

The Freethinker

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IN THE last chapters of his monastic autobiography *Twelve Years in a Monastery*, the late Joseph McCabe concluded a penetrating criticism of the role of the Roman Catholic Church as it was at the turn of the century by predicting what, in his opinion, was to be the evolution of the Papacy during the coming century. His conclusion was—I summarise from memory—that by the year 2000, the autocratic popes of his own day would have given way to a popularly-elected president of the Church, who would bear a generic resemblance to Leo XIII, the pope contemporary with the appearance of McCabe's book, as the 2000 AD president of the German Social-Democratic republic would bear to Kaiser Wilhelm II the then reigning German Emperor. This confident prediction, made around the opening years of this century, might have sounded extravagant up to a few years ago, but today Church history appears to be going the way in which the former Franciscan friar Joseph McCabe predicted it would.

Papal Infallibility

It was during the reign of Pope Leo XIII—author of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*—that the actual powers and autocratic pretensions of the Papacy were at their historical zenith. For the Vatican Council (number one by present-day ecclesiastical numeration) had proclaimed the personal infallibility of the pope apart from the Council as for the first time an unchallenged dogma—in theological terminology, an article *de Fide*. Henceforth the pope, the individual pope alone and apart from the Church altogether, was infallible “in faith and morals”, whereas contrarily, the Church apart from the pope—including without exception all its ecclesiastical organs: the College of Cardinals, the national hierarchies and the religious orders—were *ipso facto* fallible and as such were impotent to contest the papal authority. One may add in this connection that between the first Vatican Council (1869-70) and the second (1962-?), papal power in actuality kept pace with papal infallibility in theory. For the popes who reigned during this era from Pius IX to Pius XII were both *de jure* and *de facto* autocratic rulers. The popes and the papal bureaucracy at Rome run by the cardinals of the Roman Curia under the direct supervision of the pope, exercised an unchallenged jurisdiction over the entire Church. For the practical as well as theoretical result of the Vatican Council, was to create a species of both spiritual and administrative autocracy without any adequate parallel in contemporary history. Today, however, with the advent of the second Vatican Council, this state of things appears to be approaching its end.

The Bishops Take Over

For the second Vatican Council, in particular in its second session which ended early in December 1963, has witnessed dramatic clashes between the assembled prelates (archbishops, patriarchs and bishops) with the papal bureaucracy centred at Rome, the administrative as-

pendancy of which has ever since at least the first Vatican Council been virtually supreme and unchallenged as representing the *ipsissima verba* of the infallible pope himself. The most striking feature so far of the second Vatican Council is that the bishops appear to have been winning all along the line! For whilst no overt attack has been reported from the Council upon papal infallibility and supremacy itself, the Vatican bureaucracy—the various congregations presided over by the resident cardinals of the Roman Curia—has come in for incessant and forthright attacks. These onslaughts have on occasions been remarkably outspoken, as for example when an Oriental

patriarch of some uniate (non-Latin) rite publicly described the Roman Curia as “the court of the Bishop of Rome”, a scathing stricture which appears to have gone down well.

This is indeed a very different tone from the obsequious one used by the members of the first Vatican Council, and present trends indicate with ever-increasing probability that the outcome of the present Vatican Council will be to increase the power of the world-wide Catholic hierarchy directly at the expense of the Roman Curia—and, therefore, indirectly at the expense of the pope. Perhaps even this change itself will ultimately lead to a progressive weakening of the hitherto unchallenged dictatorship of the clerical caste and to the eventual admission of the laity into the inner councils of the Catholic Church. Already, for example, laymen are permitted for the first time to witness, though not as yet to participate in the proceedings of the Council.

Collective Leadership

At present indeed, there appears to exist a remarkable parallel between the current evolution of the two great rival cosmopolitan organisations of our epoch, the Roman Catholic Church and international Communism. For in place of the autocracy exercised for a generation over the Communist universe by Stalin, we nowadays have the principle of collective leadership first announced by Khrushchev at the 20th Congress of the Russian Communist Party and now accepted throughout at least the Russian “sphere of influence”. (In China Mao-Tse-Tung's giant personality still appears to be dominant.) Of course it must be borne in mind that there are and inevitably must be, certain differences between a professedly political body like the Communist Congress and an at least ostensibly religious body like the Vatican. (e.g. The pope is *theologically* infallible *de jure*, whereas Stalin—the “Red Pope”—was *politically* infallible only *de facto*—though most effectively.)

To add a personal to a collective comparison, both the Communist and Catholic pioneers of collective leadership, Mr. Khrushchev and Pope John, were similarly reformers of similar peasant stock. The present evolution of the two great ideological institutions of our era represent perhaps a striking demonstration of that basic principle

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Vatican Council I

versus

Vatican Council II

By F. A. RIDLEY

of historical materialism: "Like historical causes produce like historical effects".

McCabe Was a True Prophet

Certainly at this time of writing, the far-sighted prediction of McCabe quoted at the inception of this article seems to be already in process of fulfilment. Certainly we have still some way to go before we arrive at the year of Our Lord (will it still be "the year of Our Lord"? 2000 AD, but the current evolution of the Papacy definitely appears to be in that direction. All the present signs are that the Papacy in "the age of the common man", will gradually be compelled by the growing force of public

opinion, both inside and outside the Church to shed its medieval autocracy (which reached its apex in 1870) and adapt itself to what would be described in secular parlance as a constitutional monarchy, perhaps even as McCabe predicted, into a Church democratically run by the laity. Our generation has seen the even more spectacular theological transformation of the Japanese Mikado (after Japan's military defeat by atomic science) from a deity into a democrat. By the year 2000, as Anatole France predicted long ago, a spare-time pope may actually earn his living as a bookmaker. After all, St. Peter, the "first" pope, was a working fisherman.

"The Rationalist Annual"

By COLIN McCALL

"I AM PUBLISHING this article in the *Rationalist Annual* for several reasons. One is that in 1928 I published an article in this *Annual* on the Origin of Life, which was quite as speculative as the present one. With some minor corrections its main conclusions have been accepted . . .". These words of J. B. S. Haldane remind us of two debts: one to Haldane himself and the other to the *Rationalist Annual*. Surely there has been no more brilliant expositor of science to the intelligent layman than Professor Haldane. Now that the "quality" newspapers (and even some others) have their scientific correspondents, it is fitting to pay tribute to the doyen of them all.

In this year's *Annual* (Barrie & Rockliff, paper 5s.) he speculates on "The Origin of Lactation", and tells us of the mathematical theory of natural selection that he has been developing for just over forty years. He tells us, too, that "of late, owing to senile decay", he has had to rely on the help of colleagues. Possibly those colleagues (who include his wife) helped with the article, but it has, nevertheless, the genuine Haldane touch: daring yet deliberate. It will be a sad day for Freethought, as for the *Rationalist Annual*, when he can no longer contribute to it.

And, while on the subject of debts, we might well remember Auguste Comte, now "out of date" and worth at most, as Ronald Fletcher says in a reappraisal, "a couple of lectures and one examination question", yet in fact "one of the greatest thinkers during a period [early nineteenth century] notable for its great contributions to human thought". Comte, as Dr. Fletcher shows, thought of science as "a questing, imaginative, hypothetical study exactly as modern philosophers of science do"; he was "perfectly clear . . . about the part played by hypothesis in science". Moreover, "All that Karl Popper is now saying about conjectures and refutations and the hypothetico-deductive method, all that Talcott Parsons is now saying (in Sociology) about 'theory before empirical investigation', was stated with perfect clarity by Comte". He also anticipated another Karl—Marx. And, I might add that Comte, too, inspired great thoughts and great deeds in others. There may not be many Positivists today, but "in one way or another . . . Comte's ideas have been incorporated in developments he would have approved".

Marx, with Freud, is the subject of another article in the *Annual*: by R. Osborn, whose *Freud and Marx* will be known to older readers who were members of the Left Book Club. Mr. Osborn's thesis is that Marxism and psycho-analysis are complementary methods of studying human nature. He is here especially concerned with religion and morals, and it is useful, at a time when the very name of Marx calls up such violent horror and hatred

(mainly in those who haven't read him) to remember that "Marx's compassion for the underdog caused him to seek to remedy the evils of their lives in a juster social system. His training as a scientist taught him to look for the laws of social change so that the reconstruction of society along more humane lines might have a rational basis".

The Marxian contribution regarding morality was to stress its social relevance: "one society is morally better than another to the extent that it provides the milieu in which men can approach their full human stature". The Freudian contribution, on the other hand, lies in its account of our psychological development from childhood egocentricity to adult social consciousness. Together, Mr. Osborn argues, psycho-analysis and Marxism provide "a comprehensive picture of the emergence and growth of moral thinking in Man".

Anthony Flew also writes on morality, asking "How Far Can Humanist Ethics Be Objective?" This time, though, the approach is via Hume—the greatest English philosopher as he is now hailed (no doubt to the disgust of the Scots) and certainly the most influential—and his exposure of the "Naturalistic Fallacy". There can be no logical deduction of moral judgments from statements of fact or, in short, it is invalid to deduce an "ought" from an "is". Does this make morality a mere matter of taste? Following R. M. Hare's thesis in *Freedom and Reason* ("It is not chance that Hare's two bitterest opponents are a pair of converts to Rome"), Professor Flew suggests "some outline of a solution" to the question that he poses.

From Humanism and ethics to religion and ethics though not, in fact, with all that much difference, since Albert Schweitzer is the subject of D. A. King's article and Schweitzer is only a nominal Christian. Like many another modern clergyman, his adherence to the religion is emotional; rationally, Dr. Schweitzer fully realises Christianity's mythical basis.

In other articles, Gianni Bartocci deals with "The Classical Man", and J. S. L. Gilmour asks provocatively, "Has Philosophy a Future?" Dr. Gilmour admits that "philosophical disputes are great fun" but "on balance prefers to get his fun in other ways. As I say, he is provocative.

I have left to the last a welcome article on "Psychical Research Today" by E. J. Dingwall, who among other things, announces another piece of debunking by the indefatigable Trevor H. Hall, fresh from his exposure of Sir William Crookes and Florrie Cook. This time it is the "tedious experiments in hypnotism conducted by Gurney and the Sidgwicks" (generally regarded as unimpeachable) that, in the light of Mr. Hall's unpublished

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A Humanist of Sorts

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

SINCE ALL who flatly disbelieve in God are to be called Atheists, it would at first glance seem reasonable to suppose that all Atheists are Humanists. Having, so to speak, consigned God to the Devil, thus summarily disposing of both, Atheists are thereby freed from the stultifying sense of obligation to a fictional divinity. And that, one might naturally expect should incur an awakening sense of obligation to a factual humanity. Such an obligation is of the essence of Humanism. Yet, judging from certain recent pronouncements, it would appear to be as mistaken to say that all Atheists are Humanists as it would be to describe all Humanists as Atheists—at any rate, all those who, with doubtful justification have the nerve to refer to themselves as Humanists. It could perhaps be fairly safe to describe as Atheists, all overtly professing Humanists. It is the covertly nominal Humanists who are dubious. These timorous fellow-travellers, however much they are privately in agreement with atheistic convictions, shy away from open admission of it, as if they feared the unpleasant consequences of something not quite socially respectable, not quite intellectually reputable. It is mostly this half-hearted indefinite type that is meant by a Humanist of sorts. On that showing, a Humanist of sorts is merely a Humanist out of sorts.

Or to be, as Philip Toynbee has more aggressively called himself in *The Observer*, “a sort of humanist”, is really to be no sort of Humanist worth mentioning. It is to be neither here nor there. It is to be Bunyan’s waterman, “looking one way and rowing the other”. It is to be one of that vacillating band who provoked the famous reproof, “those who are not for us are against us”. It is to cling to the fence and never get anywhere. But as Shaw insisted, better to go to the Devil than to go nowhere at all. Not that professedly atheistic Humanists have any more fear or intention of descending into hell than they have any hope or desire of ascending into heaven. They prefer to stick to earth, where they can go all the way with humanity. For the beginning, the middle and the end of Humanism is humanity. The full-fledged, free-thinking Humanist aims first at loyalty to his fellow Humanists. He can then join with them in the wider aspiration to promote the betterment of mankind by every available sane and human means. It is a tall order. But it is a fine and increasingly practical ideal. Those who sniff and sneer at it are nearly always “Humanists of sorts” rather than downright anti-Humanists. The Humanist proper knows better. He knows how to hold his head up without turning his nose up.

Like the fool and the genius, the Humanist is probably born rather than made. His attitude to life will be given an initial slant by the temperament he is endowed with and the degree of intellectual capacity he inherits. To some extent these are later bound to become moulded by circumstance. But if the budding Humanist develops a cool head together with a warm heart, welded by sound character, his innate humanity will continually incline him to an actively humane atheism. Earlier indoctrination may for a time impede this tendency, but as he matures, he will break through the shackles of any traditionally imposed mode of thought. He will become a Freethinker. And then, able to look around him with a sympathetic and unfettered understanding, he cannot fail to see a world in which, humanly speaking, evil predominates over good. He cannot fail to see that a great deal of the evil could

be eliminated by Humanist principles. He cannot fail to see that much of what strikes him as simply man’s inhumanity to man, is actually propounded by interested religious influences as divinely ordained. And he will see that religion therefore on its own uncredited authority, deliberately obstructs the obviously possible alleviation of many human ills by human means.

He will see further that the only thing to do about this kind of frustration is to frustrate it. But in any attempt to do this, the Humanist is not exactly encouraged by finding that there are people who call themselves unbelievers (that blest negation) who seem to cast as hostile an eye upon an organised Humanism as upon an organised religion. In *The Guardian* for instance, Alasdair MacIntyre, criticising *The Humanist Revolution*, tries to put out what he disdainfully calls “Humanism’s half-light”, by training upon it what he evidently considers to be his own more brilliant spotlight. He declaims, with at least as much of the pompously moral tone he later ascribes to others, “Certainly I do not believe in God” and forthwith banishes God to limbo with Santa Claus, the unicorn and—solemn thought—that indispensable, God-like myth of myths the progressive wing of the Conservative Party. Mr. MacIntyre then goes on to observe that he finds himself in a society “where not many people any longer believe in God”. Fortunate man! And so, he asks, what good does it do to “go around being self-conscious about not believing in God?” To suppose that Humanists do go around primed with such self-conscious announcements is as unwarranted as to assume that the great majority of people have explicitly abandoned God. This would take some proving, for as yet, although a considerable percentage may doubt, only a minority deny.

It is true as Mr. MacIntyre says that “unbelievers still suffer from all sorts of absurd restrictions in our society. In the schools, on the BBC, over issues such as adoption, the equality of unbelievers [by which he presumably means fairness to unbelievers] has to be established”. He gives no hint of how he thinks it could be done, though this does not prevent him from making similar charges against others. “But when one confronts the great causes and issues that divide our society and by which men define themselves, it is clear that these are secondary issues”. Is it? It is none too clear what “these” refers to. The above “absurd restrictions” one may leniently suppose. Mr. MacIntyre finds Humanism “disturbing because relatively contentless”. He makes no offer of helping it towards content neither in one sense of that word nor the other. He further declares, “merely not believing in God will scarcely assist one in taking sides on the great causes and issues” which he lists as nuclear warfare, the abolition of poverty and the nature of the State—whatever that may mean.

Now there can be no doubt that belief in God not only assists one, it more often than not virtually compels one to take sides. And if belief, why not unbelief? Surely disbelief—as subtly distinct from unbelief—in God, together with an inescapable belief in mankind, even without much admiration for mankind, would be more likely to engender opposition to nuclear warfare, than belief in God, even without much respect for God’s mysterious ways. It isn’t so long ago that an eminent Catholic prelate expressed contemptuous indifference, on the ground

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This Believing World

We must congratulate the Bishop of Woolwich for telling the readers of the *Sunday Pictorial* (December 15th) who probably number eight millions—about 160 years after Thomas Paine in the *Age of Reason* had done the same—that Moses did not write the Pentateuch, and that the story of the Creation in Genesis was untrue. But if there never was a Garden of Eden or an Adam and Eve, there could never have been a fall of Man, and therefore no necessity for a saviour. And this was a point not touched upon by Dr. Robinson.

★

A correspondent to the "South London Press" (December 3rd) is very indignant with the paper's columnist "Wanderer", who said that "there is no evidence of life after death". The correspondent insists that the evidence is "certain and irrefutable". In reply, "Wanderer" points out that by "evidence" he means evidence which would satisfy a court of law, and such a court would reject "all the posthumous written evidence of biblical prophets, disciples, apostles, or even Jehovah himself, as inadmissible hearsay". Of course as the witnesses would have to swear on the Bible, it would be rather difficult to bring them into court.

★

"Wanderer" does however give one instance where, for the time being, "faith" was brought into court—and it has caused a roar of laughter round the world ever since. This was the famous "monkey trial" in Tennessee over 40 years ago, when the prosecution tried to prove the literal truth of Genesis and throw out any idea of evolution. After that complete fiasco, nobody else has ever tried to bring in faith with no evidence into a court of law.

★

So even Mr. Anthony Greenwood, MP, one of the most untiring defenders of the faith in Parliament, has admitted that celebrating "the birth of Our Lord for two months" before Christmas "does not unfortunately mean that we are a Christian country". But what in Mr. Greenwood's opinion constitutes "a Christian country"? Belief in Biblical stories of miracles, devils and angels? They constitute "true" Christianity.

★

When our London "Evening News" hears a report, "Cardinals Clash at Vatican Council", one can be quite sure that there was a clash. Some of the older cardinals no doubt are still living in the "glories" of the past; others realise those glories have gone for ever; that there must be changes if the Vatican is to survive in a modern world. The clash is of course (as it was in Reformation times) "over alleged abuses by the Holy Office". The story of the Papacy is full of "alleged" abuses most of which actually were true—but it does the Vatican no good to say so.

★

How much the Vatican has now to face can be seen in the words of Cardinal Frings who said, "It is not right for one Vatican congregation to have the power to accuse, judge and condemn any individual without his having been heard in his own defence". Well, the Inquisition in the past and even now claims to have that right, as the words of Cardinal Ottaviani revealed. The criticism, Ottaviani said, "came out of lack of knowledge" which has been the most universal Vatican cry, not merely for any criticism of abuses, but for criticism of any kind. But it is being compelled to change from its ostrich-like head-in-the-sand attitude.

Papal Infallibility

A point has occurred to me which may be of interest—it concerns papal infallibility. There are many obvious arguments against the Catholic notion, which Secularists can use with confidence. However I believe that it is subject to a logical difficulty even allowing the Catholic terms of reference.

The doctrine of infallibility states that in certain circumstances (*ex cathedra*) the Pope cannot err in defining matters of faith and morals. In these circumstances the Pope does not make a statement which is held to be *probably* true; the statement is held to be *certain* in both a practical and a philosophical sense. Catholics believe that this is so since, they maintain, the Pope is guided (when speaking *ex cathedra*) by God. However I do not believe that the papal pronouncements can be held to be absolutely certain even if a person accepts the other parts of orthodox faith.

It is characteristic of a logical argument (and Catholic thinkers always claim to be logical) that a conclusion cannot achieve greater probability than the premises, i.e. if the premises are only *probable* the conclusion cannot be *certain*. Now it is held that papal infallibility is validly deduced from certain premises, one of which is the existence of God. It is also held that the existence of God has been logically proved. But the proofs are *not* held to have been infallibly produced. Aquinas is not held to be infallible in a philosophical sense.

This means that Catholics must admit that there is at least a logical possibility that the proofs are invalid. And if this is so, the proofs (even if thought to be valid) cannot be held to give *certain* conclusions, only *probable* ones. And further, any notions that are deduced from the proofs can, at best, achieve probability.

Hence papal infallibility can only mean that, at best, the Pope makes pronouncements which are *probably* true. Since this is obviously not what is meant by papal infallibility, the Catholics are involved here in a serious self-contradiction.

I should greatly appreciate readers' comments on this simple thesis.
G. L. SIMONS.

THEATRE

"Treasure Island"

Treasure Island was my favourite boyhood book, and the Mermaid Theatre's Christmas production splendidly captures the atmosphere of one of the best boy's adventure stories ever written. It owes a lot to Sean Kenny's settings—you feel you are actually on the Hispaniola—but even more to the director, Colin Ellis, and to the enthusiasm of the cast, whose bloody fights have to be seen to be believed.

Perhaps Fergus McClelland, an experienced young film-star is a little priggish, but on the whole makes a very good stage debut as Jim Hawkins. (Perhaps Jim is a little priggish, anyway.) But the pirates inevitably steal the day. Especially, of course, the most likable of rogues, Long John Silver. Joss Ackland and Peter Bayliss are alternating in the role, and are said to have developed different interpretations. I can only vouch for Joss Ackland. For me he was Long John just as I had imagined him—live parrot and all.

But how can an adult assess a play like this? The Mermaid advised taking a younger critic along. I did, and he enjoyed it as much as I did.
C. McC.

"THE RATIONALIST ANNUAL"

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work, "appear to have been due to systematic fraud on the part of some of their subjects in demonstrating the existence of thought-transmission during the hypnotic trance" (Professor Vasiliev please note!). I am also glad to see C. E. M. Hansel's work acknowledged—as it so rarely is—and to read that Dr. Soal's *The Mind Readers* "hardly inspired much confidence in his method of conducting the experiments". Indeed, for Dr. Dingwall, "Parapsychologists as a body are hardly distinguished by the accuracy of their observations, the correctness of their records, or the scrupulous care required in the conduct of their experiments". Too many Humanists—including incidentally, one contributor to the *Rationalist Annual*—have hitherto accepted ESP uncritically.

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

INDOOR

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group (Arnold House Hotel, Montpelier Place, Brighton), Sunday, January 5th, 5.30 p.m.: S. V. SANDGROUND, "Humanism in the Past and Present".
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, January 7th, 7.30 p.m.: MARTIN ENNALS (Sec. NCCL), "Mental Health and the Individual".
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, January 5th, 6.30 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "The Myth of Christian Unity".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, January 5th, 11 a.m.: DR. HELEN ROSENAU, "The Meaning and Development of Tolerance".

Notes and News

IN HER Views and Opinions on December 20th, 1963, Margaret McIlroy described Christmas as Christianity's most beautiful yet silliest festival. It is also the time when quite a percentage of those who never give religion a thought throughout the year suddenly feel impelled to send Christmas cards of the crib. True a mother and child form the loveliest and most touching of human—as of animal—subjects, but Mary and Jesus, after all, were scarcely human. If we take the Roman Church as authoritative—and who would dare do otherwise on such a question?—the mother was immaculately conceived and the son virgin-born, with a ghost for a father.

IT SEEMS there was even a teenage rush to be tattooed with the Crucifixion. Just before Christmas, Victor Shipton, tattooist of Romford, Essex, told the *Daily Herald* that: "There is a rush for religious subjects just now. The Crucifixion is the most popular."

THE *Daily Herald* (17/12/63) also reported the message of Dr. William Conway, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, to Irish Catholics. "It is not always realised that a person who drives without due care commits an offence against the Law of God. Reckless driving is a matter for confession even though no-one has been killed or injured by it." Later Dr. Conway's secretary thought it necessary to explain the Primate's meaning. The Archbishop, we were informed was "trying to get home to

people that dangerous driving is a sin against life and therefore against the Law of God".

"Do WE want Church unity in the same way as a woman wants all the chair covers to match because it looks neater and nicer that way?" This was one of Ann Leslie's questions in her *Daily Express* column (13/12/63). If a Roman Catholic believes divorce is impossible, how, she asked, can he sincerely "match" with the views of other Christians who do not oppose it? And how, Miss Leslie went on, can a Catholic feel "unified" with "those who approve of birth control when he believes it to be a mortal sin?" Let us, then, not be too hasty in condemning those "sincere people who have looked Church unity in the eye and have decided against it", Miss Leslie said. "They may be the only really convinced Christians left".

A DAY earlier (12/12/63), the *Daily Herald* had reported trouble in Corfe Mullen, Dorset, where the Protestant vicar, the Rev. William Rodda, recently invited a Roman Catholic priest, Father Bernard Bassett to speak at an Anglican service. A third clergyman, the Rev. John Hayter of the Evangelical Free Church has denounced the vicar's action as "contrary to Church of England practice" which "should never have been permitted by the bishop". And Mr. Hayter has distributed a thousand leaflets stating that: "These friendly visits by Roman Catholic speakers to Protestant churches are simply the thin end of the wedge—their purpose is to lure unsuspecting Protestants into the Roman Catholic fold".

THE BOHEMIAN Freethinking Schools Association of Chicago celebrated its centenary with a birthday party on October 6th, 1963, attended by Walter Hoops, Secretary of the American Rationalist Federation. One of the Association's halls was filled to capacity, and the children presented Czech songs and dances. It was a most colourful occasion, Mr. Hoops reported in the November *American Rationalist*, and "I was given the opportunity to convey to our Bohemian friends the greetings of the World Union of Freethinkers . . . the American Rationalist Federation and the *American Rationalist*". We in turn, should like to send our congratulations and best wishes to the Czech Freethinkers of Chicago.

THE POPE's visit to the Holy Land, due to start this week, has caused quite a stir, not least among those who can profit from it. The Rev. Arthur Payton, chairman of Inter-Church Travel Ltd., organiser of a pilgrimage which coincides with the Pope's visit, told a press conference that he had received evidence that beds in Jerusalem would cost up to £178 a night (*Daily Express*, 13/12/63). Fortunately, Mr. Payton had previously booked 250 beds at about £2 a night. "Our purpose", he said, "is not to see the Holy Father at all. But we will support him by saying our prayers at the same time".

WE HAVE had a number of inquiries, unfortunately too late for Christmas, regarding the Endsleigh card design by Joan Syrett, which we used in our issue of December 20th, 1963. Endsleigh cards were picked for special notice by Pendennis in *The Observer* on December 22nd. Three million cards were produced in 1963, mostly for charities and religious bodies. "We have artists with deep personal convictions", said Endsleigh (*Peace News*) spokesman Harry Mister, "and they express them in their designs". The address for readers to bear in mind for next Christmas, or for other occasions, is 5 Caledonian Road, London, N.1.

Leibniz, Pope and Goethe

By R. SMITH

IN 1697 PIERRE BAYLE published at Rotterdam his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, in which the lives of men were associated with a comment that suggested, from the ills of life, the absence of divine care in the shaping of the world. Doubt sprang from the corruption of society. Nature and man were said to be against faith in the rule of a God, wise, just and merciful. In 1710, after Bayle's death, the German philosopher, Leibniz, then resident in Paris, wrote a book with a title formed from Greek words meaning "Justice of God"—*Théodicée*, in which he met Bayle's argument by reasoning that what we cannot understand confuses us because we only see a little part in which are many details beyond our ken. Bayle, Leibniz said, is now in heaven and from his place by the throne of God he sees the harmony of the great universe and doubts no more.

The formula in which Leibniz expressed his optimism in the *Théodicée* has passed into the world of literature—"This is the best of all possible worlds". "One could imagine a better", he said, "but no better could be created." The word, "possible", is not related to what may be constructed in the imagination, but what can actually be realised and created. However even if what Leibniz says is true—that God chose the best possible world—this does not prove that it was good enough to be actualised.

The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 made many believers question the supreme wisdom of the creator of the best of all possible worlds. And Voltaire, in *Candide* mocks at the author of the best of all possible worlds. "If this is the best world", *Candide* says to himself, "what must others be like?"

Leibniz puts up many arguments to prove that God's chosen world is the best, and worthy of existence despite the evil that exists in it. God did not create evil he says, "he only permits it". And there is a purpose behind its being permitted, as it leads to greater good.

All evil is therefore necessary as it is in accordance with the divine plan for the world. We are therefore told by Leibniz that even if the smallest evil that comes to pass in the world were missing, it would no longer be this world which, with nothing omitted and allowance made, was found to be the best by the Creator who chose it. Thus all great calamities of nature and tragedies of life are, according to Leibniz, blessings in disguise. One must look forward beyond the tragic to the universal harmony of the whole.

God's best world is defended by Leibniz against all the facts of human experience; but seemingly human experience has to take a back seat when philosophy pronounces a priori. Leibniz's facile optimism is a futile attempt to demonstrate the tragedies and miseries of life out of existence by pointing at God.

Pope gave his deistic optimism a beautiful poetic expression in his *Essay on Man*. But the man and the god that Pope writes about do not exist. Pope's man is an abstract man—not you or I. He is not the individual who wills, feels and thinks, but merely an imaginary man and an imaginary god created for the occasion.

Pope's optimism was expressed in the familiar words: "Whatever is, is right." And the sovereign will was cosmic rather than ethical; its absolute might made all its deeds and decrees right. Pope did not so much try to explain evil as to deny that it was. He so works out

the parallel between nature and man, between physical events and moral characters and acts, that the moral becomes even as the physical; but his right is too much the product of might to be equivalent to Leibniz's best possible.

However, in other respects Pope's optimistic views are much the same as those of Leibniz.

All nature is but art unknown to thee,
All chance, direction which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony, not understood;
All partial evil, universal good.

Pope sacrifices without scruple, the individual to the universal, and his principle that partial evil is universal good is construed to mean that the person who suffers ought to be content with his lot because it serves universal ends. We should not rebuke nature for enforcing her laws, even though it is at man's expense, for only by such enforcement can harmony be secured. It is the discord and misery of the world that adds to its majesty and splendour, and evil ought not to be judged simply from this life, but from man's relation to the future which must be invoked if the present is to be comprehended. Although we do not know the future, hope can make itself felt in the present.

What future bliss he gives not thee to know
But gives that hope to be thy blessing now.

Pope's optimism was of the shallowest kind. All he was doing in his *Essay on Man* was praising in polished metres the Providence which had been so wise to make him comfortable and wealthy. He rejoices to find his happiness set off by the abounding misery of the world.

Goethe was the last of the great optimists—evil for him was non-existent. In *Faust*, we are confronted by players, or rather puppets, in the hands of an all-wise God. The Devil himself is but a servant of God, not his enemy. Mephistopheles introduces himself as;

Part of that power which still
Produceth good whilst ever scheming ill.

The tragic aspects of *Faust* are framed in a Christian setting, but *Faust's* salvation is hardly in line with the Christian doctrine of redemption through repentance. *Faust*, it must be remembered was no repentant. He was rather a libertine, seducer, murderer, idler and braggart, and was most unscrupulous in his desire to achieve his pleasure at other people's expense. Those who uphold the Faustian hero seem to forget that his conduct is the very antithesis of all that we commonly uphold as refined and manly.

Faust has no faith for which to strive, but he is saved because he did strive. His salvation comes through the grace of God. This is not in line with the Christian faith which centres salvation with genuine repentance and recognition of sin. In *Faust*, we do not just have an individual with freewill confronting the powers of evil, freewill is practically eliminated and the conflict is raised to a higher level between God and the powers of evil. In this conflict it is inevitable that God must win; evil in reality is not antagonistic towards God but rather is the servant of God.

In the "Prologue in Heaven" God asks Mephistopheles "Knowest thou my servant *Faust*?" And *Faust's* salvation is assured because he is a true servant of the Lord and the Lord will lead him to final victory against all the powers of darkness. The sting then is taken out of the tragedy, and it becomes in one sense a great message for those who suffer not to despair because God is good.

But surely the highest form of literature is always tragic. Why therefore did not Goethe make the final scene of *Faust* tragic? The answer I think lies in his pantheistic optimism.

For Goethe therefore the great problem of evil that has tormented many great minds does not exist, but only error. And as long as man lives he must err. Error is not evil nor sin, but only another name for the lack of sufficient knowledge. There is no evil and nor can there be any evil, for God's world is good. Genesis, therefore, had said the first and last words on the matter; "And God saw everything that he made, and behold, it was very good".

In the final scene, therefore, Faust is borne aloft by angels with the triumphant song:

Saved is this noble soul from ill,
Our spirit-peer. Who ever
Strives forward with unswerving will
Him can we aye deliver.

In real life the rational man knows that the only deliverance for him is death; outside of that all is mere speculation. Goethe was no doubt one of the greatest men of his age but his optimistic wisdom is very questionable.

Leibniz, Pope and Goethe would have us deny misery and despair in the world by pointing to God. I think that it is more rational to deny God by pointing to misery and despair.

Churches have condemned without understanding. It must be realised that although for four thousand years enlightened citizens have been concerned with limiting the number of their offspring, they frequently had no scientific background to their ideas. The Indian child marriage was instituted because the people believed that the menstrual blood forms the primary material of the embryo, and that it was therefore a misfortune for a girl to menstruate before going to her husband from her father's house. How much better it would have been had the Western missionaries been scientists instead of preachers who laboured to substitute one superstition for another.

One may rejoice that certain names for children are today becoming obsolete in Turkey—names such as Yeter (meaning enough) or Bitsim (let it end), yet the forces of unenlightenment are still amazingly strong. I was not aware, until I read *Contraception Through The Ages*, how much the "logical" French have been forced to compromise. In France today contraceptives approved by the medical profession are legally forbidden, but are permitted as a method of preventing venereal diseases! The Rationalist can instantly diagnose the sick symptoms of governmental schizophrenia. Finally, it is no surprise to learn that permission has recently been given in France by the Ministry of Health to produce a pill which will be on sale through the pharmacies, pills ostensibly for the treatment of sterility but with a contraceptive effect if administered in a different manner.

One longs for a universal healthy free-thinking wind-of-change to fan laughter at such paradoxes and bring hope without evasion to a world cheated by prejudice and hypocrisy. Daily one is reinforced in one's admiration for the great pioneers who struggled so that all men, and not only the rich and privileged, might shape a rational destiny: Marie Stopes, Annie Besant, Knowlton, Bradlaugh. Certainly Finch and Green pay tribute to the pioneers; and they also include chapters on developments in oral contraception, and explain tests to which condoms and spermicides are subjected by reputable firms, a point of topical interest after the researches of *Which*.

One needs the background of this book to argue with the powers of reaction, as well as to satisfy one's own curiosity about such puzzles as whether Dr. Condom really existed as a royal physician to Charles II and had to change his name to avoid persecution by religious maniacs, or whether the name comes from the Persian word, Kemdu, which refers to a long vessel made of animal intestines and used for grain storage.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

Points From a New Book

G. I. SWYER, MA, DM, MD, MRCP & S, the Chairman of the Clinical Trials Subcommittee of the Council for the Investigation of Fertility Control, writes that the population explosion "presents the world with a more dangerous problem than that of nuclear war". It should be the aim of statesmen to see that all citizens have the rights of voluntary parenthood, and that effective aid in death control should not be given to undeveloped countries without the accompanying birth control. But we, who remember what happened to Bradlaugh when he made his courageous fight for planned families, know the snarls that met the sane attempt to provide contraceptives in slot machines, the blocking at international congresses of humane efforts to encourage population limits, etc., etc. So a book, such as B. E. Finch's and Hugh Green's *Contraception Through The Ages* (Peter Owen, 25s.), deserves special support from Freethinkers.

For one thing, history gives us perspective. So many rabid anti-birth control campaigners imagine that contraceptives are a modern invention, one that could only have been introduced in what the reactionaries regard as a wicked age. But the truth is that the ancient Egyptians were making pessaries out of cow dung and honey. Dionysus acclaimed Cleopatra an expert in pessaries. In fine, the high-born have been practising birth control for a very long time. The outcry only came when humanitarians tried to spread the knowledge to the working classes, for then the establishment began to fear for its slave labour. All the righteous indignation is often basically no more than economic greed.

The Church's opposition is also nourished by the same unworthy motives, since poor prolific (and poor because they are prolific) peasants can so easily be dominated by priests. At the same time, it is instructive to remember that Casanova bought a stock of "English Riding Coats" from a nun while in Vienna. Such contradiction occurs throughout the ages—money can buy dispensation.

Again, when one becomes acquainted with the historical facts, one understands so many things which the Western

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11TH, 1963. Present: Mr. D. H. Tribe (President) in the chair, Mrs. Collins, Mrs. McIlroy, Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Barker, Ebury, Millar, Mills, Shannon, Sproule, Timmins and Warner, Mr. Griffiths (Treasurer) and the Secretary. Apologies were received from Messrs. Hornibrook, Leslie and McConalogue. The Chairman welcomed Mr. R. J. Sproule who was attending his first Executive Meetings as a London Area representative. The resignation of Mr. J. Owen (Manchester) was accepted with regret. New Members were admitted to Marble Arch and Parent branches.

It was noted that the debate at Kidderminster between Church and NSS representatives would now take place on February 29th, 1964. It was agreed to give all possible assistance to members who were trying to form a branch in Belfast. A letter from Mr. Jesse Collins offering £150 to redecorate the library was read, and warm appreciation was expressed.

Letters from the Ministry of Education, Dr. Donald Soper and others were noted.

The next meeting was arranged for January 15th, 1964.

W.J.McI.

A HUMANIST OF SORTS

(Concluded from page 3)

that nuclear war would merely hasten, on a wholesale scale, a transition that sooner or later was bound to overtake everybody. Moreover, there is precious little reason to suppose that belief in God, or even a dilatory unbelief, will ever do much towards the abolition of poverty. And what about such grave issues as birth control in relation to the present prospect of a catastrophic increase in population? What about euthanasia against a so-called sacredness of human life when human life has become nothing more than the damnableness of a living death for a condemned individual and a source of far-reaching ill consequences to all those connected? What about the stupid laws under a hypocritically nominal Christianity, in regard to divorce, abortion, prostitution and homosexuality? These laws are rooted in antediluvian religious taboos. Only a thriving, freethinking Humanism can ever hope to uproot them.

But a thriving, freethinking Humanism is not "assisted" by those who refuse to take sides with either Humanism or non-Humanism, who come ostensibly to criticise constructively and remain to carp destructively. Mr. MacIntyre's cantankerous thrusts at Hector Hawton's *Humanist Revolution* are entirely beside the point. This book is what its title implies, a record and an exposition of Humanism. It does not set out to be, as Mr. MacIntyre seems to think it ought to be, a handbook of answers to all the problems Humanism has to face. It seems also a little odd that he should accuse the authors of *Objections to Humanism* of anxiety to have an argument at any price. He of course is completely guiltless in that respect. Then what an opportunity is here provided for him to turn up Humanism's half-light into a full-primed searchlight, a real secular, practical and all-illuminating Light of the World. What a chance to lead the way.

If all these Humanists of sorts would sort themselves out and make up their minds to become good sorts, they would soon find themselves rejoiced to swell the ranks of an effectually organised Humanist society. So many of them are forthcoming enough in verbal agreement with Humanists projects. But when it comes to committing themselves to direct support, when it comes to making any small sacrifice in the way of subscriptions, then it is often another matter. They draw back. They continue inertly in the middle of the muddle. Truly this world is full of willing people, some willing to do and others willing to let them. Thus many needed reforms remain unaccomplished simply for want of the necessary weight of numbers to remove the dead hand of religious prohibition. It is the ancient Church of the Laodiceans over again, blowing neither cold nor hot and of whom, because of this, it was written, "I will spue thee out of my mouth". Humanists are not as vindictive as that. But they can hardly avoid looking with a distasteful mistrust upon the "Humanists of sorts" whose numbers give signs of increasing. It has in fact been estimated that if all the present-day Humanists of sorts were laid out end to end—that would be the best place to leave them.

A COMPLAINT

A CHRISTMAS—or rather an Xmas—complaint was voiced by C. Berger of Herne Bay, Kent, in a letter to the *Daily Mail* (5/12/63). Shopkeepers Mr. Berger said, should refuse to sell goods which used the abbreviated word. It would, he pointed out, "be an insult to Christ, when writing or talking about him, to refer to him as 'X'".

CORRESPONDENCE

MARRIAGE ANNULLED

I have just been reading Elizabeth Collins's review of *Italian Women Confess*. I have often read those confessions but they rather annoyed me. It is true that divorce is prohibited in Italy, but what of "annulment" to be *bought*—very expensively they say—of the highest Church authorities? The examples I am giving all refer to real cases, so I must generalise so as to avoid a libel action.

To begin with, any Catholic man or woman who has married a Protestant (or someone belonging to a different faith) is *not* married. So if he or she wants to destroy his or her marriage, they just apply to Rome for an annulment and the case is sure. Wasn't there the case some years ago of an admiral here in Italy?

Then a man and a woman marry their first cousin or aunt or uncle *without permission* of the church authorities. Their marriage agreement is void and for a sufficient sum of money can any day be dissolved and the two erring people can marry again.

The act of copulation is only allowed by the Church authorities if it is undertaken in view of its bringing about the birth of children. Done for mere pleasure it is very sinful. If husband and wife do not want to continue their marriage, they agree to declare that one of them married with no intention of having children. The marriage will be dissolved, without further ado.

Even after eight years' marriage a man or a woman can declare that the marriage act has not been "carried through" because of a *physical aversion* that he or she had for the other and the marriage is annulled and both marry again. A real case of each of the above has occurred to my own knowledge.

MARY C. BLAKISTON (Padua, Italy).

OBITUARY

Mrs. Sara Jane Landers, who died suddenly at Slough on December 11th, 1963, was a remarkable lady. Although 85 years old, she still worked in a local factory and participated in numerous social activities. She attended a football match only a few days before her death.

A native of Wales, Mrs. Landers was predeceased by her husband who died in a road accident twelve years ago. She was a lifelong Freethinker, and a secular funeral ceremony was conducted at Slough Cemetery by William McIlroy, General Secretary of the National Secular Society on December 18th, 1963.

We extend our deepest sympathy to her daughters and other relatives.

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