

# The Freethinker

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WHEN RECENTLY engaged in a theological argument with a rabbinical Jewish expert of my acquaintance within the august precincts of the British Museum, I was abruptly interrupted by an influx of visitors. Closer inspection revealed that they were Jehovah's Witnesses currently attending their sect's annual convention at Twickenham. As both my Hebrew friend and myself take, one might say, a professional interest in strange sects and in out-

of-the-way theologies, we proceeded to discuss the special tenets of those "peculiar people", Jehovah's present Witnesses upon earth. Very soon the whole theological landscape underwent a complete change. Perhaps appropriately enough in a museum, we found ourselves transported back across the

ages to the naively primitive atmosphere of early Christianity. For, as far as these "Witnesses" are concerned, higher, and/or lower biblical criticism might as well not have existed. The Holy Bible is verbally inspired; every word, syllable and (or so it would appear) even its punctuation, is the work of a divine penman. Moreover, biblical prophecy is still uncompleted: Armageddon, the Day of Wrath and Judgment is still to come, when only Jehovah and his pre-ordained "Witnesses" will survive.

This primitive creed is I should say, nearer to the unedited Gospel of the founders of what, later, became Christianity than is that of any other more pretentious Christian sect. Here is primitive Christianity before our 20th century eyes: the vehement atmosphere of hatred and expectancy which is found in the oldest Scriptures of the New Testament; very particularly in that epic of blood and thunder, "John's Nightmare", Revelation, upon whose terrifying visions our modern Witnesses—like so many bizarre sects before them—appear to be largely based.

In resurrecting this primitive theology, we are a long way from the modern sophistications of say, the Bishop of Woolwich. Nevertheless, our primitively-minded Jehovah's Witnesses are actually more honest to God (in the literal sense) than is his modernist Lordship. If Jesus Christ were to return today, we think that he would probably prefer the apocalyptic millenarianism of the Witnesses to the more sophisticated attitude of the Bishop of Woolwich or even to that of the Bishop of Rome.

(N.B. To avoid unnecessary controversy, let me say once for all that by the term "Jesus Christ" I mean the founder or founders of what later became the Christian Church; just as for example by the proper name "Shakespeare", I mean the author, or authors of the Shakespearean plays.)

**The Apocalypse and Christian Evolution**  
As has often been demonstrated in these columns, the Christian Church emerged as a visible entity about the end of the 2nd century. It is round about this date that we encounter, in the surviving works of Lucian and Celsus, the first objective secular references to the new religion. It is however, abundantly clear from the extant writings in the New Testament, that by, say, the age of Marcus Aurelius (180) from which date our earliest critical

references, Christianity, had already been profoundly influenced and transformed by its secular environment; a fact that did not escape the keen critical vision of Christianity's earliest Pagan critic, Celsus. For in his *True Word*, he shrewdly noted that the New Testament had been rewritten "once, twice, several times".

Nor was the New Testament the only aspect of primitive Christianity that had changed by this time. The materialistic millenium predicted in Revelation (and also in some of the Messianic sayings put into the mouth of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels) had been already largely displaced by the mystical theology of the Gnostic writers whose

works have come down to us under the names of Paul and John.

## Messianism and Gnosticism

The earlier Messianic belief with which the earliest Christian sect appears to have started, with its material millenium "the Kingdom of God" in *this* world and its violent hostility towards the secular Roman Empire—"the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not"—was already superseded by the Gnostic theology expounded in the Pauline Epistles and in the fourth Gospel by a supernatural kingdom—"my kingdom is not of this world"—and by the Pauline insistence on submission to the Pagan Roman Empire. For "the powers that be are ordained of God" and "Magistrates [viz. the Roman Caesars] are a terror only to evil-doers". By the time of Constantine (early 4th century) this Pauline Christianity had prevailed over the early revivalist Messianism, and had transferred the Kingdom of God from earth to Heaven; from Palestine to the Beyond. However, whilst primitive millenarian Christianity was driven underground, it was still not completely suppressed, for its memories and apocalyptic hopes were kept alive by certain books in the New Testament which reflected the primitive point of view of the revivalist preachers of early Christianity.

## Revolutionary Handbook

By far the most influential was Revelation, which from the time of Constantine down to this most recent convention of Jehovah's Witnesses at Twickenham, has remained, so to speak, the "revolutionary handbook" of a whole series of millenarian sects on the fringe of orthodox Christianity; sects which range from the African Donatists of the 4th century down to the present-day Jehovah's Witnesses, via a whole congerie of sects that include the Lollards and the Hussites of medieval times and the Anabaptists and the Fifth Monarchy men of the era of the Reformation. All these successive sects, as also the present-day Witnesses believe in a visible second coming of the Messiah, and in an unashamedly materialistic millenium in *this* world to follow. Many of them also were opposed in varying degrees both to official ("respectable") Christianity and to its compromise with the secular power at large. Their subversive slogans ranged from that of the Donatists: "What has the emperor to

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Jehovah's Witnesses

By F. A. RIDLEY



do with the church?" to that of our contemporary Witnesses, that official Christianity is a racket.

In all these sects Revelation, as interpreted on anti-Roman, anti-state lines by the Donatist commentator, Ticonius (4th century) has remained the most important scriptural authority. The "millennial reign of the saints" upon *this* terrestrial earth, as vividly portrayed by John, inspired alike the Anabaptists to defend 16th century Munster against the forces of this evil world, the "Fifth Monarchy men" who taught that the four earthly monarchies of old were to be succeeded and superseded by the visible second coming of Christ, and the present-day Jehovah's Witnesses who refuse to enlist in the armed forces of earthly states because they are solely pre-occupied with preparing for the apocalyptic Armageddon, when the Messiah will make war against Satan and against his earthly representatives in church and state. Jehovah's Witnesses are only the most recent of a long series of such primitive Christian sects with their millenarian eschatology.

I conclude accordingly that in this curious American revivalist sect, we have, as it were, a direct reincarnation of the original Christian movement before it became transformed ("corrupted" as the Witnesses themselves would put it) by contact with the outside world and secular sophistication. Were Jesus and his Apostles to return in 1963, we should expect to find them at the recent convention in Twickenham, Middlesex! For there, by all accounts, was to be found the same apocalyptic tension—"the end of all things is at hand"—as marked the earliest Christian revivalist meetings. In the Witnesses who thronged into the baptismal tanks, there lived again "the multitudes who descended into Jordan" to be baptised "with the baptism of John". In 1963 AD, Jesus and John the Baptist are again our contemporaries!

## Is This Corruption?

By HENRY FIELDING

Peter Howard, of the Moral Re-Armament outfit, seems to accuse the BBC of being anti-Christian.

"Parliament should deal with the corrupting influence of the BBC," he said at the week-end.

I gathered from the context that he was annoyed about the fact that Dr. Alex Comfort had been given a chance to advocate a non-Christian view of sexual morality.

I have heard this sort of complaint from church people before, so yesterday I went through the current *Radio Times* and reckoned up a total of eight hours 22 minutes devoted to the Christian case.

There were 40 minutes on television, two hours 24 minutes on the Light Programme, four hours eight minutes on the Home Service, and one hour 10 minutes on the Third.

The programmes range from the Daily Service on the Home to discussions like Articles and Archaism by senior churchmen (this on the Third, of course).

This week, there doesn't seem to be anything putting forward a non-Christian viewpoint. It seems that the non-believers have a better case against the BBC than the churchmen.

—from the *Daily Herald*, 30/7/63.

## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ROME

Sirs:

In your June 21st issue, you say, "It was Saint Veronica who, following Christ up Calvary, wiped off his bleeding face."

I am a ministerial student and I am puzzled. In reading the Bible, I have found no mention of Saint Veronica. In fact I have not found Saint Veronica mentioned anywhere in the Word of God.

HAROLD L. HAYS (Trenton, Tenn.).

There is no mention of Saint Veronica in the Gospels but her story is given in the *Lives of the Saints*. The towel she is supposed to have used to wipe Christ's face is preserved at St. Peter's.—ED.

—Letter and answer in *Life* (USA).

## Religious Opinion

ONCE AGAIN religious influence has effectively stifled an attempt to improve our divorce laws. The controversy, however, at least highlighted the fact that the cleric, despite his protestations, is incapable of objective evaluation where his religion is concerned. Religious conviction establishes an end decision before any train of thought has started. The cleric then rationalises, as best he can, this decision. The process of justification means that little weight is attached to any considerations other than those based on, or in accord with, religious belief.

Today, the practice is rare of baldly stating that a system must be preserved solely because it has religious authority. The lunatic fringe of religion still does this, but usually the clerics prefer to be more subtle. An overt departure from the Bible is undesirable, and the heights of ingenuity are scaled in attempts to show that religious dogma can be equated with reason, justice and humanity. No doubt the priests had an easier task when they could state, without fear of contradiction, what was permissible and what forbidden.

In the divorce discussions, the clerical contingent, with remarkable unity of opinion, aimed at showing that its position was justifiable, even on general grounds, but anyone not blinded by prejudice would not be fooled. The committed position from which the opponents of the Abse Bill argued was plainly apparent. They were adhering to a religious dictum, and their implausible reasoning was nothing more than a red herring.

Even the Roman Catholic Church, once arrogant beyond description, now often attempts to justify its dogmas on general grounds. Contraception is forbidden, but the world, fully developed, could easily support a larger population. Euthanasia is forbidden, and anyway, even hopeless cases have recovered. Religious commandments, once imposed on a defenceless public, now have to be justified. No longer is it sufficient to pronounce and confidently expect the people to obey.

Indeed, the religious source of many opinions is often cleverly disguised or tardily admitted as merely another reason in favour of the opinion advocated. But the procedure is really a further step in the religious retrenchment caused by the upsurge of scepticism. It is an attempt to keep the old order by providing new justifications. Opinions against euthanasia, divorce, abortion and contraception often derive their toughness and inflexibility from religious sources. There is nothing to be lamented in the fact that these opinions are voiced, for lively discussion is desirable. What is to be regretted is that such opinions are often so rooted in prejudice. If, for example, the divorce laws are to be amended, then the change should be made on grounds of reason, justice and humanity. A consideration of what is best is unlikely to have much value if the final decision is predetermined by religious beliefs.

People with very pronounced religious views are seldom able to accede freedom of choice to others. It is not enough for the believers to follow a way of life; they must impose the same pattern on others. They are not much interested in others' views, which must obviously be wrong! They do not interest themselves in why people have different outlooks; they attribute divergent opinions to perversity, immorality or sinfulness. They are the disciples of absolute right, which they believe reposes with them.

D.W.



# The International Freethought Congress in Germany

DUISBURG, AT THE junction of the Rhine and the Ruhr, is not only an industrial centre, but the largest inland port of Europe. We were not surprised on arriving there to learn that it had been 80 per cent destroyed by bombing in the last war; yet it is marvellously prosperous. Hence we met with a new city in which patches of the old and odd spaces of waste struck a discordant note.

We strangers to the town were lodged in an "old" hotel of high reputation and the Congress was held in one of the most modern buildings, the Mercator Halle, for this was the city of the mapmaker, which was ten minutes easy walk from the hotel and in view of the main station. Here both small hall and great hall (2,000 seats) are fitted with radiophonic simultaneous interpretation in four languages, so that the time wasting labour of translation (which otherwise means that 15 minute speeches will take up one hour if four languages are to be heard) was avoided. This was a new and very welcome experience, but one which it may be difficult to repeat in the near future.

In the great hall of the fine new station had been established a temporary office of the Congress under a great board bearing the words "34th Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers". Young members went down to meet the trains by which congress-members were expected, brought them to the office and then arranged for their transport to the hotel. This promised well for the general organisation, a promise which was well fulfilled.

On Thursday afternoon and evening, July 25th, the Committees met and reviewed the situation. On Friday morning was held the first business meeting of the appointed delegates, where so much was found to be done that a special meeting had to be held on Sunday evening. The main problem was the reorganisation of the executive of the Union.

The Congress proper opened on Friday afternoon with classical chamber music preceding a speech of welcome by Herr W. Bruckmann, the President of the local branch of the German Freethinker Union, followed by the Oberbürgermeister (Lord Mayor) who addressed us in sympathetic terms, wishing our congress successful deliberations. The World Union President replied expressing our pleasure in meeting in Duisburg and thanks for the invitation to come there. He then formally opened the congress, welcoming all who attended, regretting the absence and paying a tribute to those who had died in the interval since the last congress, in particular to André Lorulot, whose sudden demise had robbed the Congress of one of its most eloquent speakers and most devoted workers. Messages were read from Bertrand Russell, Brock Chisholm (Canada), and Carlos M. Rama (Uruguay). The delegation leaders followed, and their speeches, varying in language, vigour, wit and grace, each having something of value to say, completed the first session. The evening was a social one and very pleasant. The hall which in the afternoon had seated some two hundred, gathered in groups about their national flags, became a restaurant where the guests, hungry after the speeches, ate and drank with enthusiasm.

Professor Hyman Levy opened the second session, that on Saturday morning, on the problem "How Freethought can profit by the wide interest in Scientific Development".

His razor-keen analysis of why and how people are interested in scientific developments, to what extent they thus may be termed free thinkers led him to concrete suggestions on how to induce them to think and think soundly.

Professor Levy was followed by Professor Hollitscher of Vienna, who dealt with the subject from a more academic point of view, though arriving at conclusions similar to those of Professor Levy. M. Rousseau (Belgium) then read the communication by M. André Koekelenberg of Brussels who treated the subject from the Belgian point of view as largely a clash with the Roman Catholic Church doctrines. Unquestioning acceptance of the crude dogmas offered to the masses becomes difficult in the light of modern scientific developments; on the other hand minds unaccustomed to rigorous reasoning tend to replace rejected dogmas with even more fantastic fancies. The discussion was continued by M. Cotereau (France) and Dr. Pollog (Basle, Switzerland).

On Saturday afternoon the second theme "The Defence of Lay Freedoms" was entered on; the opening report being from the USA by Mr. Walter Hoops, the secretary of the American Rationalist Federation, who dealt briefly, succinctly with the American school struggle and other aspects of the pressure to infiltrate religion into the secular American state. The Belgian report was given next by M. Rousseau who gave a long disquisition on the situation in his country without however getting down to "brass tacks". Heer Rausch then reported on the situation in the Netherlands.

Each country had been asked to present a report, and ten did so, viz., Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland, Mexico and New Zealand, in addition to the three already mentioned. This naturally took some time, and the reports were not completed until Monday morning. Also very naturally they varied considerably: some countries are secular, in that the state is separated from the church. In these the church, especially the Roman Church, endeavours to extend its powers and, in one guise or another, to obtain from the state ever increasing sums in subsidies, notably for Catholic schools. In other countries there are established churches, e.g. in England. Here again the struggle centres on the schools. Where the Roman Church is supreme, it endeavours to tighten its grip on all social activities and means of publicity. Of this we were all aware, yet it was as well to have exact information to confirm suspicions.

On Saturday evening was held the public meeting in the great hall, and about 1,500 gathered there. The platform and hall were gay with flowers and a mixed choir brought melody and charm, which inspired Herr Bruckmann in his lively introduction of the subject "Freethought in the World Today" and of the speakers who followed him. First the President, whose quotations from the *Erlkönig* and *Hamlet*, and declaration that Freethinkers all wished to live happily attracted the attention of the journalists present. Professor Hollitscher, the true philosopher of Marxist mould, gave us a serious and massive measure of the subject. His fellow Viennese, Dr. W. Rigler, was far more lively, even fiery at moments. The fifth and last speaker brought a very different note. Mr. Walter Hoops, once of Hanover, for half a century an American citizen, and convinced believer in the American

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## This Believing World

Such horrors as those brought about by the Skopje earthquake are never, never discussed by the fervent religious believers in the great Design Argument. Almighty God is merciful and just, but alas, an earthquake is one of the many "mysteries" designed by the Lord to try us. We must have faith, and with God in Heaven, all must be well on earth. Even earthquakes.

★

Will it or can it be believed that the "Daily Express" (July 25th) actually called that reverend figure, Lord Fisher, once Archbishop of Canterbury, a "kill-joy", and gave a number of instances of his "solemn voice" dealing with "every conceivable subject"—from football pools to labour-saving devices, or television to motoring! And the *Daily Express* wants to know if he ever said "any memorable words" on "religion itself"? We trust Lord Fisher will pluck up courage and answer that himself for we can't.

★

Nearly all our national journals deal with our fate "in the stars", and this feature is probably the first that many readers turn to. So it is not surprising to find books on Astrology still appearing and selling. The *Sunday Express* (July 28th) has a long review by Robert Pitman dealing with *The Coffee-Table Book of Astrology* (which the curious can buy for 50s.) and it asks, "Can the stars really reveal a man's character?" The review is accompanied by portraits of such assorted figures as Brigitte Bardot, Khrushchev, Eartha Kitt, and Harold Wilson, and answers the question (we think) decidedly in the affirmative.

★

Mr. Pitman naturally looked up what the stars said about himself as being "a man of Virgo", and found out that "if he took up literature" he would be "more likely to succeed as a critic". Therefore there may be something in astrology. We can't help wondering if Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Charles Lamb, and other giants of the past, and Harold Nicolson, Cyril Connolly, and other moderns are "men of Virgo"? Do people still believe that such astrological jargon as the moon jostling with Uranus, or Pluto influenced by the sun in the path of Gemini, actually gives us anybody's character or genius?

★

We need not be surprised that even the most devout Christian is very seriously disturbed because all this talk of a space age and galaxies and millions of stars and planets in space has so thoroughly upset belief in what one recent correspondent to the *Daily Telegraph*, dealing with the Ascension of Jesus, called "a beautiful vision". Dr. Matthews, the Dean of the St. Paul's, referred to it as a "myth", and was very severely called to task. One angry Christian roundly asked him if he was a better authority than St. Luke?

★

And how did the presumptuous Dean answer that one? Quite simply. He declared his "purpose was not to destroy belief in the Ascension but to point out its spiritual meaning". And if that doesn't placate believers in Luke, we don't know what would. After all, Dr. Matthews must believe that Jesus is still alive, and how could "our Lord" go to his Father in a better way than through an Ascension? They are now both sitting on the clouds "up there", thank Heaven.

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

WE HAVE been reprimanded by a friendly—and generous—Irish reader for not appealing more often for contributions to the above fund. Our reason is, of course, that we don't like to take up much-needed space with monetary appeals.

Fortunately quite a lot of readers don't have to be reminded that THE FREETHINKER, having no advertising revenue, is perpetually in need of funds. This is a brief note addressed to the others. Incidentally, we are still a long way from achieving the £10 bonus of the anonymous reader who asked (Notes and News, 21/12/62) for 49 other contributions of £10.

## From Montreal

ON AUGUST 2ND, on the French Canadian independent television network programme, *Vox Populi*, four fathers, Montrealers all, 1 Jewish, 1 Protestant, 1 Catholic and 1 Freethinker, all French-speaking, agreed publicly that secular schools (*écoles laïques*) would provide the only proper answer to the school problem created by religious divisions in the Province of Quebec.

As it is, all non-Catholics must go to Protestant schools, there being only two types of schools: Roman Catholic or Protestant.

True secular schools would leave religion out of the curriculum and could then have all children under one roof (as in the USA).

Mr. Foisy-Foley, the editor of the (French) Protestant monthly *Credo* declared that our religious school system created nests of prejudice by opposing children against children. Mr. Picard, the Roman Catholic representative, saw no reason why any real Catholic should be afraid of having his children rub shoulders with non-Catholics, at school or anywhere else. Mr. Aaron, prominent Montreal attorney, deplored the fact that religious schools made it nearly impossible for non-Christians to integrate themselves into the Quebec Community. It was then pointed out by Mr. Joseph La Rivière, a freethinker, that secular schools offered the only really fair solution, as all children would then learn to grow up from school age on in an atmosphere of mutual respect for their respective belief or unbelief. All four were in agreement on this point, which is a dramatic change from a few years ago when such a subject was taboo even in private conversations, never mind before the TV cameras!

Once again, then, the people are way ahead of their elected representatives. While the Provincial Government dilly-dallies about creating a Ministry of Education, which still allows for quite an amount of religious influence on the schools, the parents themselves are willing to leave religion out of school altogether.

LANJE GARDYEN.

## SWEET AND SOUR?

Religious commercials are to be presented on Independent Television for the first time on Sunday in ATV's "About Religion" programme. The singer who will be heard in recordings is Stan Freburg, an American known for his advertising jingles about Chinese foods.

The religious jingles were commissioned by the Baptist Church of America for broadcasting on radio. ATV expect complaints from the public, but say the commercials were written with a sincere evangelical purpose.

—Daily Telegraph (1/8/63).

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## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. A. MILLAR. (Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch NSS (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

WHEN Mr. Anthony Wedgwood Benn unveiled the London County Council plaque to Charles Bradlaugh at 29 Turner Street, Stepney on November 8th, 1961, he said that, though not himself an atheist, he had an enormous admiration for Bradlaugh and, of course, a strong personal interest in his struggle—and success! Now Mr. Benn's own struggle has ended in success and we look forward to his return to the House of Commons.

★

THE EDUCATIONAL controversy in Quebec (this column May 10th and July 26th) goes on. The bill based on the Parent Commission, subordinating Catholic and Protestant committees to an education ministry, has been postponed but "already has been submitted to bishops in the province of Quebec by way of Msgr. Maurice Roy, Archbishop of Quebec and Primate of Canada" (*The Montreal Star*, 26/6/63). And, "The Bishops are reported to have made some changes in the original legislation—changes affecting the interests of the Catholic Church—which were incorporated in the bill". Hardly surprising that a letter to the *Star* the following day should ask: "When did we vote for bishops to amend our proposed laws? Didn't we vote for members of Parliament? Don't they have Parliamentary Committees in Quebec?" And, continued the writer, Marie Décarie, "Does the Parliament of Ontario submit its bills to the Church of England, or the United Church?" Ironically, only a week before the *Star* had referred to the recognition of the separation of church and state in Canada. They are certainly not *de facto* separate in Quebec, said Miss Décarie, "although a preference is made that they are *de jure*".

AMERICAN ATHEISTS, the *Evening Standard* announced recently (17/7/63), are planning their own "heaven" in the middle of woodlands near Stockton, Kansas, the colony being the idea of Mrs. Madalyn E. Murray, who recently won the US Supreme Court Bible-reading case. Well, we wish Mrs. Murray luck in her scheme (which we had already heard of), but we must confess to being almost as sceptical about heavens on earth as heavens above! We also wish Mrs. Murray success in her new role as editor of the *American Free Humanist*, and we thank her for a very nice tribute to THE FREETHINKER. Mrs. Murray inquired if she might reprint some of our articles and that permission was gladly given.

★

DURING A RECENT convention of the Society of American Magicians reported by Associated Press on July 12th, several Protestant ministers said that their hobby of magic was useful in their work. Salvation Army Major Wayne Lockhart demonstrated "a simple, yet very instructive way to show a person how he can change his life for the good" by changing a black silk handkerchief into white in his magic red velvet bag. It was, he said, a particularly popular trick in his prison visiting. Magic and religion are more compatible than most people realise, said the Rev. Robert C. Anderson, a captain in the Chaplain Corps of the US Army, and he illustrated his point by "transforming" three separate handkerchiefs into "one large, handsome scarf imprinted with a butterfly". This illusion, Captain Anderson said, had helped him to "show individuals how they could change aimless fragmented lives into lives of personal worth and of service to the community". Perhaps for this purpose, a more suitable emblem could be chosen than a butterfly. What surprises us, though, is that the trick wasn't used to demonstrate the trinity.

★

"FOR THE sake of argument", said the Rev. Leslie K. Tarr (*Maclean's Magazine*, Canada), "let's bring hellfire and brimstone back to the pulpit". Fear of God's wrath after death, according to this Baptist minister, is "the great weapon of the Churches that preach a Christian way of life", and he regrets that they were afraid to use it. Don't get him wrong, though. He is not urging "a steady diet of sulphur", just a regular plentiful helping of it. He is not "advocating a harsh and loveless ranting and a fiendish delight in vivid descriptions of the wrath to come", but "still less can I condone taking the teeth out of the gospel by pretending that hell and damnation are not the words of God". In fact, as another American once put it bluntly, "religion without hell ain't worth a damn!"

★

SPEAKING AT A general session of the fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, held in Montreal, Dr. Hans Harms, pastor of a Lutheran church in Hamburg and a leading German Protestant theologian, appealed to the Roman Catholic Church to participate in a "responsible dialogue" with other Churches "to help the whole body of Christ regain health in renewal and unity" (*The Gazette*, Montreal, 19/7/63). And one of the Vatican's five official observers the Rev. Gregory Baum of Toronto, said that there was no theoretical reason why the Roman Catholic Church could not join the World Council of Churches. Official participation, however, "would probably result in confusion among Catholics, and many Protestants, too", he added, because his Church was the true Church, safeguarding the faith as revealed by Christ to His apostles.



# The International Freethought Congress

(Concluded from page 257)

way of life, said so in a way that delighted his hearers, often sending them into fits of laughter. If Professor Rigler showed himself to be a veritable orator of the serious school; Mr. Hoops was a first-class example of the serious speaker who knows how to laugh and to make his audience laugh. The speeches this evening were all in German; but when Walter could not get his joke through in German, he resorted to American in a manner which tickled his hearers mightily.

After it had been unanimously agreed to send a cable of sympathy to the Yugoslav Government in connection with the Skopje earthquake, Sunday morning was devoted to the Vatican Council. Mr. McCall read Mr. Ridley's paper; following that of Professor Rigler, whose monumental study lasted for over one hour and made such an impression that it has been decided to print it as a pamphlet. M. Cotereau followed in his best vein. There was no doubt that in him we had the finest orator of the congress. He has made a special study of the Defence of Lay Freedoms in France; his anthology on the subject has just been published, and the deliberations of the Vatican Council had of necessity greatly interested him. Another good session.

After a brief interval for lunch, we gathered outside the Mercator Hall to catch a tram which would take us to the steamer jetty, where we found awaiting us a smart white river cruiser for us alone. In it we made the tour of the great docks; admired the thirty-six mountains each of a different type of iron ore mined in the Ruhr and brought here for shipment to all parts. With less pleasure we saw equal hills of old iron, largely bits of old motor-cars, which were to be remade into sheets of steel. Riverships and barges come here from our own country, from all the lands bordering the Rhine; so many in fact from Switzerland that there is a special Swiss consul at Duisburg for the rivermen alone. We also noted three boats from the Danube. After the docks we explored a stretch of the Rhine, alternating patches of pastures, fields and industry bathed in brilliant sunshine. Back at our hotel about half after eight, we spent up to midnight in committee meetings.

The committee appointed to prepare the resolutions was supposed to present them early Monday morning session; but their endeavours to obtain high precision in three languages kept the four of them at it till noon, though they had spent three hours at the task on Sunday evening. Their efforts met with success, since the Congress passed their resolutions with enthusiasm. Of the five resolutions four will be given as an appendix to this summary report, the fifth proposed by Professor Levy, seconded by Professor Hollitscher will appear later.

The General Committee had prepared a project of re-organisation which was unanimously adopted by the Congress, but cannot enter into force until all the affiliated societies have had time to consider it and a majority have expressed themselves in favour.

The Congress was brought to an end with the usual speeches of appreciative thanks for what had been in many ways a model for future meetings.

## THE RESOLUTIONS

1. The 34th International Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers assembled at Duisburg, 25th-29th July, 1963, has paid special attention to the situation of the Catholic Church, which is now passing through a grave crisis in several countries despite its great efforts both in political and

scholastic domains. The proportion of those indifferent to the claims of religion does not cease to grow, and an increasing disquiet is to be observed in Catholic intellectual circles at the superannuated nature of its theology and the reactionary character of its social theory. We Freethinkers do not relax our efforts on behalf of world peace, for it is an essential condition for all intellectual progress, particularly since a new world war would see the extinction of mankind. We have therefore noted with satisfaction the appeal launched by Pope John XXIII for general disarmament as opposed to the theory of "equilibrium in terror" and his exhortation to Catholics to collaborate with all men of good will to work for peace.

We are not unaware that influential circles which are opposed to peaceful co-existence between governments of differing social and political doctrines still exist. Nor does our determination to work with all our power for the defence of peace mean that we retire from our essential mission which is to spread abroad the irreducible contradiction between science and theology, the obstacle to progress which is religion and the struggle against clericalism and the clericalisation of public life. Our aim remains the enfranchisement of the human mind from all that hinders its operation.

2. The principle of lay freedom, which means that the public power should respect individual liberty of conscience implies (1) politically the separation of church and state. The latter must neither recognise nor finance any particular sect, in particular the schools and institutions of the sect; (2) state schools must be secular. The Congress deplores the violations in nearly all countries of which we have received reports of these freedoms, and calls on all Freethinkers to work for the repeal of all laws which prevent and for the enforcement of all laws which support lay freedoms, collaborating where possible with other progressives.

3. This Congress rejoices at the conclusion of a treaty banning atom-bomb experiments, and trusts that this will be a step towards general disarmament.

4. The Congress salutes all who, wherever they may be, suffer in defence of their ideals, and deplores strongly all attempts to repress thought and conscience, no matter where they take place.

## On Calling a Bluff

By H. CUTNER

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS or so ago, I had a debate on Spiritualism with Mr. Maurice Barbanell. Like all the debates I have had with Spiritualists, it was bound to fizzle out, for it is quite impossible to bring any spirits on to a platform and, moreover, if one says one doesn't believe in the stories about them, or in ghosts or materialisations or apparitions and so on, most Spiritualists get furiously angry. Mr. Barbanell was no exception, and the debate was not reported in THE FREETHINKER.

Since then, every time I deal with Spiritualism in these pages, and Mr. Barbanell happens to see my references, he boasts that he met me in a debate, and that even my own "supporters" admitted that he had the best of the encounter. I stopped counting the number of times he made this majestic claim, and the way he treated my "temerity" (his word) in dealing at all with Spiritualism.

As some readers may remember, the exposure of Sir William Crookes and his fraudulent medium Florrie Cook by Mr. Trevor Hall, recently shook the Spiritualist world, and the "Chevalier Bayard" who went out to do battle with those of us who agreed with Mr. Hall was Mr. Barbanell, and it gave him a chance to double his encounters with me and of course double those of my "supporters" who agreed with him and not with me. So we called his bluff.

The upshot of this was Mr. Barbanell lamely agreeing that he had made a mistake, and that there had been only



one debate; and my "supporters" dwindled down to one unnamed person who may or may not have been one of my "supporters", supporting him. Mr. Barbanell was challenged also to meet me in another debate, but naturally he refused. His opponents, he claimed, were so very ignorant that it was not worth while. I do not expect that this will be the end of Mr. Barbanell's attacks on my "temerity". He is now the editor of *Psychic News* which I must say I read regularly every week.

My own interest in Spiritualism began when I was eighteen, and one of the rooms in a youth club of which I was a member was let every week to Spiritualists. We used to delight in hearing the "knocks" made by spirits on a table in the room, but I could never find out whether any of the devoted followers of the table-knocking spooks ever saw one. I never did. Since then, I have attended many seances which would take a lot of beating for ignorance and credulity, but spooks have always avoided me. So also have spirit photographs. I think I took a camera with me to most of the discussions I had with Spiritualists, but not one of them would accept my challenge to produce a spirit photograph with it. They all, without exception, jibbed at the "film" in the camera which cannot be "switched" like a photographic plate in a plateholder. I do not know of course all the methods used by the spirits to impress on a negative a portrait of, say, Julius Caesar or the Duke of Wellington or Mr. Gladstone, but I know a number of them.

The late Mr. William Hope and Mrs. Deane were masters at switching plates but—alas!—plate photography is quite out of fashion. Plate cameras are rarely made these days, and photographic plates are very dear. But films under proper control cannot be switched. Hence there are now no mediums (as far as I know) who specialise in spirit photography. The roaring trade done by Hope and Deane has vanished beyond control. It must be admitted however that every now and then the old spirit photographs—all taken as Mr. Barbanell would tell you under the strictest scientific conditions—his own at times—appear every now and then in Spiritualist journals in all their old glory. The fact that so many of them are fifty years or more old only adds credit to their illustrious makers.

The biggest audience I ever had was when I addressed an audience of Spiritualists some years ago in Belgrave Square, and I must give them credit for hearing me very courteously. But I said, in spite of that, that there were no spirits, no materialisations, no apports, no messages from "beyond", no Summerland, and so on. In the very little discussion which followed, there were no replies to my militant attacks. Only Mr. Barbanell, who hadn't heard me, tried his hand at "answering" me, and his failure was as open as his failure to deal with Mr. Trevor Hall's exposure of Florence Cook—as Dr. Eric Dingwall pointed out when Mr. Barbanell essayed a "reply" in *Psychic News*.

Recently in this Spiritualist journal, one of its readers made a slashing attack on the historicity of Jesus who, though in Heaven, still is the backbone of nearly all "healers". Without Jesus, there could be no spiritual healing, and the horrified ladies in the movement gathered an army to reply to the dreadful blasphemy of saying "our Lord" did not exist. But how easy it would be to prove that he does! Could he not be "materialised"? After all, though not so powerful as Jesus, his Virgin Mother came to a little girl at Lourdes, and spoke perfect French to her. Moreover, in these days of movie cameras and TV, the Holy Apparition could be fixed for all the world to see.

Here then is a chance for Mr. Barbanell and his all-believing Crusaders. Bring us Jesus in spirit form and not only Summerland but Christianity will be proven—and what greater work than that could be done? Even Almighty God sitting on a cloud up there—though thrown overboard by some of our Bishops—would in this way regain their whole-hearted belief.

Perhaps it's sheer "temerity" for me to talk like this. Albeit—but I stand by every word.

### A REPLY TO MR. GONZALO QUIOGUE

In criticising my position (and Bertrand Russell's) Mr. Quiogue is confused in several ways.

Firstly he makes an error common to many freethinkers, in confusing two aspects of rational thought—the philosophical and the practical. Philosophically, I believe that agnosticism is the only tenable position in religious matters. I have never come across a convincing argument which demonstrates that it is a *logical impossibility* for a god to exist. The only gods which are logical impossibilities are the ones that are assigned incompatible characteristics, e.g. in a suffering world a beneficent and omnipotent god cannot exist. Practically, however, it is reasonable to work on the assumption that God does not exist, simply because at best he has the logical status of a mythological creature.

Thus Mr. Quiogue estimates my philosophical position accurately—I certainly believe that if the arguments for God are invalid it does not follow that there is no God. I have tried to make this point before with examples. I will try again with a bit of logic. Consider the following argument consisting of three axioms and a conclusion (small letters represent propositions):—

- p and r are both true (axiom 1)
- if x is true then either q is true or z is true (axiom 2)
- if r is true then not q is true (axiom 3)
- z is true (conclusion).

The conclusion does not follow; the argument is *invalid*. But the conclusion is *compatible* with the axioms and may be true or false. Which it is would be determined by an additional axiom. For example, the axiom "if p is true then x is true" would make the conclusion true.

This shows that if an invalid argument produces a conclusion it cannot be assumed that the conclusion is false. In particular, if the arguments for God are invalid, it does not follow that God does not exist. People who deny this are clearly illogical.

I find Mr. Quiogue's comments about "finite earth-bound man", "infinite arguments" and "infinite beings" quite unintelligible. I am very perplexed when he implies that he does not inhabit the universe. Is not the earth in the universe? If a man inhabits London, does he not also inhabit England?

Mr. Quiogue's remarks about Bertrand Russell are most unfortunate, and merely indicate that not much thought went into Mr. Quiogue's article. After quoting from Russell's *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, he introduces some comments with the phrase "following this line of reasoning . . ." . But he does not follow Russell's line of reasoning.

Mr. Quiogue says that following Russell's line of reasoning "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 wrote the book. Therefore a claim that Russell wrote the book is unverifiable and meaningless". This passage is very careless, and does not have any logical connection with the Russell quotation.

In the first place the whole point of Russell's remarks in the selected quotation concern the use of "the". Following Russell's reasoning (carefully) we could rightly say that we can never strictly verify that Russell was the author of *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*. That Russell was an author of this book, i.e., that Russell wrote the *Inquiry*, is without question empirically verifiable. This is quite different from what Mr. Quiogue thought he was logically entitled to say.

In the second place Mr. Quiogue unthinkingly links the adjectives "unverifiable" and "meaningless". These were not coupled by Russell. Why is the word "meaningless" introduced? (Philosophically, logical positivists use verifiability as a criterion of meaning, but Russell is not a logical positivist.)

Mr. Quiogue calls Russell's reasoning "wishy-washy". There is nothing whatsoever in his article to support this remark. He makes no attempt to refute the quoted argument from Russell. Perhaps he thinks it is *obviously* absurd; I assure Mr. Quiogue it is not—in fact I believe it to be quite sound. I suggest he re-read the *Inquiry* and more diligently observe his own injunction: "Let us use our heads . . ." .

G. L. SIMONS.



## CORRESPONDENCE

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

## F. A. RIDLEY TESTIMONIAL APPEAL

I would like to point out two errors in my letter (THE FREETHINKER, 2/8/63) regarding the above.

1. Mr. Ridley's *magnum opus* will of course, be the *Rise and Fall of the English Empire*, and not "British" as stated.
2. My address is:

27 Muybridge Road, New Malden, Surrey.

It is very important to address letters containing money correctly and it would be appreciated if cheques and postal orders could be "crossed" and made payable to:

J. A. Millar, F. A. Ridley Testimonial Appeal Account.

Yours sincerely,

J. A. MILLAR.

## "ON THE TRIAL OF JESUS"

In THE FREETHINKER of February 22nd 1963, volume 83, no. 8, you published a review—from the pen of Mr. F. A. Ridley—of *On the Trial of Jesus* by Paul Winter. It may be of interest to your readers that the author of that book has recently published an article "News from Pontius Pilate in Liverpool" in the August 1963 issue of the London periodical *Encounter*, volume 21, no. 2.

In Mr. Ridley's otherwise comprehensive review there is no reference to the publishers of *On the Trial of Jesus*. Perhaps it should be added that the book in question is available from Messrs. B. Blackwell, Oxford, at 40s.

ANN HOPE-PINTUS.

P.S.—In my letter to you (above) I did not anticipate the publication of Mr. Cutner's long but incoherent article in your issue of August 2nd. By the way, what is "Sanhedrim"? No such word exists; "sanhedrin" is the aramised form of the Greek word "sunedrion".

[*Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary*, 1958, gives "Sanhedrim, Sanhedrin", in that order.—ED.]

## CARDINAL MINDSZENTY

As it was I who wrote the short article about this prelate, I would like to reply to Mr. McShane who complained about it (26/7/63).

The Cardinal's behaviour has been criticised by both the Hungarian and American governments—and even by the Vatican. So that it is rather curious to find a non-Romanist like Mr. McShane defending him.

It is undeniable that the Cardinal did dabble in politics—the besetting sin of so many of the Roman Catholic clergy.

It is illogical of Mr. McShane to compare Lenin's "going into hiding" with the similar action taken by the Cardinal. Lenin was a brilliant professional politician who followed a highly dangerous occupation. The Cardinal is also a professional—in Theology (which carries no hazards with it). If he had confined his activities to religion the Cardinal would be a free man today, but he deliberately elected to play politics. He didn't do this as cleverly as Lenin had done—and so now he has to pay the penalty for his mistakes.

However, there is no question of his personal safety being endangered, as Mr. McShane infers may be possible. Even the traitor Cardinal Stepinac of Yugoslavia did not lose his life. Cardinal Mindszenty's crimes are lesser ones, his main current offence being that he obstinately refuses to leave Hungary, thus causing embarrassment to his government, the Americans and the Vatican. If he does get loose in Hungary again, he will once more become a focal point for political intrigues and will again become a national nuisance.

The Vatican is considerably displeased with his attitude and recently sent the Cardinal of Vienna to reason with Cardinal Mindszenty. This visit seems to have produced some result, as the American magazine *Newsweek* of July 29th reported that "The obdurate Cardinal Mindszenty may soon agree to leave Hungary and accept a post in Rome. Once the Mindszenty hurdle is cleared, the US government will resume normal relations with Budapest, including the exchange of top level diplomats, together with trade and cultural relations".

All these desirable mutual advantages have been held up for six years by the stubbornness of one foolish old man, who deserves no sympathy at all.

I disagree with the last opinion given by Mr. McShane, viz., that no useful purpose was served by my short article which exposed a few of the shortcomings of the Cardinal. Romanists are expert in representing their guilty clergy as "martyrs", and cleverly cover up any clerical misadventures with half-truths and fictitious "hard-luck stories".

The disastrous result is that millions of gullible Westerners today genuinely believe the bunkum about alleged religious persecution.

However small it may be, I think that any article which helps to correct false impressions has some value in the fight against reaction.

ADRIAN PIGOTT.

## JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

I have read THE FREETHINKER for the past three months hoping that its purpose is that of freeing the reader's thoughts from ignorance and misleading half-truths. However I find that many of your contributors confine their efforts to the discrediting of religions and religionists. This is not freethinking, nor does it necessarily conduce to freethinking.

Reginald Underwood, in his article "God's Woman" (26/7/63), seems afraid to say anything good about Jehovah's Witnesses. The nearest he gets is to admit that their beliefs are no more absurd than those of Roman Catholics, Mormons and Christian Scientists—faint praise indeed!

Jehovah's Witnesses, in this country at any rate, have generally high standards of cleanliness, sobriety and integrity. Their unselfish industry sets a good example. Even their religion has some merits. It is remarkably free from pomp, ritual and festivals, and practices no racial discrimination. Their god may be absurd in some respects, but at least he is one in number, and not the usual three.

DAVID BIRD

[*Jehovah's Witnesses are also the subject of F. A. Ridley's Views and Opinions this week.*—ED.]

## QUESTION

Is not the resuscitation of an attempted suicide a gross interference with personal liberty?

A. O. SNOOK.

## TAIPING RISING

The Taiping Rising took place 1851-1865, not in the early 1880s as stated in Mr. Ridley's article on July 26th. Moreover, the American Ward had already turned the tide of war before Charles Gordon intervened.

JOHN GRANTHAM.

[We thank Mr. Grantham for pointing out the misprint: "early 1880s" should have read "early 1850s".—ED.]

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