

# The Freethinker

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THERE IS A PLEASANT STORY which relates how, when that master of unconscious humour, King George III, congratulated Bishop Watson on his book, *An Apology for the Bible*, with its refutation of *The Age of Reason*, the royal "Defender of the Faith" added (presumably by way of an afterthought) "Very good indeed, but dear me, dear Bishop, I really had no idea that the Bible needed apologising for". The anecdote is not only diverting but informative. After all, if a religious creed is really—as its apologists claim—dictated by an infallible divine power, what conceivable purpose can there be in trying to "prove" its authenticity by mere human reason? For all human beings, including theologians, are fallible, and arguments in favour of some abstract proposition, however ingenious, are usually open to counter-criticism.

From which it would seem to follow that attempts to defend religious doctrine by rational arguments must tend to raise more doubts than they resolve. Once admit rational argument into the religious domain and who knows where it will stop? To be sure, this supposition can also be adduced in connection with rational criticism in other mundane authoritarian fields. For did not a French conservative politician of the nineteenth century once comment, with Gallic lucidity, that a social order which permits its basic foundations to be called into question is already doomed? General Cavaignac made this shrewd comment at the time of the 1848 year of revolutions, but since his day modern dictatorial regimes have acted upon his assumption and have made all sociological criticism illegal. The social order is sacrosanct and all dangerous thoughts which criticise it are forbidden.

## Christianity and Reason

However, by their very nature, secular institutions do not have, and—again by their very nature—cannot have the same permanence, and consequently speak with the same authority, as religious ones. And since, on any coherent theological view, God represents the ultimate authority, no human criticism can have the slightest validity in the theological domain. In such supernatural matters human reason is limited to, at most, the modest task of deciding what God actually revealed. As a modern critic, Dean Inge, aptly commented, "in such authoritarian creeds there are no problems to be solved but only authorities to be consulted".

This is the logic inherent in supernatural religion, and Christianity has probably carried it further than has any other religion. One implies in this respect principally Catholicism. While certain Protestant sects, Calvinism in particular, have perhaps enforced the principle of authority equally rigidly, this line of action has been limited to generally short periods. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for a creed which owes its initial existence to a revolution—and such the Protestant Reformation certainly was—and founded, in part at least, upon a rational critique of the Papacy and of Catholics in general, to

adopt a permanent authoritarian principle.

The Catholic Church labours under no such inhibitions. From a very early period in the evolution of Christianity, the Church manifested a principle of intolerance entirely at variance with the tolerant pagan cults of the Greek and Roman world, whilst Christian apologetics manifested themselves quite early in Christian evolution. Earliest apologies for the new cult by Justin, Minuaus, Felix and others, date from the second century, and their efforts were limited to demanding toleration for their own creed and not as a general principle.

The Catholic hierarchy does not seem to have thought much of these

efforts for, apart from Justin who was also a martyr, none of the early Christian apologists appears to have been enrolled in the Canon of the Saints. In any case, as soon as the Catholic Church got control of the state at the end of the fourth century, the appeal for toleration went by the board, along with any attempt to justify Christianity on rational grounds. Once the Church was in power it did not argue with either the pagan secular philosophies or with the rival pagan religious cults; it closed down the pagan universities (Athens, Alexandria, etc.), forcibly disbanded the pagan cults and persecuted their adherents. In fact it extirpated the rival cults of Mithras, Mane, etc., so thoroughly, that few traces of them remain.

## The Inquisition

For the next millenium (c. 500-1500), the cult of the "jealous God" of Christianity remained supreme, whilst a new and inexplicable crime (as an early Church Father described it) "the mortal sin of heresy" took precedence over every other secular crime in the statute books of all Catholic lands. Throughout the Dark and Middle Ages, it was a universal ecclesiastical dream—and one at that accepted and enforced by every Christian state—that (if we may so modernise it) the only good heretic was a dead one.

It was no doubt from the unvarying practice of the medieval Church of the Inquisition of exterminating heretics as fast as they appeared, that Adolf Hitler—a close student and admirer of the Catholic Church—derived the view that he was to express so unequivocally in *Mein Kampf* on "dangerous thoughts" being easily kept at bay if one kills off the intellectuals responsible for them. For this was self-evident dogma to the Inquisition long before Hitler saw the light. To be sure it was summarised to perfection by a Puritan in the English revolution of the mid-seventeenth century, as "stone dead hath no bellow".

## St. Thomas Aquinas

Perhaps the most conclusive evidence as to the ultimate futility of Christian "apologetics", and incidentally, the most convincing justification of the remark of George III, is furnished by the example of the greatest of all Christian apologists, St. Thomas Aquinas, the angelic doctor and doyen of both medieval and modern theology. It is

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Christian Apologetics

By F. A. RIDLEY

common knowledge that St. Thomas (1225-74) in the course of his *Contra Gentiles* put forward the most ingenious and elaborate defence of Theism to be found anywhere in Christian or perhaps in any religious literature. His famous "five proofs" of the existence of God are still the sacrosanct bases of Christian apologetics as analysed by the Roman Catholic Church (at the ecumenical Council of Trent which inaugurated the Counter-Reformation the works of St. Thomas were placed on the altar alongside the Gospels). How often have we not been told by the Christian apologists that Aquinas's elaborate chain of argument represented an "irrefutable demonstration" of the existence of God?

Yet it would certainly appear that Aquinas himself did not share his modern admirers' confidence in his irrefutable demonstration. For elsewhere in the voluminous writings of this most eminent master of theological science, we find this unambiguous statement: "The heretic is not to be argued with but must be incontinently put to death". Evidently, when it came to the actual conversion of heretics, St. Thomas preferred the less subtle means employed by the Inquisition (then at the zenith of its persecuting activity) to his own "irrefutable arguments".

## Catholics and Birth Control

MOST OF THE leading Protestant denominations, noting mankind's deadly peril, have endorsed effective birth control as morally imperative, said the American magazine, *Church and State* (January 1964). But the Roman Catholic Church, having taken a too hasty position that contraceptive birth control violates both the natural and the divine law, has found itself in the difficult position of having to oppose what experts regard as necessary for human survival.

There is evidence, however, that Roman Catholic leaders are beginning to realise that the traditional position of their Church is no longer realistic or tenable. The Vatican Council, it is reported, is to consider the birth control problem in connection with its schema on "The Church in the Modern World". And, in the USA, a new look at birth control was urged by Father John A. O'Brien, a Notre Dame professor, in an article published simultaneously in the Catholic *Ave Maria* and the Protestant *Christian Century*. While Father O'Brien was not invited to the Vatican Council and has no particular standing in his Church he is undoubtedly expressing the views of millions of intelligent Catholic laymen, as *Church and State* indicated.

Father O'Brien's recommendations are receiving wide attention in both Catholic and Protestant communions. He recommends that Catholics stop their attempts to use laws and police to halt birth control programmes which seem wise and necessary to the community. He proposes a White House conference on birth control with particular regard to the problems of underdeveloped countries. He also asks that the National Institutes of Health undertake a crash research programme into the entire area of human reproduction with the hope that solutions of the problem yet unknown may be discovered.

The latter suggestion was considered particularly significant in view of the fact that Roman Catholic pressures caused the initial suppression and the eventual emasculation of a birth control study made by the National Institutes of Health a year ago.

One hopeful sign of the end of Catholic intransigence on birth control was seen in the approval of the rhythm method. While so unreliable as to be regarded by some obstetricians as virtually useless, Catholic approval of any

St. Thomas would no doubt have agreed with King George that the Church like the Bible did not need "apologising" for!

It would appear clear from Christian evolution itself, that when the Christian Church is strong it does not believe in argument but solely in authority, backed where necessary by force. During its golden age, its "age of faith", it did not argue but simply commanded. If the heretic remained obstinate he did not long remain alive. It was, in fact, only in its early years, when still a struggling sect in a still predominantly pagan world, that it sought to justify its own existence by rational argument. Again, it is only now, when deprived of its power to persecute that we again hear of Christian "Evidence" and Catholic "Truth" societies. They represent symptoms of the contemporary decay of Christianity. If by some miracle Rome today were again to recover her medieval persecuting power, would she still bother with rational proofs? One has only to look at the contemporary regime of say, Franco's Spain, where the Catholic Church is virtually still all powerful, and where religious toleration is virtually non-existent, in order to suggest a convincing argument.

method of birth control was regarded by Protestant theologians as a real breakthrough. They pointed out that once birth control had been accepted in principle, the debate over methods would not be too significant morally. They hoped that the Vatican Council would at the least endorse the birth control pill as moral.

Meanwhile, *Church and State* continued, there are reports that the Communists are to take an entirely new line in regard to birth control programmes. For years their official line has been one of contempt for all such programmes. But, having seen how desperately the problem of overpopulation now looms, Soviet leaders are preparing to assume the mantle of leadership for birth limitation around the world. So reports Richard N. Gardner, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State.

Regrettably, though, *Church and State* had to add a footnote. A provision of the \$3,600,000,000 foreign aid bill which would have made possible the support of birth control programmes in overpopulated countries desiring them, was eliminated by the US Senate-House conference. Inserted in its place was a provision that funds could be used "to conduct research into the problems of population growth".

## Place of Rest

TERENCE PRITTIE, in a "Diplomatic Commentary" in *The Guardian* (9/3/64), related a current joke about General de Gaulle's final resting place. One Minister, so the story goes, will suggest the Arc de Triomphe, but the General will reply, "No, not alongside the Unknown Soldier".

"Well, then, perhaps the Panthéon?"

"No, it has an atheistical ring . . ."

"Perhaps the Invalides?"

"Hm. But then I should be in the company of a mere corporal [Napoleon]".

"Well, then, what about the Holy Sepulchre?"

An expansive gesture of approval: "That would indeed be most suitable".

With the matter thus settled, another Minister will then put the question in everybody's mind—"Then what will happen on the Third Day?"

# Christianity and The French Revolution

By AKIBA

DURING THE French Revolution—writes Aulard in the preface to *Christianity and the French Revolution*, translated by Lady Fraser—the Christian religion “incurred serious danger; the shock of violence caused it to totter and the ground might have been cut from under its feet had the storm of fury been free to persist”. The struggle against external and internal enemies forced the government to more and more radical measures, not only against the old nobility, but also against the clergy intimately associated with the crimes of the old regime.

The enormous power of the French Church, its wealth, privileges and prestige, are well brought out by Aulard. We have, he says:

an opulent Church unpaid by the State, living on her own wealth. She does not merely possess the tithes—a legal tax imposed for her exclusive benefit; not merely does she possess the offerings and alms of her flock; she owns important landed property, a part of the soil of France. What part? It has never been ascertained exactly. The clergy did not flaunt its wealth. Under the Constituent Assembly, when the State laid hands on Church property, only vague evaluations were made. The Constituent, Rabdout Saint-Etienne said that the Church owned one-fifth of the land and the Constituent Treilhard, valued it at 4,000,000 livres. As to the amount of the income, the Constituents were unable to agree. Talleyrand estimated it at 150,000,000—70,000,000 for the proceeds of property and 80,000,000 for tithes. Treilhard valued it at over 200,000,000, Chasset at 303,000,000. All that was known was that the Church was very rich, and the notion of her wealth—whether exaggerated or not—added to the prestige of the Church on the eve of the Revolution. It did not, however, enhance her popularity.

It is not surprising that the close and intimate relationship between the ruling Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion and the “very Christian King” styled as such by the Church itself—should have resulted in a deep revulsion towards both institutions. The clergy, the monarchy and the nobility became increasingly suspect as the revolution galloped towards its regicidal conclusion. However, the pace of the Revolution was greatly accelerated by the total inability of the representatives of the old regime to come to terms with the new order, and their futile efforts (even with the assistance of France’s enemies) to turn back the wheels of history. In the first stages, the Revolution set out with the support of the clergy—especially the lower clergy.

On June 13th, 1789, the Third Estate decided to proceed by itself to the general clarification of its powers, by appealing in the first place to all the deputies. A few priests—parish priests without the blessing of their superiors, one must hasten to add—took the initiative in responding to the appeal of the Third Estate to form a united order of deputies in favour of the revolution. When the Constituent Assembly met shortly afterwards, it dealt only glancing blows at the power of the Gallican Church. On the night of August 4th, a decree was passed which abolished in principle, and to some extent, in practice, the Church’s feudal system and feudal rights. Article 5 of this decree, definitely formulated on August 11th, abolished all sorts of tithes and substitutes for tithes. Article 8 suppressed the occasional fees of country priests, but not before their stipends were increased and pensions provided for the curates. Article 12 prohibited the sending to Rome of money for “annates, or for any cause at all”. Article 13 suppressed the privileges of bishops, archbishops, chapters, etc., and Article 14 forbade the holding of benefices in plurality if over the value of 3,000 francs.

Yet, homage was paid to the Catholic religion, under whose auspices the revolution was placed, for “the welfare of France”. The National Assembly even ordered a medal to be struck and a *Te Deum* to be sung “by way of thanksgiving in all the parishes and churches of the kingdom”. They begged the king to allow this to be sung in his chapel in the presence of the Assembly. This is how the Revolution began—halting, reformist, yet pushing and being pushed towards a goal it did not even dimly perceive.

The Pope’s condemnation of the Declaration of Rights in 1790, worsened relations between the Revolutionary Government, the Gallican State Church and Rome. And liberty of worship was broadened out by the decree of May 7th, 1791. Jews were little affected by it, but the long-suffering Protestants gained much by its passing. Increasingly, the Roman religion became the anti-national religion, the religion identified with the discredited feeble monarchy and its foreign involvement. The “dechristianisation” measures were the result of the hostile positions taken up by the Roman Church and the higher clergy, and were in no sense impelled by doctrinaire anti-religious considerations.

It was the citizens at Ris-Oragnis who were the first to renounce their Catholic faith, and it was not just the Roman Church that they repudiated, it was the Christian religion. Ris-Oragnis was a little rural commune in the middle of the Ile de France. It set the first example of “expropriation” of Christianity by taking down its patron saint, Saint Blaise, and putting Brutus in his place. It gave its commune the name Brutus—and summarily dismissed its vicar. This was in the year 1793.

The establishment of the Republican era in this year—the substitution of the Republican Calendar for the Gregorian (decrees of October 5th, 1793)—was as much politically directed as motivated by anti-religious considerations. The substitution of new dates and festivals for the old ones, the abolition of Sunday, to substitute for it a “tenth rest day” was aimed at teaching Catholicism out of the life of the French people. The changed calendar approximated to the traditional months as follows:— Vendémiaire September, Brumaire October, Frimaire November, Nivôse December, Pluviôse January, Ventôse February, Germinal March, Floréal April, Prairial May, Messidor June, Thermidor July, Fructidor August.

By the 20th Brumaire (1793), the insignia of the Catholic Church of Notre Dame had been covered up, and a mound had been heaped up on which stood a Greek temple with an inscription “To Philosophy”, four busts of the philosophers, Voltaire, Rousseau, Franklin and Montesquieu, being displayed. Thus arrived the Temple of Reason, the first modern attempt to substitute a natural religion for Christianity (in any form). The French Revolution—in this sense—went beyond the “extremes” even of the British republican experience. The rejection of Christian theology and history was the most radical break in the long torturous domination of Europe by Christianity. It signalled its decline, if not its immediate end.

However, the worship of Reason was generally theistic, and not materialistic or atheistic. It is interesting to note that Robespierre denounced atheism as the religion

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## This Believing World

We must congratulate Canon J. D. Pearce-Higgins on addressing the members of the Marble Arch Branch of the National Secular Society on Spiritualism. He may have some difficulty in swallowing the famous "Articles" of the Christian faith, but he proved in his address that he never had any difficulty in swallowing materialisations, spirits, survival, inner voices, and probably all the other "phenomena" which distinguish "psychic" faith—even from his own Christianity.

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Whether he convinced his audience is a different matter. We not only rely on evidence, but on plain common sense. Anyway, it is rather late in the day to give us such names as Elisha and Jesus as "believers" in spiritualism, to say nothing of Crookes, Abraham Lincoln, and Alfred Russel Wallace. Crookes has been thoroughly exposed either as a fool, or as a liar or both; the picture of Lincoln as a Spiritualist was not accompanied by any genuine evidence, while Wallace was completely hoaxed by a conjuror. As for Lord Dowding and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—what about their unwavering belief in fairies? The worthy Canon was—*Psychic News* reported—listened to with "good humour". Why not? Many of his audience must have heard similar "proofs" a hundred times.

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The Church has made desperate efforts to convince people of the truth of Christianity for 1900 years, and one of the most solemn ways was to recount the behaviour of the dying. All infidels without exception cry for Jesus, while true believers die in joyful expectation of resting for eternity in his arms. And the truth? The Rev. D. Strudwick, who visited 5,000 patients in hospital in 1963, claims that "the majority of patients have only a nominal attachment to the Church, and do not wish for our ministrations". To put this more clearly, patients wanted to live if possible, and did not care two hoots for the safe and pleasant arms of "our Saviour".

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Within a few weeks of being given "independence", Zanzibar revolted against its new leaders, and its future seems difficult to foresee. But not many people know or remember that it was once the great source of Arab slavers whose one ambition was to capture negroes by the thousand and sell them into slavery. As the *Daily Mail* pointed out, it endured "2,000 years of slavery, in which millions of negroes were ruthlessly sold into bondage". And only "100 years ago Zanzibar was a market-place where negroes from the forests of Africa were sold in disgusting auction sales".

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But in this connection it should not be forgotten that the majority of the buyers were fully-believing Christians, mostly from America. And it took a terrible, merciless, civil war in the United States lasting for nearly five years, and costing a million deaths on the battlefield, to say nothing of appalling cruelties in other ways, to stop this slavery. Was the war successful? The history of the Southern States prove how its Christian inhabitants have ever since regretted losing the war—and slavery. Moreover, there are still Arab states which buy and sell slaves.

### TEN NON-COMMANDMENTS

(A Humanist's Decalogue)

by RONALD FLETCHER

(recently appointed Professor of Sociology in the University of York)

"... deserves great praise"—*Tribune*

Price 2s. 6d., postage 6d.

## CHRISTIANITY AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

(Concluded from page 91)

of the freethinking nobles. At the Jacobin Club on the 1st Frimaire of the Year II (Republican era), Robespierre denounced those who advocated violence against Christianity. "The man who wishes to prevent the saying of Mass is a greater fanatic than he who says it", he declared. And again, "Atheism is aristocratic—the idea of a great Being who watches over oppressed innocence and punishes triumphant crime is entirely democratic".

Under Robespierre's influence the worship of Reason was transformed into the worship of the Supreme Being. Robespierre's new religion, was derived from Rousseau's naturalistic religion. He set his face against the Hebertists of *Le Père Duchesne*, who were denounced as Atheists. Many were sent to the guillotine along with Robespierre's "conservative" enemies. He came back to his theme again and again: "The idea of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul" are, he said, "a continual reminder of justice", therefore "social and republican".

The arrest of a young girl, Cécile Renault, on suspicion of trying to assassinate him, gave Robespierre the opportunity of posing as a martyr, the martyr of the new religion. Soon he found a Cult of Robespierre surrounding him, in which he was ranked as, if not a divinity, at least, a pontiff. It is strange indeed that this cult of the personality (late 18th century version) should have helped to provide the very weapon which his enemies desired to destroy him.

A certain Catherine Théot, born in Barenton, Manche, was a victim of hallucinations, and after a long course of religious asceticism, the Convent of the Miramiones in Paris placed her under restraint. After liberation in 1782, her Messianic delusions were strengthened, and she became convinced that she was destined to be the mother of a new Messiah. From the idea of the advent of the Messiah to its realisation was but a small step. The Théotists began to look upon Robespierre as the redeemer of mankind.

Poor Robespierre was confronted with this at the famous Convention which brought about his downfall. Vadier asserted that Catherine Théot was a spy, a tool of the English Prime Minister Pitt and that the mummeries of the Théotists were but a cloak for clerical and reactionary intrigue—hinting that Robespierre favoured their designs. Catherine's case was adjourned to the revolutionary tribunal, and figured in the proceedings of the 9th of Thermidor. She herself was acquitted, but died in prison on September 1st, 1794.

These peculiar by-products of the artificial worship of the "Supreme Being" reveal the hazards of launching new religions, based on political considerations or state support.

The worship of Reason and the Supreme Being, the later activities of the Theophilanthropists who were closer to the Voltairean and English freethinkers than they were to Robespierre and Rousseau—all testify to the historic significance of the French Revolution in man's march from the cult of God to the service of man.

The French Revolutionary attempts to create a halfway house betwixt and between historic Christianity and atheism was not successful. It could not be, in the prevailing circumstances. They leaped ahead of history, only to be sucked back—at least part of the way—towards religion. Yet their achievement was not less impressive for its partial failure, because upon the shoulders of these Deists and half-freethinkers—the present Freethought movement rests.

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.  
London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. A. MILLAR. (Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: MESSRS. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.  
Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street.) Sunday Evenings  
Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.  
North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.  
Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, March 22nd, 6.45 p.m.: C. J. LAXTON, "World Federation".  
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, March 24th, 7.30 p.m.: D. J. GIBSON, "What Do We Mean By A Rational Religious Sentiment?"  
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, March 22nd, 6.30 p.m.: E. G. DUNNING, "The Development of Football".  
Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, March 22nd, 7.30 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE, "Freethought—Looking Ahead".  
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), March 22nd, 11 a.m.: MAURICE CRANSTON, "Francis Bacon Today".  
Wales and Western Branch NSS (Bute Town Community Centre, Cardiff), Tuesday, March 24th, 7.30 p.m.: D. FRANCIS, "The Trade Union Attitude to Apartheid".

## Notes and News

"DEAREST CHILDREN, we are praying today to the Madonna. Do you know for whom we pray?" A particularly silly question, this of Pope Paul's, since 25,000 people had specifically gathered with 1,000 vehicles in St. Peter's Square to receive his blessing on the Sunday before the feast day of St. Francesca Romana, the patron saint of motorists. Moreover, most of them had come straight from the front of the Colosseum, where Cardinal Luigi Traglia had previously blessed them. The Papal ceremony over the square resounded to the sound of horns and "in the bedlam of noise, the traffic cops saluted, the men of the fire brigades darted up their ladders which were pointed towards the Pope's window, and snapped to a smart salute at the pinnacle". Then Pope Paul withdrew and—in *The Guardian* correspondent's words—"the now twice-blessed vehicles immediately tried to force their way through the crowded square . . . Bumpers were bumped, fenders dented, and there was a healthy exchange of irreverent gestures between rival drivers. Three

careering nuns were nearly transported to a better world by a fast-moving convertible . . .".

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"I SPEAK here of the late Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin . . ." And very highly Alain de Galles spoke of the Jesuit palaeontologist, too, in the Professional Projects magazine, *Pulse* (8/2/64). In fifty years of almost silent labour, wrote Mr. de Galles dramatically, Teilhard "revised" the theory of evolution "in such an inspired way and with the strictest scientific rigour, that he has succeeded in giving the whole of human thinking a long-lost coherence". Which is, of course, poppycock. Witness Mr. de Galles's summary: "The entire universe is becoming a spiritual continuum, with evolution as the arrow of emergence. After the *geosphere* of the incipient world, and the *biosphere* of the primeval world, we are now in the *nöosphere*". But Sir Julian Huxley is cited in support, and his words (which we are told should be "taken literally") are: "This covering of the earth's sphericity with a thinking envelope, whose components are interacting with a steadily rising intensity, is now generating a powerful psycho-social pressure favouring a solution of least effort, by way of integration in a unitary organisation of ideas and beliefs". We can only repeat our opinion that Sir Julian did a great disservice to science and clear thinking when he sponsored Teilhard's *Phenomenon of Man* in England and adopted the Jesuit's mystical "thinking envelope", the *nöosphere*.

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EDWARD HYAMS'S fortnightly "Countryside" column in the *New Statesman* invariably contains something of interest. And not the least of Mr. Hyams's useful services is to debunk the "natural" fallacy: the idea that the more man interferes with nature the worse things become; and more especially, that modern science does more harm than good, at least in the plant and animal kingdoms. "I often hear people assert that all these plant diseases we suffer from are something new, and that in the past it was not so", Mr. Hyams wrote (28/2/64). He advised them to read through the list of vine-diseases in Pliny's *Natural History*. Not that the Roman agronomists were "sunk in superstition". Though they had virtually no controls, they were "often as scientific as we are". For example, their method of dealing with the threat of frost was "to have large piles of dry straw ready round the orchards and vineyards . . . to set it on fire and put down a screen of smoke between the plants and the clear, still sky". This, said Mr. Hyams, "is still the right thing to do".

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IT WOULD be "unwise", wrote John Ardagh in *The Observer* (8/3/64) "to take these as signs of an organised nationwide drive against erotic works of literary merit". He was referring of course to the seizure by Birmingham City Police of "several hundred publications, including copies of *Fanny Hill*". This, two weeks after a similar raid by the Manchester police. The Home Secretary, as Mr. Ardagh noted, had drawn "a clear distinction" between books of the *Fanny Hill* type and the "great mass of pornography". But what, then, are they "signs of"? Perhaps we are witnessing one of those altogether ridiculous and sometimes dangerous "purity" drives to which our island seems periodically subject. Whether or not *Fanny Hill* is a work of literary merit is to our minds beside the point. The question is quite simply one of freedom. Is my reading to be restricted because Mr. Brooke, Father Corbishley or some Chief Constable expresses concern about the effect a book might have on a child? It is time this excuse for censorship was exposed for the hypocrisy that it is.

# The Philosopher as a Hero

By CORLISS LAMONT

GEORGE SANTAYANA (1863-1952), one of America's most distinguished Naturalist or Humanist philosophers, resigned his professorship at Harvard in 1912 when he received a substantial inheritance at the death of his mother, and became a wandering scholar in Western Europe for the remainder of his long life. During the last twenty-five years of that period Daniel Cory, an able philosopher in his own right, was Santayana's close friend and valued collaborator. Later he became his literary executor.

Published during Santayana's centennial year, the fascinating volume, *Sanatayana: The Later Years, A Portrait in Letters*, by Daniel Cory (George Braziller, New York, 1963, \$7.50), gives an informal, intimate insight into the mind and character of the great philosopher. The author skilfully interweaves with his story excerpts from some 300 letters written to him by Santayana, and portrays a personality far warmer and more humane than the previous public image of the man. Santayana finally chose to settle down in Italy and especially Rome, but Mr. Cory's narrative of his unceasing dialogue with him takes us to London, Paris and various places in Switzerland.

Since this book does not add a great deal to our knowledge of Santayana's technical philosophy, its particular importance for Humanists and Rationalists is that it reinforces the clear-cut quality of his fundamental Naturalism (or Humanism). His system completely rejects belief in God, personal immortality or any supernaturalist spirits and powers. Because Santayana treats the traditional theologies with genuine understanding, stressing that they embody poetic myths with significant moral meaning, he is sometimes misinterpreted as being a semi-believer himself. He was well aware of this tendency among critics; and it is one that conscientious Humanists must vigorously combat for the sake of both philosophic integrity and the effectiveness of Santayana for Humanism.

He was also aware of certain age-long peculiarities of the Catholic Church. In 1940, amid the vicissitudes of World War II, Santayana at seventy-seven retired to a Catholic nursing home in Rome—the Convent of the Blue Sisters of the Little Company of Mary. About two years before his death, when his health had become increasingly delicate, Santayana expressed some misgivings about the Blue Sisters. In Mr. Cory's words:

He said that in case I happened to be away when a final relapse overtook him, I was not to be misled by any reports that were circulated about his last hours. I must remember that he was living in a Catholic nursing home where it was more or less expected that a man should die like a Christian. So if I ever heard reports that there had been a sudden "change of heart" at the end, I was not to believe, for instance, that he had requested "extreme unction"; but perhaps it might be difficult to avoid receiving it, especially if he were in a semi-unconscious state.

Santayana repeated this warning to Mr. Cory several times. And sure enough something of the kind was attempted during the philosopher's last days, although the episode is not described in this book. What happened was that a Catholic nurse suddenly refused to administer morphine, which the very ill patient required to ease his pains from cancer, unless he called in a priest to confess him. This manoeuvre did not succeed, because Mr. Cory was in constant attendance during Santayana's terminal illness and was able to prevent any such hoax from going through.

Throughout *The Later Years* the author records many wise and illuminating observations gleaned in conversations and correspondence with Santayana. A good example of Santayana's method in the interpretation of religion is his translation of the orthodox idea of God into naturalistic terms. "Don't you understand by now," he says to the author, "that the real object of piety is matter—or Nature, if you prefer. It is the idea of Might—the ineluctable Yahveh of the Hebrews—when this primitive notion has been freed of its local and superstitious accretions". Mr. Cory then explains:

All his life Santayana had been convinced that the religious attitude of respect of God is at the bottom the same thing as our sense of dependence on an efficacious but largely unfathomed "background" of human experience . . . When our naive ideas of God or Nature have been stripped of their pictorial and emotional accretions, what we are left with is the defiant core of both these ideas: the ineradicable conviction of a primordial Might that impinges upon and ought to control the ambition of the distracted mind.

Plainly, then, there is in the universe an Almighty Power, which is nothing more nor less than matter-energy in its multitudinous forms. Or, to quote Santayana again, "The world as I see it . . . contains no god, but it possesses the chief function which these Gods were felt to exercise".

In spite of this basic naturalistic position concerning the chief problems in philosophy, Santayana always remained sympathetic to the Christian Church as an institution and particularly to the Catholic Church whose majestic and colourful rituals had an aesthetic appeal for him. Mr. Cory brings out this point in several passages in his study. As the late Professor William Pepperell Montague of Barnard College put, it there can be both "anti-clerical theists", like himself, and "clerical atheists". Obviously Santayana belonged in the latter class.

This fact has caused some of our more militant Humanists and Rationalists to feel that Santayana has no legitimate place in the Humanist movement. Several answers are in order here. First, unlike Bertrand Russell, for instance, Santayana became a kind of hermit philosopher and was never a crusader for any cause. So he did not enter into public campaigns either for or against the Church, either for or against any human institution, however evil. Second, the fundamental philosophic principles of naturalistic humanism as such do not in themselves specify details of theory and action on innumerable issues pertaining to religion and Church affairs. Third, Santayana's intellectual contributions to the Humanist philosophy, in general, in which he was early encouraged by his father's strong anti-supernatural views, are so noteworthy that they greatly outweigh his over-tolerant attitude towards religious institutions.

Furthermore, it is not simply that Santayana's arguments and formulations can be helpful weapons in the Humanist arsenal. Their power is multiplied because his literary style is the most beautiful and compelling in philosophy since Lucretius in ancient times. For Freethinkers, Humanists, Rationalists and every variety of secularist he is the most quotable philosopher in history. The new edition of *Atoms of Thought*, an anthology edited by I. Cardiff (Philosophical Library, 1964), consists entirely of quotations from Santayana and contains brilliant aphorisms appropriate to every facet of naturalistic humanism.

I have wandered somewhat from Daniel Cory's portrait

of Santayana. It is a fine, intelligently conceived memoir of the philosopher during the last three decades of his life; and of course it throws valuable light on all the issues I have been discussing. Mr. Cory himself emerges as a writer of genuine merit and sensitivity. What he calls

“the intellectual romance of my life”—his years with Santayana—becomes, as recounted in this book, a unique and notable adventure for the reader.

[Reprinted from *The American Rationalist*, January, 1964.]

## An Atheist Don

By COLIN McCALL

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE (when reviewing the book in *The Guardian* on February 12th) has said that every minister of religion should be obliged to buy Richard Robinson's *An Atheist's Values* (Oxford University Press, 1964, 28s.) and that it should be in the hands of every student. Certainly it should be in the hands of every Atheist—and Agnostic. Not all of them will agree with Mr. Robinson all of the time, but they will all benefit from reading him. His case is presented clearly and precisely, without fear or favour, and it is provocative in the best possible way—intellectually. The author is an Oxford don, and the book consists of a course of lectures. No attempt has been made to alter the lecturing style, and the reader is therefore able to sense the stimulation that Mr. Robinson's students must have experienced at the time.

As the title indicates, Mr. Robinson makes no effort to hide his atheism. He is equally open politically, telling us that he is a liberal, and offering criticisms of conservatism, socialism, and especially communism, which “shares the counter-rational character of what is called ‘religion’, though not its theism”. He deplores the Marxist dictum (in J. D. Bernal's version) that freedom is the understanding of necessity; there being no valid reason for this “complete change” in the use of the word “freedom”. But there is, he considers, “no doubt” why the Marxist does it: “it is because he is against freedom in the proper sense of the word but does not want to say so”.

Another threat to freedom “of which we are not well aware” is the Church of Rome, and Mr. Robinson is under no illusion about Catholic liberalism.

It often happens [he writes] that a body, which is fundamentally intolerant, turns tolerant while in a minority among a tolerant majority. That is notably the case with Papists in England now. They are tolerant men. But the doctrine of their Church is fundamentally and irretrievably intolerant; and whenever it comes into power in a particular place it turns intolerant in fact. The more liberal members, who often hold the higher place while the Church is a minority among a liberal majority, are now gradually replaced by illiberal leaders in greater harmony with the essential philosophy of the body. Hence the need to restrict the Papists in England now is greater than it appears from the tolerant nature of the Papists with whom we are acquainted.

The New Testament, as Mr. Robinson says, poisons reason at its source by habitually implying that “it is wicked not to believe”. And it is sad that John Locke, “one of our great defenders of toleration”, should hold that atheism was not to be tolerated. It is, Mr. Robinson adds “a sad thing that atheists in USA and UK are still under serious disabilities in fact, though not I think in law”. Here he overlooks the blasphemy laws, but his main point is valid: that it is the frank Atheists who suffer disabilities, and that there are in consequence “many who conceal their atheism”.

As may be judged from the title of his book, Mr. Robinson is frank about *his* atheism. “Among the questions of fact on which it is important to have a right judgement”, he says, “are the questions whether there is a god and whether there is a life after death. My answer to each of these questions is ‘No’”. These are questions of existence, of what is or what happens; questions in

which we have to decide judiciously between two contradictories. We have to ask what is good evidence for the existence of a person, and whether we have such evidence for the existence of a supernatural being. We have to treat the matter as we should a report that there are abominable snowmen in the Himalayas. We have to consider the value of the report. Needless to say, the method is not infallible, but nothing better can be found. “And there are plenty of cases where the judicious man properly comes to a confident judgement as to whether a given thing exists.”

Reports of gods, Mr. Robinson points out, have the singular characteristic that they are “experienced yet not perceived”. Now experience without perception—as in thoughts, imagination, moods, etc.—is normally subjective, but not so with regard to a god. Here, it is said, there is experience of an objective reality, without perception. This universal feature of god-reports makes them valueless and “incredible”. Any such claim to have experiences of a god requires confirmation by subsequent perception.

There are other difficulties. Reports of a god who is infinite or perfect *must* be unjustified, because no one can experience infinity or perfection. Moreover, even if experience of a god, without perception, were accepted as valid, there would be no way of determining if different people were experiencing the same god.

What about inference, then? Sometimes we infer the presence of a person or thing and are later able to confirm that presence. But this, again, does not apply with God. Inferences—from alleged design and so forth—that there is a god in the universe, are never confirmed by subsequent perception. As for design itself: “The world does not appear to be designed. Little bits of it appear to be designed from time to time, but as a whole it strongly appears not to be designed”.

It is worth dealing at some length with probability. One should not abandon reason because mathematical certainty is impossible where synthetic statements are concerned. One judges a statement on the considerations available at the time. Either a statement is more probable than its contradictory, or it is less probable, or it is equally probable. In the last case one suspends judgement; otherwise, the reasonable man “adopts for the present the more probable of the two contradictories. It is perfectly obvious, when you come to think of it, that some propositions are far more probable than their contradictories, and therefore ought to be adopted. If we were to follow Descartes and reject as false everything that cannot be mathematically proved, we should be rejecting both of two contradictories, which is absurd since one of them must be true. If we were to reject as ‘invalid’ every consideration that did not amount to a strict deductive proof, we should be perversely depriving ourselves of many reasonable aids to picking the true contradictory”. It is not, then, a “burden of proof” that reason lays on us in existential and practical questions, it is a “burden of judgement”, of “judging which is the more probable of

the two contradictories in view of the available considerations".

The reasonable man holds his views tentatively, of course, but tentativeness is not the same thing as indecision. And tentativeness does not involve always listening to new arguments. It isn't necessary to read all the volumes of the Society for Psychical Research "before deciding that there are no ghosts". Mr. Robinson is not in favour of wasting time on absurdities. Life is too short, and "we are not necessarily unreasonable because we have declined to listen to Mr. A's arguments or read Mr. B's book".

It should be clear, then, that Mr. Robinson is a refreshingly outspoken lecturer. I hope I have also conveyed something of the powerful philosophical reasoning to be found in *An Atheist's Values*.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S ASSASSINATION

Thank you Mr. Cutner for showing fellow-Secularists that when confronted with good psychic evidence your only way out is to resort to feeble excuses and ignore the best evidence. I did not meet all the witnesses to Jeane Dixon's remarkable prediction. Nor did I read the original documents. You accept that Cassius Clay beat Sonny Liston, but have you seen the official documents which prove that he did? Of course not, you rely on information, media such as newspapers, TV and radio. It would be impossible for me to check every detail from original sources. This is not necessary when someone does it for me. John Gold, as I said in my published letter (February 21st issue), interviewed both the clairvoyant and the witnesses, who were named.

I agree that in the original story, published in 1956, Jeane Dixon did not name the President or the exact date. But as the days drew nearer to Kennedy's murder, she described before many witnesses—who have been identified by the Press—how the murder would take place. She knew it was imminent, and on the day told a friend, "It has to be today". It was.

Says Cutner, "The truth is that 'predictions' stated in general terms at first, like that of Jeane Dixon, would have quietly been forgotten—as no doubt many of her other 'predictions' have—had President Kennedy not been killed". Please Mr. Cutner, would you give me details of these other predictions which never came about. Be fair now. After all *Psychic News* has printed many of this clairvoyant's accurate predictions. If you cannot produce any predictions that failed, kindly refrain from insinuations without proof.

Finally Cutner complains, "All is clear cut for Mr. Stemman and *Psychic News*, but the facts are, I should guess, less so". Come off it, Mr. Cutner. The facts speak for themselves and can easily be checked—if you are willing to study them with an open mind. But perhaps that is asking too much.

ROY STEMMAN,  
Editorial Office, *Psychic News*.

### MR. CUTNER REPLIES

In my original comment I tried to show in a few words that Mrs. Dixon's "prophecy", made years before she knew who was to be the President, was in such general terms that it meant nothing and was rightly ignored. Naturally, when she knew that poor Kennedy was going to Dallas she had another try, and owing to the appalling lack of elementary precautions, he was assassinated.

If Mr. Stemman has read *The Spectator* for March 6th, he will know that, the night before Kennedy's arrival posters were pasted in Dallas showing front and side views of the President under the caption, "Wanted—Dead or Alive". Indeed, it may be that the assassination was not really the surprise to some people that it seemed to us.

However, I gave the clear and highly detailed "prophecy" made by a Mr. Mitchell in his book, *Foretold by the Stars*, in 1939 (published by the Two Words), that the war would be finished in 1940. Mr. Stemman ignores it of course. But the latest example of "prophecy" was the case of Cassius Clay. Every boxing critic pulverised Clay for months as being a "swankpot" or even "potty" and, without exception, "prophesied" a win for Liston. Clay himself insisted that he would win. He prophesied correctly. Was he divinely-inspired and the boxing critics not? This prophecy business, once the greatest proof that Christianity was divine (as Mr. Stemman believes) is just sheer twaddle.

H. CUTNER.

[This correspondence is now closed.—ED.]

### WILLIAM OF ORANGE

"Marxist" misses the point in his attack on William of Orange, than whom Holland never produced a more selfless and devoted patriot. His whole life was spent in defending Dutch independence against Louis XIV of France—the Hitler of his day. As Holland was powerless alone, William constantly worked to build an alliance against Louis, even agreeing to become king of England and live here—a great personal sacrifice—as the price of England's adherence to his coalition.

The Pope, concerned not with religion but with the European balance of power, supported the coalition against France; thus the Pope happened to find himself on William's side, which did not mean that William supported the Pope. It is of course one of the ironies of history that the Pope cared nothing for the sufferings of the Catholic Irish, and that Louis XIV was brutally persecuting French Protestants while he fought the Pope's allies. "Marxist" surely does not think that William would have been serving Protestant interests by allowing Louis to take over Holland and treat Dutch Protestants similarly?

MARGARET McILROY.

### LOGIC

I do not think that logic is infallible, nor do I regard it as a god. I merely think that it is the best tool we have for getting at the "truth", and that people who are prepared to neglect logic when it suits their purposes are setting a dangerous precedent. Neither Catholicism nor Fascism, for example, would have had any special impact if people had been prepared to be logical.

Mr. Tribe says that God's transcendence may consist in his internal self-contradictions. I think that I could show that this is a meaningless suggestion; this is because consistency is, for human beings, a criterion of meaning as well as a requirement of truth.

If there is a superior ground for philosophy than logic, this can never be asserted or communicated, since all forms of communication have an inherent consistent logic without which they would be meaningless chaotic jargon. Our philosophy must be based on logic—it is not even possible significantly to argue otherwise.

Lastly, a quote from C. D. Broad that may be relevant to some freethinkers who criticise psychical research: "And anyone who at the present day expresses confident opinions, whether positive or negative, on ostensibly para-normal phenomena, without first making himself thoroughly acquainted with the main methods and results of this careful and long-continued work, may be dismissed without further ceremony as a conceited ignoramus".

G. L. SIMONS.

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