

The Freethinker

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WHEN the late Pope John XXIII called together the Vatican Council now sitting at Rome, one of the major objectives was to bring about some measure of Christian unity, in face of the rising tide of atheism, communism and other professedly anti-Christian forces. For this purpose, Pope John appointed a permanent committee under the chairmanship of the German Jesuit, Father Bea, whom he soon after promoted to the rank of cardinal. The present Archbishop of Westminster—and, no doubt, future Cardinal—Heenan was also a member of the Committee. On Pope John's death, the present Pope (Paul VI, the former Cardinal Montini of Milan), continued the committee which, under its official designation as the Secretariat of Christian Unity, is still functioning in Rome under the same chairman.

The Vatican Council votes for Unity

A few weeks ago, the no doubt arduous work put in by His Eminence Cardinal Bea and his cosmopolitan colleagues (the secretary is a Dutch cleric) received its canonical recognition and tangible reward when the Second Vatican Council, now in its final definitive session, voted by an apparently overwhelming majority in favour of Christian reunion. Not only did the Council record such a vote, but it added the startling admission that the Vatican, "the one true Church", itself had to share responsibility for the sharp divisions which have been the normal accompaniment of Christianity in modern times. The adjective "startling" in connection with this admission would appear to be the only proper qualifying term to use.

For when one thinks of the torrents of denunciations that have in past ages (and not long ago either) issued from Rome in ferocious condemnation of advocates of Christian reunion with Protestant "heretics" and Eastern Orthodox schismatics, it is clear that a remarkable change has actually taken place. The present writer has, on occasions, been criticised for emphasising the adaptability of the Church of Rome, but surely the Second Vatican Council, especially during the last few weeks, must have proved this flexibility up to the proverbial hilt. Since the opening of its final session early in September, the Council has not only voted in favour of Christian reunion—to prevent which at the time of the Reformation the Vatican burned alive countless heretics and turned half Europe into a wilderness in the course of the Thirty Years War (1618-48)—it has heeded (and apparently applauded) the hitherto unmentionable assertion by Dr. Lucy, the Bishop of Cork, that atheists themselves might be *bona fide* and in good faith!

According to which assertion, secularists may not only hope for salvation themselves, but may even perhaps hope to have their celestial sojourn enlivened by the eminent company of, say, Charles Bradlaugh and Robert G. Ingersoll. Perhaps—who knows?—even by those distinguished past editors of THE FREETHINKER, G. W.

Foote and Chapman Cohen. For the theological possibilities opened up by such an assertion, are virtually illimitable! And yet we are still told in certain quarters that Rome is *semper eadem* (always the same) that the Papacy remains oblivious to change!

Hang Together or . . .

The facts of course are that after a prolonged intellectual hibernation—one which has in fact lasted since the victory of the Jesuit-led Counter-Reformation at the Council of Trent (mid 16th century)—the Vatican has been abruptly awakened by the spectacular advances made by the modern scientific revolution (even earlier in this century it was still

confined to a few advanced lands) and by the worldwide spread of scepticism, of atheism, agnosticism and materialism which have logically followed in its train. As a percipient ex-clerical critic (the late Joseph McCabe) noted already at the turn of this century, if matters were to continue as they were already, then the Church of Rome would awake from its lethargy with the roar of a great battle in its ears.

That time has now finally arrived. The Vatican, with its vast terrestrial experience over 2,000 years, evidently fully realises how perilous is its present situation, hence its sudden *volte face*, its present-day switch-over manifest in the recent vote at the Council upon Christian unity. Today, the effective motto of Rome is that of the cynical old realist, Lord Melbourne (Queen Victoria's first Prime Minister) when during the Chartist era of incipient revolution, he made this despairing appeal to his quarrelsome Cabinet: "Gentlemen, for God's sake let us all hang together for otherwise we shall certainly all hang separately". Pope Paul and his experienced advisers, the back room boys of the Vatican, in their infallible wisdom would surely say "amen" to that.

A Clerical Popular Front

We have noted above the present views of Pope Paul (who appears to follow Pope John's general line but with much less vigour and driving power), Cardinal Bea and most of their colleagues in the Vatican Council. But proverbially it takes two to make a bargain. Will the non-Roman Christian Churches respond to this appeal, for after all most of them have felt the heavy hand of Rome in the past? The Vatican in these days of Paul VI may welcome Archbishop Ramsey of Canterbury to its fold, but in earlier centuries the Vatican—in the days of Pope Paul IV (1554-9)—burned Dr. Ramsey's eminent predecessor, Archbishop Cranmer, alive at the stake. There are surely many bitter memories to be lived down before the Protestant Churches go over to Rome or Rome comes to them. One has to add also that some present-day Catholic activities in, say Franco's Spain, are not precisely calculated to allay Protestant suspicions.

There are also formidable theological difficulties; in particular, papal infallibility. For how is it even theoretically possible for fallible Protestant and Orthodox (Eastern

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Vatican and Christian Unity

By F. A. RIDLEY

Churches ever to unite on anything like equal terms with the infallible Church of Rome? At the same time the non-Roman Churches also have their problems; they too are menaced by the ubiquitous spread of atheism and of world-wide rejection of the supernatural. In such a dire predicament, at least a working agreement with their vastly experienced "big brother" in the Vatican is not without attraction. I do not think the recent efforts of the Secretariat for Christian Unity will lead to any large schemes of corporate organisational reunion between Rome and either the Protestant or Orthodox Churches (if it does, it would be a *bona fide* miracle and Cardinal Bea would probably be canonised in due course); what is most likely to happen as a result of the present activities of the Second Vatican Council, is the formation of a "popular front." That is to say, a common agreement between Rome and the non-Roman Churches both to

refrain from attacking each other and to concentrate mutually upon resisting the spread of irreligion.

Such a loose federation (as it would virtually amount to) would appear to be quite feasible in present circumstances, though naturally in any such arrangement by virtue of its vastly greater experience, numbers and financial resources, would take the lead. Some arrangement on these lines probably represents the present-day aim of the Vatican Council, and would presumably satisfy the ambitions of Cardinal Bea and his colleagues. Of course and particularly if this arrangement works out, appetite will come with eating. At the moment however, Christianity is upon the defensive; for the first time in recorded history, the initiative has passed to atheism. It is indeed this absolutely unprecedented occurrence that governs the entire present situation, including especially the Vatican Council and its policy of Christian reunion.

In Quest of the Presence

By COLIN McCALL

CANON M. A. C. WARREN, in introducing *The Secular Promise* by Martin Jarrett-Kerr (SCM Press 18s.) tells us that it "adds a new dimension to our understanding of the Christian Presence in man's religious consciousness". This bold, if obscure claim rests on alleged evidence of what the Canon calls "the *anima naturaliter Christiana*" in secular humanism. It is a claim worth examining.

Father Jarrett-Kerr admits that the Christian argument is circular: "the being of God cannot be demonstrated to one who is not already in some sense aware of it", and "man's ruined nature" can "only be persuasively argued among those who already have some concept of 'sin'". Yet these two concepts (God's existence and human sin) have, he says, found their way into man's consciousness. And "if we believe in God we must believe that he knows what that way is. For God cannot leave himself without witness to those, and even through those, who appear totally unaware of the true nature of their testimony." Humanists are, Father Jarrett-Kerr acknowledges, "fully awake to the fact that the era of economic affluence poses its own dangers: that 'I'm all right, Jack' is pride before a fall." If they can go a step further, he says, "and see that pride as *hubris*, they will be close to acknowledging the Majesty which is implied in that very notion—for *hubris* is essentially insult, insult to the gods."

This argument, I hardly need say, contains not a shred of evidence; it is assertion and assumption from beginning to end. Neither of the two concepts has found its way into my consciousness, for instance, nor, I suggest, into that of other second-generation Humanists; while those who have outgrown their Christian upbringing will generally have discarded belief in God and sin. If one believes in God, one may or may not believe that he "cannot leave himself without witness" to unbelievers; that is something for Christians to argue about among themselves, but whatever conclusion they come to will be no more than an opinion. That economic affluence "poses its dangers", I grant; but they have nothing to do with God or gods: they are completely secular. To introduce the quite irrelevant "pride before a fall" in order to equate pride with *hubris* and thereby bring imaginary Humanists "close to acknowledging" an imaginary "Majesty", is simply juggling with words.

What satisfaction Father Jarrett-Kerr gets from this

typical piece of Christian apologetics, I don't know. He "penitently" owns to having once engaged in a "triumphal war-dance over the symbolic corpse of humanism"; now he is trying to rescue what he can from a dying Christianity. But to weave patterns with words and then to foist those patterns on reality is a poor substitute for the evidence that Canon Warren had led us to expect. And the Father's final pages are in fact pathetic. He entitles his last chapter "The Resilience of the Natural", because he believes that "this phrase corresponds to a reality, and therefore that that reality is important for Christians to note and to appreciate." For, he says, "if life comes from God, then wherever the living is found, even in the midst of death, there God must to that extent be active in it."

To *what* extent, he doesn't say. Instead he tells us a (true) parable about twin babies who were reared for six months with "as complete unemotionality" as possible: not spoken to, shown no affection, indeed treated with cold indifference. The experiment proved too much, however, for the experimenters; they broke down and could not maintain the unnatural relationship. And, Father Jarrett-Kerr says, "We have the highest authority for believing that the resilience of the natural shown in this particular way and by these particular agents, represents a kind of epiphany: 'For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven'".

The Father has set out "to discover the strength and weakness of modern secularism, its inner contradictions but also its power of self-criticism and recuperation"; and to see whether there may be a "presence of Christ" amid "all this". Well, he has found his Christ in the perfectly natural fondness of men and women for babies.

For me, *The Secular Promise* is very disappointing. I had hoped it would present some sort of challenge to secularism (it is good to be kept on one's mettle!) but it contains none. It is deplorably sloppily written—as the reader may have noticed already—and though the author has "explored widely", it has rarely been at first hand. Indeed it would be hard to find a book with so many second-hand quotations. Harold Laski's views on T. S. Eliot, for instance, are taken from D. E. S. Maxwell, not direct from *Faith, Reason and Civilisation*. Unimportant perhaps? Well then, Freud. Accessible enough, surely!

(Concluded on page 348)

The Fate of the Free Churches

By F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

Half a century or more ago, the world must have looked rosy for the Free Churchman alert to the future. Protestant nonconformity had captured those of the lower middle classes who felt inhibited by the atmosphere of squiredom still prevailing in the Church of England. The nineteenth century had seen striking advances among those classes whom Matthew Arnold had labelled "Philistines". Congregationalism was an active force in the towns and some of its ministers had made scholarly contributions to the advanced biblical studies which marked the period. If Dr. Forsyth had become a pillar of orthodoxy, he was paralleled by the outbreak of the "New Theology" campaign with its popular heterodox representation of a mystical and vague liberal Christianity based upon something closely akin to pantheism. The Baptists had a large proletarian following, whilst Unitarianism profited not a little from the wave of generalised liberality sweeping over the country. Names like those of Dr. Martineau or Dr. Estlin Carpenter denoted a Unitarian scholarship akin to such names as those of Edward Grubb or William Braithwaite among the Quakers. There were marked alliances with the Liberal Party in politics which led to the 1906 election and the return of more dissenters to the House of Commons than had been the case since the days of Oliver Cromwell. Dissent became linked with the cause of secular education in the state schools and the voice of the Baptist, Dr. Clifford, was sufficient to shake whole multitudes. It must have seemed that the country was going to become increasingly Protestant and middle class and that the religious affiliations of such a sociological change would be found in nonconformity. Nor indeed, was culture wholly forgotten or overlooked. If nonconformity had only made one notable contribution to the world of letters since the days of John Bunyan—that of Mark Rutherford—and if it had been cruelly castigated for its vulgarity by Mrs. Oliphant in *Salem Chapel*, yet organs, Gothic architecture and stained glass windows were leaving their mark. The more educated chapel deacon was scarcely such a complete boor as his father had been before him.

If this be a fair picture of nonconformity between 1906 and 1910, the Indian summer of nineteenth century liberalism, it is certainly not a true picture in 1964. The once powerful chapel of the town has only too often been sold for a cinema many years ago, ministers are declining in number and academic ability, congregations are shrinking to a vanishing point. On September 30th, the Free Church Federal Council was addressed by Christopher Driver, the well-known journalistic commentator upon religious affairs. His speech, reported in *The Guardian* for October 1st, seems to have been received with shocked surprise. Mr. Driver was under no illusion about shrinking age both in numbers and in social importance. "In declining over a period of fifty years from perhaps twelve per cent of the population to three per cent, the Free Churches as institutions have in fact been punched much further towards the margins of English life than the Christian faith itself has been—and this process is irreversible." The speaker must have rubbed salt into this wound when he went on to expound the point that the Free Churches had little to offer the more imaginative over the next fifty years by calling upon them to sacrifice energy and leisure to "serving Christian institutions whose life and liturgy offers so little that is excellent of its kind". For

Mr. Driver, the Free Church Federal Council, through a lack of machinery for the ascertaining of social opinion, failed to interpret the feelings of ordinary men and women. His example was that it turned "Christian thumbs down" on Mr. Abse's divorce bill when forced to consider it during last year. Of course, the speaker did not go unchallenged. Dr. Aubrey Vine, the secretary of the Council, claimed that it was rightly prejudiced against homosexuality, easy divorce and abortion, whilst Principal Ithal Jones remarked that Mr. Abse's bill introduced a new principle in marriage and divorce which Christians could therefore not accept. This last ditch argument of the Principal drew from Mr. Driver the retort that a new principle was needed in British divorce law, that the Archbishop of Canterbury had set up a strong committee to look for one, and that to make the matrimonial offence the sole reason for divorce was a medieval survival.

The whole picture is of interest, as it shows nonconformity as fighting a rearguard action in a changing environment which has badly worsted it. The nonconformist world, which reached its apex in 1906 was a part of a generalised middle class trademen's movement which faded as education and social services spread and a wider public entered the political arena. As Professor Laski pointed out many years ago when reviewing R.V. Holt's *Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress*, the whole thesis of the book was mistaken. Early nineteenth century Unitarianism was socially progressive simply because it was a part of a rationalising middle-class movement seeking political reform and social change. It did not dominate this movement but was merely an unimportant by-product of it. The battles for teetotalism and anti-gambling, which marked the Free Churches at their strongest phase, were examples of the type of negative morality having its roots in the Puritan virtue of thrift with its suspicion of any spending money upon pleasure. Much of its Protestantism was merely an over-simplification. The plain man did not like Catholic worship because there was in it a mystery which the plain man did not understand. In theology as elsewhere, there was suspicion of the professional expert. The minister might possess a string of academic qualifications and might give sound reasons for any heterodox opinion or practice which he espoused, but it was the plain common sense of the semi-literate deacon or member of the chapel committee which would prevail in the end. Likewise, although the voting of the church meeting might appear to be an excellent and democratic procedure, it would be he of the loudest mouth and longest purse who would carry the day.

This world was rudely shattered in 1914 and it was well on the way out by the period of the inter-war years. Mr. Driver has assessed the fall from twelve to three per cent of the population. This is certainly a tremendous proportionate loss when regarded over about fifty years and he is probably right in saying that it is greater than the losses suffered by contemporary Christianity as a whole. Certainly, to the general observer, once-powerful groupings such as the Congregationalists or the Unitarians, merely count for nothing in the wider world of to-day. There is scarcely a minister whose name is known outside his own little circle. Gone for ever are the days of Dale and Guinness Rogers, of Martineau Wickstead. Again,
(Concluded on page 351)

This Believing World

Cardinals, bishops and priests, cheered when the latest innovations in their religion came from the Vatican Council. They are so thrilling and world-shattering that we must record them for posterity. The first is that the priest must now read the Gospel *facing* the congregation instead of having his back to it. And the second is that all altars in new churches must also face worshippers so that they can follow the service better. The only wonder is that nobody in the Church of Rome appears to have ever thought of these tremendous changes before. It just goes to show what prayers and faith in the Holy Mission of Rome can do in the hearts of mortal men.

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An article in the London "Evening Standard" (September 29th) is heavy with sorrow at the way Anglicans "drag behind in worship and church work." Just think of these depressing figures: Only one per cent of people who claim to be Anglicans attend church regularly; 53 per cent of Catholics do so, and 50 per cent of Nonconformists. This is bad and sad enough, but what about being confirmed? Only 35 per cent of Anglicans bother, compared with 58 per cent of Roman Catholics, and 63 per cent Nonconformists. And worse follows. Only 18 per cent of confirmed Anglicans go to church.

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These figures and many others quite as bad for the Church of England, were made known by the Youth Fellowship of St. Francis' Church, Vauxhall. And it was added that church attendance "is highest among scientists and technologists, and lowest among manual workers"—a conclusion which may or may not be true. Who are these scientists and technologists who believe in devils, angels, miracles, and wholesale resurrections? If they exist why cannot we have further particulars of their faith?

★

As a footnote to the fall of Mr. Khrushchev, the *Daily Express* (October 16th) added "some of the things he said," one of them being, "If God existed today he would chase the capitalists as Jesus chased the moneylenders out of the temple". Whether Khrushchev said this, or has been wrongly translated, we cannot say, but the fact remains that Jesus did not chase any moneylenders out of the temple.

★

The people he chased were moneychangers and they were doing a necessary job. Animal sacrifices were part of the Jewish religion then, and the people had to buy the animals at the entrance to the synagogue. That is how they changed their money: exactly the same method as at the entrance of most of our cathedrals when people buy picture postcards or religious souvenirs. The story in Matthew, if taken literally, is just silly, and we find few parsons refer to it these days.

★

The eminent theologian who does his best to instil Christianity into the readers of the London *Evening News* has at last discovered (October 10th) that the Holy Apostles served "our Blessed Lord" very badly with their "frequent folly and pettiness". Voltaire called them "a dozen knaves as ignorant as owls", and in "a Saturday Reflection", the writer points out that the Gospels "seem to go out of their way to mention such failures on the part of those nearest to Our Lord".

★

But great is the love of God for erring man, and "understanding of what is required of us comes by faith" so no doubt the Apostles are all in Heaven sharing the bliss and

grace of still being nearest to Jesus. At least, that is what Christians believe. The truth is something quite different. Outside the New Testament, there is no mention whatever in contemporary secular history of any of the Apostles. They are literary characters.

IN QUEST OF THE PRESENCE

(Concluded from page 346)

yet here we have quotations from *On Narcissism and Autobiographical Study with a New Society article* as reference. "What is it specially that Freud uncovers?" Father Jarrett-Kerr asks. Jacques Rivière, we learn, has "stated it well", and Mr. Philip Rieff has said something else. The Father thinks Mr. Rieff "is right", and further registers his "agreement with Rieff... when he concludes...". There follow two quotations from Alasdair MacIntyre's "useful little philosophical study of the Unconscious"; then at last we seem actually to have got through to Freud himself, discussing a case of female homosexuality. But though the Father gives the full reference in the Standard Edition of Freud, he has taken it as "cited in Rieff". Next we have Brill on Freud as cited in Rieff, and so it goes on. "We can not forget the story he [Freud] told himself about his youth..." We certainly can't—if it is in Rieff as well as in *The Interpretation of Dreams!* Or in Norman O. Brown, who occasionally takes Rieff's place as provider of Freudian texts. It must be insisted that "go back to the source" is a fundamental maxim of serious criticism.

For a Christian interpretation of the growth of scientific thought, Father Jarrett-Kerr goes back to a series of articles (in *Mind* in 1934-5) by the late Michael B. Foster, which confuses a world that is intelligible with one that is intelligent—and therefore the work of an omnipotent creator. With Dr. K. M. Pannikar the Father confuses irreligious and non-religious in connection with a secular state. He discerns, albeit "obscurely" a "presence of Christ" in a "genuine understanding" of the "nature and limits of scientific method"; sitting down "humbly before the facts" (my italics) being "appropriate to man's lowly conditions taught in the Bible". Which is surely too absurd to argue. We have, the Father goes on, "noted the positive contributions of scientific humanism, but does this mean that we can uncritically accept all that the modern world says—that somehow in all its findings, even though these are often mutually contradictory, there is, quite undifferentiated, the voice of God? And if this is absurd—as it must be—how do we differentiate?"

By "the language", is his answer to this curious question. And it signals the entry of F. R. Leavis—accompanied, of course by D. H. Lawrence. "What we need and shall continue to need not less, is something with the livingness of the deepest vital instinct", Father Jarrett-Kerr quotes from the good Doctor's attack on Sir Charles Snow; "an intelligence, a power—rooted, strong in experience, and supremely human—of creative response to the new challenges of time; something that is alien to either of Snow's cultures". What precisely we need may still seem obscure, so the Father quotes the Doctor's quotation from Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, where Tom Brangwen, watching by the fold in lambing-time under the night sky, "knew he did not belong to himself" Behold the presence!

— NEXT WEEK —

DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICAN
ATTITUDES TO CHURCH
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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

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

(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

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, November 1st, 6.45 p.m.: Miss J. M. LEVY, "Cancer Education".

Havering Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, November 3rd, 8 p.m.: A. H. HARVEY, "Does the Youth Service Work?"

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 1st, 6.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Socialism and Religion".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1.), Sunday, November 1st, 7.30 p.m.: ERIC MAPLE, "Ghosts".

National Secular Society, Secular Education Month, November, 1964. Details of Public Meetings on "Religion in the School" on back page.

North Staffordshire Humanist Group. (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme.) Friday, October 30th, 7.15 p.m., a meeting.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1.), Sunday, November 1st, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM "How new can Morality be?"

Tuesday, November 3rd, 7.30 p.m.: KENNETH SOLLY, "Problems and needs of the Mentally Handicapped".

Notes and News

WHEN the Pope confirmed—during the canonisation ceremonies for 22 African martyrs—that he would be flying to Bombay for the Eucharistic Congress, he observed that Asia seemed to be waking up and searching for its future course, that its peoples were stirring themselves and rising up under the impact of modern scientific and technical progress (*The Guardian*, 19/10/64). "We feel a growing conviction", Pope Paul said, "that it is our duty to draw these peoples closer to us in a more brotherly dialogue, to show them the signs of our affectionate esteem for them." So, he was becoming "a missionary, which means a witness, a shepherd, an apostle on the move"—against the wishes of some members of the Roman Curia. More than once—according to *The Birmingham Post* (19/10/64)—"authoritative Vatican sources have tried to discourage speculation that the Pope would go." It seems, however, that the Pope's missionary spirit has won the day.

"PURE" Buddhism, we are often told, is not really a religion but an ethic. But where—outside perhaps a meeting under the chairmanship of Mr. Christmas Humphreys—does one find pure Buddhism? The veneration shown towards a piece of bone allegedly recovered from Buddha's ashes "after his cremation 2,500 years ago" and brought to England by the Prime Minister of Ceylon is surely as silly as Catholic veneration of the bones of saints. Whether it was the "importance of this gift of a relic" (as Dennis Bardens said in the *Birmingham Post*, 14/10/64) that accounted for the presence at London Airport of "many diplomatic missions and the representative of the Queen", or whether they were there in Mrs. Bandaranaike's honour, we don't know. Mrs. Bandaranaike hoped that the gift would help to strengthen the ties of friendship between Britain and Ceylon, but we can think of less superstitious ways of furthering a good cause.

★

WRITING as a practising schoolmaster for many years, S. F. Bennett was sure (in a letter to the *Yorkshire Post*, 19/10/64) that the whole approach to RI must be radically altered. Much that was taught to children about the Old and New Testaments took little account of modern biblical research, Mr. Bennett said, and children were, "by implication, led to believe that theological assertions are historical propositions or scientific explanations." Yet, Mr. Bennett added, it is now clear that "little is known of the historical Jesus; the Gospels are not *history* books." When the children grew up they were often puzzled and bewildered and came to the "natural but erroneous conclusion" that Christianity is "nonsense." Erroneous?

★

THE REV. ALAN JONES, vicar of St. Catherine's Church, Leyton, would like to see a new set of wedding vows "worded appropriately for divorced persons" (*The Guardian*, 19/10/64). Perhaps one day the Church will put into action what many of us believe, Mr. Jones said, "that the innocent parties getting married for a second time should not be denied the spiritual benefits of a church wedding." In some cases divorce may be the only way out of a miserable existence, he said; perhaps the welfare of children was at stake, or one of the partners had committed adultery or was suffering from mental illness. In many such cases, Mr. Jones thought, "a divorce may be a good thing." He should speak to Dr. Ramsey about it.

★

RECENTLY, in his weekly column in *The Guardian*, Brian Inglis referred to F. A. Hornibrook as "the late". Mr. Inglis visited Mr. Hornibrook to apologise and found him looking as powerful as he did when he posed for the illustrations of some of his exercises in the first edition of *The Culture of the Abdomen*. And we can well believe, as Mr. Inglis reported, that Mr. Hornibrook "unleashed a flow of admirable good sense about the condition of medicine orthodox and unorthodox today"

★

THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN has banned *Meals on Wheels*, a new play by Charles Wood, due to be performed next month by the Bristol Old Vic Company, because he considers it blasphemous. Mr. Val May, director of the company, told *The Guardian* (20/10/64) that the changes required by the Lord Chamberlain altered the play so fundamentally that it had been decided not to proceed with it at present. The changes mainly affected the last scene in which the central character, an anti-Christian, harangued Christ. "I thought blasphemy went out in the Middle Ages", Mr. Wood commented.

The Awful Truth About Convents

(Concluded from page 343)

By GILLIAN HAWTIN

THE monastic institution means that the best brains and characters are creamed off into a *dead end* occupation, and barren life. This religion is, taken to its ultimate conclusion, nihilistic. Christians of all sorts, and Catholics in particular, make great play of the person being of great worth in the eyes of God, but the fact is, the Christian life is abnegation, mortification, death. It does not deepen and enlarge the personality, except in so far as suffering gives a character fibre. It does warp the mind, narrow it; every action, every activity is done as if under the eyes of another world, to gain merit, i.e. to increase one's place in the celestial hierarchy. This is what Christianity is for. Nothing else is important.

"Do you know how long I have been here?" a nun confided to me. "Eighteen years. It's a long time, isn't it? I wouldn't have done what I did, if I had my time over again. It is very difficult not to get narrow minded." Naturally, when the same people, the same thoughts, the same actions, constitute each day. And consider that being broad minded (to her) probably left off where we should begin! Mercifully, most Christians fail to take their creed to its logical end. But while living lives in this world much like you and me, the laity are bearers of the virus; they do not understand what a vocation is; it is shrouded in mystery for the clergy. And the clergy tell them a religious vocation is that most pleasing to God. So, often uncomprehending, they yield their children. The religious does, however, take her religion to its ultimate end, and she often arrogates to herself the words of St. Paul, "If Christianity be not true, we are of all men the most miserable." In the Catholic viewpoint, to gain one's life (salvation) one must lose one's life.

Not only do the unfortunate inmates of religious houses stultify their own existences, however, dragging it out through a miniature of unchanging regulations. These are the people who teach *our* Catholic children, these are the able, idealistic people, perverted to do the work of something far beyond their understanding — an evil system — people who could be out in society playing their part in it, living full, secular lives of their own.

If grace is all it's made out to be, why cannot the child be "safe" in a state school? The Catholic replies, "evil communications corrupt good manners." He believes in an unseen world of devils, and in the weakness of the flesh, and believes that the spirit of the world is opposed to his religion. Why cannot we see that his religion is opposed to us? The truth is that the child has to be indoctrinated, encased, have all his senses moulded in his formative years.

Gratia non tollit naturam — the Catholic quotes the schoolmen, which is, that, as God made nature, so nature must not be disregarded, but grace builds *on* nature. I have not seen any grace, or its "operations": I can make a very good case out for the proposition that natural means are doing all the work. A child is born into a Catholic family, is in that environment for the first five years, then in a Catholic school from five to fifteen or eighteen years of age. Few find their way out. The indifferent "leak," but many do not rationalise or intellectualise their break. They are bad Catholics, but still they are Catholics. In this sense it is often true to say, "once a Catholic, always a Catholic."

Sacraments, sacramentals, numerous small regulations of fasting, the obligation to Sunday mass, Easter confession, and communion are not channels of grace, but they are a thousand small threads which tie down the personality like the strings that held down Gulliver.

If a girl is suitable, it will not deter the Superior if she is not a Catholic. Every human being alive is potentially a Catholic — so the girl may be hers. So the Superior sets out to ensure by the most earthly efficient means a result she will ascribe to the Supreme Being. The younger the postulant, the more malleable. Thus, unknown to herself, the girl is destined for sacrifice before she has had time to live, to reach maturity — she grows out of gay and carefree childhood into nundom and the obligations of a vocation which — teaches the Church — she may disregard at the peril of her soul. "I often wonder" — I heard a Jesuit once say — "if a young man who becomes a priest realises how much he gives up." You will recall the recent case in France of a laicised priest who was, after the woman who loved him had waited twelve years, *allowed* to marry her. How much this means in terms of human misery! The man is reported to have said that he had not realised the psycho-physical implications of what he had done earlier. And you cannot be ordained a priest until you are twenty-four. (Not that candidates for the priesthood, too, are not drawn into the orbit even before the age of sixteen — so ridiculously early, one would have thought — so allows them to go to the novitiate proper.) A few orders are wise enough to counsel a girl to leave school and return later, but most prefer not to risk losing any likely candidate. Novice mistresses complain that they cannot mould girls older than 20-21. What they mean is, that by this time the senses, reflexes, habits, are too fixed to respond to the sausage machine. Doesn't it rather give the game away? After all, it's all meant to be done by Divine Grace. Catholic parents believe that as parents of a religious, they themselves will be saved; so if the family is large, they tend to sacrifice a daughter, a son. This is not doctrine, only "pious belief," but it is widely held. It may account for a number of "spoiled" priests. There are spoiled girls too!

The novitiate will usually be in a remote country house. The postulant is dressed distinctively. Her luggage will be locked away. She has no access to any money. In theory she is free to leave any time she likes. In practice she may have to be equally as strong minded to leave as to show that amount of perseverance which the pursuit of any prolonged course of training requires. "The first years are the hardest," a nun said to me. This is not because the life is strange and new. These are the years in which the surrender of self, the surrender of will, the surrender of all, is made. A person who has not been through it can only imagine what disruption this can cause to the personality. See how long it took Monica Baldwin — as she related it in *I Leapt Over the Wall* — to readjust herself to secular life. "It is a book" — Reverend Mother said to me, "which should never have been written." Indeed it should not! It illustrates the difficulties of one who had to build her life afresh. She took the step. How many more are deterred? There was no concern from my Reverend Mother for the situation that the woman found herself in, only concern for

the "scandal." After all, she added, lots of women come out. This is true, though not much known. The Church has loosened up in recent years — doubtless partly to avoid "scandals." Let the woman reader think of all the things she has done since the age of seventeen, and this condemnation to a life of drabness, without sex, without colour, shows itself to be the *really* awful truth about nuns.

THE FATE OF THE FREE CHURCHES

(Concluded from page 347)

within the narrower sphere of religion itself, Mr. Driver is probably right in allying the decline with the unaesthetic and uncultured attitude of the Free Churches towards the religious cultus. Religious worship had its rise in such cults as the sacred dance or in the mystery cults of the ancient world. They embodied a sense of drama, mystery and awe, a side which Dr. Havelock Ellis stressed when he considered the mysticism embodied in the Easter ceremonies in a Spanish cathedral from his humanist standpoint. Traditionally, Christian worship has been sacramental and Catholic merely because these very qualities are older than Christianity, the point which Professor Kirsopp Lake never tired of making. The centuries have drawn into it aesthetic qualities which evoke the atmosphere of the mystical. For anybody whose mind is attuned in this direction, it is impossible to imagine that he will be attracted by the barren ugliness of popular dissenting Protestantism, with its condemnation of any suggestion of ornamentation or improvement, by an evocation of the superstitious refrain that it is Roman Catholic. The case against Rome from the freethinking angle is tremendously powerful but it does not rest upon a support of Protestant cult of the ignorant and unvarnished ugliness, which robs Free Church worship of any intrinsic culture.

If Mr. Driver's conclusions be correct, the greatest losses within contemporary Christianity are to be found among the Free Churches. This end might have been expected. There are two logical standpoints as Charles Bradlaugh remarked, Rome or reason. Reason has increasingly eroded the religious survivals embodied in various liberalising positions of the past. For example, the pure theism common among liberals in the middle of the nineteenth century gave over before the century had closed to agnosticism pure and simple. Fundamentalism collapsed before advanced biblical studies but these in their turn have yielded generally to a rejection *in toto* of the Bible as a guide to life in any vital sense. The agnostics who formed the London Ethical Society with Sir Leslie Stephen or the Ethical Church with Dr. Coit accepted Christian morality whilst rejecting its supernaturalism. The present-day liberal thinker tends to challenge Christian morality altogether. As a result, the temporising positions of the liberal Protestantism which seeks to restate Christianity in rational and ethical terms, the position of Harnack in *What is Christianity?*, has broken down before deeper rationalistic challenges just as its central figure of Jesus as the historical and ethical prophet of righteousness was fatally undermined by Schweitzer half a century ago. Freethought has become increasingly secular and humanitarian. On the other side, Anglo-Catholicism has clearly passed its zenith and Rome is reaping the fruits of its "second spring".

In the last resort, if Mr. Driver's analysis means anything at all, it means that the real battle of today is between a Rome, towards whom the ecumenical movement is attracting such other bodies as the Church of England, and an out-and-out secularism basing its view of

life and of morality upon the utilitarian ends which reason dictates. There is no halfway house and, for the liberal of today, the traditional conception of sin and redemption upon which Catholicism is finally based is as dead as any other piece of fairy lore dating from the childhood of the world. The Free Churches have failed to realise this fact and they have failed to understand that morality is a field into which psychology and sociology have penetrated. Homosexuality, divorce and abortion, to take the three cases named by Dr. Aubrey Vine, are merely no longer moral issues which can be understood by references to an antique doctrine of sin or to vague remarks about Christian principles. They call for a far deeper analysis which makes the opposition of the Free Church Federal Council to Mr. Leo Abse's divorce bill appear merely silly. Certainly, as Mr. Driver reminded his hearers, the Archbishop of Canterbury is wiser in his generation, but even his approach with its cautious glances at the law of Belgium scarcely compares as an overall investigation with a secularised thought which refuses to allow any place to supernatural dictates in any shape or form.

There is one basic lesson to be learned from Mr. Driver's lecture. The Free Churches, the core of Anglo-Saxon middle class Protestantism no longer count for anything at all in the England of today. Exactly nothing is to be gained by seeking out compromise with liberal Christians in the educational field or by trying to attract an increased clientele through pretending to be ethical religionists or some other thing equally obtuse. It is futile to claim that there is no great or final difference between the liberal Christian, the religionist and the humanist. The vital issue of to-day is clear-cut between an authoritarian Church claiming totalitarian social control, fighting the twentieth century with the aid of right-wing forces of reaction, intolerant to a degree in its demand for the dictatorship of a theocracy, and a secular approach which realises the immense dangers of the force to which it is opposed, refusing to temporise or to compromise itself with half-accepted religious assertions, clear in its mind that the vivid distinction of the day is one between Rome or reason, preparing itself for a naked social and political struggle which all of the indications suggest will be fought with increasing bitterness during the next fifty years.

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WORLD UNION OF FREETHINKERS AN APPEAL

AN extraordinary congress of the World Union of Free-thinkers was held at Brussels on August 29-30th, last, when, as part of the reorganisation proposed at Duisburg the preceding year, an Information Secretary was appointed as a member of the Executive. His work will be as follows:

1. to develop better co-operation among the affiliated members of the Union; 2. to establish contacts with free-thinking and humanist bodies in all parts of the world; 3. to promote generally an understanding of the problems of Free-thinkers in individual countries.

An international Information and Press Service will undertake these services from the beginning of 1965. This service will be, as required by the articles of association of the Union, quite independent of any political party or outlook. It will appeal to all members of the Union, and address itself to all Freethinkers whether members of Free-thought organisations or not. And it asks for co-operation and support in this great and necessary work.

All who are ready to help should write to:

The World Union of Freethinkers,
Information Secretariat,
Postfach 124
5840 SCHWERTE (Ruhr)
Bundersepublik
GERMANY.

Further information will be sent on application
Hubert Freistühler, *Information Secretary, World Union of Freethinkers.*

CORRESPONDENCE

HUMANISTS AND FREETHINKERS

Reginald Underwood says in his article on "Freethinker, Humanist and Christian", that "It is virtually safe to say that all proper Freethinkers look upon themselves as Humanists in the more deliberate sense."

Is that so? Well, personally speaking I just can't agree with this view. It seems difficult now even to define what a Freethinker is, let alone claim that a Freethinker and a Humanist are interchangeable terms, especially after Mr. Ridley upset the apple-cart by praising Calvin and Stalin.

Perhaps some wisacre will be soon writing in THE FREETHINKER an article in favour of Holy Moses or the Bible and claiming him as a progressive figure in history.

WILLIAM STARKIE

THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

I remain quite unimpressed by F. A. Ridley's article on "Calvin, Stalin, and the Idea of Progress." Indeed the idea of progress is as repugnant to me as the idea of the Christian God of Love, especially when accepted from Mr. Ridley's Marxist point of view.

At one time we were led to believe that we were instruments of God, but now Mr. Ridley would have us believe that the crimes committed by Calvin and Stalin against human beings don't count for much, because they were major instruments of progress.

I notice Mr. Ridley criticises the murder and torture committed by the Catholics; when it comes to the men whom he thinks progressive, who are tyrants as well, we find that he is prepared even to write an appreciative commemorative article on them. What kind of freethinking is this? Surely he must think that the readers of THE FREETHINKER are easily gulled. Technological progress connotes no advance in morality. The most appalling atrocities that have happened in our own lifetimes are enough to refute the idea of moral progress in mankind. As Lamartine said, the notion of progress is a dream, a Utopia, an absurdity. And Bernard Shaw stated the verdict of history that progress is an illusion.

The classical expression given in Bury's *Idea of Progress* is hardly acceptable today. Bury of course, in 1920, could hardly have envisaged an atomic era in which people then alive would seriously have to take account of the possibility of the destruction of the world. In that sense we can excuse Bury, but we can't excuse Mr. Ridley, any more than we can excuse Calvin and Stalin for the ruthless measures they adopted against the people. Both were dictators and tyrants. The Christians often excuse murder and torture in the name of God, but Mr. Ridley

excuses it in the name of progress, especially if it is carried out by the Communists. Empty nonsense like this is passed, and still passes, for profundity!

The change from one system to another does not necessarily lead to happiness. A change of system does not necessarily mean progress, it could mean decay. Many civilisations have decayed, so why should ours be an exception? Mr. Ridley would do well to reflect a little more on these things before authoritatively asserting his views on progress.

Whether we think seriously about the violence and decadence in the world to-day we just can't take Mr. Ridley's views on progress very seriously. Progress to what?—to where?—and what then? I leave this to Mr. Ridley to fathom out, as he thinks that he has the answer to it all, and writes more like a religious man than a Freethinker.

R. SMITH

PROTESTANT RACISM

At a regional meeting of the ultra-orthodox Protestant Reformed Communities' Young People's and Study Association at Goes (Zeeland, Holland), the speaker, Mr. Bakker, declared President Verwoerd of South Africa's policies of "apartheid", aiming at self-government by the black population, thanks to separated development, to be the right ones.

Mr. Bakker foretold a still greater future for white South-Africa and recommended emigration to South Africa with a view to increasing the white population. He warned against such black leaders as Loetocli and the Rev. Martin Luther King, who "have connections with communism."

A. M. VAN DER GIEZEN
(Middleburg-Holland)

SECULAR EDUCATION MONTH, NOVEMBER 1964

"Religion in the School"

Public Meetings organised by the National Secular Society
Highgate (Archway Tavern Ballroom, Archway Corner, N.19) Friday, November 6th, 8 p.m. Speakers: David Tribe, Rosalind Rogers, Martha Blend, Joan Scott. Chair: William McIlroy.
Glasgow (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street) Sunday, November 8th, 3 p.m. Speaker: E. G. Macfarlane.
Tooting (Co-operative Hall, 180-196 Upper Tooting S.W.17) Tuesday, November 10th, 8 p.m. Speakers: Amphlett Micklewright, Margaret McIlroy, Martha Blend. Chair: Eric Kinton (Editor, *The South London Press*).
Inverness (36 Waterloo Place), Wednesday, November 11th, 7.30 p.m. Recorded speeches by David Tribe, Joan Scott, William McIlroy.
Nottingham (Adult Education Centre, 14-22 Shakespeare Street) Friday, November 13th, 7 p.m. (tea) 7.30 p.m. (meeting) Speaker: David Tribe. Nottingham NSS and Nottingham Humanists.
Birmingham (Digbeth Civic Institute, Digbeth) Saturday, November 14th, 3 p.m. Speakers: Richard Clements, David Tribe, Professor P. Sargent Florence.
Leicester (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate) Sunday, November 15th, 6.30 p.m. Speaker: David Tribe.
Manchester (Register Office Hall, 64 Lower Ormond Street, All Saints) Sunday, November 15th, 7.30 p.m. Speaker: Margaret McIlroy.
Reading (Rainbow Hall, Cheapside) Tuesday, November 17th, 8 p.m. Speakers: Margaret McIlroy, James Johnson, Dr. Ronald Goldman, Bob Crew. Chair: David Collis.
Richmond (Parkshot Rooms, Parkshot) Tuesday, November 17th, 8 p.m. Speakers: F. H. Amphlett Micklewright, Hilda Flint, G. N. Dev. Chair: Nigel Sinnott.
Poplar (Bromley Public Hall, Bow Road, E.3) Friday, November 20th, 8 p.m. Speakers: David Tribe, F. H. Amphlett Micklewright, Simon Ellis. Chair: Mrs. E. Venton.
Westminster (Alliance Hall, 12 Caxton Street, S.W.1.) Monday, November 30th, 7.45 p.m. Speakers: Harold Pinter, Margaret Knight, David Collis. Chair: David Tribe.

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