

The Freethinker

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WITHOUT ANY DOUBT, the pre-eminent feature of present-day Christianity is to be found in the world-strategy of Christian reunion as propounded by the Vatican since the accession of that far-sighted clerical strategist, Pope John XXIII. To be sure, this urgent plan of Christian reunion may be regarded by the present Pope and his advisers—the ubiquitous “back room boys” of the Vatican Curia—as only a preliminary to a united front of at least all the theistic religions under (of course) the effective leadership of Rome: in which connection, tentative overtures to both Judaism and Islam are already evident to the discerning observer.

However, following upon Pope Paul's highly successful visit to Palestine, the main emphasis is still upon *Christian* reunion and by this term, the Vatican obviously implies in the first instance with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, with whom Rome has in general much closer affinities than she has with the Protestant Churches owing their origins to the Reformation, to the iconoclastic religious revolution of the 16th century which marks the essential dividing-line between the medieval age of faith and the modern secular age. Rome and the Reformed Churches are divided on principled lines, not merely on theological quibbles and administrative convention such as separate the present Greek and Roman Churches.

Pope versus Tsar

In the West when one uses the term “Catholicism”, one is inclined to limit it to its Roman Catholic variety, so much better known in the West than its Eastern counterpart. One could perhaps add that this has been the case particularly since 1917, when the Russian Revolution broke the political power of the Eastern Churches by abolishing Russian Tsardom. Prior to 1917, the tsars of Russia discharged a role in Oriental Christianity in some respects analogous to that fulfilled by the Papacy, especially in the days of the pope's temporal power before 1870. For though the tsar was a layman, he discharged the function of head and protector of the Orthodox Church with an ecclesiastical authority parallel with his secular absolute power as autocrat of all the Russias. This was so, in particular, since that ruthless autocrat, Peter the Great (18th century) abolished the rival jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow. Like his English prototype, Henry Tudor, Peter made the tsars, like the Byzantine emperors of Constantinople before them, supreme head equally in both church and state. It is nowadays often forgotten that prior to 1917, Catholic Christianity was effectively divided between two rival papal jurisdictions, or—from the exclusive point of view of the Vatican—between an Italian pope and a Russian anti-pope, the tsar. It was incidentally, this fact that induced Rome at first to take up a friendly attitude to the Russian Revolution which effectively destroyed the power of the Russian anti-pope. It was at this time that Cardinal Gasparri (then papal Secretary of State) told a visiting correspondent of *The*

Times that they in Rome welcomed the Russian Revolution as “a judgment from Heaven upon the heretical and persecuting tsars” (cf. my book, *Pope John and the Cold War*). The “infallible” Papacy did not yet foresee the shape of things to come; for as far as Rome was concerned the substitution of the atheistic Bolshevik dispensation for that of the orthodox tsars, ultimately implied that unpleasant process usually described as “out of the frying pan into the fire”.

The Three Romes

As historians have often pointed out, the ecclesiastical division of Christianity into Eastern Orthodox and Western Roman varieties corresponded with the secular division of the originally

united Roman Empire into the Eastern and Western empires. The Eastern Church acknowledged the political and cultural leadership of the Byzantine Empire of Constantinople whilst, after the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, the popes themselves more and more came to exercise an effective authority over the Churches of the West. Rome versus Constantinople dominated the Middle Ages.

When however, in 1453, the Byzantine Empire was overrun by the Muslim Turks, the political centre of the Orthodox Church was removed to Moscow where the Russian tsars, originally converted to Christianity by missionaries from Constantinople, took over the position vacated by the Byzantine Empire, of political protector and champion of the Orthodox Churches. Moscow became in ecclesiastical history, the “third Rome” as Constantinople had been the “second Rome”. Nowadays, the erstwhile “third Rome” has seceded altogether from the Christian camp and has become the world capital of Communism and—by implication at least—of atheism. What, in effect, we are witnessing today, is the formation of a united front of the first and second “Romes” (Rome and Constantinople) against the “third Rome”, Moscow, the abode of anti-Christ!

Rome and Constantinople

The main object of Pope Paul in his recent visit to Jerusalem, seems to have been primarily to establish personal relationships with the Orthodox Churches and in particular, with the Patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul). In so doing (the press informs us) Paul was carrying out a project initially conceived by Pope John, but prevented by the latter's untimely decease. According to the same authority, the meeting between Pope Paul and Patriarch Athenogoras went off very smoothly; no doubt it will be followed up. In any case the dividing-line between Rome and Constantinople is so much thinner than is that between Rome and the Protestant Churches, that any serious plans for Christian reunion would naturally start there. No such revolution as the Reformation divides them. Again, while Protestantism is fundamentally democratic, both Rome and Constantinople are essentially autocratic. Both belong to what the French historian Michelet, aptly described as “the Christian open sea”, in contradistinction to

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Pope and Patriarch

By F. A. RIDLEY

Protestantism which he described as merely "an estuary". From a theological point of view, both Roman and Orthodox accept essentially Catholic creeds. The only really important difference is papal infallibility. For the Orthodox Churches do not accept either this or the modern dogmas, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Virgin promulgated on the strength of papal infallibility. From the ecclesiastical point of view, the Orthodox Churches are autonomous and their patriarchs possess only limited powers. The remaining differences, ritualistic, liturgical and administrative, are merely matters of discipline, not of fundamental belief.

It is true that efforts at reconciliation in the past, culminating at the Council of Florence in the 15th century, have been conspicuous failures. However, since that distant date, a new enemy has manifested itself, and one that far transcends technical theological differences—the now world-wide menace of atheism. For we must again

emphasise the fact that if Christian or any other form of religious reunion does come about eventually, its originating cause will in final analysis be the present growing menace of world-wide atheism, rather than Pope John or Pope Paul.

In effect, Pope John's Vatican Council and Pope Paul's official pilgrimage to Jerusalem, are the beginnings of a new counter-reformation of the Roman Catholic Church. It was originated by Pope John, without doubt a great pope from the Catholic point of view, and is now being continued by Pope Paul, a Roman diplomat trained by Pius XII, but evidently endowed with a more flexible mind than his master—one capable of evolving new tactics in order to meet a new historical situation. What we are witnessing today is the perhaps final assault of the Christian "Old Guard" against the rise of an atheistic culture that represents an altogether new feature in human evolution.

Two Christian Sects

By H. CUTNER

IN HIS LETTER on December 27th, 1963, my old friend, Tom Mosley, writing on the Disciples of Christ and Christadelphians, has trusted more to his memory than to hard fact. The two sects are quite different. For the record then, the Disciples of Christ sect was founded not "at the beginning of the century" (as he says) but at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Thomas Campbell; hence being known as Campbellites. They believed in the scriptural necessity of "immersion" and, in fact, were very religious Baptists with a first organisation of about thirty members in 1811.

It was not, however, Thomas Campbell who gave the sect its rapidly-spreading organisation so much as his son, Alexander, who conducted a vigorous campaign to spread its (or rather his) tenets all over America.

The United States is the home of some curious Christian sects—look at Mormonism and Christian Science—all of course based on the Bible, and all preaching "Gospel truth" with extraordinary fervour; and naturally denying the other sects their ration of that nebulous quality. Campbellism provided its disciples with God's Precious Word in all its primitive obscurity. And when Alexander Campbell died in 1866, he left the Disciples of Christ (as they preferred to call themselves) a wonderful theology which persists at this day for at least 1,800,000 believers with 8,000 congregations. "In point of origin, the beliefs of the Disciples are as American as the Declaration of Independence", says its modern exponent James E. Craig in *Religion of America* (published in 1955).

The Disciples, while quite certain that both the Old and New Testaments are inspired, prefer to follow the New Testament, the Old being for the Jews. They reject the one God of the Unitarians as well as the three of the Trinitarians, though many of them baptise in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Their all-sufficient religion is that of Jesus Christ, who is everything for them; and they insist that "the sinner shall hear, believe, repent, and obey the Gospel trusting God to do the rest". They do not believe "in any human formula of belief", only "on a confession of Christ". They reject "original sin" and, as the Bible does not mention artificial birth control, they have no views on that subject.

The Disciples have no catechism and no particular rituals, but they do differ from other Protestants in their emphasis on individual liberty, the right to hold an

opinion, and the right "to interpret the Scriptures in one's own way"—whatever that means in actual practice.

Although they do not claim to be the only true religion, they believe that theirs comes nearer to Christ than others. It is based on the Authorised Version "which is the final and infallible word of God"—though here again more modern Disciples think that later translations "throw new light on many passages of the Scriptures". But even now most Disciples believe in Heaven and Hell, though they are rather divided on "future rewards and punishments". But whatever the belief, everybody must be saved by Jesus Christ. They do not proselytise, though they invite people to stand by the Cross of Christ at a morning service.

Incidentally, President Johnson is not the only President of the United States to be a Disciple. The other was James A. Garfield who was assassinated in 1881 after little more than a year in office. Garfield was an active member, his heart and soul were with the Disciples, and this certainly gave them a boost in their work.

On the other hand, the Christadelphians owe their "breakaway" from the current Protestantism to Dr. John Thomas (an Englishman though then in America) who, in 1848, wrote *Elpis Israel* which, I regret to say, I have never come across. But it attracted other similar-minded Christians and in particular Robert Roberts in England who not only became a convinced disciple of Dr. Thomas, but did his best to make it a "living faith" through his lectures, debates, and his journal, *The Christadelphian*. Given his premises, he was a fine controversialist, but he made a very poor show when he met Charles Bradlaugh in debate.

Roberts first published his "arguments" in *Twelve Lectures* which later he expanded into *Christendom Astray*. He claimed that the current Christianity had lost its primeval beliefs and apostolic fervour, and had mistakenly interpreted what the Bible says about immortality, a personal Devil, salvation, the meaning of the Second Coming of Christ, and many other perfectly clear doctrines if only you took him—and Dr. Thomas?—as your guide. I have tried—God alone knows how I have tried!—to read *Christendom Astray* and to understand what Christianity has strayed from, but I finally gave up. I should think it is the most boring book ever written on the

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Psychical Research and Mr. Simons

By COLIN McCALL

I HAVE AT VARIOUS times expressed alarm at what I believe to be the gullibility of some distinguished Humanists on the subject of extra-sensory perception (ESP). I have, in consequence, been considered—and called—dogmatic and unscientific. In his article, "Psychical Research and Secularism", a fortnight ago, G. L. Simons didn't mention me by name, but he obviously had me—among others—in mind. He didn't call us dogmatic: he treated us rather as misguided and "confused"; in need of a lecture on science and scientific method. I think on the contrary that it is Mr. Simons who is confused, and I shall try to show how.

His main confusion is between method and interpretation. "It is characteristic of experiments in telepathy (and other related activities—clairvoyance, precognition, telekinesis, etc.)", says Mr. Simons, "that they are carried out in a purely empirical fashion: cards are used with shapes or colours or numbers on them. Subjects are asked to name predictions which are visually tested". This approach, he goes on—as though it were relevant—"is quite different from the conventional way in which the soul is regarded".

Well, supposing we leave Mr. Simons's gratuitously-introduced souls out of it. No one disputes that Dr. Rhine or Dr. Soal (no pun intended!) uses cards or dice for his experiments; but then, so does a magician. Isn't his act equally empirical? Cards selected at random by the audience, then named correctly by the magician. Mr. Simons, I take it, has seen this done and repeated; so have I. We have "visually tested" the result. The question is, how do we interpret it?

There are three possible explanations: chance, ESP, or trickery; and the explanation we give in the case of the magician is trickery. I may not know how the trick is done, but I am prepared to rule out the first two possible explanations. Mr. Simons, I imagine, would not regard me as dogmatic or unscientific for doing this. He and I know that many magicians can do what the allegedly extra-sensory perceptionists do, and do it very much better. I know, for instance, an amateur magician in Birmingham who, with his daughter, will put on an ESP act better than any described in that much-praised book by Dr. Soal and Mr. Bowden, *The Mind Readers* (Faber, 1959). And the famous American magician, John Scarne, has publicly offered \$100,000 to anyone who can demonstrate "telepathy, clairvoyance, mind-reading, thought-reading, second-sight, thought projection, extra-sensory perception, or whatever you wish to call it". Why doesn't Dr. Soal cover Mr. Scarne's stake and place his faith in the reputedly telepathic Jones cousins who performed for Dr. Soal himself for—probably smaller—rewards? Is he afraid—wanting to believe in ESP—that Mr. Scarne might see through the act? For some unaccountable reason, as Mr. Scarne says (*The Amazing World of John Scarne*, Constable, 1957) there is nothing that infuriates the psychical-researchers more than a reward for proof. Conversely, there is nothing that pleases them more than an article like Mr. Simons's with its plea for open-mindedness.

I can't help wondering, in fact, if Mr. Simons closes his mind to anything: whether, for instance, he still has an open mind on astrology, fairies, or the moon being made of green cheese. "It is at least a logical possibility", he writes, "that someday there will be an empirical demonstration of some of the 'truths' of religion". What does

he expect us to do in the interim? Keep an "open mind" on Jesus's virgin birth, walking on water, feeding of the five-thousand, raising the dead, or his resurrection and ascension?

"The indifference of telepathy to an inverse square law . . . causes some secularists concern", Mr. Simons says. "But they need not worry. It is the strength of science that it is self-correcting". This is a clear reference to some remarks of mine, and Mr. Simons is again a little confused. I am not in the least worried about the indifference of telepathy to the law of inverse squares, but with the credulity of people who so easily accept a story flouting that law. The Nautilus hoax was a case in point.

Mr. Simons, mind you, "will not argue that telepathy, for example, is a fact", he will "merely suggest that if it is, then the agnostic/atheist view of reality is not harmed at all". One wonders what, if anything, Mr. Simons will argue is a fact—or contrarily deny. One pictures him in a permanent state of indecision—a sort of inverted Micawber, waiting perpetually for something *not* to turn up. Angels, elves, gnomes, hobgoblins, warlocks, witches—who knows, they might eventually be proved true! It is "at least a logical possibility".

I admit I am more impatient—dogmatic, if you prefer the word. I can't await the indefinitely-postponed hour. I have to build a philosophy here and now, by which to live. Clearly I can't base it on what science will be in 2064, I have to base it on scientific knowledge as it stands today.

What I have to do is to assess the degree of probability of different aspects of science in the light of scientific history and my own commonsense critical faculties. I should not, Mr. Simons tells me, dismiss telepathic experiments because they contradict the law of inverse squares. I don't dismiss them merely because of that, but because of that and other factors. But let me ask Mr. Simons if he would similarly argue that I should not dismiss levitation because it contradicts the law of gravitation? Should I regard it as "at least a possibility that someday there will be an empirical demonstration" of it?

There have, in fact, been empirical demonstrations of levitation; there is plenty of testimony to it. There is likewise plenty of testimony to telepathy; the problem is, how to evaluate it. I was not present at Dr. Soal's experiments with Glyn and Ieuan Jones, which have been hailed as the most convincing of telepathic tests. I have, however, read Dr. Soal's and Mr. Bowden's account of those experiments in *The Mind Readers*, and found it full of holes. Mr. Simons might say that the procedure did not "stray outside the limits imposed by scientific method", that "the experiments depend upon the investigation of sensory impressions (the basis of all science) of subject and scientist" and that, "at no stage does a mystical or supernatural element occur . . ." He must forgive me if I treat his open-mindedness as naivety.

The same three possible explanations apply to the Jones cousins in Dr. Soal's experiments, as to the magician. Dr. Soal himself rules out chance because of the overwhelming mathematical odds against it. That leaves ESP or trickery. Now, while I have no experience of boys possessing telepathic powers, I know that boys can cheat. If, then, telepathy between boys (or adults for

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This Believing World

One advantage of being a believer in spiritualism, telepathy, psychometry and occultism, is that one can so easily swallow any story no matter how silly—particularly if there is no evidence. For example, as soon as the tragic murder of President Kennedy was announced, an American lady came forward with the remarkable story that she had predicted it *many* years before. That anyone can predict the murder of some president somewhere is nothing so wonderful, for presidents are quite often murdered. Had she given at the time the name and country of the president, the exact date as well as the place of the murder, that would have been at least some evidence in her favour. But of course she couldn't.

Then there is the case of the Greek ship *Lakonia* which caught fire on a pleasure cruise with, unhappily, much loss of life. Our all-believing contemporary, *Psychic News*, followed up the story with that of a lady who dreamt that she saw a ship on fire some days before the tragedy happened. Millions of dreams occur every night without one coming true—but if there is a hit this proves that some "occult" force had been at work which is sure to confound all blatant materialists. What the lady should have done is to give the name of the ship and the date of the fire to the authorities beforehand. She didn't because she couldn't.

As all Christians believe that God is Jesus and Jesus is God, they never have any difficulty in swallowing the beautiful story which was given out by the London *Evening News* recently that God's "first Christmas gift" was "of himself in the person of His Son Jesus Christ". It was this "supreme act" by which "He revealed Himself to man". It was "at an historic moment of time"—though curiously enough nobody has discovered when the "historic moment of time" occurred.

After centuries of the teaching of the Authorised Version of the Bible as God's unique Precious Word, we regret to say that it is slowly being disintegrated by Christian scholars who, while believing it is based on God's revelation to man, hunger for the truths it contains to appear in other words. The Lord's Prayer which, though still solemnly recited on every possible occasion, has been more or less emasculated in newer translations, and now the "revisers" are wielding a deadly blow at the Psalms. Many of them are, alas, so very, very blood-thirsty.

You can buy a copy of the Revised Psalter for 9s. 6d., and you will find that "dozens of errors in translation have been corrected". As an example, we find in Psalm 137, that, "If I forget them, O Jerusalem: let my right hand forget her cunning" has been beautifully corrected to: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be withered away". Psalm 73 in the Prayer Book ends, "to speak of all thy works in the gates of the daughter of Sion". It is changed to, "I will tell of all Thy Works". We are sure that the Lord will heartily approve of such miraculous new renderings of His Holy Book. They make the path of the righteous so much easier.

We note with interest that Canon Pearce-Higgins is speaking before the Marble Arch Branch of the NSS next month, so it may prove interesting to learn from a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* some weeks ago that he "has never displayed much awareness of or belief in New Testament Christianity". The gentleman who wrote it is "amazed"

that the Canon publicly avowed his belief in the 39 Articles and then "publicly criticised them", particularly those "which relate to the Bible".

In the past decade, wrote A. Oyles of Bognor Regis (where else?) to the *Daily Mail* the other day, "we have substituted a materialistic doctrine for our hitherto Christian beliefs and heritage. There are too many pagans among parents, teachers, magistrates and even MPs for our young people to have a true guide in life".

Leslie Grinsell, curator of archaeology at Bristol City Museum told the *Daily Herald* (January 10th) that he had "many antiquities from owners who thought they had been haunted by bad luck since they possessed them". "Their bad luck is our good luck," he added.

TWO CHRISTINE SECTS

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Christian religion, which is saying something!

Still, it attracted lots of people and probably still does though almost everything Christadelphianism stood for has long since been laughed out of court. Roberts was full of the Apocalypse and the "prophecies" of Daniel, and particularly the more obscure parts of the Jewish prophets and Paul. The way he managed to get out of it all exactly what God and Jesus thought of the Israelites and the Jews and God's punishments on the unhappy "race" for not accepting Jesus, always commanded my admiration. I think he could have done the same with a school arithmetic book if Jesus had been once mentioned in it.

In his last days, Roberts published *England's Ruin*, a slashing attack on Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England* and on Socialism in general. In it will be found what he thought of Jesus:—

A king reigns, who combines in himself all the sweetness and manliness of Arthur, all the grace and ability of Cyrus, all the energy and capacity of Alexander, all the talent and celerity of Napoleon all the irresistible velocity of Charles XII. all the invincibility and organising skill of Charlemagne . . . and so on and on, including Frederick, Louis XIV. Solomon, David, Moses and Job.

Christadelphianism is, I suspect, almost if not quite dead. The Disciples of Christ are still strongly kicking but no doubt will go the same way due to "liberal" heresies.

PSYCHICAL RESEARCH AND MR. SIMONS

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that matter) is to be demonstrated, the possibility of their cheating must be completely removed. It is clear that, in at least some of Dr. Soal's experiments with the Jones cousins, that possibility was not removed (e.g. one boy's father was present; one boy could see the other's legs, and so on). Dr. Soal even caught the boys cheating on a couple of occasions, but assured himself that they were genuinely telepathic on the occasions when they weren't caught. He was "not certain whether the boys had resorted to trickery because they feared their powers might desert them, or if they had merely imagined that the intervention of a code would prove a more certain way to the achievement of higher scores and bigger money". But he was "certain that no code was being used" when he recommended tests a few months later. He may be, but I am not. My position quite simply is, that where trickery cannot be ruled out, telepathy should. And I say again, if Dr. Soal or any other experimenter is so sure that he has discovered telepathic subjects, why doesn't he accept Mr. Scarne's challenge?

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

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

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

Manchester Branch NSS (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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group (Arnold House Hotel, Montpelier Terrace), Sunday February 2nd, 5.30 p.m.: KIT MOUNT, "Convictions, Commitments, and Co-Existence".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, February 4th, 7.30 p.m.: ARTHUR GOLDREICH, "Apartheid".

Hornchurch and Romford Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane), Tuesday, February 4th, 8 p.m.: CHRIS ROSE, "The Development of Religion—Animism to Rationalism".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, February 2nd, 6.30 p.m.: H. J. COHEN, MA, PhD, "The Place of Religion in the Reformation".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, February 2nd: ALAN BUSH, "Music and Religion".

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, January 31st, 7.15 p.m.: A MEETING.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, February 2nd, 11 a.m.: MAURICE CRANSTON, "John Stuart Mill: A Reconsideration".

Notes and News

LAST WEEK was a week of prayer for Christian unity, and it began with a gathering of "several hundred people of many denominations" in Trafalgar Square on Sunday, January 19th. The Dean of Westminster, the Very Rev. Eric Abbott called for prayers for "the visible unity of the Church which had been lost" (*The Guardian*, 20/1/64). Roman Catholic Monsignor Gordon Wheeler read a passage from the Gospel of St. John, Baptist Rev. Howard Williams led the Lord's Prayer, and Mr. Philip Potter, president of the World Student Christian Federation gave the charge to the congregation. Then, members of the Orthodox Church went in procession to the Thames, where Russian Patriarchal Archbishop Anthony Bloom of Surozh blessed the river by the triple immersion of an episcopal cross.

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WHETHER Old Father Thames, London, or indeed any place or anybody derived any benefit from the blessing is hard to tell. It seems, anyway, that our own river was

only chosen because the silly ceremony is forbidden on the Neva at Leningrad, on the Danube at Belgrade and indeed in the greater part of what the *Guardian* rather quaintly called "the Orthodox world".

★

THE OFFICIAL Catholic attitude to birth control "can no longer be defended by rational arguments", wrote Catholic Paul Johnson in the *New Statesman* (17/1/64). It has, Mr. Johnson said, "become a simple question of discipline", which "epitomises the struggle between those who want to transform the church into an organisation based upon reason and Christian charity, and those who want to retain its traditional hierarchical structure, based upon the blind acceptance of self-perpetuating authority". Mr. Johnson was no doubt right when he added that, if the progressives win the birth-control battle, the Church will never be the same again. But whether it can ever be based upon reason is another matter. Swallowing a wafer believing it is God may be less harmful than overbreeding, but it is no more reasonable.

★

THE WEEK before, the *New Statesman* cartoonist Trog had given his own view of Pope Paul's pilgrimage as a gimmick. Depicting a priest with a letter to the Pope from the Beatles, it had the following as the Holy Father's answer: "Thank them in writing, but say there's no question of our taking up the electric guitar".

★

DR. ANNE BIEZANEK, whose birth control clinic for Roman Catholics prompted Mr. Johnson's article, was interviewed by John O'Callaghan for *The Guardian* (21/1/64). Although Dr. Biezanek is a convert, Catholicism is now "part of the fabric of her life", and until two years ago she was an implacable though "increasingly perplexed" opponent of birth control. But pregnancy became "more and more hazardous for her" and she faced "prolonged ill-health, loss of figure, abuse and misunderstanding". Dr. Biezanek actually wanted "to die for the principle of purity". Instead, recalling the condition of women in a mental hospital who faced the same problem as herself, she decided to work for a more reasonable solution.

★

WRITING in *The Spectator* (17/1/64), Alan Brien offered a memo for nationalists and racists. The Roman Empire, he pointed out, "was built by Wops and the Egyptian by Wogs. Dagoes once ruled the waves, Christ was a Yid—and so were Freud, Marx and Einstein". The new "supermen of the West", said Mr. Brien, "are the mongrel race of Americans", but by the year 2000 "it may be the turn of Niggers and Chinks to dispute the ownership of the world".

★

AS WE expected—and as the editor of *Psychic News* (perhaps psychically) suspected—Mrs. Jessie Nason is not prepared to put her clairvoyance to the test. Mr. D. Yeulett (see Correspondence) naturally does not blame her and, frankly, neither do we. As a student of spiritualism we are perfectly aware that a spirit of "goodwill" is essential to a successful seance, and that "hostile scepticism" is fatal. Perhaps we should remind readers that our "unwarranted attack" on Mrs. Nason's integrity was merely a suggested explanation of one of her remarkable feats as recounted by Mr. Yeulett. We might also draw attention to the latter's egoism. He "couldn't care less" about the missing Goya and is "sure those on the other side of life have more worthwhile preoccupations than being lost and found property agents". Like telling Mr. Yeulett that he is a Communist, for instance?

A Rational View of God

By G. L. SIMONS

IF WE LOOK UP "atheism" in a dictionary it is often defined simply as "disbelief in the existence of God". This definition, however, is not precise enough for philosophy. "Disbelief" can be interpreted to mean either positive denial of, or lack of belief in, a proposition. Thus atheism can mean either a denial of the possibility of God, or a lack of belief in God's existence without asserting that it is a logical impossibility. I believe that the former view (with a qualification to be given later) is untenable and that the latter view, which some people may prefer to call agnosticism, is the only reasonable one in such matters.

I have argued this point before in *THE FREETHINKER*, but largely in the correspondence columns, so I kept the arguments short. The subject merits an article since it is important that secularists are not driven to defending a difficult doctrine which is not essential to their case. Dogmatic atheism—the view that God cannot possibly exist—seems to me to be such a doctrine. Agnosticism—the view that God is a logical possibility but that we have no grounds whatever for believing in his existence—seems to me the preferable alternative for the secularist. Many people confuse these two views but it is vital that they be clearly distinguished. The secular view of society and the universe stands or falls according to its inherent rationality or lack of it; it is thus important that secularists maintain a philosophy which is cogent, factual and valid. Before arguing my main point I will submit (as I said I would) a necessary qualification.

Whilst I suggested that it was untenable to regard God as a logical impossibility, he *is* such in the peculiar cases where he is defined so that no other view is possible, i.e. where God is assigned the attributes a, b and c, and where not-c can be deduced from a and b, it is apparent that the god with attributes a, b and c is a logical impossibility. In short a god with incompatible characteristics cannot exist. A case in point is the Christian god. This god is supposed to be all-knowing, all-loving and all-powerful. If this were so, sentient creatures would not suffer as they do. Since suffering exists God is inactive in this respect—but infinite love, infinite knowledge, infinite power and inaction cannot characterise the same being. The Christian god is therefore logically impossible. But this does not imply that a god with *compatible* characteristics cannot exist either. Indeed I think that such a god is logically possible. The Christian god could be salvaged if one of the three attributes listed above were sacrificed. For example, if a god were all-knowing, all-loving but *not* all-powerful, this would explain his inaction and such a being would be a possibility.

One of the main purposes of this article is to object to an argument held by certain dogmatic atheists. They suggest that because there is no reason to believe in God it is rational to deny the possibility of his existence. This argument has two forms, both of which I believe are invalid. These two forms may be called the metaphysical and the empirical; I will deal with them in turn.

The metaphysical form of the argument concerns the abstract proofs of God's existence—such philosophical proofs as the Cosmological (First Cause), Teleological (Design) and Ontological. These proofs are believed by secularists (myself included) to be quite invalid. Similar abstract arguments are similarly discarded since they are (rightly) thought to be invalid. But when the secularist, perceiving that no metaphysical argument can establish

God's existence, concludes that God's existence can be denied as a logical possibility, he is being irrational. This is because it does not follow that a true conclusion cannot be derived from an invalid argument. In short just because we cannot prove God's existence this does not mean that God does not exist. The following argument, consisting of two premises and a conclusion, shows that an invalid argument can produce a true conclusion:—

If President Kennedy was killed by shooting he would be dead (Premise 1). President Kennedy is dead (Premise 2). Therefore President Kennedy was killed by shooting (Conclusion).

This example shows that even though the argument is invalid (if in doubt consider the similar argument: If God made the world it would exist; The world exists; Therefore God made the world), its conclusion is true. This may also be the case with God. He *may* exist even though all the known arguments for his existence are invalid. It is a logical possibility that at some time in the future a valid argument will be discovered.

The empirical form of the argument is much more relevant to science, and states that since there is no evidence for God's existence, it is reasonable to assert that he does not exist. This again is an untenable position. Lack of evidence cannot prove a negative proposition except in certain specific circumstances. These circumstances have been defined by C. D. Broad in *The Mind and its Place in Nature*:—"Finding no evidence for a proposition is evidence against it only if the proposition be such that, if it were true, there ought to be some observable evidence for it". And we cannot assume that there would be evidence of God if he existed; there *may* be but it is not inevitable. Indeed, absence of evidence cannot be taken as proof that something does not exist (except in the special circumstances). In science this is obvious. All sorts of things existed before evidence for them was discovered. Electrons, viruses and remote stars did not spring into existence just when we discovered grounds for believing in them. They pre-dated our discovery of the relevant evidence. If this were not so, science could not be continually discovering new things for lack of evidence would be a criterion of their non-existence.

It should thus be apparent that neither an invalid argument nor lack of evidence can prove that something does not exist. As far as I know there is no valid argument for God's existence, nor is there any satisfactory evidence. But from this it cannot be concluded that God does not exist, only that we are irrational if we believe in him. It is thus apparent that dogmatic atheism is an untenable philosophy since it goes further than the evidence will allow. The evidence justifies neither belief in God, nor positive denial of the possibility of his existence; the only rational outlook is agnosticism.

The above reasoning may seem tedious and pedantic but it is essential that the secularist understand it and be able to present it in argument with religious believers. The basic strength of secularism lies in its rationality, and free thinkers do no service to atheism when they overstate their case and find themselves defending a too extreme position. When, for example, a religious believer says "Well supposing I don't *know* God exists, how do you know he doesn't?" the secularist (unless he is talking specifically about the Christian god) should not advance

positive arguments but should say "I do not claim to be able to demonstrate the non-existence of a deity. It is not essential to my case that I do so. I am merely saying that we have no grounds for belief in God. He may exist but we know nothing of him. The onus is on you to convince me otherwise".

Agnosticism is secure since it does not have to prove any difficult assertion. It is at odds with both the religious believer and the dogmatic atheist, both of whom are advancing categorical statements which it is up to them to prove. It may be significant that the great dogmatic atheists of history, e.g. Lucretius, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, have not been known for their logical acumen, but rather for their polemical or literary abilities. By contrast, great philosophers known for their logical insight, e.g. Hume, Richtenbach, Russell, have almost invariably been agnostics.

It is thought by some secularists that agnosticism is fence-sitting, that the agnostic cannot make up his mind. This is a quite inaccurate view, as the above reasoning should indicate. The agnostic is driven, through logical rigour, to reduce the status of God to that of a fairy, a unicorn or Father Christmas. This should satisfy any secularist. For all practical, social purposes the agnostic is an atheist, i.e. he works on the assumption that God does not exist, being merely a figment of untutored and childish minds. But the secularist is bound to admit that philosophically agnosticism is the only secure position. This is because it is impossible (apart from Broad's qualification above) to prove that something does not exist. For example, although I work on the assumption that fairies do not exist, I defy anyone to prove it to me philosophically.

Points From New Books

THERE IS a magnificently described storm in Kenneth Macpherson's new novel, *Rome 12 Noon* (Collins & Harvill, 21s.). The sky is an opaque black roof upheld by writhing white bars, and chords of thunder grope for focus. Then comes the rain, an increasing hiss, a drumming, shouting crackle, an elemental sibilant uproar; and the mountainside collapses and a sea of mud pours over the tormented valley. And afterwards, the few survivors have lost everything; yet they cry out that miraculously the ancient chapel, half-buried, is undamaged. Adriana, around whom the story centres, has, however, no longer a bright opinion of Heaven, and she proposes that "a better miracle might have suggested itself". Later, when she learns about other "acts of God" during the storm, she is "swept by rebellion: she wants to take someone like the Mother of God by both shoulders and shake her till her teeth rattle".

Adriana's good sense is not the only reason for reading this book. It begins slowly, but ends with a tense stripping of pretence from proud old men who are as ready to stoop privately to shabby deceit as to preach publicly a pious sermon at a funeral. The scene is in and around Rome where for modern youth Heaven is mainly a great procuring house in the sky.

A chorus of well-deserved critical praise has greeted Kingsley Amis's recent novel, *One Fat Englishman* (Gollancz, 18s.); and the book is superbly amusing and ego-deflating, in the vintage Amis manner. But free-thinkers may be especially amused at the anti-hero's spirited attack on a dandy American priest. After enduring a lot of smug conversation from the cleric, the visitor to the States says: ". . . To hear you talk one

would imagine God to be some sort of corporation president with strong views on group morale and togetherness and all that tomfoolery . . . White-haired old man up on the top floor who knows what's going on in every corner of the organisation and never too busy to listen to anybody's problems even if all they do is sweep the floors or work the lift. Superhuman only in scale . . . Nobody could say you're not in touch with the modern world, Father, I'll give you that. I rather envy you, I must confess, with your Fifth Avenue vestments and your commuter communicants and your neon Christ and your hangover penitents—what do you give them, a Hail Mary for every Martini after the first three?"

The money these smart priests make out of "telling the rest of us we put all the bad things there ourselves" really bugs the fat Englishman. In a particular moment of emotional tension he calls on the priest and baptises him in a bowl of gold-fish. As Kingsley Amis describes this retribution, it's enough to make a bishop laugh, one of those gentlemen whose faces look as if they'd been liberally basted with hot gravy!

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

Brief Biographies

The following extracts are from *A Dictionary of Modern History, 1789-1945*, by A. W. Palmer (Penguin Reference Books, 5s.) due to be published on January 31st.

BRADLAUGH, CHARLES (1833-91). British politician. The centre of a constitutional dispute during the second Gladstone Ministry. Bradlaugh was a rationalist lecturer who had been sentenced to imprisonment in 1876 for his share in a pamphlet advocating birth control. Although the sentence was quashed on appeal, he achieved an unenviable reputation in Victorian society for "advanced views". In 1880 he was elected Radical MP for Northampton. As a Freethinker he claimed the right to affirm when taking his seat rather than swear the oath. The Speaker, Sir Henry Brand, referred his request to a select committee, which decided against him. Bradlaugh then offered to take the oath, but a group of Conservatives complained that since Bradlaugh was a freethinker, his oath would not bind him. Bradlaugh was thereupon excluded from sitting in the Commons. On three occasions he was re-elected for Northampton but was still excluded; in 1881 he was even forcibly removed by ten policemen. In 1886 a new Speaker, Peel, insisted that Bradlaugh had the right to take the oath. Bradlaugh remained an MP until his death and in 1888 secured the passage of an Oath Act, permitting affirmation in both the Commons and the law courts.

MILL, JOHN STUART (1806-73). British philosopher, economist, and humanist. Born in London, the son of the utilitarian philosopher James Mill (1773-1836). J. S. Mill worked in London for the East India Company from 1833 to 1856 publishing two important works while in their service, *A System of Logic* (1843) and *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), an analysis of the classical economists which showed much more sympathy towards human suffering than they had themselves. Mill's political theories marked a transitional point in British liberalism, for he saw the need for state interference to prevent the abuse of *laissez-faire* principles; in his later years he regarded himself as a socialist. His great plea for respecting minority convictions, *On Liberty*, was published in 1859. Mill was Liberal MP for Westminster, 1865-8. In 1867 he introduced a motion proposing to enfranchise women on the ground that taxation necessarily carried a right of parliamentary representation. The motion, the first of its kind in Britain, was defeated by 196 votes to 73. Mill developed his views on women's rights in *The Subjection of Women* (1869). He spent a considerable part of each year in France, and his thought was influenced by French traditions.

PAINE, THOMAS (1737-1809). Born in Norfolk, became an excise officer until dismissed for seeking increased pay. In 1774 he emigrated to Pennsylvania. Two years later he published *Common Sense*, a forthright demand for the complete independence of the American colonies. He was secretary to the first American committee on foreign affairs and served with Washington's armies. He returned to England by way of France in 1787 and published *The Rights of Man* (1790-2) as a reply to Burke's criticisms of the French Revolution. Fearing prosecution he fled to France in 1792, was made a French citizen, and became

a member of the Convention. He was imprisoned in 1794, completing his *Age of Reason* while under the threat of execution. In 1802 he was able to return to America, but his extreme religious views and political radicalism made him a social outcast. His bones were brought back to England in 1819 by his former antagonist Cobbett (q.v.).

CORRESPONDENCE

PRESIDENT KENNEDY

You will have to excuse the tardiness in answering to your Notes and News of December 6th, 1963, as I receive the publication one month later in the United States. You state Kennedy's record in office vindicates him. This may be true if one is willing to ignore some very minor details, such as the fact that between 1946 and 1961 Roman Catholic institutions received 18.4 per cent of federal property declared surplus. From 1961 to 1963 this rose to 93.5 per cent, much of which went to assist schools and hospitals via land grants. In most cases there was public need and demand for these properties. This was completely ignored by Kennedy Catholic appointees, such as Celebreze, and duly elected officials who completely disregarded our Constitution. I feel sure you'll find that Spellman benefited in this manner. We are speaking of tens of millions of dollars. Hospitals given to them and staffed by nuns operating at supposedly no profit, make no concession cost of their facilities as against those privately owned. In foreign aid we have continued to build for the Roman Catholic Church at an increased rate, again in violation of our Constitution. Our invasion of Cuba was shameful to say the least. Legalities were overlooked, such as Congress passing an act of war, treaties were broken, etc. We continued our shameful conduct on world politics, alliances with Franco continued as an example. While Kennedy voiced separation of church and state in school matters, he was instrumental in the enactment of the new bill which Johnson just signed which gives aid to private schools on a college level. No one seems to know much about it as yet, with the very fine censorship our news affords the American public and which seemingly increased during the past two years. Here again there are questions of constitutionality. We can get no information on this new legislation in any of our publications. As a representative in Congress, I believe his record will show he was for assistance to private or parochial schools by the attempted promotion of a bill.

No one can deny the immensity of the crime perpetrated against the public by this one senseless act, but so far no one can show any concerted effort by any group to have participated in this act of violence. It was committed by one individual, not as in the past where many good leaders have been assassinated by religious provocation of the Catholic Church. Kennedy had many fine qualities, but they were certainly not those as practised by the Roman Catholic Church in world politics today.

GEORGE KISSLINGER

(American Rationalist Federation).

[Of course it is possible—and legitimate—to criticise the Kennedy administration. The invasion of Cuba was, as Mr. Kisslinger says, shameful, but there is reason to believe that the President was virtually forced into it soon after his narrow election victory. Certainly he inherited a disastrous American policy towards Cuba; he deserves some credit for moderating it. Above all he deserves credit for his part in easing East-West tension. As for the increase in grants to Roman Catholic institutions, we suspect that many of these were on a state, non-federal level and therefore not his responsibility. It is rather too simple to talk of "Kennedy Catholic appointees". He appointed very many non-Catholics to influential roles. It should also be remembered that another Catholic, Speaker McCormack, did much to thwart Kennedy's legislative hopes. Indeed it is by contrast with McCormack that one may truly assess Kennedy's political independence.—Ed.]

TRAGEDY

Perhaps Roger Bassett is confusing my statement regarding tragedy being the highest form of literature with that of the best form and most pleasant for the human mind. The "highest" is not necessarily the "best". Everyone has their own views regarding the best form of literature.

I think that tragedy is the highest because it is here the terrible side of life is most powerfully expressed. I don't think that it is only pessimists who hold this view. For instance, Bertrand Russell, whom one could hardly call a pessimist says, "Of all the arts, tragedy is the proudest, the most triumphant; for it builds its shining citadel in the very centre of the enemy's country, or the very summit of his highest mountain".

My devaluation of Goethe was purely from the point of view of his pantheistic optimism, not from his great genius as a poet.

R. SMITH.

SPIRITUALISM

As promised, I have shown Mrs. Jessie Nason (not Mason) your comments to my letter which was published in THE FREETHINKER under the heading of "Spiritualism" (27/12/63). She informs me she is not prepared to submit herself to your suggested test, and after reading of your unwarranted attack on her integrity, I can hardly blame her! As any student of Spiritualism knows, for any seance to be successful, a certain spirit of goodwill of those taking part is of utmost importance. This being so, perhaps she feels that no worthwhile purpose would be served where an atmosphere of hostile scepticism prevailed! However, if you insist on a public meeting, the invitation to go to the Co-operative Hall, Rye Lane, Peckham, S.E.5, on Wednesday evenings at 8 p.m. is still open!

As to your editorial comments under "This Believing World" (17/1/64) on the missing Goya, I for my part couldn't care less where it is, and I am sure those on the other side of life have more worthwhile preoccupations than being lost and found property agents.

D. YEULETT.

[This letter is referred to in Notes and News.—Ed.]

THE TENNESSEE MONKEY TRIAL

I agree that it is a very minor mistake, but in "This Believing World" of January 3rd, you referred to the Tennessee "Monkey Trial" as taking place "over 40 years ago". It was actually held in 1925.

R. STUART MONTAGUE.

WITHOUT COMMENT

In its first 24 hours 250 people used the automatic dial-a-prayer phone service sponsored at Dundee by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.—*Daily Sketch* (14/1/64)

CHRISTIAN UNITY

Members of the Roman Catholic and Anglican youth clubs at Wheathampstead, Herts, have taken a step towards Church unity. They have decided to amalgamate so that they can play and pray together.

Both the rector, the Rev. George Roe, and the Roman Catholic priest, Fr. John Davey, have approved the merger. Mr. Roe said: "It is an excellent idea. The combined club may be called 'The Saints'".—*Daily Telegraph* (14/1/64).

OBITUARY

James Schofield Merritt, a staunch Freethinker, died recently aged 64. He had been in poor health for a long time, never having fully recovered from the effects of gassing in the first World War.

Mr. Merritt was extremely well read, with a particular fondness for poetry.

Mr. T. M. Mosley conducted a secular funeral ceremony at Grimsby Crematorium on January 13th.

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