

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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FROM A READER'S point of view, the first requirement if not the greatest merit of any book worth reading, is readability. It can hardly be said that books dealing with philosophical subjects invariably excel in this admirable quality. How easy to recall occasions when, in order to unearth the author's gems, not always of the first quality one has had to plough through great slabs of wearisome, academic pretentiousness which seemed resolved never to use two words when six would do and those the longest, ugliest and least familiar. There is nothing of this in Hector Hawton's new book *The Humanist Revolution* (published by Barrie and Rockliff in association with Pemberton Publishing Co. at 15s.; 10s. 6d. paperback). Mr. Hawton certainly knows how to write. He can use a necessary vocabulary without falling into the pedantry which Thackeray derided as "the height of foine language entoiely." What he says has both style and weight. He thereby makes intensely interesting a subject which, too heavily handled could soon become intensely dull. From first to last his book is splendidly readable, a model of clear thinking, not only lucidly but engagingly expressed. It would be hard to imagine a better exposition of contemporary Humanism.

Time and again as page follows absorbing page, one catches an unmistakable echo of the tone and temper of those trenchant and balanced columns which, month by month, stand so to speak, as the prologue to *The Humanist* magazine. When a level is so well maintained, it is not only difficult, it seems almost invidious to quote, to take this and leave that. One is reminded of Dr. Johnson confronted with a similar dilemma: "He that tries to recommend him by select quotations will succeed like the pedant in Hierocles who, when he offered his house for sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen". Much the same is true of this book. By the time I had reached the end of it I had marked so many points for emphasis and comment that a fulfilment of my intentions must have resulted in another though less acceptable book.

## Humanism and Atheism

Even in these days when scientific knowledge and understanding have become more easy of access than ever before, we can still read and hear the wildest notions in reference to Humanism — sometimes from Humanists. Between an often supercilious indifference on the one hand and an overriding religious prejudice on the other, Humanism would seem to range from a new and impossible religion to an old but impossible black magic. But Humanism is much further from being either religion or magic than religion and magic are from each other. In the popular religious view, which is virtually, not to say virtuously, the view of simpletons, Humanism is largely and quite rightly identified with atheism and atheism is automatically but quite wrongly identified with the most heinous wickedness. Which is saying that Humanists are a bad lot. Such nonsense apart, it is no more possible to contain Humanism complete within the limits of a verbal

definition than it is Christianity. But while it becomes increasingly difficult to say what Christianity is, beyond saying that it is a hopeless muddle of contradictory variants, thanks to such a compelling presentation as *The Humanist Revolution*, which could as well be called a Humanist revelation, Humanism is quickly becoming more comprehensible, more attractive and, I think, more successful.

One highly probable reason why there is so much confusion about the meaning of modern Humanism is, that the name Humanist has been more and more appropriated with such calculating effrontery by those who have no more occasion

to call themselves Humanists than they have to call themselves crocodiles—excepting it be on account of their tears. We have now got to the point when it is getting quite fashionable to talk of Christian Humanists. Some go even further and talk of Christian agnostics. One more nudge and we shall be having Christian atheists. The miracles in the Bible are fools to the miracles religious casuistry can accomplish. There are times when the less well equipped have a job to know whether they are standing on their sacred heads or their secular heels. But here at last they may find a capital compendium of instruction which, although nobody, least of all its author, would claim to be infallible, nevertheless provides a formidable defence against the assaults, trickeries and blandishments of wily religious protagonists.

## Humanism and Christianity

Throughout the book it is made abundantly plain that whatever sympathies may exist between individual Humanists and Christians, Humanism and Christianity are essentially in militant opposition. This does not mean that Humanists, at any rate, nourish a blood-thirsty enmity. Humanists are Freethinkers. Their thinking is guided by their own uninhibited reason and not subjected to an external authority that can easily be unmasked as bogus. By the very nature of their claims, Humanists are therefore reasoning and reasonable adversaries. It would be risky to speak of their religious opponents with the same assurance. Catholics, especially those Catholics who jib even at being classed as Christians, and certain non-Catholic sects, live by a blind faith in dead dogmas. Their records have always shown and still show that they will not hesitate to obstruct as far as they can, whatever is humane let alone humanistic, whenever it conflicts with their particular religious shibboleths. And they are often at no great pains to conceal what they would do about it if they had the chance. Fortunately, opportunity is a fine thing.

## Humanism and Morality

Life is the hardest nut we have ever had to crack. And it will long remain so for those who come after us. Life has never been and can never be static as organised religions would have it to be. As Mr. Hawton points out, new solutions entail new problems and neither he nor any

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

## A Humanist Revelation

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD



other Humanists would pretend that Humanism can finally solve them all. It is vastly more unlikely that religion can and the more it pretends to do so the sillier it will look. Where religion elects to say "it is", Humanism prefers to say "is it?". But working conclusions for everyday living have to be found and Mr. Hawton's book is rich in suggestions for finding them. He has many penetrating things to say on such matters as faith, reason, survival after death and indeed on most subjects vital to humanity. But his dominating concern is manifestly to establish a basis for morality independent of supernatural sanctions, that is, a secure basis for whatever we may mean by the good life. And it can safely be said that for those who are out to pursue truth rather than to defend preconceptions, he makes out a far more practicable case than religion has yet succeeded in doing.

#### The Humanist Revolution

The whole tenor of this Humanist revolution, which

may now be well on its way to its coming of age, can be summed up in its abandonment of divine sources. Humanism is for man. Religion is for God. Man is an actuality we can and indeed must cope with. God is a supreme doubt which Humanists resolve in their own way. The affairs of man must inevitably, however inadequately, be ordered and controlled by man. It is useless to cry for the moon or seek assistance from what is not there. To put the matter in humbler phraseology, if you want a helping hand the first and usually the best place to look for it is on the end of your arm.

It is impossible in a summary as sketchy as this to do justice to this fine book. It may be that I have not conveyed as satisfactorily as one might wish, much of what the author has in mind. But I have tried to indicate that here is a book of exceptional interest both for Humanists and their critics, a book at once intellectually stimulating and a pleasure to read.

## Dogma—Man's Greatest Enemy

By G. L. SIMONS

DOGMA, IN ONE FORM or another, is at the root of most of the world's problems. Dogma makes people intolerant and reactionary, bigoted and cruel. To dogma we owe persecution, war, widespread disease and famine. We live in a world abundant in raw materials; wise, gifted men are many. Only dogma prevents the intelligent organisation of the world's resources so that all human beings may have the necessities of life and experience the spiritual riches for which the human personality seems so uniquely equipped. But what is dogma?

Dogma is of two sorts—intellectual and moral. Intellectual dogma comprises statements which, although purporting to be reasonable and intelligible, go beyond or against the available evidence. Intellectual dogma appears much in religion; it also appears in politics and occasionally in science and philosophy. This form of dogma is bad for two main reasons—it restricts free intellectual enquiry (e.g. Church opposition to Galileo, Darwin, Freud) and it generates cruel moralities (e.g. Nazism and apartheid).

Moral dogma is of two sorts. It may be derived from dogmatic intellectual beliefs or from authority—monarchic, priestly, parental, etc. It is apparent that this second type is also based on intellectual beliefs, but beliefs removed one stage. Moral dogma is bad because it restricts the application of intelligence to social problems; it inhibits reform and preserves injustice and apathy.

Political dogma is identical in nature to moral dogma. It may be derived from intellectual beliefs concerning, for example, the inferiority of Jews, or the immutability of human nature. Or it may be derived from the belief that, for example, *all* state control over education, health, industry, etc., is a bad thing, or conversely that *all* private enterprise is undesirable.

Intellectual dogma is usually characterised by propositions which seem to have a scientific status. These propositions, however, usually become untenable or meaningless under close examination. The supporters of such statements claim that they are reasonable, and that the "unprejudiced" will accept them. Intellectual dogma is a substitute for knowledge—knowledge which is thought to be emotionally unacceptable. In the first case the dogma goes beyond the evidence. In the second case it goes against it. The range of intellectual dogma is very great;

it extends from the traditional "old wives' tales" and everyday superstitions to, for example, the propositions of the world religions.

Moral dogma is characterised by its extreme nature (e.g. abortion is *always* wrong), its intransigence and its tendency to seek justification in tradition or sacred texts. It is also characterised by its unwillingness to accommodate genuine scientific propositions. Rational intellectual statements which would undermine a moral dogma are either ignored or countered with a statement that rightly belongs to intellectual dogma.

There are, however, some isolated instances where intellectual and moral dogma may be desirable. For example, in a revolutionary environment dogma can serve to create enthusiasm and solidarity, where a more cautious, scientific approach would fail. However, this is dangerous since the transition from a dogmatic social order to a reasonable, democratic one is hazardous and uncertain. For dogma tends to breed dogma, minds dogmatically educated have difficulty in adjusting themselves in a more sober and less fanatical atmosphere. In a revolutionary situation dogma has some merit and some danger. In other situations the disadvantages of dogma are so much greater than the advantages that the latter are negligible in significance.

In history people could only derive satisfaction from dogma (in its more extreme form) by the suppression of a majority or the persecution of a minority. No doubt ancient priests derived a perverse pleasure when they sacrificed children to Moloch. Similarly in primitive societies witch-doctors probably enjoyed the frequent sacrifice of "saviour-kings"; no doubt the wretched victim did not share this enjoyment. These are clear examples of cruelty arising out of intellectual dogma; examples in more developed societies are also numerous. The killing of the Christians in pre-Christian Rome and the persecution of the Jews in post-Christian Rome show that merely to replace one dogmatic creed with another is no real improvement. Cruelty is still practised but is directed at a different social group.

The activities of the Catholic inquisitors and the Protestant witch-burners also indicate some possible consequences of intellectual dogma. The religious wars—

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# Italian Women Confess

By ELIZABETH COLLINS

IN TRAVELLING some hundreds of miles about Italy, as I have done, staying in out of the way places, and visiting small fishing villages around the Venetian lagoon, it comes as a surprise to read of another and somewhat secret Italy one was not really aware of. The Italy of women and girls whose personal and sexual problems are revealed in the letters they write to the "photo-romance" sentimental type of women's magazine read by the lower middle and working classes. *Italian Women Confess* edited by Gabriella Parca, translated by Carolyn Gaiser, and published in Great Britain by George Allen & Unwin at 21s., is an Italian bestseller, being in its eighth edition in that country.

It is a carefully prepared sociological documentary picture of relationships between Italian men and women of today, based on selected excerpts from 8,000 letters received over the last three years by two women's magazines published in Rome. How popular this new "confessional" in the public press is may be judged by the 5 million letters sent to the "lovelorn columnist" of these magazines over the last ten years. Many of them are charmingly naive, fresh and direct, revealing a pathetic confidence in the columnist's ability to help and advise the writers.

These letters were collected by an eminent sociologist, and the extremely informative main preface by Gabriella Parca gives a clear picture of the social climate from which the letters emerge. They are divided into eighteen groups or chapters, each having a short concise preface dealing with the type of letters following ("Adolescents", "Forbidden Loves", etc.) as well as giving percentages of that type received. They reveal the environment of the writers, the mentality of the family, and of the people who surround them, and point to the necessity felt by the younger generation for a new morality. Drawn from a wide circle, they include factory and farm workers, housewives, domestic servants, office clerks, and schoolgirls, categories which represent over 60 per cent of the Italian female population.

This book explodes the generally accepted myth of the Italian woman as a "serene person satisfied with her role of wife and mother . . . and free from every desire for independence and equality with men". She is usually represented as completely natural, "born for love" and "without complications of any kind".

These ideas are apparently far from reality. We learn that Italian women are "obsessed by sexual problems", "inhibited by prejudices, dissatisfied with their own lives", but "incapable of making the smallest attempt to change them". With divorce prohibited except in rare circumstances, and surrounded by old traditions and superstitious taboos, these women are a prey to the many emotional difficulties which, in often overcrowded living conditions, beset them from childhood onwards. Hence the cries for help, understanding and guidance that run through these many moving letters, which set out, often inadequately the problems of their writers' inner lives. These they confide to the "lovelorn columnist", not daring to disclose them to "parents who are conditioned by the traditional morality of their own upbringing", nor to friends (since this might lead to gossip), and ashamed to consult a priest.

Among the letter-writers are girls whose knowledge of the facts of sexual life is practically nil, and who are the victims of an exalted virginity cult reminiscent of the

ancient slave markets where young virgins fetched the highest price. We learn of the free morality almost "imposed by the boy friend who does not then know how to live up to such morality". Of the fear that unless the girl "gives in" the boy will leave her for someone more amenable. Once having "given in" a guilt complex oppresses her and remorse at having lost her virginity, "a girl's most precious possession". Which possession is, in many cases surrounded by a "thick veil of ignorance, as most of these women and girls have not even the most elementary knowledge of anatomy or of the physiological processes". The picture emerges of a pretty tight rule of sexual conduct for women and a very loose one for men, with women too inclined to submit to the man's will. The women tend to be emotionally immature, leaving all decisions to the man and granting him alone the "right to think". Masculine prejudice seems to be the source of much feminine anxiety and fear, the morality of the man judging the same actions differently according to whether performed by a man or a woman.

In Italy marriage is considered to be the ideal condition for a woman and it is often her only objective, yet in attaining it she encounters numerous obstacles. Pleasing her family comes first, then prestige, financial interests, family ancestry, etc. While surmounting all these difficulties the young people often have no opportunity of really getting to know each other, so that after the marriage they often become profoundly disillusioned and burdened with regrets. "Prejudices are the first cousins of superstition in which it is said Italy rivals Malaya, obscure prejudices survive today as part of a morality that in its almost total discrimination against women creates a social injustice of the first order". This prejudice often so limits the liberty of the women as to make them "at times the prisoners of their families".

The plight of a woman tied to a flagrantly unfaithful husband is a situation she is expected to tolerate and from which she has no legal escape. The legend widely accepted by Italian men that wives almost recognise the husband's right to be unfaithful is not in reality true. The women are extremely jealous and suffer deep humiliation by such betrayals. As, owing to the attitude of the Catholic Church, divorce is impossible, the wife has no other choice than to tolerate this state of affairs, "unless she is prepared to face life alone without the possibility of starting another family". Italian law seems purposely designed to create and maintain these ambiguous situations. The possibility of asserting their independence by means of a career has not yet dawned upon the majority of these women, partly due to their environment, and because of the prevailing implication that "every woman working takes a job unfairly from a man".

Although apparently customs differ between North and South, there being more liberty and frankness in the North, there are certain prejudices common to both, and distrust of medical science is one. Even though cured of an illness by means of medical skill, the cure is still attributed to "divine grace" and publicly recognised by means of "ex-voto offerings to the saints". Except in the North it is almost impossible for boys and girls to meet alone and get to know each other without risking gossip, and in small Sicilian towns it is enough for a girl to be seen talking to a man twice to be compromised!

(Concluded on page 372)



## This Believing World

Although the Christian Churches cannot help moaning about the apathy of their more or less faithless flocks, they have nothing to complain of about their harvest of cash. "All of them," says the *Daily Telegraph* (November 7th) "report a 'boom year' for contributions". And it adds, "The figures in themselves are impressive. For example, the Church Missionary Society had a £1 million income last year, and so did the Methodist Society". So, even if Christians more and more find their religion a bore, cash for the propagation of Christianity rolls in.

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And this is not all, for "legacies pour into the Churches' coffers". The Bible Society, for example, received £192,000, and the Baptists about £60,000, and it is interesting to note what joy giving must give to the giver when one of the largest legacies was £16,000 and the smallest £10. Naturally, such figures pale in face of the Church of England with its £13 million a year income.

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In spite of all this Church officials do not appear very optimistic about the progress of Christianity in the country. One of them told the *Daily Telegraph* that "the millions of today must be multiplied at least five times if Christianity is to do its work efficiently". But would it even then? How about calling in hosts of coloured Christian missionaries from abroad to re-convert England, as the Archbishop of Canterbury has proposed?

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Is it not touching the way some of our parsons are appealing to teenagers with "pop" versions of famous old hymns, often changing the words as well as the tune? The Salvation Army was a master of this kind of thing, and never had any difficulty in getting its old "Blood and Fire" followers singing "Washed in the blood of Jesus" to the tune of "After the Ball is over". Now the Rev. P. Wright of Walton, Lancs, has changed the words, "Hail to the Lord's Anointed" to "Hurrah, for Him who's with it", and the hymn "Love divine all loves excelling" to "Love divine all lust expelling" as the *News of the World* of November 3rd informs us.

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Another hymn re-written by Mr. Wright invites: "Bring your sex to Jesus, let him rule your will. He will guide you surely, and your love fulfil". And it is only fair to add that the vicar considers his changes have resulted in teenagers "swelling his congregation". All the same, we have an idea that if it was a question of birth control, most people would trust artificial contraceptives rather than Jesus.

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It is a mistake to imagine that November 5th is always sacred to the memory of that Roman Catholic champion Guy Fawkes. In the village of Shebbear in Devon, the day is celebrated to keep out the Devil for another year. According to Bonfire Night's London *Evening News*, to frighten off the enemy of mankind the usual peal of church bells is rung, and to make sure, everybody also goes to a pub to drink a toast to his downfall. A massive boulder is then turned over on the village green, after which the Devil wouldn't dare to enter Shebbear for another twelve months. We think that in the cause of unity, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster should join forces and lead the proceedings at Shebbear next year.

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It must be a long time since the Pope was burnt in effigy in this country, but the record was broken (*Daily Mail*,

November 7th) when a number of youthful Church of England club members at a garden party in Pennfields threw an effigy of the head of Roman Catholicism on to a fire with the slogan, "Pay your last respects to the Pope". The organiser later said he was "sorry" if it hurt anyone, but a Sunday school teacher frankly declared it was meant to symbolise "the triumph of the Protestant faith over Roman Catholicism".

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But can it be said now that Protestantism has really triumphed over Catholicism? Which Church gets the best publicity on films, radio, and TV—indeed, one might also add, in our national press—even in Protestant England? But anyway, this effigy burning belongs to the days when Christianity was a force in the land. And that time has gone—for ever.

## ITALIAN WOMEN CONFESS

(Concluded from page 371)

Almost the largest percentage of letters, 19 per cent, comes from people who would formerly have discussed these matters with their confessors, but who today prefer to consult the "adviser" of the "lovelorn column", who finds himself or herself having to make decisions likely to change the lives of countless unknown people.

In her main preface the editor says it is not easy to understand how certain obscure prejudices still survive today. "Only if we seek out the causes that by powerful means have preached this morality for centuries, and still struggle against every change, does it become understandable". But, she says, "an analysis of that type is not the purpose of the present work which limits itself to presenting a reality which has always been surrounded by silence".

This is a most interesting book which I strongly recommend to all who are interested in the human problems of our time, especially to women who already enjoy privileges won for them in the early days of this century, such as yet are only dreamed of by the writers of these letters. It places vividly before the public evidence of an almost medieval mental prison as regards sexual morality and ideas in which these women exist today. Ideas that are still based on the long out of date Pauline conception of woman's place in the scheme of things. The well educated and aristocratic section of society is of course outside this survey. It would have been interesting if we could have known their answers to some of the questions posed.

Finally, a quotation from the last rather amusing letter in the book, from a French girl born of Italian parents. "I ask you," she says, "why are Italian women so narrow of mind in this space age?" Why indeed? No doubt Freethinkers could supply the answer.

## HOMOSEXUAL LAW REFORM SOCIETY

THE HOMOSEXUAL LAW REFORM SOCIETY announces that Professor A. J. Ayer, FBA, has accepted the office of President of the Society.

Mr. C. H. Rolph has been elected Chairman of the Society's Executive Committee, in succession to Mr. Kenneth Walker, FRCS, who has been Chairman since the Society's foundation in May 1958.

The Homosexual Law Reform Society, whose Executive and Honorary Committees include Members of Parliament belonging to all three political parties, exists to promote the passage into law of the Wolfenden Committee's recommendation that "homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence".



# THE FREETHINKER

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THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 17s. 6d.; half-year, 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d. In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.25, half-year, \$2.75; three months, \$1.40).

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Inquiries regarding Bequests and Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. A. MILLAR.

(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: MESSRS. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street,) Sunday Evenings.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Humanist Group (Arden Hotel, New Street), Wednesday, November 27th, 8 p.m.: MRS. F. M. MCNEILLE, MA, "The Aftercare of Prisoners".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, November 26th, 7.30 p.m.: MISS GLADYS FARNELL, MSc, "China Revisited—1963".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 24th, 6.30 p.m.: F. J. CORINA and REV. BILL MATTHEWS—Debate: "The Idea of God is Unnecessary Today".

Marble Arch Branch (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, November 24th, 7.30 p.m.: ERIC MAPLE, "Witchcraft in Britain".

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, November 22nd, 7.15 p.m.: A MEETING.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, November 24th, 11 a.m.: DR. JOHN LEWIS, "Can we do without Religion?".

## Notes and News

TWO BOOKS published last week will provide plenty of discussion in Humanist circles during the coming months. One of them, *The Humanist Revolution* by Hector Hawton (Barrie and Rockliff, 15s. hardback; 10s. 6d. paper) is the subject of Reginald Underwood's Views and Opinions this week. And next week, Mr. Underwood will review the second book, *Objections to Humanism*, edited by H. J. Blackham (Constable, 16s.), which was compiled in response to a suggestion by Philip Toynbee, when he reviewed Messrs. Constable's previously published *Objections to Christian Belief*.

★  
IN HIS *Observer* review on November 10th, Mr. Toynbee—as "a sort of humanist myself"—informed us that *Objections to Humanism* had a "less surprising" effect on him than *Objections to Christian Belief* but proved "on the whole, to be an interesting and encouraging companion volume". But the Humanists were, he found, "no match for the Christians in humility" (did he expect them to be?) and Kingsley Martin trod "the worn old rationalist path with the familiar rolling gait of a rather worn old rationalist". Mr. Martin revealed his

decrepitude when he dared to say that, "Darwin, Marx, Frazer and Freud were none of them infallible, but they taught us to think in a way that excludes the story that mankind began four thousand and four years ago", and the story of the Fall and Redemption. "Oh, dear!" Mr. Toynbee exclaimed, as anxious, it seemed, as our "Modernists", to ignore the credal basis of Christianity.

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WE HAVE time for only one other comment on Mr. Toynbee's review. There is no contradiction between Mr. H. J. Blackham's insistence on the empirical basis of modern Humanism and Miss Kathleen Nott's reference to the "historical" (in fact, philosophical) meaning of rationalism as reliance on "pure reason" rather than empiricism. The changing or differing uses of a term may be confusing to the unenlightened, but that does not make them contradictory when they are specifically used in different senses. Not that we don't have our own criticisms of *Objections to Humanism*, one of them concerning Mr. Blackham's choice of contributors. He might for instance, have included Mr. Hawton, editor of the foremost English Humanist magazine. Still, we have *The Humanist Revolution*, and the two books afford many interesting comparisons.

★  
"THEY WOULD not suffer little Ann to come unto them" was the headline to a story in *The People* (27/10/63) which it described as a "sin against society" and "against the Founder of Christianity". Four-year-old Ann Morrison of Normanton, Yorks, was sick and physically handicapped, and needed the companionship of other children. Her mother therefore applied for her to join the nursery class at Castleford Road Infants School, quite near her home, but the child was turned down, partly no doubt because of her limp (handicapped children are often sent to special schools) but also because she was a Roman Catholic. It was this that outraged the "Man o' the People", who doesn't "care a two-penny fig whether a man is a Catholic, a Jew or a Hindu". If he is a British citizen, "he is entitled to all the rights and privileges of the rest of us".

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IDEALLY, OF COURSE, this is so. And no one can help but sympathise with Ann Morrison. But it is well to consider the real cause of her "victimisation". First, and foremost, it is the pitiful shortage of nursery schools. Second, however, she is a victim of the "dual system" and her own religion's segregationist policy. As Miss Stork, headmistress of the school in question, pointed out, there is a long waiting list for the nursery class and preference is given to those children "who intend to continue their education with us". "I am not biased against Catholics", Miss Stork said, "but they invariably leave us to attend Catholic schools when they are older . . .". So, while commending the "Man o' the People's" righteous indignation, we must notice his failure to offer a solution to cases like Ann's (except, apparently to allow her into the nursery school to the exclusion of another child). In fact, the solution is twofold: many more nursery schools and secular education. But what would Ann's Church say to that?

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THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY issued a National Education Week statement supporting the recommendation of the Robbins Committee on Higher Education and the more general aspirations of the 1963 Campaign for Education. It also called for the secularisation of education—"the disappearance of collective worship and the replacement of religious education with the teaching of ethics, anthropology and the history of ideas".



# The Religious Policy of the Emperor Augustus

By F. A. RIDLEY

ACCORDING TO Christian chronology (which in its present form dates from about 500 AD), the birth of the titular founder of Christianity eventuated in the reign of Augustus Caesar, whom (rather than his more spectacular uncle, Julius) most classical historians now regard as the authentic founder of the Roman Empire. From the time of St. Augustine, Christian writers have not omitted to point to the remarkable coincidence that the founder of the Christian Church should have been born in the reign of the founder of the Roman Empire. But was it really a coincidence? For within a decade of Christ's traditional birth, an inscription (excavated in recent years) salutes the founder of the Roman Empire as a god come down to earth and as the universal "saviour" of mankind. Is there not some organic connection, quite possibly a relationship of cause and effect between these two contemporary events, the one in the religious, the other in the secular sphere?

Though neither a great general nor a "universal man" like his uncle, Julius Octavian Caesar (63 BC-14 AD), the later Augustus, was a far abler politician than was the hero of the Gallic Wars and author of both the *Commentaries* and the *Julius Calendar*. Octavian bore a generic relationship to Julius analogous to that of Louis Bonaparte, Napoleon III, to his great-uncle Napoleon. For it was under the dynamic and completely ruthless leadership of Octavian Caesar that Roman society, based on the twin foundations of chattel-slavery in the economic sphere and Roman domination of the Mediterranean hinterland in the domain of politics, was finally constituted on a definitive basis.

The preceding era of storm and stress, of servile insurrections, of political conspiracies and of endemic civil war, of Spartacus, Catiline, and of the Ides of March, had reduced the Roman Republic and the social order of classical antiquity to a state of chaos. By the beginning of the later Christian era, Rome had to go on or get out. Under the ruthlessly efficient leadership of Octavian Caesar, Rome went on: the moribund Roman Republic was translated into the Roman Empire. As the first effective Roman emperor, Octavian, the ultimate victor and survivor in the civil wars that had consumed Julius Caesar and his rival Pompey, and then Mark Antony and Cleopatra, Octavian was hailed by the Roman Senate as Augustus (the Blessed One) and the summer month of August annually reminds us of this first and greatest Roman emperor.

A very important aspect of the policy of consolidation of the Roman world by Augustus, was presented by the decisive line that he took up with regard to religion. For whilst the deliberate use of religion for political ends was not actually invented by Augustus, he probably practised it more systematically and successfully than had any political regime before his time. A century before the first Caesars, the Greek historian, Polybius, had congratulated the Roman Senate on its artful manipulation of religious superstitions for its own secular ends, but under Augustus, the deliberate use of religion and even (as in the conspicuous case of the Arval Brothers *ut infra*) the artificial revival of long moribund religious cults for political objectives, was raised to an art.

Augustus recognised the importance of religion as a "moral policeman", as a stabilising principle in an unstable social order as was that of ancient Rome at the dawn of

the Christian era. In fact, the policy, if not the actual phrase of, "if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him", represented a major contribution of the Emperor Augustus to the science of politics. This was the more necessary, since the official religion of ancient Rome was an aristocratic cult with no popular roots and with beliefs so archaic that even its own votaries scarcely believed in them. A writer contemporary with Augustus (the younger Cato) tells us that two Roman priests could not meet in the street without winking at each other.

At the same time oriental religious cults like those of Mithras and Isis, both of them then recently introduced in Rome, were making rapid headway amongst the emotion-starved masses. Beside being alien to Roman official traditions, these cults, particularly the solar cult, are known to have been associated with the subversive forces amongst the slaves. "The sun that shines equally on the just and on the unjust" was the then symbol of social equality and inevitably antagonistic to the great exploiting empire and servile social order of Rome, and at least one earlier slave insurrection, that of Aristoricus in Asia Minor—133 BC—had been bound up with this equalitarian solar cult.

It was the supreme aim of Augustus as the saviour and would-be restorer of the Roman state and social order, to combat these subversive tendencies by every means in his power. Amongst such means, religion figured prominently. Precisely how, a modern authority informs us:

The old religion was already so decrepit at the time of [Julius] Caesar that it is surprising it should have lasted four centuries longer. This survival was due to the national and political character. The worship of the Roman divinities became a form of patriotism especially after the reaction inaugurated by Augustus. Himself a free-thinker like Caesar, he exerted himself to the utmost to revive a reverence for the past and combat the subversive tendencies of his day. He found auxiliaries in serious men such as Virgil and Titus Livius, and even in epicurians like Properthius, Horace and Ovid. *The Aeneid* [composed by Augustus's express order a few years before the beginning of the Christian era—F.A.R.] which has become the national epic of Rome, was a religious poem; Livy's *Decades*, Horace's *Carmen Seculaire* and Ovid's *Fasti* are inspired by a kindred spirit and simulate a kind of piety that supplies the place of faith.

Salomon Reinach adds in *Orpheus*:

The throne looked to the altar for support; the orthodox man, the *homme bien pensant* who believes in nothing, but sends his servants to church, dates from the time of Augustus. Finally, the public worship accorded to the emperors, especially to deceased and deified emperors, for which the Senate prepared the way by building a temple to Caesar, was associated with the worship of the goddess Rome, and became in the provinces the religious formula of loyalism. It was because they refused to participate in this worship that the Jews and Christians were always looked upon with suspicion by the powers; the Christians more particularly, because they did not constitute the remnants of a conquered nation, but a State within the State.

In the field of religious practice, Augustus patronised older pagan cults, even some which celebrated their rites in archaic Latin already unintelligible to him and his contemporaries, and conspicuous amongst these was the primitive cult of the Arval Brethren, dating perhaps from the earliest days of Rome (traditionally founded 754 BC) and which consisted apparently of primitive fertility rites that culminated in a kind of sacred war dance in honour of Mars, accompanied by a ritual chant in such primitive Latin that even modern classical scholars have difficulty in deciphering it exactly. Augustus revived this archaic cult, all the Roman emperors down to Marcus Aurelius were



enrolled in it; its rites were celebrated at the public expense, and the Arval Brethren seem to have had considerable influence under the early empire. They were only finally suppressed by victorious Christianity at the end of the 4th century. NB. The artificial revival of the Arval cult had obvious affinities with the modern revival cult of Shinto in modern Japan.

In the secular sphere, Augustus restored the Roman Empire on stable foundations that lasted down to its overthrow by the German Bonificarius. But in the religious field, he was less successful. For by the end of the 3rd century, the Roman pagan cults were moribund. The way was left clear for the final struggle between the Oriental cults that ended in the triumph of Christianity. The Christian Church of Rome eventually succeeded the Pagan Empire.

## Convent Melodrama

By MARGARET McILROY

*Sister Cat* by Felix Gould (Lyle Stuart, New York, \$4.95) is an absorbing novel of life in an American convent. In its incidents and plot it is melodramatic and bizarre, but the characters of the nuns are well drawn and psychologically convincing. The story grips, from the excellently contrived opening, when we have our first view of the convent through the eyes of two workmen carrying out some repairs—"Like a prison, they thought wonderingly"—to an ending of which I will only say that it is unlikely to be foreseen by the reader!

The theme of the book is the distortion of personality caused by the nun's efforts to repress all her natural inclinations, and particularly to drive out love for all living creatures, loving Jesus and Mary alone. Nun after nun is drawn to the love of a creature, whether it be love for the cat of the title, a robin, a priest, another nun, or a child. "Personality under the continuous repression and denial of itself trembles perilously on hysteria", says the author, and he illustrates this plentifully, showing the unconscious motivation which none of the nuns is ever able to understand in herself. There are on record enough cases of abnormal behaviour and "demonic possession" in convents to justify all Felix Gould's assertions.

The main strength of the novel is the compassion with which Felix Gould treats his unfortunate nuns through all their mental aberrations. In the gentle and affectionate *Sister Gresualda* he has created a character of unusual charm.

At one point I suspect Mr. Gould has done the Church an injustice. There is in his convent a fourteen year old novice, who had been abandoned at the convent gates as a baby. She believed herself to have been left there by an angel. She had never left the premises, and it did not seem to occur to herself or anyone else that she should look outside before taking her final vows. It is hardly probable that a baby would be brought up in a convent which did not run a regular orphanage. Moreover, whatever pressures may be put on young girls to become nuns, it does not seem likely that in modern America a girl would be accepted as a novice with quite so little idea of any alternative.

However fantastic and improbable the nature of the incidents perplexing these good nuns may be, Mr. Gould's basic thesis of the essential unwholesomeness of monasticism—particularly, perhaps, for women—remains convincing. I recommend this book to all those readers interested in convent life, and to anyone who likes a dramatic novel, without insisting too much on credibility of plot.

## Australian Scientist on God

"THE BIBLICAL concept of God is totally inadequate for this age," said Professor Sir Mark Oliphant, director of the school of research in physical sciences at the Australian National University, addressing a lunch-hour meeting at St. Mark's Library, Canberra on October 11th, 1963.

Sir Mark said he was always amazed by the verbal and mental gymnastics indulged in by the Churches to explain how a God of Love permitted diseases and pestilence, famine and all the untold miseries of want, war and the exploitation of man by man.

"There is a look of gentle resignation on the face of every clergyman with whom I have ever discussed these questions—resignation at my ignorance of one of the most basic theorems of theology," he said.

"A fat prelate in Rome, London, New York or Sydney, his belly lined with good food, claims greater knowledge of God than was possessed by Pasteur, by Newton, by Gowland Hopkins, by Einstein or by Rutherford.

"The prelate knows much of Church history, of dogma, of liturgy, and of church politics.

"The man of science knows much more of God's universe and of man, because he has not confined himself to records of the past, but has sought knowledge—new knowledge—for himself, in voyages of discovery where his only goal is the truth."

Sir Mark said he believed St. Paul had done a grave disservice to Christianity through his concept of God as an even narrower and pettier dictator than the God of the Jews, living in a heaven of a repulsively cloying and inane character.

Ideas which were 2,000 years of age must be suspect in the totally different physical and mental climate of today.

In recent years there had been growing scientific support for the concept of continuous creation of matter in the universe.

If God was the Creator, he was as solidly at work now as he ever was in the past, and he would continue to be so for evermore.

"The universe of space, matter and light is no ephemeral thing, but possesses in itself those attributes of creation, permanence and limitlessness which are associated with the idea of God," Sir Mark said.

"Surely, then, if there is a God, he is this universe.

"Through it and in it he must express himself.

"In it and by it he must have his being."

Sir Mark said man had shown a peculiar arrogance in fashioning God after his own image.

"For me, God is a far grander conception," he said.

"He is best explained through man's striving, not for salvation—a petty, personal aim—but for understanding of himself and of the world in which he lives.

"Man is at his best and noblest when he is creative, when he produces beauty in art or in words, or when he begets new ideas.

"If there is divinity in man it is expressed by this innate endeavour."

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## DOGMA—MAN'S GREATEST ENEMY

(Concluded from page 370)

between Mohammedan and Christian, Protestant and Catholic, Hindu and Mohammedan, etc.—are a further example. It matters not whether religion was the direct cause of military conflict or merely the conditional requirement for the release of sadistic and hostile tendencies. The final result was the same. (And what is regarded as a *cause*, as opposed to a *condition*, is no more *causal* than any other feature of the situation. It is merely the aspect of immediate interest.)

The burning of the Irish Catholics by Cromwell's Protestants and the burning of the Lutherans by the Catholics indicate the tendency of factions opposing strong dogmas to sink into a reverse theology—one which differs intellectually but which generates the same sort of extreme and harsh morality. The First World War (supported by three Christian emperors—opposed by German and Russian atheists, by the French atheist Jaurès, by the English free-thinkers John Morley and Bertrand Russell), Stalin's purges, and the Second World War (promoted by a man whose belief in "Providence" was akin to theism, and whose renowned "intuition" was akin to revelation) indicate the disasters which can befall mankind through the activities of dogmatic and bigoted leaders. In the past, great individuals have been executed and persecuted for daring to express opinions which did not conform to popular prejudice. Socrates and Bruno were executed. Aristotle and Anaxagoras had to flee Athens, Spinoza, Wycliffe, etc., were persecuted by the Church. And in modern times great men are still subject to the wrath of bigot and fanatic, e.g. Einstein fled from Europe, Bertrand Russell was pronounced unfit to teach in the College of New York.

It is no accident that most of the selected examples of war and persecution have religious associations. For religious persecution has been widespread because religion has been widespread; a dogmatic supernatural creed is invested with more apparent authority than any dogmatic secular creed. For this reason they have always seemed more compelling to the superstitious masses. And dogma inevitably leads to hate and intolerance. In his *Sceptical Essays*, Bertrand Russell says (p. 200), "When a school accepts as part of its task the teaching of an opinion which cannot be intellectually defended (as practically all schools do), it is compelled to give the impression that those who hold an opposite opinion are wicked, since otherwise it cannot generate the passion required for repelling the assault of reason. Thus for the sake of orthodoxy the children are rendered uncharitable, intolerant, cruel and bellicose". This unfortunate tendency is also supported by the demands of nationalism. Hence, in addition to Catholic children being taught to hate free-thinkers, American children are taught to hate Communists, children in Cuba and China are taught to hate Americans, etc. Hate is dutifully preserved; charity and understanding are discouraged in millions of children in their attitude to all who do not share their parochial dogmas.

Thus dogma is the chief danger in the world, whether masquerading under the banner of piety, patriotism or rightmindedness. The answer is painfully obvious—education . . . education for all into world citizenship. In one generation *with rational education* the foundations could be laid for a secure world in which starvation, war, widespread disease, overpopulation and cruelty would be but vague recollections of a less reasonable and less humane world.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### "THE REPRESENTATIVE"

It is to be hoped that all readers of THE FREETHINKER whether they have seen the play or not, will ask at their local public library for a copy of *The Representative* by Rolf Hochhuth. If it is obtainable from one County Library, as it is here, then it should be from all; but it must be asked for and demanded. Even if you have bought your own copy, ask for it at the library. It should be read by all.

The play is *not* as some criticisms seem to suggest, a vicious attack on the human individual known to history as Pope Pius XII. The pope in question is surely demonstrated as a victim of "Vatican Diplomacy" quite as much as the monsters of Auschwitz were themselves the victims of another kind of indoctrination.

*The Representative* does very effectively demonstrate that the Roman Catholic Church, both in its Head and in its members has been unable to provide a divine remedy for the terrible evils of the age in which we live.

How could a Church which has sponsored the Inquisition with all its horrors, provide any effective remedy for the evils of modern totalitarianism?

It is not surprising that some Roman Catholics should feel somewhat apprehensive about the possible effects of the play upon those who see or read it. The pope is certainly not the hero of the play; no attempt is made to create a false image of moral grandeur in one who clearly had no such ambition. The hero of the play, if there is one, is the young Jesuit priest, who can however fulfil himself only by rebelling against the pope, and by indentifying himself with the cause of suffering humanity by attaching the Jewish Star of David to his priestly habit, and finally by choosing all the physical horrors of Auschwitz in deliberate preference to the moral turpitudes of Vatican Diplomacy.

*The Representative* is not likely to shake the faith of millions, but it may cause a few potential converts to Rome to think again before surrendering their individual consciences to the institution known as the Roman Catholic Church. It may also help to prevent any attempt to have Pius XII canonised as a saint.

PETER P. CROMMELIN.

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