

The Freethinker

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ON APRIL 23RD, we shall be celebrating the quatercentenary of the birth of William Shakespeare. Providing, that is, we are not Baconians, Oxfordians, Marlowe-ites, or what have you, I don't say that scornfully. It may be easy to play off the anti-Stratfordians against one another and to present them as a lot of cranks, yet the authorship is far from settled. Even orthodox scholars disown at least some of the canon, and certainly the "Swan of Avon" commemorated in and around Stratford—for the "benefit" of tourists—is legendary, if not mythical. "No matter", some will say, "we have the plays". To be sure we have, and they are most important, but the puzzle of the man—or men—behind them must surely fascinate all but the dullest reader. Let the debate continue then. For present purposes, however, it is the plays to which we must turn.

The question of Shakespeare's religion has been discussed again and again, and to some extent he is all things to all men. It is not surprising that, with so much material, so many diverse characters and situations, and with so much taken at secondhand, one should to a large degree, find what one seeks.

Oh God! thy arm was here;
And not to us, but to thy arm alone,
Ascribe we all,
exclaims Henry V, after his victory at Agincourt, and forthwith calls for holy rites with *Non nobis* and *Te Deum*. Only a Christian, it might be thought, could present his hero thus. But as it happens, the scene is straight from Holinshed.

Hamlet

The Christian, in fact, has an unenviable task to make a Christian of Shakespeare—or, for that matter, to make him religious at all (we must distinguish between religion and the utterance of oaths, which Santayana has rightly called the fossils of piety). It is misleading—or mischievous—that, on the statue at Stratford, the quotation from *Hamlet* should be Horatio's

Good-night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!
rather than Hamlet's own final, far more significant words,

The rest is silence.
More significant, since the Prince is much the more important character—the central one in the play—and much the most thoughtful. The Christian is, we are often told, distinguished by his attitude to death. And if there is a character in Shakespeare likely to express his creator's views on death, that character is surely Hamlet. This is supported by various inconsistencies between the most famous soliloquy and the events in the play. His father might appear in ghostly form and swear Hamlet to revenge, yet death remains, for the Prince,

The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns . . .

Nor is Hamlet exceptional among the great tragic figures. None of them in his dying moments turns to God or looks to a future life. Lear mourns Cordelia:

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!

and asks for a button to be undone. Othello recalls that he has been of service to the state and that he "lov'd not wisely but too well"; then, stabbing himself, dies on the corpse of Desdemona. Antony, too, wants to die with a kiss. And, had her lips the power to revive him, Cleopatra would "wear them out". She herself might have "immortal long-

ings" in her and think she hears Antony call, but her attitude is hardly religious—Egyptian, Roman or Christian.

I am fire, and air; my other elements
I give to baser life. So; have you done?
Come then, and take the last warmth of my lips . . .
If thou and nature can so gently part,
The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
Which hurts, and is desir'd . . .
Heaven, for Cleopatra, is to be kissed by Antony.
Macbeth, of course, dies off-stage. But he muses on his wife's death:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

Inferior to Dante?

Many find it hard to accept that our greatest dramatist should not hold out more hope, breathe more faith. And T. S. Eliot has called Shakespeare's philosophy "inferior" to that of Dante. But what Mr. Eliot really deplors, of course, is the non-Christian nature of the plays; and particularly of the great tragedies. He consequently undervalues them, and—leaning heavily on J. M. Robertson of all people—argues, for instance, that *Hamlet*, "far from being Shakespeare's masterpiece . . . is most certainly an artistic failure".

Yet, in spite of all Mr. Eliot's protestations, we continue to regard *Hamlet* as a masterpiece. And we are right. With all its inconsistencies and implausibilities, it remains superb. Age cannot wither nor custom stale its infinite variety.

Tragic World View

There is a strong tendency to idealise Shakespeare, and Walter Kaufmann has corrected some modern misconceptions. Like the Greeks before him and Nietzsche after him, says Professor Kaufmann, Shakespeare "believed neither in progress nor in original sin; he believed that most men merited contempt and that a very few were head

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Shakespeare and Religion

By COLIN McCALL

and shoulders above the rest of mankind and that these few, more often than not, meet 'with base infection' and do not herald progress". The tragic world view, Professor Kaufmann points out, "involves an ethic of character, not, like the Gospels, an ethic of otherworldly prudence". The Sermon on the Mount, the epitome of the Christian ethic, is saturated with the idea of reward and punishment, and it has been remarked (by a German theologian) that the conception of a good deed having intrinsic value is unknown in the New Testament.

Another German theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, has argued that the absence of the idea of genuine self-sacrifice from the Christian ethic proves that no ethic can maintain such an ideal. It may not be coincidence that the obvious refutations of Niebuhr's assertion, Socrates and Bruno, are

non-Christian; nor that the greatest tragedians are likewise Grecian or Renaissance.

One will look in vain, as T. S. Eliot did, for humility in Shakespeare's tragic heroes. Their outstanding feature, like that of Socrates and Bruno, is nobility, and they have affinities with Aristotle's "great-souled" man. Shakespeare, as Professor Kaufmann says, is much closer to Socrates and Nietzsche, to Aristotle and Goethe than to Christians like Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, or even T. S. Eliot. "His work stands as a monument of a tradition that is frequently forgotten today, and it celebrates the riches of a world without God."

Ironically, Shakespeare's own quatercentenary will be celebrated with church services and pious panegyrics. No matter, we have the plays!

A Jesuit View of Darwinism

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE MARCH 8TH issue of the Irish *Sunday Press* featured a book review of special interest to critics of Christianity, and in particular to those who are following the rather startling changes taking place in the Roman Catholic Church. The reviewer was an Irish Jesuit, the Rev. Martin Brennan, and the book under review was *Charles Darwin, Evolution by Natural Selection* by Gavin de Beer, FRS (Thomas Nelson & Son, 21s.).

Having started with a brief commendation of "this very readable book, by one of the leading biologists of the day", followed by a personal tribute to "one of the greatest biologists of all time" (Darwin), and a further tribute to Darwin's personal character, which was "admirable in many ways", the Jesuit critic gets down to serious business. For, whilst Charles Darwin was "a very modest man", and further, one whose "reluctance in abandoning the Christian faith contrasted sharply with the aggressiveness of his followers", he also, whilst indisputably adding much to human knowledge in the sphere of biology, yet made serious mistakes "in depth in philosophical thinking".

Thus, "it was a failure in philosophy, coupled with a misunderstanding of the role of sacred scripture [presumably Genesis] that made of him not an atheist, but an agnostic; denying not God but our ability to know His existence with certainty". Notwithstanding these allegedly serious intellectual shortcomings, Father Brennan concedes that: "Darwin's outstanding position in the history of human thought is that he revolutionised men's way of thinking in breadth, with a brilliant insight into the origin of organic nature which he expounded and illustrated with equal brilliance".

Father Brennan, SJ, is a modern Catholic, a Christian of the "new look" which the late Pope John and the Vatican Council have made popular in contemporary Rome. That is to say, he is an evolutionist, a Christian evolutionist, of course, like his distinguished former companion in the Society of Jesus, Father Teilhard de Chardin. As such (whilst somewhat presumptuously ranking the Catholic biologist Abbé Mendel, as the co-founder, along with Darwin, of evolutionary theory) he yet admits that at the time of the initial publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859, "there were not wanting even then those who saw that evolutionary ideas could be applied to the origin of man's body".

However, Father Brennan claims, "the bitterness of controversy delayed the realisation of this amongst believers". Darwin was absent through ill-health from the famous 1860 Oxford meeting of the Association for the Advance-

ment of Science, and the more militant T. H. Huxley's devastating attack on the "fundamentalist" Bishop Wilberforce may be said to have launched the embittered controversy between religion and science. Now, however, claims the Jesuit reviewer, the way is open for a fresh appraisal of the present and future relationships between Christianity and modern, evolution-based science.

How stands evolution today from the point of view of the "new look" Catholic theology of 1964? Father Brennan's arguments presuppose a dualistic composition of essential human nature as body and soul, with evolutionary theory applying to the bodily organism of *Homo sapiens*. Consonant with current Catholic orthodoxy, this can be legitimately expounded on Darwinian lines. But man cannot be fully explained on material grounds. For, whilst the (proud?) possessor of an animal body, he also possesses something which no animal possesses, an immortal soul.

Even though man's bodily organs have evolved from rudimentary animal organs, he is not, as Darwin and his disciples supposed "a more highly evolved animal, whose thought and moral standards had developed gradually without any essential break out of animal sense and instinct". In the case of Darwin himself, Father Brennan is prepared to concede that "this seems to have been an honest failure in philosophy". However, mankind has to invoke soul as well as body, special creation as well as evolution, to explain his unique nature.

For, "mankind's abstract conceptual thought, even at its crudest, is utterly irreducible to material terms and postulates an immaterial principle which we call the soul. This cannot evolve from any material source but must be created specially, not merely in the first beginnings of the race, but in the conception of every human child". Hence we find this remarkable aboriginal set-up. Our "first parents", Adam and Eve, were presumably human beings and as such endowed with both body and soul, whereas their ape-like progenitors were body pure and simple, without any trace of a soul. Apart from technical scientific difficulties this ménage is surely a little difficult to imagine. Would it not be correct to comment that the old pre-evolutionary Christianity (both Catholic and Protestant) was at least both more logical and more easy to imagine than this Jesuitic hotch-potch? Surely also, soul and body, special creation and animal evolution both in the self-same organism appear to be about as mutually congruous as the proverbial oil and water.

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Parson's Piece

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

IN NOT SO MANY days gone by, the devout churchman and still more the strict chapelman looked with sour disfavour upon the theatre and all its works as one of the pathways to hell that could scarcely be said to be paved with good intentions. It apparently never occurred to minds thus constituted that beneath superficial differences, what they revered as God's house and what they reprobated as the Devil's, fundamentally served the same purpose, which was to provide entertainment, whether edifying or otherwise. They never for a moment perceived any affinity between preacher and actor, probably because as entertainment the bulk of the preaching was as dour as the secular acting was lively. No doubt there would have been lively enough entertainment in hearing the parson's reactions to being described as an entertainer. (And here, "parsons" is used to cover the lot, from pope to the obscurest little pastor.) It is more than likely that any congregation would have been scandalised at the suggestion of going to church or chapel to be entertained, as any theatre audience would have been derisive at the notion of going to the theatre to be edified. Yet at bottom that is mostly what it amounted to. It still does. Just as a famous actor or a spectacular stage will attract the largest audiences, so a famous preacher or a grandiloquent service will draw the biggest congregations. To be told a story or to see a show is a basic craving of both church- and theatre-goers.

The Christian Church in general has always understood, quite as thoroughly as the theatre, this very patent if not always very agreeable fact. And like the theatre, the church has never hesitated to profit by it. For a profit is never without honour in a Christian country. It will hardly be denied that, with few exceptions, the parson can tell a good tale, whether or not he can sing. To such purpose in fact, that the medical books have long listed a vocal complaint known as "clergyman's throat". The parson has usually been credited with having *par excellence* the gift of the gab. Some unkind folks have gone so far as to add the gift of the grab. There are those who still remember the once-popular "parson's ditty":

'Tis money, O money, thy praises I sing.
Thou art my saviour, my lord and my king.

'Tis for thee that I preach and thee that I pray
And give service to God three times in the day.

But that belongs more to the period when the duffers or younger sons of noble houses were hustled into conveniently vacant incumbencies as the only gentlemanly and lucrative last resource. In these more liberal days it may have become less applicable. But the love of showmanship shows no sign of diminishing, whether with those volubly sentimental sermonisers so expert in popularising the pulpit, or with the more priestly, whose performance excels in the ritualistic rather than the elocutionary. These certainly know as well as any stage manager how to put on a show and how to show off with their ceremonial posturings and the flamboyant get-up they pompously flaunt as vestments on the flimsy explanation that, various stoles, copes, mitres and what not, symbolise this, that and the other—anything but the vanity they fail to cloak.

A thousand gullible people will flock to the Romish cathedral to gape with a craftily stimulated, sometimes artfully simulated, emotionalism at the pomp and circumstance of High Mass, while at the unadorned Quaker Meeting in the next street there may be gathered fewer

than a dozen, silently awaiting what they take to be all that is essential. They call it the inner light. The cathedral gapers prefer the electric light—disguised as candles. The cathedral puts on a show that can outshine the best theatre, just as the best theatre wields an influence that is far more wholesome if not so holy. The theatre does not need to employ humbug. The church does. The actor is at least honest in that he doesn't pretend to be anything but a pretender. The cleric pretends not to be a pretender. Yet, obliged to offer legend for history, dogma for truth and faith for proof, he cannot avoid being a pretender. As for acting, he would no doubt indignantly resent being called an actor. But how much more he would resent not being looked upon as the chief actor in the piece.

Considering how very obviously analogous are sanctuary and stage, cleric and actor, congregation and audience, it is rather remarkable that parsons should be so conventionally lumped together with lawyers and doctors. There are professional resemblances of course, as the late Lady Cardigan cheerfully pointed out. Three professions, she said, get their pay whether they succeed or fail: the lawyer whether he wins your case or loses it, the doctor whether he kills you or cures you, the parson whether he sends you to heaven or whether he sends you to hell. Yet because superstition springs eternal in the human breast, the parson is still able to earn his pay for manipulating human credulity. It remains one of the minor mysteries why so many otherwise level-headed people will lap up any twaddle from the man in a clerical dog-collar. People may know perfectly well that the dog-collar is a long way from practising what he preaches. They may know that he would never dare to preach what he practices and yet—!! Exclamation marks are about the best that can be said.

More than a century ago, the famous cleric Sydney Smith protested against an idea which, he complained, seemed to be gaining ground, that there are three sexes of humanity, men, women and clergymen. The sly, if not altogether just, implication was, that clergymen were merely a pack of old women. Nowadays, he could almost have said four, for the idea of the professional woman minister also seems to be gaining ground. But it is pretty plain that the great majority of present-day clergy look with alarmed hostility upon any kind of female preacher as a kind of female poacher. They probably harbour a sneaking suspicion that the female of the speeches might prove more deadly than the male. Therefore if they possibly can they are going to prevent any female from having a voice in their own sacrosanct concerns. Luckily for them, the proportion of women with pastoral ambitions seems to be small. Even to the non-churchman a woman clergyman looks and sounds something of a freak. Women seem by nature more suited to the pew than the pulpit. Unlike men, they can worship the parson as well as God. Perhaps that is why they far outnumber men in the present diminishing congregations. They will accept a male ministry in a way they would never accept a female. The mere notion of one woman going to confess to another woman is like one prize-fighter apologising to another prize-fighter. A feminine ministry could thus lead to disaster and the majority of both males and females seem to realise it.

It is easy to see that both actor and parson become what

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This Believing World

The "Daily Mail's" lady theologian, Miss Monica Furlong, began her sermon in March 26th (on "God, Lip-service and Holy Week") by bluntly informing us that England "never has been" a Christian country. This pronouncement will, we are sure, astonish the Archbishop of Canterbury quite as much as the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, to say nothing of the thousands of—more or less—hardworking parsons and priests who do so much to keep the Christian flag flying, not only in their own churches and chapels, but on the radio and TV.

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The Rev. David Sheppard, a fine cricketer who discovered Jesus, now writes a weekly column for *Woman's Own*, and informed us on March 21st that God said honour your father and mother. This is quite true—for the *Old Testament*. But it is a pity Mr. Sheppard did not add that Jesus apparently threw this particular commandment overboard, and sternly ordered us to *hate* our parents if we wished to be considered his special disciples.

★

So Dr. Coggan, the Archbishop of York, has discovered that there are small communities of Christians with a parish church and a few other churches, most of them more or less empty when they should be filled with fervent worshippers. He wants the "redundant" churches scrapped or pulled down in the sacred name of "unity", so that all worshippers could come together, even if they still violently disagree about the precise teaching of Jesus and what "our Lord" really meant. The London *Evening News* (March 24th) is very sad about the empty churches, but admits that only one in nine of baptised Christians regularly attends his or her church. Strange that the paper's regular feature on Christianity has so completely failed to bring the lost sheep back into the pious fold!

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You can't keep the "impossible" out of our newspapers, so long as it is guaranteed by gullible belief. The *Sunday Express* (March 22nd) gives us a picture of D. D. Home "levitating" himself in front of "witnesses". He was, we are told, the most "celebrated medium of all time". No doubt he was—actually celebrating the most brazen frauds of all time. His "witnesses" were for the most part completely bamboozled, but does that matter? It will be years before the truth about Home will in general be accepted.

A JESUIT VIEW OF DARWINISM

(Concluded from page 114)

However that may be, this Christian evolutionist concludes with a eulogy of Darwin that almost makes us prepare for the official announcement that Charles is due for admittance to the celestial hierarchy of canonised saints! For Father Brennan declares that Darwin has given even to Christian thought almost a new dimension. "In place of a static 6,000-year-old creation he has substituted a vista of vast geological time throughout which the creative plan is progressively achieved . . . Instead of a static design we have the vastly more inspiring concept of a dynamic plan that accomplishes itself, a design that is continually weaving itself. The world will be forever in the debt of Darwin". Surely, of few even canonised saints, could as much be said!

Here we have noted, a clear and well-informed statement of the outlook of the new Catholicism towards modern evolutionary science. The Catholic leopard is busily engaged (with of course divine aid) in changing its spots! Without wishing to pedal my own prophetic wares,

I can in future quote this learned Irish Jesuit in support of the thesis that I have already enunciated several times before in these columns: that the static philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is on the way out, and the evolutionary Catholicism of Newman and Teilhard de Chardin is on the way in.

PARSON'S PIECE

(Concluded from page 115)

they are for unmistakable and similar reasons. To say so may outrage the parson. He advances a much more imposing claim. Nevertheless there is no getting away from the fact that both actor and parson love the spotlight, both love the sound of their own voice, both love dressing up, both love public prestige. In short, both are out to satisfy their earthly ambitions in their several ways—like everybody else. Up to a point, which the actor does not exceed, this is harmless enough, one might even say necessary. Life would be pretty lifeless were it not so. But the parson, whether a cardinal or a Salvation Army officer, goes far beyond that point. He claims to be what he is through obedience to a direct call from God. And it certainly does seem to be true that while so many and various are chosen, God only knows why they are called. The parson is unable to say. There is evidence that he himself frequently doesn't believe it. Yet on the strength of such bluff, he presumes to superintend man's comings and goings in this world as well as to organise man's destiny in the next. Now the first parson who can prove beyond refuting the truth of his unique claim, will have the honour of converting all the atheists in the world in the twinkling of an eye. For in the very nature of things, atheists are reasoning and reasonable creatures. But until the parson can do this, no matter how respectable he may appear, he can never hope to win the respect of thinking, above all freethinking, people. In fact the more they think of him the less they think of him.

There are of course parsons and parsons. But the worst feature of the average parson is his censorious attitude towards whatever opposes the way of life which he so smugly takes for granted as right. He trots out God, Christ, the Church, morality and the rest as if they were all defined, sealed and settled beyond controversy. To him, the atheist is not so much mistaken as deliberately and purposefully wicked. The parson has been known to fear atheism so much that he has contemptuously dismissed it as a perverse pose, impossible of conviction. Does it never occur to him, that as the atheist seems to him so he must seem to the atheist? Is he quite beyond conceiving the possibility that the religion he practises can in some ways be sheer malpractice against human nature? Does he never suspect that what he so blandly propagates as unquestionable truth can often be convincingly demonstrated as nothing but snare and delusion? Does he never stop to consider that he survives mainly by trading upon the facile emotionalism of those—sometimes including himself—who, mentally speaking, it is as easy as pie to swindle? That the parson as a man can be of unblemished integrity nobody denies. But we are not concerned with him as a man, we are concerned with him as a parson. And—so says a sardonic old freethinker—there are only two real objections to the parson as such: everything he says and everything he does.

SPECIAL PENGUINS FOR THE SHAKESPEARE QUATERCENTENARY

Shakespeare: A Celebration, Edited by T. J. B. Spencer, 6s.
Shakespeare: A Survey, by E. K. Chambers, 5s.
A Shakespeare Companion (1564-1964), by F. E. Halliday, 10s. 6d.

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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.
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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

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, April 14th, 7.30 p.m.: AVRIL FOX, "Paganism and Christianity: A Critical Comparison".
Havering Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, Corner of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, April 14th, 8 p.m.: DIANE MUNDAY, "The Case for Abortion Law Reform".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), April 12th, 11 a.m.: RICHARD CLEMENTS, "A Humanist Looks at the Affluent Society".

Notes and News

It is wrong, said the Archbishop of Canterbury, "to lay blame upon the Jews for the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ" (*Daily Telegraph*, 25/3/64). The Roman Governor was no less responsible, Dr. Ramsey continued, in his statement issued in response to a request by the London Diocesan Council for Christian-Jewish Understanding. "The important fact, however, is that the Crucifixion was the clash between the Love of God and the sinfulness and selfishness of the whole human race. Those who crucified Christ are in the true mind of the Christian Church representative of the whole human race. Nobody should point a finger at those who brought Jesus to his death. Instead they should see the Crucifixion as the Divine Judgment upon all humanity for choosing the ways of sin rather than the Love of God".

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WE DON'T profess to know precisely what Dr. Ramsey means by this effusion: it is quite possible that he doesn't really know himself. But what we can discern we deplore. Assuming Jesus to have been crucified, it is perfectly right and proper to "point a finger" at those responsible (though not their descendants) and it is unjust to blame others. If the Crucifixion was a historical fact, as Dr. Ramsey presumably would contend, then he must treat it as such and not as some mystical clash between "the Love of God and the sinfulness and selfishness of the whole human race". Even were it true that "all humanity" had chosen "the

ways of sin", it would have nothing whatever to do with a death on a cross some two thousand years ago. In trying to be generous to the Jews, Dr. Ramsey has exposed the immorality of Christianity with its detestable doctrine of original sin.

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NO LESS a person than Cardinal Tisserant, 80-year-old Dean of the Sacred College, has confirmed the truth of Rolf Hochhuth's charges against Pope Pius XII. The Cardinal confirmed "with minor reservations", the authenticity of a letter he sent to the Archbishop of Paris in 1940, in which he said he had repeatedly urged the Pope to issue an encyclical condemning Nazism and Fascism (*Daily Telegraph*, 25/3/64). The Italian weekly magazine, *Il Mondo*, quoted Cardinal Tisserant as writing: "I have insisted with the Holy Father that he publish an encyclical on the individual duty to obey the fundamental precepts of conscience because a vital point in the theory of Hitler . . . is the substitution of individual conscience with the duty to obey blindly . . . I trust that history will not blame the Holy See for having followed a policy of comfort and convenience, and nothing more". Pius XII never issued such an encyclical, and now at last, history is catching up with him.

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THE enormous popularity of Pius's successor, Pope John XXIII would, thought Father Francis Ripley have shown itself in the number of converts received into the Roman Catholic Church. But the opposite has been the case. "In North America as well as in the British Isles the decline in conversions has been quite startling", Father Ripley reported in the *Catholic Herald* (26/3/64). As Director of the Catholic Information Centre in Liverpool, he invited readers of the Catholic press to suggest reasons for the decline. The Vatican Council (leading "separated brethren to believe, not only that one church is as good as another but that we are coming to think that way also") was cited most commonly—367 times. Other reasons given were: bad example of Catholics, 146; deficiencies of priests, 103; the Church's teaching, 99; the Liturgy, 89; money, 31. In its own commentary, the *Catholic Herald* supported ecumenism "to offer together a clear alternative to the pagan and the humanist". In this country, the paper said, "it is the humanist who predominates".

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MANCHESTER CORPORATION Parks and Cemeteries Committee is, we note, to consider offering cremation without charge in order to save land for housing and other purposes. The Parks Director, Mr. R. C. McMillan, and the City Treasurer, Mr. H. R. Page, are preparing a report for submission to the committee which will argue that there would also be a saving in the long run in the cost of maintaining cemeteries (*The Guardian*, 31/3/64). At a conference of the Institution of Park Administration in 1961, Mr. Page urged free cremation, and asked whether a city like Manchester with—at that time—60,000 slums and the need to overspill at least 100,000 people, could afford the luxury of 370 acres of cemeteries. A large number of houses could be built, 12 to the acre, on land reserved for future burials.

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IN THE SECOND half of this week's issue are two recent expressions of opinion on religion in the schools: a long article by Sidney Hook, Professor of Philosophy at New York University and a short letter by eight Londoners. Although one deals with the USA and the other with this country, and although they differ on some points—or at least in emphasis—they are also complementary. And they are certainly stimulating.

Church and State in the USA

A SECULAR-HUMANIST VIEW

By SIDNEY HOOK

CHURCH AND STATE have never been completely separate in this country. From the very outset religious practices as well as religious language pervaded American public life. This was not the result of any direct decision. It certainly was not a conspiracy.

Everybody acknowledges that since the founding of the American Republic, the separation of church and state, measured by the presence and influence of religion in public life, has broadened. The question today is whether or not this tendency is to be approved.

The point of view from which I shall discuss this question is: what *should* the attitude be towards the place of religion in public life from the perspective of one who is committed to a free society or to the democratic way of life?

I firmly believe that democratic *principles* require that the laws of a democracy should give no official recognition to one religion over another, or to all religions over none. Nonetheless I cannot accept the Supreme Court's *justifications* of its findings even in the cases in which I agree with them. Although I am prepared to go much further than the Court on grounds of commitment to democracy with respect to taxation of church-owned property and stopping government payment of the salaries of chaplains, I find the pattern of the Court's decisions shifting, arbitrary, and inconsistent. More important, I find its reasoning unacceptable—marred by questionable history, doubtful psychology, and defective logic. This seems to me to be traceable to an attempt to read the implications of a *present day democratic position* into a document which did not presuppose that position when it was originally adopted, and therefore to limit the present area of legislative competence with arbitrary fictions about the intentions of the framers.

The validity of justification of a democratic society does not rest on any metaphysical or theological dogma whatsoever as a necessary condition. A sufficient justification can be found in the empirical consequences—the fruits of experience—of living together in a democracy as compared with the consequences of living in a non-democratic society.

Individuals of any religion or no religion are entitled to the same rights and privileges as citizens of the democratic commonwealth, provided only that they obey the democratic rules of the game. By obedience to such rules is meant the acceptance of certain prescribed practices and the avoidance of certain proscribed practices.

In a community in which there are religious differences and especially in a community of plural religious faiths, it follows that religion from the point of view of the state should be a private matter. The state has no responsibility to support religion nor to establish a religion.

Mr. Justice Douglas proclaimed in *Zorach v. Clauson* that "we are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being". And more significantly has not the Court in its recent opinion in *Abington Township v. Schempp*, reaffirmed this, and without a demurrer from any of the Justices, declared that it gives "specific recognition to the proposition"?

This proposition is a misleading half truth. That we are a religious people is an historical or sociological fact. That our institutions presuppose the existence of a Supreme Being is demonstrably false. Not a single one

of our political institutions, or all of them taken together, presuppose the existence of a Supreme Being. The existence of God is logically compatible with *any* political system whatsoever and with any feature within it.

If the Court believes that the political institutions of this country depend upon the existence of a Supreme Being and belief in Him, then its decisions in the whole class of cases on state and religion are radically incoherent. For *if* our political institutions *presuppose* the existence of God as a necessary condition of their validity, then one of the first functions of our school system in the interest of good citizenship and patriotism should be to honour and praise His name.

However, the Court is mistaken. By accepting and stressing Justice Douglas's apothegm, it has confused itself and the country as well. It owes us an explanation of how it is possible to reconcile its decisions on released time, prayers, Bible-reading in the public schools and related matters, and the reiterated maxim of Justice Douglas to which it gives "specific recognition". It should spell out for us which specific institution at the founding of the Republic presupposed the Supreme Being.

Last year, in a much publicised address, Chief Justice Warren proposed that in their deliberations leaders in business, labour, in education, government, and other areas of social life call in "experts in ethics" to advise them whether their proposed decisions were right. One may applaud the Chief Justice's insight that basic questions in all these fields have a moral dimension without necessarily accepting the view that there are "experts in ethics", who can speak authoritatively in fields in which they have not been trained, especially since the Justice made no recommendation that our *Judiciary* consult them. But it seems to me that a good case can be made for the proposal that the Supreme Court consult an expert in logic before it pronounces or publishes its opinions.

Although the democratic state must regard religion as a private matter, it must permit the widest latitude to its citizens for the propagation of religious belief or disbelief.

Religious freedom cannot be absolute, any more than the other freedoms of the First Amendment. If we speak of religious thought, then like all thought its freedom has no other limits than the capacity to think. But where thought is given expression in words, and especially where religious faith is expressed in ritual and practice, then despite Mr. Justice Black's stubborn insistence that *all* the freedoms of the Bill of Rights are absolute—even when they conflict with each other—there are obvious limits to such freedom set by the moral standards of the community. No community has or can permit complete freedom of religious practice.

In the civil order, morality must have primacy over all social phenomena including religion. Morality is not only autonomous in relation to religion; it is the arbiter of conflicting moral claims put forth by different religious groups in a pluralistic society.

It is sometimes said that morality itself is derivative from religion but that this is obviously false. It has been established by Plato, Kant, and hosts of modern philosophers, Men build God in their own moral images and attribute their moral discoveries to God to give their moral insight greater authority. Nor can they forswear their own responsibility for their moral judgments and actions.

The most fundamental reason for preserving the neutrality of the state in matters of religion is that religious doctrine and practices have often run counter to the principles of an enlightened morality. To the extent that such religious doctrine and practices have influenced the laws of the state, a conflict develops between law and morals.

Not only is morality independent of religion in theory; it is also false to assert, as does Dr. Robert Hutchins, that "it is not practically possible for a man to be good without being religious". This gratuitous piece of dogmatism flies in the face of the empirical evidence. All of us know good men who are not conspicuous for their piety and who have not had a markedly religious early training.

In a democratic society of plural religious faiths, the law can and must recognise the category of moral evil but it cannot recognise the category of *sin*. Members of religious groups have the right under the First Amendment to agitate for any change or practice which they think desirable. But if they wish to avoid fanning the embers of religious resentment into the fires of civil war, they must argue against gambling or drinking, against birth control or legal euthanasia, against divorce and abolition of Sunday closing laws not on grounds that certain sacraments will be violated but only on grounds of objective moral policy.

Secularism is not a religion, and a politically secular nation is not guilty of imposing any religion or disbelief upon a people merely because it extends to all citizens the right to propagate their beliefs and disbeliefs.

Although as a secularist and a humanist I am convinced that all religious practices should be private, I am also convinced that at the time the Constitution was adopted this was not the view of the framers. They wanted no established church but they were not opposed to the presence of religious elements, including rituals and practices, in public life. They countenanced so many religious practices that compared with them Bible-reading in schools, from which children of non-believing families may be excused, appears relatively innocuous. If there is no constitutional objection to opening sessions of Congress with a prayer how can there be a constitutional objection to opening the school day with a prayer, educationally unwise as that might be.

Although the framers forbade Congress to make any law respecting an establishment of religion, it betokens a lack of a sense of proportion as well as a sense of humour to interpret the reading of a few passages from the Bible as a first step towards the establishment of a religion. If this were true, we would long since have had an established church in our states and nation. For anyone informed about the history of public education in this country knows, that until recently, the curriculum was drenched with religious overtones.

One gets the impression that the Court believes that even if students are excused from any or all religious exercises, they would still be subject to the pressure from their friends and colleagues, marked out as different, and bear the spiritual scars of nonconformists and dissenters. One would like to get the evidence for this. If true this would certainly be a conclusive reason for dropping any required Bible-reading. But if true would it not also be true for the released time cases?

Nonetheless, even if inquiry were to establish that no coercion is involved in asserting or failing to assert the right of excusal from prescribed religious services, I would oppose on educational grounds prescribed Bible-reading without any critical comment in the public schools.

Now I wish to state my strongest reasons for doubt

concerning the wisdom of the Court's decision in the Bible-reading case. Concerning its constitutionality, one can only guess or perhaps toss a coin. I fear on good evidence that this decision, and some others like it, will lead to an extension of the system of parochial schools. The parochial school system is undoubtedly constitutional but I regard it as educationally and democratically unsound. To separate large sections of our youth from each other in their most formative period is to breed latent hostility among them. The public school system helped to forge a united nation. The parochial school system, if extended, shatters that unity, makes for separation and religious prejudice.

Anything which tends to strengthen a parochial school system of any denomination tends to introduce a prejudiced divisiveness among youth, at a time when habits and visceral reactions are set for life.

There are many grosser violations of the principle of separation of church and state which the Court has not yet struck down like government payment of the salaries of chaplains and exemption of church property from taxation than uncoerced submission to Bible-reading or the recitation of an innocuous prayer. More important than any particular decision on these matters is the avoidance of fanaticism.

The only thing that we can afford to be fanatical about is the use of intelligence in negotiating the conflicts which arise in a secular society of plural religious faiths. That is why I should prefer, except in the case of some extreme and dangerous breach of separation between church and state requiring immediate repair, to leave to the process of discussion, debate and persuasion within community, the gradual elimination of these vestigial elements of religion in public life rather than to seek relief from the Courts. In a democracy, the Courts cannot be keepers of the people's conscience because the conscience of the people is divided as is that of the Court.

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

The Case for Secular Education

THE following letter appeared in *The Guardian* on March 30th. We would only comment, apropos the seventh paragraph, that voluntary schools should be voluntarily supported.

SIR,—As a group of parents and teachers, members of a study group set up by an independent local education association, we wish to declare ourselves against compulsory religion in schools in the hope of continuing discussion on this important matter. We emphasise that we speak for no one but ourselves.

Discussing the provisions of the 1944 Education Act, we found that though it makes religious instruction and worship in schools compulsory it specifies no religion. In fact a form of Christianity that is the lowest common denominator of Christian creeds in this country is used in the shape of "agreed syllabuses". A parent who does not wish his child to participate may withdraw him, and a teacher who does not wish to give religious instruction may not be required to do so.

It is time to recognise that the freedom to opt out is largely illusory. Children entering school at the age of five do not understand segregation. They want and need the sense of security and the enjoyment of participation in every aspect of their classmates' activity. To deprive them of this is harmful to their emotional development, and a parent may find himself forced to do this harm if he insists on his rights under the Act. Is it any wonder if he acquiesces?

Further, we feel it entirely wrong that from the age of five children should be made aware of differences between them rather than of their common humanity; should possibly perceive conflict between their parents' beliefs and those of their teacher, whose word on other matters they unquestioningly accept; should have seeds of prejudice sown in their minds against groups upholding

a "rival" way of life; should be made to feel "out of it" if their parents withdraw them.

As for the freedom of the teachers to opt out, we have been assured that they may find themselves obliged to participate in the religious activity of the school whether they believe in it or not.

All this is presumably considered by the authorities (but who are they?) to be in the children's best interests; but we found ourselves, to our own surprise, unanimously and emphatically of the opinion that religion and its inculcation is an intensely personal matter, the prerogative and responsibility of the parent, not to be assumed by any agency of the Government.

We are confident that those parents who hold sincere religious convictions are already fulfilling that responsibility. They will continue to do so regardless of what is taught or not taught in schools. (If they want religion to be part of their children's curriculum it is open to them to take advantage of the voluntary schools, run by their co-religionists, which should continue to exist, and in which religion should be compulsory.)

Basically it comes to this: that the freedom we enjoy, to worship in our own way, or not worship at all, without being penalised, does not extend to our children. However well meaning the indoctrination, that is what it is; and we feel that the time has come to remove religion altogether from the State schools.

Yours faithfully,

D. GWINNELL,
S. LEVY,
R. GILBERT,
J. GILBERT,

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46 Brim Hill, London, N.2.

CORRESPONDENCE

"AN ATHEIST'S VALUES"

Readers of THE FREETHINKER will have seen the very able review by Colin McCall of Richard Robinson's book *An Atheist's Values* (Oxford University Press, 1964, 28s.). This book, I feel, should be in every public library, and it seems to me that members would perform a useful service to Freethought and Secularism by making this request at their local library, where shelves are often burdened with religious works of no value. We, as ratepayers, help to support these libraries, and should be catered for, especially in the matter of new and important books, even though for the moment we may be in a minority.

I have already approached my own local library asking for *An Atheist's Values* to be procured for readers and trust that my fellow Freethinkers will do likewise.

ELIZABETH COLLINS.

SANTAYANA ON MIRACLES

In his article, "The Philosopher as Hero" (20/3/64), Corliss Lamont says that George Santayana's system "completely rejects belief in God, personal immortality or any supernaturalist spirits and powers".

For anyone who has read Santayana's *The Life of Reason*, this view is very questionable. Santayana writes: "What surprises us in the miracle is that, contrary to what is usually the case we can see a real and just ground for it. Thus, if the water of Lourdes bottled and sold by chemists, cured all diseases, there would be no miracle, but only a new scientific discovery. In such a case, we should no more know why we were cured than we now know why we were created. But if each believer in taking the water thinks the effect morally conditioned, if he interprets the result, should it be favourable, as an answer to his faith and prayers, then the cure becomes miraculous because it becomes intelligible and manifests the obedience of nature to the exigencies of spirit".

R. SMITH.

NAZI ATROCITIES

We have heard the alibi put out by the Vatican so often that we have almost got to the point of accepting it. "Pope Pius did not speak out more strongly on the Jews because he feared his words might provoke even greater slaughter". Is that the reason why he said nothing about Croatia where it was his own Church that was responsible for the persecution.

It was recently said, in the trials now being held in Germany, that some bishops made a protest against the Nazis, as a result of which there was an easing off in the atrocity campaign. So now we are getting to the position where the Vatican is exonerated and bishops are getting good marks for opposing Hitler.

It seems to me that we are too easily fooled. As I understand it, during the 30s, Freethinkers, Communists and even Jehovah's Witnesses were put into the concentration camps. It would therefore appear that the Jews, etc., were destroyed by the Christ-

ians of German. Are any census figures available for Germany prior to 1939 showing the Roman Catholics, Protestants, etc. in the country? Also the clerics of all denominations. We know that a few did protest and some died in concentration camps, but what percentage were they of the whole?

The quiet assumption is that up to 1939 the Germans were a normally Christian nation but at the end of 1939 they lost their religion. Again in 1945 they blossomed forth again as a devoutly Christian nation. We should scotch this nonsense every time it crops up, and if we had the census figures our protests would be all the more effective.

A. E. STRINGER.

F. A. RIDLEY TESTIMONIAL APPEAL

At an informal ceremony at The Carpenter's Arms, London, W.1, on Saturday, March 21st, a cheque for £225 and a further £7 0s. 6d. cash, were presented to Mr. F. A. Ridley. Of this amount, may we acknowledge the following received after the termination of the appeal:

O.A.P., £3; W.C., £1; H.C., 10s.; M.B., 5s. 6d.; C.B., 5s.; F.H., 5s. 6d.; A.C., 10s.; L.P., £1; M.C., 6s.; M.H., 8s. 6d.; Mr. and Mrs. G., 10s.; J.J., 5s.; E.E., £1; M.D., 10s.; N.G.S., 6s.; M.K., 10s.; Mr. G. and Mr. McD., £1; W.M., £1 1s.; M.Q., £2; Mr. McG., 10s.; A.C.C., 5s.; and W.H., 10s.

Mr. L. Ebury (Vice-President of the National Secular Society and Chairman of the North London Branch, which instigated the appeal), and others, paid tribute to the former President of the Society.

J. A. MILLAR.

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