

The Freethinker

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QUITE recently I referred here to the emphasis on Christian ethics—on the “sublime ethics” of the Sermon on the Mount, as modern Christian Socialists are fond of styling the ethical teaching of the New Testament—nowadays in particular relationship to politics.

The tendency today, at least in Protestant circles, is to play down the specifically theological tenets of the Christian Churches and to concentrate more or less exclusively upon the “unique” ethics of Jesus often summarised as the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

How far does this widespread tendency coincide with the known facts about Christian origins and the Christian Gospels? Was the teaching of Jesus Christ really unique or even in any way markedly original? Is there in fact any such thing as a distinctively “Christian ethic” at all? In view of the contemporary publicity given to these questions by Christians who, so to speak, spell god with a small g and Ethics with a large E, this crucial and intriguing question seems worth pursuing in more detail.

The Protestant modernist, Albert Schweitzer, put forward a theory of Christian origins that has since become widely influential and which, in my opinion, constitutes a permanently valuable contribution to the understanding of Christian origins. According to this view, the original Jesus (whom Schweitzer of course accepts as an historical character, a Jewish preacher who flourished in the first century of this present era) was what would nowadays be described as a revivalist. Jesus was obsessed with the approaching end of the world, to be immediately followed by the millenium, the coming of the “Kingdom” of God.

According to Schweitzer everything else in the original Christian gospel was subordinated to this decisive belief. Now obviously if doomsday is due next week, there is no conceivable point in possessing any ethical code to govern one's life. Since this life and all the normal duties that it entails were just about to disappear, ethics as we know them would be entirely superfluous! Therefore, according to this view, the ethics of Jesus were what the German writer called an *Interimsethik*, an essentially temporary ethic, the primary purpose of which was to prepare the hearers of Jesus for the fast-approaching end of the world.

Early Ethics and the Gospel
Whatever view one may take about the precise nature of Christian origins, one fact at least appears to be perfectly clear: the earliest known Christian movement started as a revivalist movement in the imminent expectation of the end of the world and of the return of the messiah in glory. Who precisely this messiah was, and whether he can be identified with any earthly Jesus, may be controversial problems, but of the existence of this belief and of its practically universal character amongst the first generation of Christians, there cannot be any doubt at all. The belief recurs again and again in writ-

ings ascribed traditionally to all the leading figures in the Church, Peter, Paul and John. “The end of all things is at hand” was the repetitive refrain of all of them. Naturally people holding such a belief had no need of any ethical system; all they required was (as Schweitzer very aptly described it) an *Interimsethik* whilst they awaited the end. Such still surviving phrases in the gospels as “take no thought for the morrow”, were no doubt originally part of this temporary ethic. For “the morrow” would see the dawn of the millenium! While such beliefs held sway, there could not possibly be any point in evolving any special Christian ethic. It was only when the end failed to arrive and

the messiah resolutely refused to return in glory and when presumably the first generations of millenarians had passed away—that any kind of permanent Christian ethic could and did evolve. This ethic the “sublime” teaching of the Sermon on the Mount which our Christian Socialist friends are so fond of appealing to, was included in the four gospels which, in their present form at least, date from the second half of the second century, being first mentioned by name by Irenaeus about AD 180. But this time the second coming had receded into the far future (where it still remains!) and the Christian Church had settled down for a long period in this “vale of tears”. Consequently, like every permanent organisation of a socially responsible character, it needed an ethic. This ethic included items like the golden rule, drawn from the most advanced thought of the day, primitive miracle mongering and the crudest kind of diabolical exorcism. It figures largely in the gospels, where it is mostly put into the mouth of the traditional Jesus.

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Ethics of the Gospel

By F. A. RIDLEY

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Was Nietzsche Right?

The accusation that Christianity was a religion specially designed for slaves has been made by various critics, but most forcefully by Nietzsche, whose merciless indictment of Christianity as essentially a slave ethic must rank amongst the most damaging attacks ever made on the morality of the gospels. To a very large extent at least, this criticism is justified. Perhaps two-thirds of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire were legally enslaved. Moreover (as I recently demonstrated with more detail in my little book on Spartacus) the times were peculiarly propitious for the rise and diffusion of such a slave ethic, for the ruthless suppression of the Spartacus revolt—the last and greatest slave rebellion—by Roman Imperialism (73-71 BC) had put a summary end to any hope of emancipation for the servile class.

The slaves therefore, hopelessly beaten in *this* world, sought *post mortem* assurances in the next. This, the Christian Church proceeded to supply, promising them eternal happiness hereafter on condition of their submissive behaviour in this “vale of tears”. (From the eventual point of view of the Church, this compromise worked extremely well, but perhaps less so from that of the slaves.) The culminating point in this slave ethic was

reached not in the gospels, but in the Pauline epistle with its frank injunction, "slaves obey your masters". Many traces of it also appear in the gospels that enjoin non-resistance to evil and even to personal violence, which must have been very common in the relationship between masters and slaves. Even more significantly, Jesus is made explicitly to order submission to the Roman Empire: "render unto Caesar . . .", then—in Marxist phraseology—the permanent executive committee of the slave owners. All the above are grist to Nietzsche's mill and collectively make up a formidable case for the prosecution.

The Messianic Ethic

However, whilst true of most of the gospel ethics, as indeed, of that of most of the rest of the New Testament, it is not the only ethical tradition to be found in the gospels. For even in the much-edited and bowdlerised New Testament, we find scattered but unmistakable traces of an older messianic tradition which in no sense whatever can be described as a slave ethic, but contrarily is filled with the most violent hatred of the then prevalent social *status quo* and of its custodian and armed protector, the great slave empire of Rome.

The main and quite unique repository of this authentic anti-Roman messianic tradition is not the gospels but the Apocalypse (Revelation) which may be briefly defined as a hymn of hate against Rome, the essential theme of which is the violent overthrow of the Roman slave empire by the celestial intervention of the messiah—not in any sense the gospel Jesus ("meek and mild") but a warrior, a celestial Spartacus or Bar-Cockba, who actually

succeeds where the human enemies of Rome failed in finally demolishing the city on the seven hills "drunk with the blood of the saints". In the conditions of its own time, the Apocalypse was an authentic revolutionary document and its permanent influence upon later subversive movements, such as the Anabaptists and the Fifth Monarchy Men has been so great that I have described it elsewhere as the "Communist Manifesto of the Utopian age". Here we have clear traces of the fact that early Christianity was a composite movement derived initially from several widely divergent sources.

A Composite Ethic

The ethic of the gospels is also a composite ethic; for side by side with the predominantly slave ethic of Nietzsche are to be found traces of both the older original *Interimsethik* and of the revolutionary messianic ethic of the Apocalypse. Such texts as "The Kingdom of Heaven cometh by violence and violent men take it by force", or the injunction "Let him who hath no sword, sell his cloak and buy one", cannot in any sense be described as slave ethics. In the gospels the same Jesus is made to command his disciples here to "turn the other cheek," there to sell their cloaks and buy indispensable swords! Does not all this suggest very strongly the conclusion that "the Jesus of history" was actually himself a composite figure?

Be that as it may. There is no such thing as a distinctively Christian ethic. Grant Allen's famous description of Christianity as "a mausoleum of dead religions" is as true of its ethics as of its theology.

Freethinkers

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

MR. UNDERWOOD'S article, although I am fundamentally in agreement with him, requires, so it seems to me, further clarification, particularly of the meaning of the label Free-thinker. To do this perhaps the Editor will allow me to insert the 1945 Declaration of Principle and Aims of the World Union of Freethinkers. As we are now preparing for the international congress to be held in July 1966 as part of the celebration of the centenary of the National Secular Society, it would be as well that all participants understand what the World Union of Freethinkers stands for.

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLE

BY FREETHOUGHT is meant the use of reason applied through exact observation and experiment, by the process of argument and the test of practice, as the sole means for the determination of what is true.

Consequently the Freethinker rejects all authority opposed to reason or going beyond it, whether the authority of a man, of a book or of an organisation, whether based on alleged miracles, or on tradition.

The Freethinker cannot accept the claim to finality of any system or body of doctrine.

Nor can the Freethinker be satisfied with the bare denial of that which fails to meet the test of reason; he should endeavour to apply and to extend knowledge in the light of his principles.

Freethought covers the whole domain of inquiry; it is concerned with science, ethics economics and politics, no less than with philosophy and religion.

THE AIMS OF ORGANIZED FREETHINKERS

Freethinkers combine for mutual aid and protection against all that hinders the free exercise of thought, for the overthrow of such obstructive forces, and for the advancement of civilisation along purely humanistic as opposed to theological lines.

All obscurantist bodies, whether political, economic, cultural or religious, are the enemies of Freethought, and it is the

crusade against them that forms the main bond between Freethinkers the world over.

Freethought can never be fruitful, unless besides clarifying men's minds, it furthers solutions of social problems; in addressing themselves to such problems, Freethinkers are governed by the paramount interest of securing for all, without distinction of sex, race, or nationality, equality of opportunity for the enforcement of their rights and the practice of their duties.

From this it will be seen that the Freethinker is a truthseeker, rejecting revelation and know-all claims. The "welding of the two words free thinker" occurs only in Germanic languages, and I have never seen any real value in it. The terms "freethinker", "rationalist", "humanist" have been first applied to religious or cultural forms of mental activity. Later, and until recent years, these three terms have been used as synonymous for non-religious thinkers, where "religion" meant "worship of the supernatural". The timorous, keeping up with chapel-going Joneses or church-attending Smiths, have invented a hundred and one new definitions of religion, so that a "Humanist" can come to me declaring that a man must have a religion; what he meant was an aim in life and a code to live by. Atheist as I am, I do not deny "God"; it is foolish to deny the meaningless. I can and do deny the existence of specific deities, particularly personifications of abstractions. If however one pretends that "God" equals "the root of minus one", or is "electricity", I request that one refrain from adding anthropomorphic qualifications.

Humanists who accept Dr. Corliss Lamont's philosophy are Atheists, and are just as dogmatic as Freethinkers (who may not call themselves Atheists), or as Agnostics.

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Republican and Democratic Attitudes to Church and State

(Assessed by Protestant and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State)

THE REPUBLICAN platform for 1964, at the urging of Rep. Delbert L. Latta of Ohio, adopted a plank favouring a Becker-like amendment to the Constitution. The amendment does not mention the Bible or the public schools. The amendment favoured would "permit those individuals and groups who choose to do so to exercise their religion freely in public places, provided religious exercises are not prepared or prescribed by the state... and no person's participation therein is coerced...."

It was pointed out by opponents of this plank that Americans already have freedom to practise religion both in private and public. Also, that if the statement applied to public school classrooms it might deprive teachers of control and discipline of students since they could then practise their religion there at any time they wished. Proponents pointed to the large number of voters who favoured such an amendment. The language proposed would arouse few objections. As an additional safeguard, they added the words: "thus preserving the traditional separation of church and state." Addition of the phrase regarding "separation of church and state" was credited to Franklin C. Salisbury, general counsel of Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State, who recommended its inclusion during his appearance before the Committee.

On school aid the Republicans would "continue the advancement of education on all levels, through such programmes as selective aid to higher education (and)... tax credits for higher education."

The "tax credits" would credit against income tax amounts paid for college tuition (including church-related institutions). This was proposed in the 88th Congress by Sen. Abraham Ribicoff (Democrat-Connecticut), but was defeated. It is the same proposal that the Citizens for Educational Freedom, a Catholic Action group, seeks for the benefit of parochial elementary schools.

The Republican President nominee, Barry Goldwater, is an Episcopalian. He is on record as favouring a Becker-like amendment specifically permitting religious exercise in the schools. In regard to Federal school aid, Sen. Goldwater is opposed to it altogether. If it is to be granted, however, he would extend the aid to parochial schools as well as public schools. The second phase of his position is similar to that taken by Cardinal Spellman and the National Catholic Welfare Conference.

One of the clearest statements by Sen. Goldwater was made in a letter to CEF dated April 24th, 1964. He wrote: "I am opposed to all federal aid to education but if... such legislation should be enacted it should go, on equal terms, to all nonprofit schools... However, I prefer the approach by way of tax-credits which... lays to rest the church-state issue... provides equal treatment for all... (and) excludes the Federal Government from any participation in or interference with education..." Apparently the tax credit would be applied to parochial elementary schools as well as colleges.

On church-state issues Sen. Goldwater's voting record is favourable to separation in some instances, opposed in others. He voted against the Morse Amendment in 1960 which provided Federal loans for parochial schools and against the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963. On the other hand, Sen. Goldwater took issue with former President Kennedy when the latter declared that the Supreme Court's interpretation of the Constitution barred

grants for church schools. He did so in a memorandum filed July 31st, 1961. A member of the Labour and Welfare Committee, Sen. Goldwater opposed a bill providing aid for public schools and sought to amend it so as to include construction aid for parochial schools. He said that he was seeking to "assist sectarian and private schools as schools and not as religious institutions." His amendment lost 66 to 25.

Angered by Baptist criticism of his position, Sen. Goldwater inserted in the *Congressional Record*, July 20th 1961, a list of 229 church-related colleges, including some of Baptist designation, which he said had accepted donations of property from the government. His list was described by Baptist Editor Barry Garrett as "a gross misrepresentation of the facts."

For second place on the ticket the Republicans nominated Rep. William E. Miller of New York. Rep. Miller, with an undistinguished record in Congress, served with success as Republican National Chairman, a post he assumed in 1961. He is a Roman Catholic and an Easterner and was chosen to "balance" the ticket. Rep. Miller signed the discharge petition for the Becker Amendment. On the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963 which provided generously for church colleges he was listed as "not voting." Rep. Miller was one of 25 "friendly" congressmen who received 1960 campaign donations from Roman Catholic lobbyist John A. O'Donnell. Mr. O'Donnell put through congress war claims bills providing \$30 million for Catholic institutions in the Philippines.

THE DEMOCRATIC Party platform for 1964, while far from ideal from the standpoint of strict separation of church and state, will stand comparison with its Republican counterpart. There is in the Democratic platform no endorsement of the "Becker Amendment" or allied proposals for changing the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States.

On school aid the Democrats call for broader programmes than the Republicans. In regard to church and state the key sentence of the Democratic platform is one which states that "new methods must be explored including the channeling of federally collected revenues to all levels of education and, to the extent permitted by the Constitution, to all schools."

It will be recalled that the late President Kennedy always contended that Federal aid to church schools was unconstitutional and that was why he was against it. The 1964 platform does not repudiate the position but raises a question about it. Spokesmen for the Catholic Welfare Conference had strongly urged inclusion of Federal aid to church schools in the platform. What they got was not a period but a question mark. Franklin C. Salisbury, general counsel of POAU, in his appearance had urged the Democrats to affirm the position of the late President Kennedy who had strongly opposed any inclusion of church schools in Federal aid programmes. He also questioned any tampering with the First Amendment which, he said contained guarantees of full religious freedom.

The Democratic platform contains a pledge to repeal the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act which embodies a

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This Believing World

Congratulations to Dr. Ramsey who refuses to allow the Churches to ban Big Jim Taylor, the now famous Plymouth Brother, from preaching. At least, he recognises that Mr. Taylor is loyally following the teaching of Jesus—though the Archbishop thinks his mistake is to take "certain texts out of their context", and "to apply them ruthlessly". Unfortunately, very few Christians know these texts; were they publicised on radio and TV, they might well show that, after all, the Plymouth Brethren are truer followers of Jesus than anybody in the Churches of Rome and England.

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But alas little rifts are beginning to appear even in the heaven-sent ranks of the true Plymouth Exclusives. The *Daily Mail* (October 21st) reports the sad news that Mr. Taylor's son-in-law, Bruce Hales, wants to tighten the religious sect's already harsh disciplinary code. Believers must now never talk to unbelievers, not even on the telephone, nor must they eat with them; and already 100 members "have been thrown out on trumped-up immorality charges". We learn that even Mr. Taylor might be excommunicated if he does not accede to the more extreme rules. Talk about Christian unity...!

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We must applaud the way the Bishop of Southwark manages to mix up politics with religion—unlike some of the more timid of his Christian brethren. He is recorded by Mr. Robert Pitman (*Daily Express*, October 21st) to have said, "All I can say to the voters of Southwark who voted for the Tories is: One day they will stand before God at the Bar of Judgment—and God help them." Mr. Pitman is outraged. "God help the Bishop of Southwark", he says in return.

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No one has been firmer, than Dr. John Heenan with Catholics who wanted to limit their families, for not understanding that the Law of God cannot be evaded by the use of such anti-Catholic devices as contraceptives. He called on the Vatican Council to make the position crystal clear one way or other, but thereby to postpone any final decision for four or five years. In the meantime, Toronto Catholic women can use the famous "pill" for at least 18 months after having a baby, though they have to ask permission of the co-adjutor Archbishop of Toronto, and it is technically not as a birth control method, but to regularise the menstruation for rhythm-method calculation.

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There is always joy in Heaven among the angels when a convert is made, so we are sure that they will be highly gratified to learn that the notorious murderer and bank robber, Donald Hume, who is now serving a life sentence in Switzerland, has become a Catholic.

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The Church has, in the opinion of the Rev. Leslie D. Weatherhead, overemphasised sin and its consequences. The sense of being guilty sinners stems from Paul, not Jesus, who "is reported" as using the noun for "sin" on only six occasions and the verb on only three (*The Sunday Times*, 25/10/64). Paul on the other hand uses them ninety-one times. "Jesus forgave men freely." Dr. Weatherhead said, while Paul, "with his Jewish background and legal training," seems to have an "obsession about sin and guilt." The Anglican Prayer Book "makes the picture darker still," Dr. Weatherhead continued, instancing marriage as "a remedy against sin and fornication," and baptismal prayers for deliverance from God's

wrath. As a firm opponent of the concept of sin, we naturally sympathise with Dr. Weatherhead; we are afraid, however, that Christians are landed with Paul and with original sin for a long time to come.

REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES (Continued from page 355)

quota system favouring immigration from Northern Europe. The Democrats would, in effect, abolish the quota system which they call "discriminatory" to make possible a larger influx from Southern Europe.

The Democratic candidate for the Presidency, Lyndon B. Johnson, is a member of the Christian Church but frequently attends the Episcopal Church with his wife and daughters who are members of that communion. Mr. Johnson had a good voting record on church-state issues both in the House and the Senate. For example, in 1960 an amendment to the education bill would have provided Federal funds for parochial school construction. The then Senator Johnson voted against it. He also voted against the \$1,000 million public school construction bill in 1958, but voted for the school aid bill of 1960 that would have provided \$917 million a year for two years to aid the public schools.

As president, Mr. Johnson has been successful in driving through Congress legislation which provides wide benefits for church institutions. The Higher Education Facilities Act which he signed into law December 20th 1963, provides \$1,200 million for college construction over a three year period. Prospective beneficiaries include some 842 church-controlled colleges and universities. The school may receive grants to erect any kind of building except a chapel or a seminary. After 20 years the buildings may be used even for these purposes.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, also signed into law by President Johnson, contains provisions which enable Federal support and labour for a variety of church projects. Even facilities which house sectarian programmes may be erected with Federal aid, provided that those portions of the edifice actually used for such purposes be paid for by the church group. The provision just mentioned is said to have been included as a result of Roman Catholic pressures and represented their price for support of the bill.

The Economic Opportunity Act, the so-called "anti-poverty bill," was the project of President Johnson's own advisers and could not have passed without his influence. He has also pressed, though far less successfully, for the passage of an education bill which would provide general aid for public schools.

The Democratic nominee for the Vice-Presidency is Senator Hubert H. Humphrey. He is a member of the United Church of Christ, frequently attends Chevy Chase Methodist Church in Washington. Sen. Humphrey was a principal architect of the National Defence Education Act of 1958 (renewed twice since) which provides important forms of assistance for church schools.

Senator Humphrey voted for the Morse amendment to the education bill in 1960 which would have made funds available for construction of parochial schools. On February 24th, 1964, Senator Humphrey publicly favoured appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican. He said: "It is in our self interest to have regular representatives at the Vatican... It is foolish public policy for us to deny ourselves this vantage point at a crucial period in world history."

Senator Humphrey has expressed opposition to any change in the First Amendment or any amendment which would permit official religious exercises in the schools.

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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

- Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street), Sunday, November 8th, 3 p.m. E. G. MACFARLANE, "Is School Religion Out of date?"
- Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 8th, 6.30 p.m.: ERIC MAPLE, "Devils".
- Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1.), Sunday, November 8th, 7.30 p.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT "Morals, Education and the Law".
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1.), Sunday, November 8th, 11 a.m.: RICHARD CLEMENTS, "The Role of Humanism Today".
- Tuesday, November 10th, A. F. DAWN, "Religious Instruction in Schools".
- Sutton Humanist Group (Small Public Hall, St. Nicholas Road), Tuesday, November 10th, 7.45 p.m.: LIONEL ELVIN, "Should Moral Education be tied to Religion?"

(See page 360 for meetings at Highgate, Tooting and Inverness)

Notes and News

POPE PAUL VI's condemnation of the bombing of Monte Cassino served as a reminder of his closeness to Pius XII, whom he referred to as "unarmed defender of faith and civilisation". All bombing is horrible, but the destruction of the abbey has to be considered in the context of a fight against Fascism and Nazism. To call it "one of the saddest episodes of war"—as Pope Paul did—is absurd and, in the light of Pius XII's silence about German atrocities, impertinent. We may aptly recall the words of Earl Alexander of Tunis, who ordered the bombing: "When soldiers are fighting for a just cause and are prepared to suffer death and mutilation in the process, bricks and mortar, no matter how venerable, cannot be allowed to weigh against human lives."

LAST WEEK, F. H. Amphlett Micklewright wrote on "The Fate of the Free Churches." The first report of a Unitarian Faith and Action Commission, *Unitarian Theology* in 1964 was published almost simultaneously.

There is now a widespread feeling that what are called traditional ideas of God are outmoded", it says, and it feels that Unitarians should further the "Honest to God" debate. It rightly finds it difficult to see how prayer and worship can be justified if the traditional ideas are rejected entirely, but we must, it says, "be fully prepared to acknowledge that it is supremely in the realm of human experience and the *relationship of man to man* that God is to be discerned" (our italics). The Jesus of history is not, and never claimed to be, "a universal type of human perfection", the report says. Jesus was "one who challenged tradition and orthodoxy and who showed astonishing insight into the ways of God and the nature of man. He will always remain a source of moral and spiritual inspiration."

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METHODISM must "redevelop", said the Rev. Bernard Parker of Alfreton, Derbyshire, in a public meeting in Birmingham when criticising the report on Anglican-Methodist conversations about union. The report showed, he said, that people felt that the Methodist Church would shortly have finished its task and that absorption into another Church would be essential (*Birmingham Post*, 26/10/64). Mr. Parker felt, on the contrary, that Methodists had forgotten "our task to spread the scripture of holiness throughout the land". We must he said, recapture our sense of responsibility, and increase our membership".

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A STUDY GROUP formed by the Oxford University Humanists is producing a pamphlet for teenagers giving factual advice on sex. Michael Lockwood, president of the Humanists, believed that few teenagers had access to enough information, either of the dangers—both mythical and real—attendant upon sexual intercourse, or on its technique and nature. And Jenny Slater, 19-year-old chairman of the study group said that the Oxford Humanists had begun by distributing a British Humanist Association pamphlet on the subject, "but they found it was presenting merely an ethical standpoint and not giving the facts" (*The Guardian*, 26/10/64). Miss Slater considered that most of the literature on the subject for young people was vague and inadequate, and therefore dangerous. "We want to be explicit and say exactly what happens", she added. "We see so many sex relationships in Oxford which end unhappily in pregnancy and abortion."

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A SPOKESMAN for the Most Rev. Philip Pocock, Roman Catholic co-adjutor Archbishop of Toronto, has "qualified" a report that the Archbishop had approved the use of the pill as a method of contraception. The emphasis in the report was "not entirely accurate", said the Rev. Frank Stone, head of the Church's information centre in Toronto. Roman Catholics were not allowed to use the pill as a contraceptive measure. Its use (according to a BUP report in the *Daily Telegraph*, 22/10/64) was permitted to regularise the menstrual cycle to make the rhythm method of birth control more dependable. A nice distinction.

★

THE Vatican Council's draft decree, "The Church in the Modern World"—attacked so strongly by Archbishop Heenan—was passed as a basis for detailed discussion after a three-day debate on October 23rd. The voting, 1,579-296, was smaller than usual, however, because "many bishops were in the coffee bars adjoining the debating hall in St. Peter's basilica" (*The Guardian*, 24/10/64).

Livers and Cold Feet

By KIT MOUAT

IN Emerson's essay on "Experience" I found this: "I knew a witty physician who found the creed in the biliary duct, and used to affirm that if there was a disease of the liver the man became a Calvinist, and if that organ was sound, he became a Unitarian." I suspect, then, that Emerson, too, would have been surprised to come across Rationalists to whom the world is as dark and hopeless as is the nature of man to some fundamentalist Christians. The weft and warp of human relationships, however, is never more surprising than at election times. An opponent in matters of religion turns out to be a political ally; bonds of sympathy and interest spring up where there are no mutual ideals at all.

I have not only been puzzled by rationalist pessimism, but also sometimes by the blustering about biblical "obscurity". I have a card of biblical references published by some American society. A note at the end which asks, "would you be willing to read these 'holy' passages aloud in your church or home?" strikes me as just funny. Of course the Bible contains horrors as well as superb poetry, absurdities as well as wisdom. This is inevitable, considering the age of the books involved. I simply cannot, however, raise a matronly blush at verses about "one that pisseth against the wall" although (having a tendency to lisp) I would find it hard to read aloud anywhere. Presumably the practice is being criticised (like non-circumcision and pork-eating) for hygienic reasons, and is therefore quite rational. The massacres organised by the divine Jehovah are no more than we might expect for the period and somehow more logical than a society such as ours, full of injustice and cruelty, turning to some abstract wishy-washy deity that really isn't worth bothering about one way or the other. Yet I have heard Freethinkers almost shouting about the "filth" in the Bible like a lot of Mrs. Grundies at a tea-party faced by Lady Chatterley.

What surely is important is not that the Bible is robust and bloodthirsty in places, but that it is still treated with a special reverence in a country that pays little respect to books as a whole. What matters is that the Bible is still used as a basis for ethics. It is this situation we need to attack, not the Bible itself. I sometimes wish we had a Hugh Burden in the British Humanist Association, who could poke gentle fun at religion as this artist makes even the Abbot of Downside laugh at his monks. But it is hard for minorities such as ours to have confidence enough to laugh kindly at our opponents. In fact the Humanist editor of *Punch* is an excellent ally, and who knows how much good this magazine is doing by its heartening lack of reverence for the reverends and their flocks.

The "obscene" four-letter words that shock me are not sexual or lavatorial, but words like "hang", "flog", "maim", "fear" and "bomb", yet no one seems to want to censor these. Even if they did it would be foolish, for what matters is not the words but the meaning behind them. To object to Anglo-Saxon sexual words used in their right context is to show how conditioned we are to object to sex, and although the objections to sex are going out, the words are still not comfortably in, and continue to be used out of context. The sooner we are able to ensure that the verbs "hang" and "flog" and if possible "bomb" and "maim" in all languages only make sense in the past tense, the better. But somehow, some-

where, there is still an uncomfortable link between the old biblical desire for revenge, pessimistic Calvinism, rationalism and the liver. I like to think that it is only Tory women who want capital punishment retained and flogging reintroduced. If the "creeds" are in the biliary duct, where are the "principles and objects of the National Secular Society" to be found?

Obsessions of any sort are embarrassing. Yet apathy is worse. I crumple when faced by a neighbour who wants to rush round sacrificing himself for Christ (via, say, the refugees) but I am equally deterred by the woman who prides herself on her "peace of mind" and ability to avoid worrying about things which "don't concern her" (meaning almost everything, of course, beyond the family limits). And so my respect pours out to those Freethinkers and Humanists, past and present, who avoid both frenzy and indifference, and perhaps the best thing about the 1960s is the way their numbers are increasing.

"Faith" (religious or rational) without "works" is ineffective. If Humanists and Freethinkers want to hit the headlines, keep the Bible in its place, "influence people" and "make friends" they have to be able to point to successfully organised works of benefit to mankind as a whole. This is where we all (as outsiders and as a minority with unpopular and unprivileged opinions) weave back again into the social fabric and have our opportunity to prove ourselves the toughest and brightest threads of all. I am very glad to be living at a time when young men and women are committing themselves and their talents to humanism in action. In spite of the bomb, Kierkegaard, lung cancer, traffic accidents, the population explosion and their own individual problems in a world full of deprivation, they believe that their energy is best spent on increasing the happiness of mankind.

There is another quotation from Samuel Butler: "The healthy stomach is nothing if not conservative. Few radicals have good digestions..." I am still trying to work out the relationship I should like to have between my liver, my politics and my convictions; and I am confused. I think I should like someone to say that if a man has a warm heart and a cool head he is probably a Humanist whereas if he suffers from cold feet he is more likely to be a Christian. Am I really too much of an optimist?

FREETHINKERS

(Concluded from page 354)

In fact the "dogmatic" Atheist exists only in the mind of the dogmatic Theist. The main difference as far as I can judge between today's Humanist as distinguished from Freethinker is that the former wishes to be on good terms with the religious powers-that-be and to hobnob with bishops. In politics, or as a pacifist, or as a teacher, I am ready to labour with Christians, Mohammedans, Hindus, Catholic Humanists or what you will, for common aims. As a Free Thinker I reject their claims of impossible knowledge. Such definite declaration is often termed "aggressiveness" by opponents and by the half-hearted. Just as the criticism of religious origins is abused by some as "flogging a dead horse". On this perhaps the Editor will allow me one day a column. In the meantime to Free Thought in any real degree, violent emotion such as is bred by war, by racial controversy, etc. is inimical; we require peace and goodwill, prosperity and contentment *without inertia*.

A Deluge of Christian Tracts

By H. CUTNER

ONE of the recently published books which interested me greatly is *Fiction for the Working Man* by Louis James, published last year by the Oxford University Press. The period covered is 1830-1850 when the working classes were emerging a little from dense ignorance. Most of them couldn't read or write, but no doubt those who could would read to their colleagues such works as *The Age of Reason* or the early tracts written by John Wesley and his followers.

Enterprising publishers like Edward Lloyd, gathered a few writers together and issued what may be termed exciting literature very cheaply, either in penny numbers every week or in cheap paperbacks. Such journals as *Reynolds's Miscellany* and *The London Journal* had enormous circulations, if we take into consideration the relatively small population in Britain at the time; and the slogan, "to be continued in our next", was sure to keep readers excited and crying for more.

Mr. James goes very fully into most of the publications during the twenty years he deals with, and tells us a great deal about their authors—G. W. M. Reynolds, J. F. Smith, J. M. Rymer, Thomas Prest, Thomas Frost, and many more, who are rarely if ever dealt with by our literary critics. In my own omnivorous reading, I have come across a number of now scarce works, hugely melodramatic and impossible, but—at least for me—most entertaining and interesting as specimens of active imagination. Among them were exciting stories by Eugene Sue and Alexandre Dumas, translated by literary hacks—and in most cases very well. But I found it rather amusing to read some of the reviews of Mr. James's book by modern literary critics who, for the most part, had never read any of the fiction for working men, and who had to content themselves with rather general observations which gave away this fact.

However, I wish to deal here with only what Mr. James has to say about Christian tracts—for working men—in the one chapter he deals with them. (Incidentally, does he call the stories taken from the Bible in these tracts "fiction"?) He insists that "no picture of the reading of the lower classes would be complete without a consideration of the massive flood of printed matter poured out upon them by those anxious to improve their minds and souls". Even "massive flood" could be an understatement. They must have come into our own house by the hundreds in my childhood days, and I read them as avidly as I did *Dick Turpin* (in penny numbers) or *The Cottage Girl*.

But all the same, says Mr. James, "During industrial distress, the lower classes were also angered by the way the tracts were distributed to save souls to the neglect of the more pressing needs of food, clothing, and sanitation". And we need not be surprised to learn that "in Paisley the starving unemployed in 1837 were assiduously supplied with Bibles". G. W. M. Reynolds, as a Chartist, filled many of his melodramatic romances with angry descriptions of the way in which the poor lived and starved. In his *Mysteries of London* will be found many pages on the misery of the poor. Eugene Sue did the same in his *Mysteries of Paris*. It should be added that Dickens, Thackeray and Wilkie Collins, all poured fun on the tract distributors but, as far as I could ever make out, with very little effect.

Mr. James, however, thinks that many homes, in spite

of their terrible poverty, were made happier by these Christian tracts which also provided reading for nothing or for a halfpenny, when other books were expensive to buy. And once the movement was started the distribution of tracts really became phenomenal. Above all the societies which were working to bring about moral, religious, and educational improvements in the working classes was the Religious Tract Society which sold them to any Christian sect; and not far behind were the English and Foreign Bible Society, the Wesleyan Methodist, the Baptist, the London, and even a Trinitarian, Bible societies. Paternoster Row (destroyed in bombing raids during the last war) was as notorious for tracts as was Holywell Street for pornographic literature.

Whether the numbers given by the various societies can be really relied upon, it is difficult to say; but the RTS claimed to have sent out 14,339,197 tracts in 1834, rising a few years later to 4 millions more. The Wesleyans claimed nearly a million every year, while the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge exported over 31,000 out of a circulation of 3,446,038 in 1844. In addition, many of the weekly Christian magazines at a penny or halfpenny could boast of a combined circulation of 90,000 per issue. We were given at the Wesleyan school I went to, back numbers of some of these little journals which I read from cover to cover—often marvelling at the way some hulking working man, a notorious wife beater, child torturer and, of course, an unflinching drunkard, would be "redeemed" by the beautiful and simple message.

Of course, not all the tracts were drivel—some of them were certainly well written. One of them *The Dairyman's Daughter*, by the Rev. Legh Richmond, had a circulation of 2,000,000 alone in eighteen years, and probably as many when enlarged into the *Annals of the Poor*. On the other hand, those which dealt with the deathbed agonies of "infidels"—like Thomas Paine—were not merely ignorant, but lying. And a good deal of tract literature was the work of a devoted band of religious women, among them quite a number of famous names. Eliza Cook, Hannah More, Mary Howitt, all tried to "uplift" the working classes with didactic stories, poems, and articles.

And the upshot of it all? Where did all this Christianity lead to? During the nineteenth century to evangelical religion—permanently? Alas, for all the religion the mass of our people have these days, it was largely wasted effort. Whatever bishops and priests may say, the pie in the sky, the eternal life in Jesus among the clouds in the heavens, are mostly objects of derision. Even a bishop can poke fun at the picture of God Almighty sitting on a cloud "up there" with Jesus at his side. The Christianity taught in these tracts has gone like the wind—for ever.

OBITUARY

The Glasgow Secular Society lost one of its oldest members with the death of Alexander Brown, in his 72nd year.

Sandy, as he was affectionately known, was severely wounded in the first world war, when the trench he was in was hit by an enemy shell. It was many days before he recovered consciousness and he never completely got over his injuries. Lately his malady had increased, and he died in Glasgow Royal Infirmary on October 24th, leaving a son and a daughter to whom we convey our sympathy.

A secular service was conducted by the President of the GSS.
R. M. HAMILTON

CORRESPONDENCE

RELIGION AND POLITICS

When "This Believing World" reminds us (THE FREETHINKER 16/10/64) that "the three main parties in this election all appear to have left the question of religion out of any discussion", it draws attention to a very dangerous situation in England today. For the idea that religion is out of politics is more apparent than real. There are very many people who have their own very good reasons for not making issues of religion apparent in politics, but it is there all the same. So much more can be done by devious means—pressure groups, the ear of the Minister, administrative laws.

These people know very well that it is not true to say, despite the conspiracy of silence they have themselves engineered, that it "no longer matters".

I wonder do we? Look at the situation in England today. The 1944 Education Act has entrenched the tradition of *some* sort of RI and Assembly in the schools as never before. The Church of Rome makes 14,000 converts a year. The Church of England is reintroducing Canon Law into this country by piecemeal legislation, through the agency of an indifferentist Parliament which knows not what it does. An intending perjurer may swear on the Holy Book as of right, while a hundred years after Bradlaugh, he who wishes to affirm must first prove his case. Divorce still hangs on the "matrimonial offence" and takes little or no account of sexual pathology. At the same time as the Abbot of Prinknash hopes to extend his buildings to the tune of £4 million, in Liverpool the schools building programme was cut by the Minister from 21 to 9, of which remaining 9 there were 7 Roman Catholic schools, to save £4 million. Mr. Harold Wilson's constituency appears to be dependent on a Catholic vote. The late unlamented government put Roman Catholic schools in a privileged financial position in 1959.

Are we told religion is not in politics? I will tell you where it is not. It isn't in Parliament, it isn't on the election manifestos. It is there that the aims of the Freethought movement of this country and of the National Secular Society should be fought for. And where is the Secular Education League? The need for it today is greater than ever it was in the days of the Cowper-Temple amendment, for the spread of Catholic schools is nothing less than the "Conversion-of-England question". Where is the Divorce Law Reform Association? Where will the Freethought movement be when the Church Assembly tries to get money from non-believers for its decaying churches at the same time as it sells its City sites? Where is the society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws? If they are not going to be used, they can be repealed—it's as simple as that.

No!—religion isn't in politics, and a great shame too.

GILLIAN HAWTIN

GOD BLESS THE ELECTION!

On the Sunday before the General Election, a Scottish minister prayed that God would bless the election and guide the electors.

One can picture the Almighty sitting up all night to hear the results and, as he is assumed to take an interest in politics, being extremely annoyed if his favoured candidates failed to win the poll. Or must we also assume that all his chosen candidates won; that he engineered a close fight and a Labour victory?

(Mrs.) M. A. WATSON

THE ONE BOOK

Those of your readers who do not listen to *Desert Island Discs* on BBC radio, may be interested in the fact that on Monday, October 12th, Jon Pertwee, a distinguished actor, when asked what one book he would like to have in his, presumably indefinite exile, named F. A. Hornibrook's *Culture of the Abdomen*.

I would congratulate Mr. Hornibrook on his advent "on the air"; and Jon Pertwee on his common sense and discrimination.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER

RELIGION IN THE SCHOOL

I thought you might be interested to know that a number of pupils refused to go to the regular end-of-session religious service in Rockwell Secondary School, Dundee in July of this year. As you know I am officially excused participation in religious services by the education authorities in Dundee because I asked for this some years ago, and I have no doubt that this is why the children were left with me whilst the rest went to church.

I feel that the increase in numbers with the years proves that the opposition to official religious services of this kind is growing in strength, and that the illogicality of schools which are supposed to be preparing pupils for a democratic existence being herded into religious services—often against their will or beliefs—will soon cause authorities to discourage headmasters and others from subjecting their charges to exercises of this kind.

In my view a democratic system should meticulously adopt an attitude of neutrality in the sphere of religious or non-religious

ideas. I think that Humanists, Freethinkers, Rationalists, etc. should be given the same opportunities of speaking to school pupils as is now given to ministers of religion exclusively. In Dundee, for instance, a Presbytery decision to appoint ministers as chaplains in various schools was made and several headmasters agreed to co-operate. The result is that a minister of religion has gained access to a platform and the pupils are subjected to a religious service every Friday as a kind of captive audience. I object strongly to this as a piece of favouritism or bias, though I do not object to the pupils being allowed to hear what the minister has to say provided the other sides of the questions are fairly presented.

E. G. MACFARLANE

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, At 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. 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.

NEW PAPERBACKS

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Nina Epton's *Love and the Spanish* 5s.
Nina Epton's *Love and the English* 5s.

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FICTION

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Anthony Bloomfield *The Tempter* 4s. 6d.
Jeremy Brooks *Henry's War* 3s. 6d.
Alberto Moravia *A Ghost at Noon* 3s. 6d.
Georges Simenon *The Stain on the Snow* 4s. 6d.
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PLAY INTO FILM

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E. Stengal *Suicide and Attempted Suicide* 3s. 6d.
W. J. Reichman *Use and Abuse of Statistics* 5s.

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