

The Freethinker

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IT IS OBVIOUS that when we speak of omnipotence we are trying to indicate by a single comprehensive word, all the things God cannot do. For whatever else omnipotence may be, it is manifestly not omnipotent. Omnipotence used as an alternative name for God is no more than a courtesy title, the courtesy of which is constantly falsified. To see that this is so we need only take a look at the theistic religions which invented it. These religions work by a sort of axiomatic rule that to God all things are possible. No rule ever had so many exceptions and no exceptions ever failed so ignominiously to prove the rule. All they do is to demonstrate that the only unexceptionable rule is that there is no unexceptionable rule.

Religious bombast about all things being possible to God is invariably followed by a deflatingly contradictory list of things impossible to God. At the same time God is proclaimed omnipotent, we are exhorted that in all human affairs, God, without man's permission and collaboration—whatever that may mean—is as frustrate as man himself. If man refuses to co-operate God cannot do this and God cannot do that, which rather takes the omni out of God's potence. Omnipotence begins to look like another figment of pious imagination. We are driven to the conclusion that we can think and act an almighty sight better for ourselves.

Can and Cannot

As far as one can make out, this attribute of miscalled omnipotence which religion in general bestows upon its God, turns out to be nothing more than the limited power to do only what is humanly conceivable as possible. Beyond that, God it seems cannot go. For instance, it is easy enough to conceive, whether or not to believe, that God can make a tree. It is impossible either to conceive or to believe that God can make two and two come to five. We may not be able to see how the first thing can be done, but we can clearly see why the second thing cannot be done. On the whole, religion is too wary to contest this. Even the infallible Catholic Church would hardly go as far nowadays as to maintain that God could disprove what is mathematically proven or refute what is logically irrefutable. But casuistry will always find some way out and this limitation of God's power is blandly reconciled with God's omnipotence by the specious argument that the laws which govern mathematics and logic, were originated and ordained by God and naturally God cannot transgress his own laws. Can is always followed by cannot. This explanation seems to be offered as self-evident and indisputable. We have to take it or leave it. Yet no necessary reason has ever been found why God cannot contravene his own laws. Statesmen find no difficulty in contravening theirs.

There are of course quite a lot of fanatics, especially those superficialists masquerading as fundamentalists, who would stubbornly maintain that God could disobey himself if he chose, that there is nothing, however impossible to

human conception, that is not perfectly possible to divine performance, that God could invalidate the laws of mathematics and logic or anything else if he wished. As this kind of contention is impervious to argument, those who advance it are in that sense invulnerable. They are blind to its inherent contradictions, particularly the utter incompatibility of omnipotence with freewill. They cannot foresee what a self-cancellation it ultimately leads to.

They can never give a concrete example of these displays of God's omnipotence. Moreover, such a special assurance of God's almighty power inevitably rests upon grounds which take no account of reason. It strongly suggests that perverseness which slyly

takes advantage of the fact that whatever surpasses the humanly intelligible can never be intelligibly disproved. In countering this sort of mystification, falsely dignified as mysticism, the surest and shortest way is to follow the wise old maxim that the answer to a fool—in this case the fanatic—is silence. It is the one answer that neither the fanatic nor the fool can ever cure or endure.

Incompetence

Admittedly, there are also unbelievers prone to some degree of fanaticism in their own sceptical way. For it is too often overlooked that unbelief, quite as much as belief, can be primarily a matter of the intuitive conviction which religion exalts as revelation. Faith can cut both ways. Believers may virtuously proclaim a spontaneous, unquestioning faith in very God, but there are unbelievers who, with less virtuousness but more humanity claim that they too have just as naturally firm a faith in no-God. In addition to reasoning things out, unbelieving Freethinkers may feel in their bones that all the centuries-old accumulation of theistic theology amounts in the end to nothing but a motley of calculated ecclesiastical interests. Unbelievers will often have an intense, instinctive conviction that certainly all the miraculous elements and probably most of the history of orthodox religion, especially Christianity, are simply not true. There is virtually no evidence for them except what theologians have deliberately concocted to serve their own purposes. And even if they were in any sense true, they are more likely to confirm God's incompetence than God's omnipotence. No all-powerful God would have need of the deplorably barbarous, clumsy and ineffectual shifts such as the Christian scheme in order to work out his purposes.

Omnipotent Vanity

That there is power in existence which as yet man is unable to comprehend or control, not even the most ardent atheist would be so incautious as to deny. Evidence of it is abundant throughout the universe. But it does not necessarily follow that this power is omnipotent. It does not follow that this power will for ever remain uncomprehended and unmastered by man. And it most certainly does not follow that this power is to be equated with any of the anthropomorphic and fabulous Gods of the theistic religions. There are unmistakable pointers

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Impotence of Omnipotence

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

that gropingly, very slowly perhaps, and despite constant set-backs, the human mind is nevertheless inexorably gaining dominion over hitherto indomitable forces. Man has a long way to go but it can hardly be said that he has not already come a long way. It can be said that religion has been one of his greatest obstacles. Yet more and more, religious ideas once vaunted as immutable, have been compelled to change. Man in his hard-won freedom is moving and has moved an inestimable distance from the Old Testament times in which the brutish, ranting ancient of days called Yahweh bragged and brayed to his servant Job until that sorry victim through the last chapters of his Book is portrayed as cowed and terrified into the fawning flattery and craven profession of repentance which seems to be all that the Omnipotent, as he is actually called, requires to satisfy his omnipotent vanity.

At this point it is time to ask the blunt question, what precisely do we mean by omnipotence? That is easier to ask than to answer. In its literal dictionary sense, omnipotence is the unlimited power to do anything and everything, conceivable or not. If omnipotence is not that, it is not omnipotence. The least limitation immediately destroys it, for power cannot be unlimited and limited at the same time. A supreme being cannot be

supreme unless his supremacy is absolute. Omnipotence must indeed be as the fanatics claim. God must for example, be able to unsay whatever has been said, to render opposites identical, to multiply by dividing and all things similarly. If he cannot do these things—and nobody really supposes that he can—it is plainly because he is thwarted by something stronger than himself, in which case he cannot be omnipotent God. In other words he is simply not in existence. On the other hand, if, as we must, we push the matter to its utmost extremity, if we say that God is omnipotent, that he is supremely able to do everything conceivable or otherwise, then he must be supremely able to overthrow his own supremacy, to obliterate his omnipotence and thus cancel out his own existence. So in the last resort it seems to come to this: if God is omnipotent he cannot exist because he is omnipotent; if God is not omnipotent he cannot exist because he is not omnipotent.

On such a showing, God and omnipotence turn out to be mere vacuous words, inherently undefinable. They can be and are loosely used to convey whatever one wishes and are therefore practically meaningless. They may not be exactly full of sound and fury, but they can be said to signify exactly nothing.

Religious Influences on Canadian Children

By LANJE GARDYEN

DR. HENRY ZENTNER, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Alberta, regards religion as the "most divisive factor" in Canadian life; more acute than in the United States, where he lived for ten years.

Dr. Zentner was interviewed by the Canadian Press on June 16th, after he had delivered a paper at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, showing that children in Alberta's city and town public (state) schools have a lower drop-out rate and obtain better marks than Roman Catholic children in sectarian schools.

In his paper, Dr. Zentner examined the structural differences of what he called the "two extremes" of Canadian Christianity, Calvinistic Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, and considered how they affect the child. The Catholic child had a "heavenly family" of divine personalities performing certain "supernatural welfare services for the individual." The Protestant child, seeing God as almost a "deceased ancestor," thought of these welfare services as performed in the "historic past," and was less prone to appeal to a divine personality when faced with a difficult situation.

The Catholic child, on the other hand, was "inclined to rely more heavily upon his mythological rather than his real worldly reference groups as a basis for orientation and self definition." However, he would probably enjoy a "richer and more extensive intuitive life than the Protestant, who was more restricted by concepts of how other humans see him."

The Protestant child, Dr. Zentner said, approached all truths with doubt and scepticism "since no authority but personal experience is acceptable," and there was a consistency between these values and those of science. Moreover, he was less prone to sacrifice long run material gains for short term rewards and gratifications.

Dr. Zentner elaborated his "speculative argument" when interviewed. The lower class Roman Catholic student, he said started school with "two strikes" against him—his religion and his class. The two together were

"dynamite." However, the Catholic child was less susceptible to mental illness, and there were less suicides among Catholics. The Protestant had "much more tension, having to make decisions about everything," while the Catholic let his Church make decisions for him. "If mental health is the bigger problem, perhaps dogmatic religion is the solution," Dr. Zentner said. In any case, it was only by "dragging religion out and talking calmly about it" that we could appreciate "the differences that divide us on religious lines."

With that, no Freethinker will disagree. What we might hope is that Dr. Zentner might widen the scope of his "speculative argument" to include the children of non-Christians. Might it not be that they had advantages over both Catholics and Protestants?

OTHER-WORLD-ISM

Other-world-ism,
This-world-ism —

Because there is a star,
Does it mean the deer
Should not dip his head
To drink in the pool?

JEAN OVERTON FULLER.

The above is from *Venus Protected And Other Poems*, just published by Outposts Publications, and dedicated by the author to the late Victor Neuburg, friend of Chapman Cohen and frequent contributor to THE FREETHINKER.

The Post

We regret that subscription copies of THE FREETHINKER have again been delayed owing to the cancellation by the Postmaster General of all printed paper rate post.

The postal dispute has also interfered with our inward mail. We hope, however, that with its settlement things will now return to normal.

Should the 39 Articles be Scrapped?

By RODNEY BENNETT-ENGLAND

WHILE Christianity is endeavouring to present a united front to the non-Christian world, the Church of England is facing the threat of a major doctrinal split. And it could lead to the biggest rift since John Wesley broke away in 1738 to found Methodism. For Anglican opinion is now completely divided over the 39 Articles of Religion to which all clergy have to make general assent.

Since the beginning of the century there have been strong pleas from bishops, clergy and convocations for the revision of the Articles. The reformers argue that they are out of date—they were passed in 1562—and refer to matters no longer relevant.

Many, too, are totally unacceptable to Anglo-Catholics and modern churchmen. They are commonly referred to as "the forty stripes save one."

But the Church Society, a group of Evangelicals, or Low Churchmen, decided at their annual conference at Oxford last autumn that there should be "full and uncompromising acceptance of the doctrinal principles set forth in the 39 Articles."

This decision may easily split the Anglican Church right down the middle, for since 1865 clergy have been required only to make general assent to them. This they are required by law to do at their ordination and after their induction into a new living. But many argue that this makes a mockery of the whole procedure since most clergy cannot subscribe to all the statements of faith.

In May of last year there were rumblings in Church circles when the Rev. John Pierce-Higgins, former vicar of Putney, London, publicly protested at making the general assent during his installation as a canon and Vice-Provost of Southwark Cathedral.

Canon Pierce-Higgins, who is Chairman of the Modern Churchman's Union, objected to five of the articles. He questioned the value of the particular interpretation of faith contained in them. Wide publicity was given to his protest and in a letter to *The Times* Lord Fisher of Lambeth, former Archbishop of Canterbury, urged that a group of "scholarly churchmen" set about revising them.

In the September 1963 issue of *Outlook* a Church of England publication, an article by the Rev. Eric James, vicar of St. George's Camberwell and a former Chaplain to Trinity College, Cambridge, questions the present-day usefulness of the 39 Articles. He says: "It is unsatisfactory that an intelligent layman, turning the pages of his prayer book during the service, should find a document which is so archaic in language, so related to ancient controversies . . . so unrepresentative of the present mind of the Church."

Even the late Archbishop Garbett of York said: "It would be impossible for any intelligent man to give whole-hearted assent to every sentence in every article."

Consider Article 37, for example. Abolitionists of the death penalty would be disloyal to their beliefs if they agreed that "The laws of the Realm may punish Christian men with death for heinous or grievous offences;" a pacifist likewise cannot sincerely declare that "It is lawful for Christian men at the commandment of a magistrate to wear weapons and serve in the wars."

Anglo-Catholics have good reasons for objecting to Articles 22 and 28. The former states that "The Romish Doctrine concerning purgatory, pardons, worshipping and adoration . . . is repugnant to the word of God." Article 28 states: "The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is not

by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up or worshipped."

Is reform such a bad thing? Tradition should never be sacrificed just to please the masses, but if the Bible can be brought up to date or elucidated in more easily understood language, so ought the basic doctrines of the Church.

The Anglican Communion has traditions of which it can be justly proud, but its leaders would do well to remember that its own origins are through reform. Christ had a simple way of talking to the people in their own tongue. The Anglican Church still uses language unintelligible to the average layman. What was good enough for our grandfathers is not good enough for young people today.

The late Pope John's call "*Aggiornamento*" is helping blow a fresh—and long overdue—breeze through the Vatican Council. The Church of England needs the same stimulus.

The Church Society, however, stands firm by its decision. They argue that if there is to be reunion with the free-churchmen—"and Roman Catholics willing to accept a biblical reformation"—full and uncompromising acceptance of the 39 Articles is essential.

Mr. Frank Gough, the Assistant Secretary to the Society told me: "The Church of England was formed as a Protestant Church and those who come forward as clergy ought to be protestant. The 39 Articles are statements of Biblical doctrines. It is no use clergy making a general assent to them, tongue in cheek one Sunday, and throwing overboard the teaching contained in them the next."

But the Rev. Frederick Coleman, Secretary of the Church Union, which represents the Anglo-Catholic movement says: "Requirement that clergy make full and uncompromising acceptance of the Articles is taking the Church back, not forwards. They are only acceptable as an historical document. Naturally there is a lot of good in them but they have their weaknesses. They are the children of a generation. It is absurd making people ascribe to them when they can't agree with them all. It is morally debasing."

Latest to join the ranks of public protestors is Canon Hugh Montefiore, former Dean of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. Canon Montefiore, a Jew before his conversion while a prefect at Rugby, took the unprecedented step of making a supplementary declaration during his installation as vicar of Great St. Mary's, Cambridge, on September 29th, last year. He told the congregation that his pet aversion was Article 13, which states that "work done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of Christ are not pleasant to God, as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ . . . for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt but they have the nature of sin."

Canon Montefiore said: "I cannot believe that every single action of every member of the Jewish Faith has the nature of sin. For me to subscribe specifically to this article I would be deliberately calling black what I know to be white."

Commenting on the diversity of opinions amongst clergy on the 39 Articles, Sir Kenneth Grubb, Chairman of the House of Laity of the Church Assembly told me: "It is unsatisfactory that things should be allowed to drift on as they are. The Evangelicals regard the Articles as

(Concluded on page 244)

This Believing World

In spite of strenuous efforts for Christian unity, the recent Methodist Conference thought that "serious consideration should be given to banning from Britain Big Jim Taylor, American leader of the Exclusive Brethren (*Daily Express* July 9th); while Dr. Ramsey has defended Sir G. J. Scott who wrote a pamphlet, *No Drift to Rome*, which has made many Anglicans angry. The ecumenical Anglican view seems to be that the Church of Rome was given to the world by "our Lord" himself, though they may not be too sure about the Church of England.

★

And, incidentally, would not Jesus himself be most enthusiastic over Big Jim Taylor who curses other believers in much the same terms Jesus used when faced with opposition. We doubt, in fact, if even Big Jim could beat "Ye generation of vipers" as a truly Christian curse. The only way to keep Christianity pure, uncontaminated by any heresy, is to use Big Jim's methods. Even if they do come from America.

★

The vicar of St. Leonard's Parish Church, Old Warden, Bedfordshire, the Rev. F. W. Meager, finding it very difficult to explain "gang warfare" as he calls it (*London Evening News*, June 27th), blames the parents. All child gangsters "get their own way at home," and so "it becomes easy for many young people to be involved in serious mischief." But surely the problem is not solved by blaming the parents when it is obviously the failure of Christianity, which the children were compulsorily taught at school. If the wonderful and simple teaching of Jesus Christ cannot suppress crime, then it has failed. Not the parents.

★

The door-to-door vendors of piety are now coming in for a good deal of criticism. Many are trying to sell the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses—and anybody who falls for the boys and girls of eight babbling about God and the Witnesses deserves to be one for the rest of his life! But it appears that other salesmen are finding it easy to sell books on a doorstep—Catholic missals, for example, at 10 guineas which can be bought in a shop for 4 guineas. You can even buy a Catholic Bible for 12 guineas, worth at the most £2 10s.

★

The people who believe the fairy stories in any Bible can it seems, just as easily be bamboozled in other ways. A salesman selling piety in the name of God or the Roman Church or Jehovah's Witnesses to a fully believing Christian of any brand has an easy victim. Especially if he can put the fear of Hell into anyone who refuses.

★

Mixed marriages were the subject of an article in the *London Evening Standard* (June 18th), initiated by the marriage of a grandson of Sir Winston Churchill to a Roman Catholic. This couple solved their problem by marrying in a register office—if that can be said to solve it. For the Roman Church refuses to recognise any civil ceremony declaring that without its "sacramental" blessing the two people concerned are living in sin.

★

This always seems to us sheer impudence—especially in England, not so far as we are aware a satellite of the Vatican. The law in this country is that its civil marriage is the legal one—and even Catholics have to accept that, whatever mumbo jumbo—which they call a sacrament—is performed with it. But let us face the real fact, any religion might make a mixed marriage fail.

SHOULD THE 39 ARTICLES BE SCRAPPED?

(Concluded from page 243)

a guarantee of orthodoxy in the Church of England, but this is the wrong way to go about things. Clearly they need revising and there is no reason why the Protestants should not put forward their own views, but it is monstrous that clergy should have to make assent against their consciences."

At a time when Church leaders are striving for greater unity amongst all denominations, the Church Society conference findings are likely to create a major stumbling block. They clearly demonstrate that even the Church of England is divided on the question of unity, for members affirmed that it is the duty of the state to uphold the law of God. They rejected the conception of a secular or "neutral" state.

This means they wish for the retention of the Established Church which could prove a hindrance to union with the Roman Catholics. With the Anglo-Catholic movement gaining in membership and supporting union with Rome, the conference findings of the Church Society will lead to bitter feuds in the Church of England.

But as Christ himself declared, a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Here are a few extracts from the Articles:

Article 9. Man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil . . . every person deserveth God's wrath and damnation . . .

Article 13. Works done before Christ are not pleasant to God . . . They have the nature of sin.

Article 18. They are to be accursed that presume to say, that every man shall be saved by the Law or Sect which he professeth . . .

Article 19. The Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith.

Article 22. The Romish doctrine, concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well as images as of Reliques . . . is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.

Article 24. It is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God . . . to have public prayer in a tongue not understood of the people.

Article 28. Transubstantiation is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.

Article 37. The Laws of the Realm may punish Christian men with death for heinous and grievous offences. It is lawful for Christian men . . . to wear weapons and serve in the wars.

[Reprinted from *Past and Future*]

SCHOPENHAUER AND ETHICS

According to Schopenhauer ethics as a philosophical discipline is entirely unpractical to exactly the same extent as are logic and metaphysics. Not only can it prescribe nothing, it cannot even treat precepts. There is no power, whether in man or outside of him which could hold up an Ought against him.

Truly there is a principle of moral conduct which is deeply anchored in the nature of man, but ethics can only lay it bare, draw it into the light of consciousness so far as it is already active in him. It cannot incite the principle to activity where it slumbers buried and choked with earth. Ethics is not an energising factor in real life, it can only behold, analyse, comprehend in a contemplative way, like all philosophy. It is pure theory. What ought to happen is already there; indeed the decision for or against is already made.

Schopenhauer's view is that ethics is not at all normative. What was right? Antiquity or Schopenhauer? Can the good be taught, or is ethics purely contemplative?

G. MCKENZIE

TEN NON-COMMANDMENTS

(A Humanist's Decalogue)
by RONALD FLETCHER

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

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

North Staffordshire Humanist Group, (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, July 31st, 7.45 p.m. A meeting.

Notes and News

BARRY GOLDWATER, as *The Observer* reminded us (19/7/64) is not Adolf Hitler and "it is unwise to make exact comparisons between the two." Nevertheless, as the paper went on to say, "there are some disquieting similarities." Senator Goldwater may be personally charming and attractive, but he is an extremist, as his voting record shows, and he has the support of the worst elements in the US—the John Birch Society for instance. Like Hitler, Goldwater plays on the fear of Communism (which he interprets almost as widely as did McCarthy) and with not-so-dissimilar results (as the shouting-down of Nelson Rockefeller showed). He has chosen, incidentally, a Roman Catholic "running mate" in William E. Miller—a conservative, too, though not so extreme. All in all, then, a Republican victory in the Presidential election would be a disaster for the USA if not for the world. Fortunately we can't really see Goldwater beating Lyndon Johnson. Should he do so, possibly his own country's ferment might curtail the harm he could do abroad. But we hope we don't overestimate American liberalism.

MISS MARION LOVELAND'S reference to Humanists and Freethinkers "living only for the day"—reported in *The Guardian* (11/7/64) and mentioned here last week—did not go unnoticed. It was "irresponsible," said Mrs. Ruth Cooke, "hardly fair," said S. S. A. Watkins (*The Guardian* 15/7/64). As to the atomic bomb Mr. Watkins added, "don't let us forget that it was developed and used by a country that is reputed to have the biggest proportion of churchgoers, outside the Roman Catholic states, and

whose motto is 'In God we Trust.'" Three days later the National Secular Society President, David Tribe, pointed the irony of Miss Loveland's remarks in the light of Matthew 6,34; "Take therefore no thought for the morrow . . .". And Mr. Tribe challenged Miss Loveland for statistics.

★

So "agreement" has been reached on Malta's independence constitution. A few weeks ago (10/7/64) the *Daily Telegraph* reported that Dr. Borg Olivier had "run severely against difficulties with the requirements of the Roman Catholic Church. Archbishop Gonzi, the report continued, "is taking a firm line that little, if anything, should be done to interfere with the Church's responsibility for the political consequences of the electorate." It was, of course, from a sense of "responsibility" that the Archbishop made it an official sin for Catholics to read the campaign literature of the Malta Labour Party at the last election—an act which undoubtedly ensured Mr. Mintoff's Party's defeat and Dr. Olivier's victory.

★

NOW THE White Paper (Cmnd. 2406) expressly lays down in Chapter 1, Article 2, that: "The religion of Malta is the Roman Catholic Apostolic religion. The State guarantees to the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church the right freely to exercise her, proper spiritual and ecclesiastical functions and duties and to manage her own affairs." The Constitution makes no provision whatever for civil marriage or divorce and with the exception of a few minor points it seems as though Dr. Olivier and the British government have given way to the Archbishop. Dr. Olivier is, of course, a devout Catholic, but he may eventually learn the lesson that Mr. Mintoff learnt long ago: that the power of the Church will have to be broken before there can be democracy in Malta.

★

WE WERE ASSURED by Norman St. John-Stevas, however, that the world is "witnessing an extraordinary revival in the life of the Catholic Church as she leaves the Counter-Reformation behind and moves forward not to anathematise but to encounter contemporary civilisation and initiate a dialogue in terms which the modern world can understand" (*The Sunday Times*, 19/7/64). The immigrant Irish Church belongs to the past and a "more homogeneous, reasonable educated, Catholic middle-class" is taking its place. The educated Catholic laity is "strongly ecumenically minded in the widest sense of the word," said Mr. St. John-Stevas, and "is no longer content to be told what to do." Indeed, it will insist on being consulted and will protest if it is ignored. Mr. St. John-Stevas significantly extolled Pope John, whom Archbishop Heenan (of the "immigrant Irish Church?") recently damned with faint praise.

★

HERE IS something to ponder. Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard figure prominently in our correspondence columns this week; the former also in G. McKenzie's additional little piece on ethics. Curiously, the letters which refer to the Atheistic pessimist and the Christian existentialist all come from Scotland, and especially from Dundee. The climate perhaps?

★

LAST WEEK we printed a letter from Mrs. Madalyn Murray in which she made allegations against the Freethought Society of America. Next week we will print the Society's point of view.

Humanism: The New Image

By KIT MOUAT

"ARE HUMANISTS human?" seems to be a favourite slogan at the moment, implying that there is some doubt at any rate in the minds of some Humanists. The adjective "human" is, in Humanist terms, high praise. Oddly enough, so it is to many Christians who instead of describing their favourite clerics as "nearly divine" or "up in the clouds" (as we might expect) more often exclaim that they are "so human and down to earth." It is natural, however, for newcomers to Humanism (and even the not-so-new) to want to be able to prove that Humanists are more thoroughly human than anyone else.

I suppose we all mean by "human" those virtues we most admire. My own definition refers to the sort of person who is aware first and foremost of the humanity of other people no matter what their nationality, colour, sex, or age, recognising their problems and weaknesses as well as their talents and their achievements. The sort of person who is self-confident enough to be generous with praise and enthusiasm, affection and good humour. And this is what I want other Humanists to be, partly I suppose because it is so hard to be it oneself.

I think that the sort of critical and analytical mind that takes to Humanism can also make us too critical and demanding of others. We do not suffer fools gladly, and we are apt to find them everywhere but in the looking glass. Humanists, then, who already feel outsiders in a Christian society may well find that it is difficult to turn to their fellow believers for the approval and encouragement that they need.

For many years my own idea of a "Rationalist" was unfortunate; almost entirely masculine, enfolded in theories and aloof. Although a little more information and experience proved this to be an exaggeration, I had never thought of these preachers of tolerance as being intolerant themselves (and again experience proved me wrong). Their victims were not only Christians (as one might have expected) but Communists, Liberals, Tories, vegetarians, and quite a lot of other people who could certainly claim to be as reasonable and convinced and unfanatical as Rationalists themselves. The stake was verbal but the victims were for burning in the name of Reason. This was upsetting, for it almost seemed to offer an excuse for doing a bit of witch-hunting of one's own.

The next discovery about my fellow believers was just as great a shock. It was that many Humanists don't like admitting that they are not Christians. It seemed to have something to do with "not hurting people's feelings," but I had an idea that it was because "Humanist" was secretly considered to be inferior to "Christian." This fact, however, provided no temptation for me at all, for I am always willing to announce that I am a Humanist, given the smallest encouragement, and can see no reason at all why the fact should upset anyone else's feelings or beliefs any more than their religious faith upsets mine.

And then many Rationalists became "Humanists," and "Secularists" didn't, and there were lots of discussions as to whether Humanism was, is or is going to be a "religion" and we were almost as deep in semantic problems as the Bishop of Woolwich himself. Some Humanists seemed to want each other to be definitely committed for or against the CND (although so far as I know not even the Roman Catholics in this country insist on their members sharing the same view of disarmament). It was all very puzzling for there is every difference between a policy and a creed.

A creed cripples the mind and limits the vision but a policy organises for action. Surely we cannot even expect that those who have approached our way of life by quite different paths shall all stand on the same spot waving the same opinions about Jesus, medicine, politics or diet? Surely the summit we have reached is broad enough for us all to hold our different flags without pushing each other over the edge into irritation or distress? And isn't the variety of our approach, our personalities and ability, part of our strength? It is certainly something the Christians pride themselves on accommodating and we cannot afford to offer less. If the individual Humanist strives for a life that pays respect to all aspects of the human development and the conditions and opportunities that arise, then the whole international body of Rationalists, Secularists and Humanists must surely do the same?

What, then, was I accusing Humanists of? A lack of understanding, and humility, charity and tolerance? Taking an uneasy look at the Humanist Kit Mouat. I decided yes, far too often, yes. It is easy enough to go round criticising those who are too modest to defend themselves. If Humanism is in any way impoverished, lacking money, enthusiasm, co-operation, assistance and publicity, then each and everyone of us is responsible.

But I would never have made an Oxford Grouper with "quiet moments" of revelation and self-destruction and I quickly looked outwards again, right out this time to the non-Humanist world. What sort of impression were we making on Christians? More important still, on the Agnostics, Atheists and potential Humanists (Rationalists, Secularists)? Had anyone noticed our moments of intolerance? Had anyone registered that we, too, can compromise for comfort or safety? Had anyone seen us pretending to be Christians rather than being identified as outsiders? I hoped very much that they had not. I might not be able to demonstrate the ideal Humanist but I wanted everyone else to do it for me.

There is a lot of talk today about presenting new "images" of, say, the Army or Britain. It was Marghanita Laski who said that this is nonsense for if the Army and the country improved no one would have to bother about the image, whereas no matter how good the image, facts will out. Admittedly we still have to dispel the Soviet conception of a Dickensian Britain and stop thinking of Americans as lighting their cigars with dollar bills, but Miss Laski was of course right.

What, then, must we do for Humanism? Look hard at the old image and get rid of it, and improve the reality? No more, no less. We can pause briefly to acknowledge our inheritance, the inspiration and endeavour of our elders and betters but our lack of financial acumen has long since lost any charm it may once have had; in clearing away the cobwebs however, we shall have to try and avoid getting them in each other's hair.

Humanism must be set firmly on its feet, responsible and self-supporting; wide-awake with a clear-cut view ahead and a path to follow. We have taken our place in a world where Christianity is still powerful because it is organised and wealthy (as Mr. Abse must know better than anyone). We don't have to try and imitate the Vatican (or even the South Bank) but we may be able to learn from and acknowledge the success of Quakers who have earned world-wide respect for their activity and humane achievements.

This is a busy year for Humanists and if we want Humanism to prosper we shall never be anything but busy again. If we suffer from lack of opportunities then it is up to us to make them. I, for one am optimistic. From my own experience I know that Humanists are human!

Those people who know anything at all about us, are usually aware of some of the things we reject and oppose, (they know our "cons" but not our "pros."). I suggest that a starting slogan for Rationalists, Secularists and Humanists could well be "Convictions, Commitment and Co-existence." This could be both a reality and an acceptable image.

The First Person

HAECKEL SAID that the greatest moment in the life of a child is when it first uses the word "I" for then it springs to conscious existence. A very young child talks in the third person: "Baby is tired," it says, or "Baby wants to do this or that." But there comes a time when it says, "I want this." So it is with humanity today, wrote George Barrett. "It talks of itself invariably in the third person. It speaks of the housing, clothing, and feeding, of the people." The time was near at hand, he thought, when it will discover the first person, and then it will say we.

That will be the greatest moment in the life of humanity." Barrett was writing in 1916—of all times—not only during the worst war in history, but less than a year before his death from tuberculosis at the age of thirty. Yet he had faith: not faith in God or politicians or even "the People," but faith in what he saw as "logically the next link in a long chain of mental evolution," recognition of *The First Person*. And, that is the appropriate title of a short collection of Barrett's writings published by Freedom Press, London (2s. 6d.).

His was not a blind faith, however. He didn't regard progress as inevitable. If it were to continue, though, it was "obvious that the next step" was "to place our faith in ourselves" not in myths. And "the People" so extolled by the politicians is as much a myth as the avenging personal God.

Indeed, Barrett believed that man had changed his religion rather than got rid of it; made God "not only in his own image, but even of his own flesh and blood." Authority—"High Church, Low Church, aristocrat and democrat"—had "usurped the throne of the more abstract deity." The abolition of government was as necessary as the abolition of religion, if man were to attain liberty. "The best word, it seems to me, to describe this actual practice of liberty is 'Anarchism,' as it simply names the object and suggests the action also."

Not all readers will share George Barrett's political faith—I don't myself—but there is much that they will share with him. There is much, too, to admire in this little book, especially when one learns that its author addressed meetings almost every night in the week and would often cycle twenty miles each way to do so. This after a day's work.

C. McC.

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The Untamed Years

By ARTHUR FRANCIS

MY WEEKLY reading of the THE FREETHINKER sets my too few brain cells storming; I have to ask my weary self, "Why can't the writer put his point in plain language instead of the high-falutin' stuff. I think it is about time a lorry-driver steered a few points home. Here goes!

Having served my term of five-minute sermons at a West Ham council school, my religious education is not without the blessings of the Holy Ghost, the learned love of mankind and the importance of keeping my proper place. And my fellow-beings have given me additional knowledge of the faith, both those who practice attendance at the House of God and those who don't.

Yet very few appear to give much thought to such an important subject, though the theological shelves are full in the library, and religion is pumped over the wireless and TV as if a host of people cared about it.

What started the whole vexed question of believing in something; something that today has less general interest than the horoscope in the daily press? Were people in such a miserable state in the non-football-pools days as to wish to believe in something above? The sun was the great god once; many other hopes and fears have been invented for us silly humans. The greatest slander is to say that God made us—we should have more respect for Him.

The foolishness of humans is without limit. New foods flood the market; each day changes the lessons of yesterday. Today we argue, "topless, to be or not to be?" tomorrow we face extra millions of starving fellow-creatures who are topless with milkless breasts and starving children crying into the wildness of the night. Heathens and Christians suffer as the world turns amid America with its fifty-paged newspapers and some forgotten lands who see only the writing of death on the wall. Striped tooth-paste versus the grinning skulls of meal-less Asians.

A world gone mad. A human world; only humans could be so wicked. But there, who am I too complain as my taxes are taken for the greatest arms race of all time to stop the Russians from paying an unwelcome visit ("British business men racing to Moscow to obtain trade is quite a different matter, old boy!"). The greatest heathens of our history pleaded for world government while Christians were too busy on crusades of butchery.

Now what on this solid earth is my article all about? It is to ask that the problems we face should not be. Let us think our things and say them. We can teach the so important bottom-dog that, as the squire and his relations were thrown out of the barnyard door, so can we dispose of the "one on high." It is no use reading THE FREETHINKER with our heads high in the heavens we preach against; let us not be afraid to make the weekly readable to the weekly wage earner.

To sum up. To me, religion is an escape from the true things and problems around us. The world can be as mad or sane as we wish to make it. With that my tale is told. The words have spun my mind for a few gay minutes; tomorrow many, many minutes will be spent at the wheel of a lorry amid the traffic and its people—their habits will not reflect any special belief.

Except a wish for tomorrow on this earth.

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CORRESPONDENCE

HUMANISM

Kit Mouat, like all other people who belong to a faith, believes that the followers of her creed are different from the rest, while in reality they are much the same as everybody else. Burns rightly called people like that, the "Unco Guid."

The best definition I ever heard of Humanism was that given by Kierkegaard. "It is incredible," he wrote, "how impertinently many people nowadays urge the purely human as opposed to Christianity. And what is it we now call 'Humanism?' It is a vapourised Christianity, a culture consciousness, the drags of Christianity . . . One ought to say to Humanists: produce 'undiluted humanism, for the humanism we now have is really Christianity,' though it will not own it: but you cannot, with justice call it yours in opposition to Christianity."

The shallowness of Humanists can easily be seen in their desire to escape ill suffering and live a life of enjoyment and happiness.

ALFRED SMITH.

Kit Mouat says in her article, "Accusations Against Us": "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 'blurb,' that overstates an exciting and satisfying story."

When we consider that about two thirds of the world's population are grossly underfed, and the thousands upon thousands of tragedies which happen nearly every day, combined with the fact of the possibility of another world war, we just cannot take Mrs. Mouat's humanistic optimism seriously.

Schopenhauer once said that God must have been tortured by the devil to create such a world as ours, but Mrs. Mouat finds it all a good and satisfying exciting story. In that sense she is not so far away from the Bible as she thinks. The Book of Genesis tells us: "And God saw everything that he made, and behold, it was very good."

Even Russell, who is by no means a pessimist, called the world a horrible place.

No wise person would accept Mrs. Mouat's views regarding the world, as they are obviously gross overstatements due to a serious lack of understanding the tragic facts of life.

A. WRIGHT.

Dogmatic is a word that is often used loosely and wrongly, says Kit Mouat (3/7/64). To be dogmatic is "to assert positively," she quotes from her dictionary. But mine (Chambers's Twentieth Century) adds "overbearing," surely rightly. One can be dogmatic in one's behaviour as well as one's beliefs, and the Humanist who bangs on the table and shouts "I don't believe in God," is dogmatic in this "overbearing" way.

H. CARTER.

CHARLIE PEACE

If Mr. Micklewright really wanted to show us that Charlie Peace would have been a bad character whatever his views had been he should have said so in his article, but he did not. Why bring religion into the subject at all if it had no bearing on Peace's character? Surely the mention of religion was meaningless from that point of view seeing that the article was written

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from an anti-religious viewpoint.

There is nothing in Mr. Underwood's shallow criticism that a deeper understanding of human nature would not put right. To this end I would recommend to him the works of Kierkegaard, Kant and Schopenhauer for study. As to his assertion that Humanism is not a Religion, noted Humanists would disagree—did not Huxley term it "Religion without Revelation?"

G. MCKENZIE.

GOD AND SEX

I am sorry Mr. Snook is so worried that rationalists seem obsessed with "God" and "Sex" (THE FREETHINKER, 3/7/64), but perhaps this is a reflection of the society in which we live and must react against.

Alec Brown, in his translator's introduction to Zola's *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* in 1956 wrote: "The obscurantist forces of religion are restlessly active. Here and there, taking advantage of the flabbiness of thought and betrayal of many scientists, they have latterly even made some advance. The problems of sex and of the allied questions of continence and chastity, are still with us. They are indeed unresolved . . ." Believing this description an accurate one, who is to fight, if freethinkers forget all about it?

DENIS COBELL.

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