

The Freethinker

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A FEW WEEKS ago (May 8th), I replied in this paper to a personal letter from the Maltese Dominican theologian, Father G. M. Paris, OP, spokesman of the St. Paul's Apologetic Circle and Editor of *The Faith*. I did this because the points raised by this apologist for Roman Catholic belief and practice, in particular his references to St. Thomas Aquinas (also a Dominican), and to Aquinas's attitude to religious persecution, are of interest to the readers of this paper.

For I have myself expressed the opinion that current criticism of the Catholic theological system often tends to concentrate on relatively unimportant superstitions in popular Catholic belief and practice rather than upon the fundamental tenets of that vast dogmatic structure of theological and metaphysical beliefs. After all, Holy Church existed long before Lourdes and Fatima, or even the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius (which so scandalised Newman when he first witnessed it) were ever heard of. No doubt these manifestations of popular Catholic belief have their contemporary uses for if they had not, the Infallible Church could and would drop them. For neither Lourdes nor Fatima, nor even the inimitable St. Januarius, is an article of faith, an unalterable ecclesiastical dogma.

Father Paris congratulates me upon my citation from the *magna opera* of the "Angelic Doctor"; but whilst I appreciate his courtesy, to ascribe any credit to me for this, is quite superfluous. I have been for many years the possessor of a ticket to what is probably still the finest library in the world, that of the British Museum. Accordingly, nothing was easier than to stretch out my hand and open the collected works of St. Thomas Aquinas. For the Library is rich in theological, as well as in more secular lore. For example, whilst Karl Marx still probably ranks as the most famous student ever to work within the hallowed walls of the famous Bloomsbury institution, many learned theologians have also worked there. In which connection, Father Paris may be interested to know that the famous Russian (pre-revolutionary) theologian and forerunner of present efforts to achieve Christian reunion, Vladimir Solovyef not only worked in the Library, but actually had a vision of the Holy Trinity there!

What Did St. Thomas Really Say?

So much for my acquaintance with the Latin text of St. Thomas. Next however, Father Paris criticises me for mistranslating. According to him the Latin word *possunt* in Aquinas's text, translated by me as "ought" (viz. "heretics ought to be put to death"), should be rendered "can". In which case, St. Thomas would presumably have said: "heretics *can* not only be excommunicated, but *can* be put to death". I freely confess that I am no Latin scholar, but Father Paris goes on to criticise, the English Dominicans, for mistranslating the same word *possunt* as "to be". I may therefore at this difficult juncture take refuge in the consoling thought that if the learned modern theologians of St. Thomas's own Dominican order cannot make up their minds as to which is the right way to

translate their most famous colleague, a mere unbeliever may be excused some slight measure of inaccuracy.

In any case, it is quite clear that *in practice*, the Inquisition, staffed exclusively by members of St. Thomas's (and Father Paris's) Dominican order appear to have preferred my translation to that of Father Paris. For in dealing with heretics they uniformly proceeded upon the assumption

can be! Throughout the era in which Aquinas flourished, in the 13th century, as well as in the centuries which immediately followed, heresy was not only a theological "mortal sin", but legally a capital offence. Heretics were given the choice of repentance

or death by fire, whilst "relapsed" heretics were invariably burned alive without any further chance of repentance. Does Father Paris deny this? Or again, does he deny that his own order, whose express function it was to run the Inquisition both in Rome and Spain, were primarily responsible for it? It is moreover, surely somewhat unlikely that the Dominicans failed to understand the teachings of St. Thomas upon this important point.

Persecution and the Catholic Church

So much for St. Thomas! However, in the last part of his letter, Father Paris returns from medieval to modern times and accuses (or so it would appear from his text) both me personally and THE FREETHINKER collectively of an exclusively anti-Catholic bias. "You always attack the Roman Inquisition" he writes, "but seldom speak of the Protestant Inquisition and of the tremendous cruelty used against Catholics during the time of the Reformation, or of the barbarous inhuman outrageousness of the Communists against the Catholic Church. Why? Why do you condemn what happened 700 years ago and do not say a word of the cruelties of our days? Why your special hatred of the Catholic Church?"

Fair enough. For, whilst the Roman Catholic Church can be fairly said to have invented, or at least systematised in both practice and theory, the relentless persecution of heretics — a form of persecution all but unknown (with only a few isolated exceptions like the martyrdom of Socrates) — to the tolerant society of Pagan antiquity, it is of course quite true that, at the Reformation, cruelty was not by any means a Roman monopoly. Queen Elizabeth's "sworn tormentor", Thomas Toplady, boasted that he would stretch the Jesuit Southwell on the rack until he had made him a foot longer than God had made him! Moreover, Protestants also burned heretics on occasions. Calvin burned the Unitarian Servetus, and the last heretic to be burned alive in this country was, I think, burned by the order of the Protestant James I in 1612. Similarly, in burning witches, the Calvinist Church of Scotland rivalled even the Spanish Inquisition in cruelty.

It is salutary to be reminded of these atrocities, as perhaps we do sometimes give the impression that religious intolerance is a Roman monopoly. However, Protestantism has long since discarded the weapon of religious

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Father Paris Replies

By F. A. RIDLEY

persecution; and in any case Protestant theology does not logically require persecution since, unlike Rome, no Protestant Church claims to be the "one true Church" outside which there is no salvation. Hence, whilst Freethinkers have repeatedly denounced Protestant persecutions in the past, there is little present need to do so. The case is quite different with Rome, which still persecutes wherever she is strong enough to do so (Spain, Latin America, etc).

As regards Communism, this is a political creed, and if it really does persecute the Catholic Church, it does so presumably on political and not religious grounds. This is rather beyond the terms of reference of THE FREETHINKER, which is not a political paper. Speaking for myself, when I went behind the Iron Curtain into the Communist East (in 1957), I did not see or hear of any such persecution as Father Paris alleges. Contrarily, all the Peoples' Democracies of Eastern Europe (including

Hungary!) subsidise the Churches, including the Roman Catholic.

I have not myself been in Russia or China, but from what I know of these countries, I would say that there probably is some truth that the Chinese Communist regime has actually dealt harshly with Christian missionaries. The reason for this is unfortunately clear. Missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, took a leading part in the "gunboat diplomacy" that, during the heyday of European Imperialism in the nineteenth century, imperially forced opium and the Christian gospel down the throats of the Chinese. Their victims have probably neither forgotten nor forgiven this peculiar version of apostolic propaganda!

I can however, assure Father Paris sincerely that as Freethinkers, we condemn impartially all forms of religious and/or political persecution.

Jean Meslier (1664-1729)

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

IN REGARD to the Curé Meslier, both McCabe and Voltaire have something in common. In each of these prolific writers there is a mistake, and McCabe copied Voltaire's. M. Maurice Dommanget has recently completed a careful study of this remarkable man and his *Testament*. Meslier lived in obscurity and would probably have remained in obscurity if one of the three hand-written copies of the *Testament* had not come into the hands of a publisher in Paris, and a printed copy not fallen into the hands of Voltaire, who produced an *Extrait* of the work, which, though alteration and suppression made it misleading, nevertheless created an immense interest.

J. M. Robertson in his *History of Freethought* speaks of Meslier as follows: "He is recorded to have been an exceptionally charitable priest, devoted to his parishioners [of Etrépigny in Champagne], whose interests he indignantly championed against the tyrannous lord of the manor; apropos of Descartes's doctrine of animal automatism, which he fiercely repudiates, he denounces all cruelty to animals, at whose slaughter for food he winces; and his book reveals him as a man profoundly impressed at once by the sufferings of the people under heartless kings and nobles, and by the immense imposture of religion which in his eyes maintained the whole evil system. Some men before him had impugned miracles, some the gospels, some dogma, some the conception of the deity, some the tyranny of kings. He impugns them all; and where all the deists had eulogised the character of the gospel Jesus, this priest envelops it in his harshest invective. He must have written during whole years with a sombre, invincible patience, dumbly building up in his lonely leisure his unflinching negation of all that men around him held for sacred, and that he was ordained to preach — the whole to be his testament to his parishioners. In the slow, heavy style — the style of a cart-horse, Voltaire called it — there is an indubitable sincerity, a smouldering passion, but no haste, no explosion . . . when the long book was done it was slowly copied, and yet again copied, by the same heavy, unwearying hand. He had read few books it seems . . . but he had read them often, and Montaigne is evidently his chief master . . . he had reached as absolute a conviction of the untruth of the entire Judaeo-Christian religion as any freethinker ever had. Moved by his sense of corruption and misrule

around him, he sets out a two-fold indictment against religion and government. . . . Religions he exhibits as tissues of error, illusion and imposture, the endless sources of strifes for men. Their historical proofs and documentary bases are assailed, and the gospels in particular are ground between the slow millstones of his dialectic; miracles, promises and prophecies being handled in turn. The ethic and the doctrine are next assailed all along the line, from their theoretic bases to their political results; and the kings of France fare no better than their creed. . . . The entire theistic system is oppugned . . . and the eternity of matter affirmed. Immortality is denied, as miracles had been; and the treatise ends with a stern affirmation of the author's rectitude."

Whereas Voltaire in his *Extrait* presented Meslier as a deist, he was a thorough-going atheist. Voltaire also suppressed the social part of the *Testament*. The integral text was not published till 1864 by a Dutch freethinker, D'Abblaing van Glessenburg, under the pseudonym of Rudolf Charles.

McCabe quotes Voltaire and gives a wrong date for Meslier's birth, which has been established by M. Dommanget as 1664 in the parish registers of Mazerny in the Ardennes, not so far from Etrépigny, where Meslier was a priest for forty years. Robertson was uncertain as to the date of Meslier's death, which has since been shown by M. Albert Mousset (1955) to have taken place between June 27th and July 7th, 1729.

This year is certainly the tercentenary of an unusual man. It has not been rare that priests have scrutinised critically the doctrines they have been ordained to preach. Robertson lists several, such as the Abbé Terrasson and Abbé Gaidi of the 18th century, both outspoken atheists; and Napoleon regarded Talleyrand, who was not only a diplomat but Bishop of Autun, as an atheist. In our days two of the most erudite critics of the Christian religion, Alfarcic and Turmel, were both priests, the former until he left the Church, the latter until excommunicated.

We shall look forward to the publication of M. Dommanget's work. In the meantime the Union Rationaliste announces for the autumn a symposium on Meslier organised at Aix. In Greece a plaque in honour of Meslier has been unveiled and in Russia a book by Professor Porchnev is being published.

Accusations Against Us

By KIT MOUAT

AS WELL as being accused of being "beastly to the Christians", Humanists are often blamed for being too "dogmatic". "Dogmatic" is a word that is often used loosely and wrongly: "dogmas" imply a doctrinal system, which is included in both Christianity and Marxism, but not in Humanism. To be dogmatic is "to assert positively". The Humanist, then, who bangs on the table, shouting "I do not believe in God!" is not being dogmatic, but the clergyman who murmurs gently, "God created Heaven and Earth" or "Jesus rose from the dead", is being dogmatic. Similarly, of course, the Humanist who goes round quietly insisting that "there is no God" and "there never was a man called Jesus" is being dogmatic, whereas Christians who preface their convictions with "I believe" are innocent of dogmatism.

Many people, many agnostics even, suppose that atheism itself is a dogma, can only be expressed dogmatically and is, as a result, offensive to all sensitive and liberal-minded people. But in my dictionary atheism means quite simply "disbelief in God"; it isn't defined as a "complete certainty that God does not exist", I do not believe in a God, and I am, therefore, an atheist whether I or anyone else likes the label or not. An agnostic, on the other hand (according to the same dictionary) is "one who holds that nothing is to be known of a God or anything but material phenomena"; in other words, a "materialist" in the right sense of the word. Dr. Leslie Weatherhead, who calls himself a Christian-agnostic is, we must accept, a Christian-materialist!

We all know how many accusations are aimed at "atheistic materialism", which, I suppose, must mean the beliefs of those who do not believe in a God about which they hold nothing is to be known. But of course "materialism" is also used glibly to mean the sort of people who care more for stocks and shares and Jaguars than for religion. Or rather, it is more often directed at those who care more for Bingo and TV sets than for religion, but that is only because the Church of England has so many stocks and shares and the wealth of the Vatican puts even General Motors to shame. In Babylonian times, however, materialism was clearly distinct from humanism, and a tablet about a father who scolded his son for his "pursuit of materialistic success rather than humanistic endeavour" is described in that fascinating book *History Begins at Sumer* by S. N. Kramer.

Rejecting supernaturalism, Humanists can justifiably accept the label of materialists, although they have every right to claim that they do not necessarily deserve it as a term of abuse. They may be convinced, determined and forceful people, unless they assert positively those things which cannot be proved universally, they do not deserve to be called dogmatic. Humanism contains no creed, doctrinal system or dogmas. Christianity depends on all of these for its existence and survival. The moment the existence of God or Jesus, the need for salvation, the possibility of a life to come are questioned, the whole fabric of the faith begins to crumble and must collapse unless the dogmas are carefully welded together again.

There is another popular claim made today, and that is that Christianity is all Humanism and Heaven too. It seems to me that this charge against Humanism (for that is what it is) is simply answered. The idea rests, of course, on an imaginary scale of faiths, rational as well as religious, starting at the top with Roman Catholicism, des-

ending through High and Low Anglicanism, Methodism, Congregationalism, the Baptists and lesser non-conformists down to Unitarianism and Quakerism, with Humanism as low as you can get — unless you add Communism even lower than that. It suggests that Roman Catholics have the Holy Ghost with the Mostest, as it were, and that every other sect lacks something enjoyed by those above it on the scale. Anglicanism need lack very little and can get away with almost everything Roman even if some "Romish doctrines" are said to be repungant to the Word of God. Non-conformism is the poor relation without prayer book, bishops or candles. Unitarians are poorer still, without even the Trinity, and Quakers are often left with little more than an Inner Light and a Divine Guidance. It would be absurd, however, to suggest that Quakers are "missing" what the Anglicans treasure. They feel that what the others have got and they haven't is superfluous: magic if not downright superstition.

Not even the Headmaster who was claiming that Anglicanism has got more than Humanism, would have dared to claim that Anglicans are necessarily "better Christians" than Quakers. The other day I heard our local Baptist Minister comparing Roman Catholics with savages. "Mind you", he added, "I like savages, but with their rosaries and incense and so on, they are no better than the Africans with their snakes' skins and tom-toms". Clearly, he did not feel that the Roman Church has all that Baptists have got.

Nor, of course, do Humanists believe that they lack anything that is enjoyed by those who have a religious faith. Christians may be promised (on certain conditions) a life to come, but who wants an eternity of anything? They may have rewards for their good deeds, but they are not the sort of rewards we would choose. Some of them have what might seem an enviable certainty, but far more have doubts against which they must pray. Christians have some beautiful churches and cathedrals, but we can enjoy these too, with no guilt complexes at all. And anyone who seriously suggests that Humanists are by the nature of their convictions deprived of aesthetic or sensual satisfaction is deceiving himself. There may be Humanists who can't tell a Rodin from a Reg Butler, but Christianity has never been a synonym for intellectuality.

Religion is no longer needed as poetry and nourishment for the imagination, although it may still serve as such for those who have not looked elsewhere. Humanists without saints or rosaries, ritual or worship, without even a belief in some vague, unspecified supernatural "Power-over-all", can have lives as enriched by poetry and aesthetics as they are stimulated by argument and investigation. If Christianity is All Humanism and Heaven too, then we believe that Heaven (that "extra something that the others haven't got") is an over elaborate frame round a good picture; unnecessary decoration on a fine building; a "blur" that overstates and distorts an exciting and satisfying story. We are no more deprived by not being Christians than Quakers are deprived by not being Anglicans or Roman Catholics. Humanism is what each individual makes it. Potentially, it is a way of living and looking at life that is non-Christian and can be fully satisfying; but we can't put into it more than we have got. We are fortunate, however, to have had in our history—and to have still—so many Humanists with a lot to offer. Not only Humanists benefit, but humanity as a whole.

This Believing World

"Some of the opinions expressed on television programmes such as 'Meeting Point' are more of a hindrance than a help to a right understanding of Christian morality", said the Rev. P. Powlesland, as quoted by the *Daily Express* (June 9th). What Mr. Powlesland worries about as lack of "Christian" morality, the Rev. Dr. W. Snow (*Daily Express*, June 8th) calls "Godlessness". Dr. Snow complains that "Godlessness underlies the rise of Mods and Rockers, layabouts, Purple Heart addicts", which are "the symptoms of a sick society deficient in one of the vitamins of a healthy life, belief in God". But history is packed with the appalling crimes committed by people who believed in God. If Dr. Snow is championing the Christian belief in God, we challenge him to name one century since its inception when it has not murdered and tortured and imprisoned people for "unbelief". Even the rise of Western civilisation has not stopped it.

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Sir Alan Herbert in the "News of the World" (June 14th) dealt wittily and convincingly with the "Lord's Day" and its Christian implications. Perhaps we ought to add "crushingly" as well, for he pulverised the pious makers of the Sunday laws which have made that day, for most people, the most dismal one of the week. As in the case of our archaic Blasphemy Laws, which are never called upon these days to imprison "blasphemers" but remain apparently for ever on the statute books because Parliament won't abolish them, so it looks as if it will take a devil of a lot of fighting to get rid of our even sillier Sunday laws. Think of it—you can buy frozen peas on a Sunday but not tinned peas, fresh fruit, but not bottled fruit, newspapers, but not books, and so on. Christian theology is asinine enough, but God help us with Sunday laws like these!

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Nearly ninety years after Charles Bradlaugh was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for selling a particularly mild book on birth control, and dozens of other people fined or imprisoned for many years afterwards for advocating it, we now have the Bishop of Bristol advising parents to "Plan your family wisely". Birth control methods he said "were permissible for Anglicans within the bonds of marriage". Of course, he could not stop them. But why not for *everybody* who wants to learn such methods? After all, do we want hordes of illegitimate children? In any case, we are sure to have some bishop one day allowing all who want contraceptive information to have it in the name of Jesus and Christianity. To put it another way, our Christian bishops are not pioneers of birth control. That was left to infidels, unbelievers, and Atheists.

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Everybody who has read Samuel Butler's autobiographical *The Way of All Flesh* will have some idea what a clerical household was sometimes like with a real Christian father in charge. It looks as if Field-Marshal Montgomery's childhood was not much different from Butler's for, in an interview in the *Daily Express* (June 8th) he admitted that he had "a pretty miserable childhood". Monty's father was a bishop who wanted him to enter the Church which he sturdily resisted. But the parsons who talk about our wonderful Christian homes where all is sweetness and light, should explain Monty's "miserable childhood". And in a bishop's Christian home too!

★

We were rather amused by the "Daily Telegraph" report that Carlo Lewis' *Christ Stopped at Eboli* was classified in a northern public library under Travel/Europe.

The Bible

EUROPE was no longer aware of the Bible's importance for the conduct of human life, said Bishop Hans Lilje of Hanover, at a world consultation on Bible production and distribution held in Driebergen, Holland on June 23rd (*The Guardian* 24/6/64). And Professor Murdo MacDonald of Glasgow University said that, while almost every home in Scotland possessed a Bible, it was little read. Many brilliant men, high in their professions were only at primary school level in their knowledge and understanding of the Bible. But there was one part of Scotland where it was still "diligently read and understood"—the islands of the Outer Hebrides.

On the same day, Mr. R. T. Paget, Labour MP for Northampton — Charles Bradlaugh's constituency — told the House of Commons that he knew no book in history which had been a source of brutality and sadistic conduct, both public and private, which could compare with the Bible. "If the Home Secretary were looking afresh at books, in that one he would find certain notorious chapters, not only of pornography but a creed of race hatred. And he would find mixed up in it accounts of appalling sadism, approved murder and approved human sacrifice. All this, and yet I do not suppose that even the Home Secretary in his most enthusiastic moments would seriously prescribe banning the Bible".

Speaking during the Commons Standing Committee on the Obscene Publications Bill, Mr. Paget said it was far better to leave alone the job of deciding which books were mischievous. In that way, on the whole, humans would reject the dross.

ADRIAN PIGOTT

ADRIAN PIGOTT, author of *Freedom's Foe* — *The Vatican*, and a contributor to THE FREETHINKER, underwent an operation in Amersham General Hospital on June 17th. We are pleased to report that he is now making good progress.

Mr. Pigott's new book *The Vatican versus Mankind* has just been published by the Pioneer Press, and will be reviewed in THE FREETHINKER in due course.

DAVID TRIBE

DAVID TRIBE, President of the National Secular Society will appear on the television programme *Sunday Break* on Sunday, July 5th at 6.15 p.m.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society was held at 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1, on Wednesday, June 17th, 1964. Present: Mr. D. Tribe, who was in the Chair, Messrs Barker, Condon, Ebury, Hornbrook, Millar, Shannon, Sproule, Timmins and Warner, Mrs. Collins, Mrs. Mellroy, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer Mr. Griffiths, and the Secretary.

A number of recent events organised by the Society were reviewed. The Lecture Entertainment "Freethought and Humanism in Shakespeare" had been highly successful and the text was to be published in the near future. The visit to Thetford for the unveiling of the Thomas Paine statue had been well supported. Regret was expressed for the inconvenience caused to those who had travelled on the second coach.

Arising from the Annual Conference, it was decided to send letters to various Government departments, organisations and individuals. It was also decided to challenge the Lord's Day Observance Society to a debate.

Messrs. S. D. Kuebart and W. Miller were accepted as members of the Committee.

A Freethought Literature Fund was to be launched. The next meeting will take place on July 15th, 1964.

THE FREETHINKER

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

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

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY and J. A. MILLAR.

(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: 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

Havering Humanist Society, (Harold Wood Social Centre), Tuesday, July 7th, 8 p.m.: Debate "The Value of Christianity in Education", Speakers: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A., F.R.HIST.S. (Secularist); J. L. WHITELEY, M.A., PH.D. (Christian) South Place Ethical Society, (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, July 5th, 11 a.m.: Dr. JOHN LEWIS, "Samuel Beckett and the Decline of Western Civilisation".

Notes and News

THE SIGNIFICANT thing about the Pope's statement on birth control on June 23rd—as *The Guardian* (24/6/64) recognised—is that it should have been made at all. Of course it was vague and cautious, but it acknowledged the possibility of change "in the light of the scientific, social and psychological truths which have been brought to light in recent studies and research". The Pope referred obliquely to the world population problem. "We will", he said, "do all that is possible to forward all endeavours to abolish famine in the world and to favour progress and prosperity in social justice". It would be necessary, he went on, to examine closely the practical and theoretical developments of the problem (our italics), and the question was receiving profound and extensive study. The birth control rules of Pius XII should still be considered valid, said Pope Paul, "at least until we feel obliged, in our conscience to change them".

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THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY deserves full support in its protest against the Lord Chamberlain's censorship of plays. *Afore Night Come*, by the Birmingham school-master, David Rudkin, won the *Evening Standard* award for the best new play of the year; it has been published in full by Penguin Books and performed in full before club audiences at the Arts Theatre. Yet, as the *Sunday Telegraph* reported (21/6/64), Lord Cobbold, the Lord

Chamberlain, originally suggested 34 cuts in the Royal Shakespeare Company's production, and "now still insists upon 25 deletions from the printed text". The words that he finds unspeakable are, as the paper remarked, "not those many reasonable adults would find unprintable—they are usually 'bloody', 'hell', 'Christ' and 'Jesus'". They do not, the *Sunday Telegraph* continued, "affect the theme of Mr. Rudkin's powerful and serious work", but the Royal Shakespeare Company rightly feels that "such obsessive snipping and scissoring robs the language of the play's Black Country yokels of its rough and realistic vitality".

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PETER HALL, Managing Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, has pointed out that the same "Christs" which Lord Cobbold has forbidden in *Afore Night Come* occur in Shakespeare's *Henry V*. "Captain MacMorris has ten in a row, then on the last, the audience roars its head off", says Mr. Hall, whose Company's production of *The Representative* was also interfered with by the Lord Chamberlain. He ordered the removal of such filmed scenes from Belsen and Buchenwald as a vague unfocussed shot of a naked woman running; all close-ups of naked male and female corpses; corpses being unloaded from a lorry; a female body being tipped into a communal pit—all of which had previously been shown to millions in cinemas and on television. It is preposterous that the theatre which, as Mr. Hall says, "is probably our most adult form of communication" should have an outside censorship against which there is no appeal.

★

THE PSYCHOPHYSICAL RESEARCH UNIT at Oxford has received a good deal of publicity recently with its invitation to readers of the *Daily Mirror* and *Queen* to participate in an ESP "experiment" with 25 Zener cards locked in a drawer by an Oxford professor. The readers were asked to give their sex, how many brothers or sisters they had, etc., and to place the cards in what they believed to be the right order. There were some 6,000 replies from the daily and 756 from the fortnightly, and according to Lena Jeger (*The Guardian*, 23/6/64) the 756 replies have now been fairly well analysed. Chance expectation is, of course, five cards right, and Mrs. Jeger informed us that: "The highest scorers were the 220 readers who were eldest children, with 5.5 right. Youngest children scored 5.1 and only children did worst with 4.7". It sounds, then, as though the average was around the expected five.

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BECAUSE THE 4.7 was below the chance norm, however, "questions have to be asked as to whether these only children, for instance, knew the correct answers subconsciously and perversely wrote the wrong ones". But do they? Should we ask why they didn't "perversely" get all the cards wrong, whether bespectacled ones did better than those without glasses, lefthanders better than righthanders, fat than thin, tall than short, and so on? We can understand the Misses Green, Adams, Eastman and Drummond—the Psychophysical Research Unit—feeling it necessary to ask if the only children knew the correct answers subconsciously, but we are surprised that Mrs. Jeger should give credence to the idea; or that she should contemplate the possibility of anybody "knowing" the order of the cards in the professor's drawer. What, in fact, happened, was that many people made guesses, the overwhelming majority of which were wrong. But Mrs. Jeger said that the Psychophysical Research Unit hopes for a university department "as big . . . as an engineering block at least and with undisputed academic status".

The Value of the Religious Experience in Pentecostalism

By DEREK STUBBS

(Concluded from page 208)

OFTEN a "baptised" believer will stand up and break out in "tongues." I have never yet heard a recognisable language. Some manifestations have been only one step ahead of a child's imitation of a foreign language (some Pentecostalists believe that their "language" may come from another planet). I once heard a man rise and say "Didi-doo, didi-daya," about fifty times, at different speeds and in different tones. He claims it is a foreign language. Another "baptised" believer will rise and "interpret the message" (from God). The message may be for the whole congregation or a single "believer." Perhaps the member concerned (the "Spirit" tells him it is for him) or the pastor will make a prayer of thanks "to the Lord." I have seen old ladies burst into tears and say "Thank you, Lord, I have been waiting for that message for weeks."

Such important life decisions as marriage, buying a house, change of job, going to the mission field, have been decided by this method, with the most unhappy results. The whole process will then be repeated another two to four times. This will last about an hour. (Because of the powerfully emotional atmosphere, at the meetings, one cannot rule out subliminal-wish fulfilment, especially as the "messages" are often so general in their nature that anyone could glean a "personal" message from them.) The power, and speed, of voice of the speakers is fantastic. At the Welsh revival of 1904-5, converts who normally spoke little or no Welsh, broke out into Welsh prayers (*Yorkshire Post*, 27/12/1904). They had heard Welsh spoken, and had stored it in their vast unconscious memory, and their ecstasy (as in hypnotic trances) must have released their memory.

Some great biological force is involved, which controls the believer and to which he submits himself. The subjective mental state is one of euphoria. It is an opportunity to release mental tensions. Their relaxed mental state afterwards, demonstrates this.

After this will come the communion. The bread and wine will be handed or brought round with such phrases as "This is Christ's blood, shed for you. Drink it in remembrance of Him." All throughout the communion and worship parts of the meeting, "baptised" believers will have been whispering and mumbling "tongues of praise."

Then will come the sermon, church notices, closing hymn and prayer, etc. Just after the communion, people may come forward to request healing. The pastor or another will pour a drop of oil on the person's head, lay his hands on the head, and pray for healing. I have never yet seen any obvious results.

The meeting of group type b are all held at different times and occasions, but their structure is basically the same. Always a very high proportion of the congregation are believers, possibly "baptised" believers. Non-believers are very much encouraged.

At these meetings the atmosphere is one of cordiality. Much of the pre-sermon time will be spent in singing a chorus, a song which expresses a fundamentalist idea, in a simple language, to a simple melody. There will be hand-clapping and miming the idea with actions. Perhaps even

guitars and tambourines (as well as the piano) will accompany the singers. The music has a repetitive, strong beat, and will be repeated at least several times, accompanied by the leader's encouragements to sing louder. The leader may invoke the congregation to chant and shout such things as, "Hallelujah!"; "Amen!"; "Praise the Lord!". These will be shouted loudly, perhaps even twenty times. At one meeting I went to, held in a former aircraft hangar, I saw about two hundred people sway, hand-in-hand, in a huge circle, round the room, singing the same eight lines. It lasted about twenty minutes. Old ladies ran round the room, to demonstrate the healing power "of the Lord." There were continuous shouts of "Glory!", "Hallelujah!", "Jesus!" etc. At the direction of the pastor, the meeting "gave Jesus a clap." For about forty-five seconds they clapped and cheered Jesus.

The sermon is always of the same nature (even though all the meeting is of known believers); a condemnation of the congregation as corrupt sinners and then an emotionally loaded appeal for conversions, using elementary sales techniques.

New converts will then give some demonstration of their decision, such as going out to the front or a public prayer. But for difference in numbers, this part of the meeting is similar to Billy Graham's mass-meetings. The Pentecostalists have had, and sometimes still do have large meetings (500-plus) and the psychological value of "letting their hair down" and indulging in a mass-meeting, with all "believers" together (as in Hitler's Nuremberg rallies and at Beatle concerts) is obvious. Speaking in "tongues" is very rare at these meetings, but "baptisms" may occur and are encouraged.

Let me recapitulate and schematise the ecstasy process:

- (1) A prerequisite in the believer is a static energy economy (and therefore accumulated mental tensions) with few energy-release mechanisms.
- (2) Ecstasy will be precipitated by physical and mental rhythms; and an emotionally "loaded" atmosphere such as a believers' "baptism in water," and other believers invoking them or "the Lord" to be "filled" or to "fill"; and a strong desire to be "filled."
- (3) It will reach a stage of compulsion when the believer must break out in "other tongues," shaking, laughing, crying, sweating (perhaps even fainting), all of which are energy-release mechanisms. Some strong "indescrutable power" will fill the believer and be felt in his body. All sense of duration will cease. The mind will go blank.
- (4) The ecstasy will subside and leave the believer in a euphoric state.

Also, at the first experience:

- (5) A maturation of character will occur.
- (6) This will be the most powerful experience.

Throughout anthropology one sees that rhythmic music, with a pronounced beat, and rhythmic movement, is a necessary part of the ritual which precedes the orgy of ecstasy.

I have heard the ecstasy state described thus: "I felt as though I was walking on air," "All my burdens (mental

tensions) were lifted up." There is talk of a "wholeness," and an "at-oneness" with God. The Pentecostalist has heard (and seen) "speaking in tongues" before. He has heard the descriptions of ecstasy before, from other believers. He does nothing original, he just (unconsciously) copies. As in a dream one arranges the "bricks" of experience in a different permutation to achieve (what one

considers) an original structure, so the Pentecostalist does likewise.

To point to the ecstasy state as a form of non-genital auto-eroticism, would, I think, not be wrong. If we further conceive of it as a vicarious orgasm, points 1 to 6 have a definite pertinence, the Holy Spirit being the fantasy lover.

The Meaning and Value of Freethought

By CHAPMAN COHEN

EDITOR'S NOTE—The following, slightly amended text of the late Mr. Cohen's gramophone recording is reprinted in response to many requests and will later be issued as a leaflet by the National Secular Society.]

I WILL commence with a definition. Freethought may be defined as the rejection of authority in matters of opinion. It sets the persuasion of fact against the coercion of force. A Freethinker is one who forms his own opinions on the facts as he sees them. Right or wrong, his opinions are his own. He is a voice, not an echo.

Historically, freethought has become identified with the rejection of religious doctrines. This is because it is from the side of religion that the impulse to intolerance has come. Human society is born in the shadow of religious fear, and in that stage the suppression of heresy is a sacred social duty. Then comes the rise of a priesthood, and the independent thinker is met with punishment in this world and the threat of eternal damnation hereafter. Even today it is from the religious side that the greatest danger to freedom of thought comes. Religion is the last thing that man will civilise.

Considerable progress was made in the old Greek and Roman civilisations in the way of establishing freedom of thought. Neither had anything in the shape of a sacred book warning men not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, and, in Greece particularly, every question of religion, ethics, science and philosophy was discussed with a freedom that Europe subsequently lost and has only recently regained. Indeed, if it were possible to revive an ancient Athenian, and place him in the centre of Europe at any date from the 5th to the 16th century, and if he could have seen the prison, the stake and the torture chamber being used to prevent criticisms of religion, he would have thought that the world had been overtaken with an epidemic of insanity.

The intellectual freedom of Europe died with the establishment of the Christian Church. Bible in hand, the Church met every new idea with a "Thus saith the Lord." On the ruins of the ancient civilisation, she placed the flag of an interested dogmatism, and opened one of the most hideous chapters in the history of mankind. Inquiry was forbidden, freedom of speech was taboo, a premium was offered for cowardice and hypocrisy, a tax was placed upon intellectual sincerity. Intolerance became a virtue and persecution a habit.

Nothing more demoralising has ever existed. Where religious heresy was concerned, no man could feel himself safe. In the name of religion a man was taught to denounce his neighbour, a wife her husband, a child its parent. The Church went further and made a man a policeman over himself, until men feared to think, lest they should be led to doubt. The thinker was everywhere suspect: the credulous fool was held up as the model of religious perfection. It was the vilest system the world has ever known.

In prohibiting the free play of ideas, the Church struck at the foundation of progress. Throughout the whole of animate nature, variation is one of the conditions of development. The opposite process is elimination, by which unfavourable or undesirable variations are weeded out. The Church adopted the latter policy. Every variation against its teaching was crushed. It imposed conformity on all with the result of achieving stagnation — and worse. A sheep-like attitude was inculcated, and where men are trained like sheep they share the fate of sheep — they are sheared and eaten.

Had a bench of Bishops existed amongst our simian ancestors, the human race would never have arisen. The first variations towards a more human type would have been crushed as a blasphemous innovation.

In the history of every institution there is a time when it has to face the challenge of new knowledge. The man who makes this challenge is an asset of great social value. He compels us to something like a mental stocktaking, to get rid of unusable goods and to restock on better lines. The greatest need of today is to create an environment that is completely hospitable to new ideas.

The vote spreads political power over a wide area, but carries no guarantee of its right use. All can read, but reading without the critical habit is of but small value. The press flashes its lightning, and the mass of the public are without a conductor that will protect them from its dangers. There never was a time when there was greater need for independent thinking than there is today. Unfortunately, fifteen centuries of Christian rule have made intolerance of unorthodox opinions fatally common.

In the Christian mythology, it is noted that man's primal sin was an act of disobedience. He ate of the Tree of Knowledge, and the Gods cannot forgive that offence. Yet knowledge is the greatest need of mankind. It is that which has raised him from savagery to civilisation. It is that which makes him more than the equal of the Gods. It lifts him above them. But you cannot acquire sound knowledge without the courage to examine, modify and reject what is already established. This is a painful and troublesome process; but the pain is that of a new birth, the trouble that of clearing away things that have outlived their utility.

Freethought, then, claims the fullest possible freedom of thought, speech, publication and action. It asks for these, not as luxuries, but as necessities; not for their mere toleration, but for their encouragement. They must be the unquestioned and inalienable rights in a society where men and women can exist with dignity and self-respect.

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CORRESPONDENCE

SPAIN

The announcement of a £14 million arms deal between Britain and the Franco regime has aroused the greatest concern among the Spanish people. The British government has taken a calculated step in support of the most oppressive regime in Europe.

This is a great blow to the Spanish people who have fascist Franco by the throat today: the Asturian miners and metal-workers strike; the demonstrations in Bilbao and other cities on May Day; the challenge to the regime from the Andalusian peasants and students during the last few months in Spain.

This act of the present British government not only strengthens the power of the Franco regime, but also brings its inclusion in NATO a step nearer.

We Spanish Trade Unionists protest most strongly against this gesture of political and military negotiations with fascism and warn British workers that what is inflicted on the Spanish people today could be turned against the British people tomorrow.

We call upon all Trade Unionists, students, and all those who wish to see Spain freed from totalitarianism to oppose this policy of rearming the last vestige of Hitler and Mussolini in Europe.

A. ROA, Secretary,

Liaison Committee, National Federation of Labour of Spain in Exile.

PORTUGAL

We are very grateful for the transcription of an article from our Bulletin in the June 5th issue of THE FREETHINKER.

We thank you also in the name of the many Portuguese men and women who today either suffer injustice in Salazar's jails or bravely fight for human dignity and a better life in Portugal.

With warmest regards.

R. FERREIRA,

for Portuguese and Colonial Bulletin.

NEHRU

I do not think your Christian correspondent should have any doubts about Nehru's position so far as superstitions of a religious kind are concerned, now that you have quoted extracts from his own writings.

However, the writings prove at the same time that he was somewhat short of being a humanist. His "references to the Ganges being 'the river of India, beloved of her people', etc., and to the scattering of his ashes over the fields "so that they might mingle with the dust and soil of India and become an indistinguishable part of her" shows that he had all the parochialism of the nationalists in the world and was therefore a menace to the human race from this point of view.

The same could probably be said of Shakespeare with his mania for dealing with kings and queens and other aspects of nationalism. Do you think for a moment that Shakespeare's likeness would have been allowed to appear alongside the likeness of the Queen on our stamps if he had not been regarded as a sound supporter of the monarchy?

And why should Robert Burns have been refused to have a stamp in his honour but that he was a bit more outspoken against nationalism and monarchy than was Shakespeare?

I think that if we freethinkers and humanists are to make headway in creating a more intelligent human society generally we must be careful to comment upon these weaknesses of so-called "great men" so that we may not reap the whirlwinds of wrath which can easily be generated by following their sub-humanist principles.

E. G. MACFARLANE.

[Mr. Macfarlane's idealistic internationalism seems to have carried him beyond reasonable bounds. To call Nehru "a menace to the human race" is ridiculous in the extreme: it was his influence, more than that of any other world statesman that helped avert a nuclear war.

In our view, a love of one's country such as that exemplified in Nehru's will is in no way incompatible with an international outlook. Is Mr. Macfarlane suggesting that one should stifle all "parochial" human emotions? If so, he is asking not only the impossible but the undesirable. It is an a par with the indiscriminate love ideal of Christianity. One cannot love all people and all countries: one can, however, live with them.

Whether Shakespeare owes his privilege of appearing on stamps with the Queen to his histories rather than his tragedies, we don't know. But had he not written the latter plays, he would not have earned his supreme position in English drama.

Burns, it is true, was a rebel, but he is an unfortunate example from Mr. Macfarlane's standpoint. Burns's love of Scotland is incontestably indicated in his poems—ED.]

AUTHORITATIVE NOTE

At the request of a well-meaning Roman Catholic friend, I read *An Outline History of the Catholic Church*. He claimed, that this book would prove, by philosophy and logic, the divine origin of his Church, as well as the existence of God.

On page 230 of this presumably authoritative book, there is a note on philosophy and Catholic doctrine which reads, "Any opposition between these two can exist in appearance only, and evidently, in case of such an apparent opposition, we must not presume revelation to have erred but philosophy".

Now we know!

JAMES DOBBIN

OBSESSIONS?

It becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between a rationalist and a Roman priest: both extremes appear to be obsessed with sex and religion!

God knows how many times the words "God" and "Sex" occur in every edition of the three rationalist journals I subscribe to.

What a bore it all is.

A. O. SNOOK.

THEATRE

"The Maid's Tragedy"

The Maid's Tragedy, at the Mermaid Theatre, London, is a highly-coloured piece of melodrama by Beaumont and Fletcher, two contemporaries of Shakespeare, all about Honour and Revenge (bloody). The plot is fantastic and the characters incredible, but for those who can accept the conventions of Jacobean drama this is a splendid evening's entertainment. The actors bring to their parts the flamboyancy the play requires, and Irene Hamilton is horribly satisfying as Evadne, the "Maid" of the title. There are some delightful touches of irony, and an old man, Calianax, played by David Bird, provides occasional moments of pathos, whose truth, contrasting with the high-flown emotions of the other characters, is genuinely moving.

M. McL.

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