An Inquiry Into Meaning And Truth*:

No proposition containing *the* (in the singular) can be strictly proved by empirical evidence. We do not know that Scott was the author of *Waverley*; what we know is that he was an author of *Waverley*. For aught we know, somebody in Mars may have also written *Waverley*. To prove that Scott was the author, we should have to survey the universe and find that everything in it either did not write *Waverley* or was Scott. This is beyond our powers.

Following this line of reasoning, therefore, if we want to prove that Bertrand Russell wrote the book, *An Inquiry Into Meaning And Truth*, we should have to survey the entire universe to find out whether or not some other philosopher also wrote the book. Therefore, a claim that Russell wrote the book is unverifiable and meaningless. This wishy-washy reasoning happens when the earthbound reasoner persists in regarding the infinite universe as his world, instead of finite planet Earth. Beware of authoritarianism! Let us use our heads while learning from the authorities!

### WITHOUT COMMENT

Receiving pilgrims at his little village church in Sussex—Father Charles Dolman.

They all come to look at the hard wooden chair President Kennedy sat in when he went to Mass during his talks with Mr. Macmillan. "I hope no one takes it", worried Father Dolman.

—Daily Mail (4/7/63).

## Religion in Schools

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION given today in State schools in this country was bogus and a sham, declared Mr. David Tribe, president of the National Secular Society, at a meeting on Friday [July 5th] at Ilford Town Hall where the audience included several clergy.

The meeting was held by Ilford Humanist Group. Mr. Tribe said that prior to 1944 schools were under no obligation to teach religion. The Education Act of that year made religious instruction compulsory with a daily act of collective worship. This did not come about because of the deep religious convictions of the government but as a political compromise.

The Anglican Church had a lot of derelict schools which they were glad to hand over to the State, and in return religious instruction was made compulsory in State-aided schools.

So far as the law was concerned, schools need not teach anything else, yet children could be withdrawn from this "indispensable" subject merely by the will of their parents.

"Surely," said Mr. Tribe, "if religious education has this indispensable value, it should not be possible to escape it. The conscience clause is, of course, another political compromise".

Collective worship was not accepted as desirable by Humanists but most did not withdraw their children for fear of victimisation. We were a multi-religious society and members of other faiths also objected to Christian teaching in schools, and withdrew their children from it.

The people concerned with the propagation of religion had an emotional vested interest in it. No attempt was made to teach it objectively, and investigation was discouraged. It was indoctrination, and therefore a bogus subject.

"The good red meat of controversy is essential to education, but indoctrination pretends that individual beliefs and private opinions do not exist", he said.

It was undesirable that children should be streamlined in conformity, but on the other hand it was not right that the corporate life of the school should be disrupted, as it was when children were withdrawn from religious instruction.

Was such instruction religiously desirable? The secular classroom atmosphere was not conducive to genuine worship. "Headmasters who have no more belief than myself have to conduct services—a sham and hypocrisy. They give a caricature of what they really believe and children are quick to sense insincerity."

Most teachers did not specialise in religious instruction and consequently it was the worst taught of all subjects, and a waste of school time.

Catholicism was the most doctrinaire religion, yet it produced the highest proportion of delinquents. Anglicanism produced the next highest proportion, then Non-conformism and Judaism, with non-religious people bottom of the list. How could we build a moral system on an insincerely taught subject?

[Reprinted from the *Ilford Pictorial*, 11/7/63.]

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, July 17th, 1963. Present: Mr. D. H. Tribe (President) in the Chair; Mrs. McIlroy, Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Barker, Ebury, Hornibrook, Leslie, McIlroy, Millar, Mills, Timmins, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths), and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. McConalogue and Shannon. New members were admitted to North London, Nottingham and Parent branches. No reply had been received from protests to the Greek and Viet Nam embassies. Replies from the Home Office on the Public Order Bill and the Wolfenden Report, from the Foreign Office regarding Lord Home's apology to Queen Frederika, and from the BBC acknowledging appreciation of *The Defenders*, were read. Mrs. E. Collins was appointed to represent the SW Area on the Executive Committee. The President was appointed to second a motion on Euthanasia at Queens University, Belfast on October 15th. Leicester Secular Society had offered use of premises for 1964 conference if required. A CND sub-committee was elected. Correspondence from North London Branch and Glasgow Secular Society dealt with. Mr. Joseph Lewis's \$2,000 challenge to Professor Catlin was announced. Following letters from the President, a possible joint-meeting with the Abortion Law Reform Association and co-operation with the Divorce Law Reform Association were considered. Letters to the Lord Chancellor (on affirmation) and *The Times* (on religious education) were approved. It was agreed that information be sought concerning conditions in Catholic institutions for children. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, August 21st, 1963.

## CORRESPONDENCE

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

### F. A. RIDLEY TESTIMONIAL APPEAL

A unanimous decision of the National Secular Society Annual Conference supported a motion by the North London Branch NSS calling for a testimonial appeal to be launched on behalf of our retired President, Mr. F. A. Ridley, to which those members, branches or friends, who feel inclined to express their gratitude for the many years of hard work which he donated to our cause may contribute in order to show him that although we may not always be vociferous in our acclaim, it is perhaps because the secularist prefers a more practical way of showing approbation.

It would be impossible within the space available to even begin to outline a fraction of Mr. Ridley's achievements and sacrifices. Fortunately he needs no eulogist. As a prolific contributor to *THE FREETHINKER* (which he once edited) he is well enough known to secularists as a scholar and intellect, and a historian of international repute. As an orator of over thirty years standing he is respected and admired by all who have heard him.

The presidential chair was thrust upon this modest genius who sought neither wealth nor acclaim, and he proved himself a big man among giants by adding to the brilliance of the light of freethought where we would have been content merely to see it kept burning.

Amongst the many reasons for his resignation was his desire to complete several books, including a monumental *Rise and Fall of the British Empire*. He will continue to play an active part in the movement giving freely of his intellect and ability, and that, no money could buy. I know that no stronger appeal need be made to freethinkers than to say that a fund has been opened for this worthy successor of Paine, Bradlaugh, Foote and Cohen: the rest can be safely left to them.

All contributions should be sent to myself at the address below.

J. A. MILLAR,  
227, Muybridge Road, New Malden, Surrey.

### THE CONVERSION OF ENGLAND

One sometimes wonders how serious Mr. F. A. Ridley really is, or whether he is letting his imagination run away with him. On July 12th he seemed to be competing with the *Sunday Mirror* sensationally, when he exclaimed: "For the great news has now arrived, and in a journal boasting one of the largest circulations in Britain. Westminster (RC) is in: Canterbury (C of E) is out!" And he then proceeded: "In case of an eventual Catholic restoration . . ."

Does Mr. Ridley seriously believe that this will occur—or in his phraseology—that "all the present odds" favour it? That the Church of Rome is a menace, no one would deny. That it is really likely to be restored in England, I should doubt. Whatever the "Romeward gyrations of successive Archbishops of Canterbury", the social "odds" are against it.

May we have your reasoned, considered view, Mr. Ridley, uninfluenced by journals boasting large circulations?

J. G. GOODWIN.

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