

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXIV—No. 48

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

IN what is nominally the Christian world and maybe in other religious spheres as well, two of the most persistent and outstanding of present-day topics are, what is said to be a marked rise in human depravity and what is seen to be an alarming decline in religion. According to prevailing religious opinion, not only are the two inseparably linked but, as we might expect, the supposed increase in human wickedness is confidently attributed to the undeniable falling away from religion. However, the evidence for such a conclusion is to say the least extremely shaky. In the first place it depends on what is meant by wickedness, not always as easy to determine as it looks. As for what is meant by religion, in this sense it is nothing more than churchgoing with all its usual and sometimes unusual concomitants.

Quandary
It is true we are solemnly adjured to come back to God, but when we inquire what is meant by coming back to God and how such a feat is to be accomplished, this also turns out to be merely a more rhetorical way of saying come back to church—the one true church of course. But as all the churches, despite their deep-seated and acrimonious differences, make claim to that nice distinction, to the exclusion of all other churches, priority is not easy to decide. We have only their very bare word for it. We are left in a more embarrassing quandary after the inquiry than before. Besides, although the invitation is always couched as an entreaty, it is transparently a demand. It is a veiled order for submission to an authority which has to be taken at its own valuation and subscription to a testimony which cannot possibly be verified. But the increasing number of people who now cultivate the habit of freely exercising their own intelligence, are unlikely to respond to demands of that sort, no matter how pontifical they may be.

Speculative belief, based more often than not on motives that would wilt before any rational scrutiny, is always paraded and defended with a fervour demonstrable knowledge does not require. This injunction to come back to God, whether it emanates from the educated Archbishop of Canterbury in his cathedral pulpit, or from the uneducated Salvationist on his pitch in the market square, is likely to be enunciated all the more passionately because it applies to a hypothesis rather than a reality. But no amount of fervour can transform hypothesis into reality. It cannot even provide unassailable assurance that it is dealing with something that could possibly be more than a hypothesis. What it can do is to induce yet another delusion in a world already overstocked with delusions. It is difficult not to suspect that the most reverend and highly sophisticated prelate is privately and therefore hypocritically aware that he is utilising a hypothesis. The unsophisticated Salvation Army officer could be completely, because ignorantly, sincere. For the nuisance is that sincerity, however universally blessed as one of the most desirable attributes, rarely escapes the curse of being

under some form of undesirable limitation.

But that apart, we are impelled to the melancholy conclusion that, as so many clerics show signs of being despondently aware, this God to whom we are bidden to return is, not altogether unjustifiably, coming to be looked upon as nothing better than a clerical stooge. A popular passion for God can so readily be fanned into flame that it usually ends by going up in smoke, leaving nothing behind that it is possible to lay hold on. In spite of the desperate efforts of modern theologians to evolve interpretations of God more in keeping with sense and science, to pull as it were the Woolwich over our eyes, without disrupting orthodox supernaturalism, this ex-

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

On Coming Back to God

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

hortation to come back to God sounds pitifully like another of those drum-beat slogans which boom all the louder for being hollow. Sentiment is always more compliant than sense. And no doubt the exhorters know that an emotional appeal is likely to beget a wider response than any appeal that is calmly rational. If they see they never say that it is more temporary. On the quiet they probably plume themselves upon possessing in this way an asset which reason cannot share. Yet they could well take warning from experience. Be not deceived, reason is not mocked. Emotion never wears like reason. When presently it peters out, there is indeed the metaphorical devil to pay.

Debatable assumptions

It is curious how so many modern religionists sighingly take for granted that a present-day increase of wickedness is as well established as a present-day decline of religion. But it is only one of the sights of the times. There have been similar doleful assumptions in every age. And even for some of the religious as well as the non-religious, such assumptions have always been highly debatable. They could never be decisively tested. One generation's virtue is another generation's vice. The ethics of Deuteronomy may be wildly inappropriate to the space age. Irreligion is arbitrary in a way religion cannot be. In the last resort it is all a matter of opinion just as it will always be a matter of opinion whether the supposed increase in wickedness is the cause or the result of the decay of religion. It may be observed in passing that opinion either way makes a poor testimonial for the regenerative power of religion. As for the decay of religion, that is not a matter of opinion; it is a matter of fact. This is at least sufficiently recognised to provoke its anxious spokesmen, both lay and professional to constant outbursts of dismay and bitter diatribes against any kind of opposition. Religion is admittedly still full of fight, fighting for its life in a fight to the death.

Wickedness

It should be plain enough that wickedness (or for that matter goodness) cannot be defined or condemned for the non-religious according to the welter of contradictions euphemistically described as religious principles. When religious protagonists hold forth about the modern

increase in human wickedness, they are not thinking half as much about the evils which they suppose men do through rejecting churchianity as they are thinking of the rejection in itself. It is that which is the prime wickedness. It is that which so effectually puts the churches—and the protagonists—out of gear. That is the basic evil which, once rectified would, they claim, automatically rectify all contingent evils. Maybe, on their definition of evil, or if it could be maintained that on the whole those who belong to the Church lead better lives than those who don't. But can it be so maintained? To many, the truth often seems very much the other way about. In so far as the Church actually is in decline, it is, as Dean Inge saw, the Christians themselves who have done far more to bring it down than any outsiders. As with an over-ripe pear the rot hiddenly originates in its own interior.

Serious thinkers, especially Freethinkers, governed by their backbone rather than their wishbone and unhampered by religious prepossessions, are bound to take an aggressively critical view of churchianity. For them, churchianity is by no means inevitably to be equated even with Christianity let alone natural human goodness. They are neither perturbed nor surprised by the widespread indifference to empty pews and the growing distaste for the parson, who may be excellent as a man but anathema in what he presents and represents professionally. They look with an irrepressible derision upon the ritualistic antics of eminent ecclesiastics or the capers cut by the big pots of the small denominations. Far too many of these shining lights cast sinister shadows. It is not unknown, it is not even uncommon, for their own followers to express the caustic suspicion that they would no more dare to preach all they practise than they would care to practise all they preach. Sensible people, who are satisfied that one world at a time is as much as they can cope with, look askance, as well they may, at the worldliness so brazenly displayed by some of these dog-collared exemplars of the unworldly. As never before, people see through that sort of humbug, without any nonsense about a glass darkly. And the humbugs know it. That is why they wangle so pertinaciously for early indoctrination in the schools. They know that at least a few young birds may almost certainly be caught with chaff.

Now whatever difference of opinion there may be about the nature and fluctuations of human wickedness, it will hardly be denied, either by the religious or the non-religious that world-wide wickedness is indeed abundantly in evidence. If such rampant and ubiquitous inhumanities as greed, cruelty, rascality, tyranny and a hundred others are not wickedness to every honest mind, then there is no such thing as wickedness. And evil deeds, like troubles, are anything but few and far between. If it is a fact as many religionists contend that mankind is still no better, that mankind is even worse than it was two thousand years ago, what sort of compliment is that to the influence of Christianity, to the guidance of the churches, to the mystic power to whom we are besought to renew our allegiance? When the exponents of religion are plumped with this they hedge and dodge and trot out every conceivable casuistry to explain it away. They never succeed. But a still more striking feature is that while the apologists are so busy explaining away, while they are so vehemently expounding the cause or reviling the consequence of man's stubborn recalcitrance, they are either blindly obtuse or craftily impervious to a third and, one may risk saying, more cogent point of view. It is, that a great deal of modern wickedness, deplored by secularists as strongly as religionists, is not the outcome of irreligion at all, it is literally and directly the outcome of religion.

But that is too complex a proposition to be dealt with here and now in detail. However this at least can be said. No other human activity has ever practised more deceit than religion and no other kind of deceit has, in modern times, ever been so rapidly, so relentlessly and so widely exposed. No doubt two world wars did much to aid the process and to leave behind a trail of disillusionment probably unparalleled in history. Where religious faith among the older generation has not altogether evaporated, it has largely become diluted to such inefficacy that it is useless for handing down to a younger and more vital generation. All the same, the loudly lamented increase in general human depravity is questionable. It may well be that with youthfulness particularly, it is largely a matter of newer, unfamiliar and more baffling forms. But this much is surely certain. It is no use calling the unregenerate to come back to God until they can come to back God. And it is no more feasible to back a God whose very existence remains in question than it would be to back an imaginary horse. Prove that God is and back we will all come. But if coming back to God merely means a resumption of the religious ruck that is being slowly maybe, but resolutely and sanely discarded, then the real hope and the right intent is not to come back to God but to back away from him as far and as fast as we possibly can.

On The Spree

THEY knew that the young priest had studied German at school, and so they sent him to the Eucharistic Conference in Berlin. He looked forward to the occasion, to the comparative freedom of being a delegate. At home he was for ever being chastened by superiors.

But to his amazement, when he arrived in Berlin, he found that his German had vanished. He could not say the things which his superiors had so carefully taught him to say. Not a word of the foreign language could he remember.

He went to psychoanalyst who spoke English. The priest lay on the couch, but he couldn't think of anything to confess. After a prolonged silence, he offered payment; and he pressed the notes immaculately before he handed them to the doctor.

The analyst instantly demanded an explanation. Why? ... That German book for children the priest had seen when he was ten with a picture of a woman ironing out a man with long hair and long finger-nail, ironing him flat from toe to head. In the picture, the woman had just finished ironing out the man's legs.

As soon as he remembered the picture, the priest's German came back to him in a flash.

It was with very crumpled notes that the priest happily paid for his first whore in Berlin on the Spree.

OSWELL BLAKESTON

DO THEY THINK THEY'RE GOD?

WHEN they asked him if it wasn't more important to deal with problems of poverty and disease rather than direct energy to religious problems and the worship of God, the Bishop of Salisbury told Oxford University Humanist Group members that there were fanatical "do gooders" obsessed with the problems of the whole world (*Daily Telegraph*, 16/11/64). To use this approach in an effort to dodge one's responsibility to one's neighbours was intolerable, Dr. Fison added. And he wondered sometimes whether some students did not think they were God.

How Wonderful is Nature!

By EDWARD ROUX

IN 1872 two American evangelists, Dwight Moody and David Sankey arrived in England to conduct one of the greatest religious revivals since the time of Wesley. Their success (according to George Godwin: *The Great Revivalists*, Thinker's Library, 1951) arose from the fact that never before had religion been served up with so large an ingredient of entertainment. Moody represented the impact of high-powered American methods of salvation upon somnolent British practice. One of the daring innovations was a female choir.

The time came (says Godwin) when Moody's phenomenal success with large emotionally conditioned crowds began to wane. The moment came when his advance agent brought him the melancholy news that his latest appearance in New York had cost him several hundred dollars per head in publicity. And the man who had filled the largest halls in England and America looked down on an audience of—thirty three!

However, rivals would be impossible if the religious did not lapse into irreligion or indifference, and evangelists ought to be thankful for this. The Moody Institute of Science has for some years been attempting a mid-twentieth century come-back for evangelism through the medium of its "Fact and Faith" films. These exploit one of the greatest achievements in scientific technology, the colour-sound film, and also represent a very successful attempt to climb on the scientific band-wagon; for is it not a fact that science nowadays can "prove" everything, as the man in the street believes?

There is no gainsaying the great popularity which some of these films enjoy. The *City of the Bees* has for the second time within a year been shown to capacity audiences in the University Great Hall in Johannesburg, while thousands have again been turned away.

The contents of these films is largely straight science and very well done. The religious propaganda comes at the end when the handsome recorder opens a Bible and quotes an appropriate passage to show that the marvels of nature, which have been depicted, are God's handiwork. The technique resembles that of advertisement films shown in cinemas. Against a background of wonderful scenery the beautiful girl appears and finally begins to smoke one of so-and-so's brand of cigarettes.

Dr. Irwin Moon, Principal of the Moody Institute of Science, has put the argument neatly in his commentary on the film *God of Creation*. He begins by quoting "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all." There follow appropriate commentaries as the film depicts the wonders of astronomy, planets, stars and galaxies. It then shows pictures of Californian poppies, roses and other flowers growing and bursting out in a riot of colour. Then comes the "struggle of a bean plant to place its leaves in the sunlight so that the mysterious and wonderful process of photosynthesis can carry on." This is followed by shots of a caterpillar changing into a chrysalis and emerging as a swallowtail butterfly.

Having shown us these marvels of "creation" the narrator tells us that "God offers to create in us a new life... to forgive our sin... all on one condition... that we accept by faith Jesus Christ as our Saviour.... The decision now is up to you."

Even supposing that the structure and behaviour of butterflies or stars pointed to the existence of a Creator,

it would not follow by any means that the Christian idea of the blood sacrifice of a saviour god was more than a myth. There seems no good reason that the creator of the world should have a son and that the crucifixion of this son should remedy the fall from grace of the human creatures the god had made and had somehow failed to control. All this savours of tribal anthropomorphism and sympathetic magic.

But apart from Christian non-sequiturs, is the creationist view itself valid? It is based on the argument that if there is design there must be a designer, if there is contrivance there must be a contriver, and if things are strange and wonderful they must have been produced by something even more strange and wonderful.

The word "design" can be used in two ways. It may refer to a created pattern e.g. the design in a Persian carpet. On the other hand it may describe a contrivance or a gadget, e.g. a design for an electric toaster. If we find a pattern in nature there is no need to suppose it was made by a celestial carpet weaver. The beautiful forms of snow crystals with their six-sided symmetry have been attributed to God. It is easier to think of them as due to random conjunctions of water molecules. The properties of water molecules in turn spring from the nature of the atoms of which they are composed, and these in turn from the nature of protons and electrons. These are the "ultimate particles" as we know them today and we may take them as "given". To say that "God" gave them does not take us any further. It is merely another way of saying that the origin of matter, or whether it indeed had an origin, is a mystery!

So much for patterns. As for contrivances in nature, these, in terms of modern biological theory, are contrivances in an analogical sense only. The plant does not struggle to place its leaves in a certain position in order to absorb the sun's rays, in order that photosynthesis may take place, in order that food may be produced, in order that the plant may live, and so on. The words "struggle" and "in order that" represent an unnecessary assumption or begging of the question. The leaves are orientated to the light because certain hormones in their stalks are differentially destroyed or stimulated by the sun's rays so that unequal growth results—a purely biochemical and mechanical process. As a result of their orientation they absorb the light, and photosynthesis and food production follow. The plant that did not have this response mechanism would have little chance of survival in "competition" with plants that did have it. This process has been called "natural selection" and seems adequate to account for "contrivances" in nature without supposing purposive action either on the part of organisms (such as plants) or on the part of some hypothetical "creator".

There remains the subjective fact that "nature" inspires a sense of wonder in those who study her. If something is wonderful must we suppose that there is something more wonderful behind it? If so, this second and greater wonder will have behind it a third and even greater wonder. And so on ad infinitum. It is much easier to realise that nature itself is wonderful and leave it at that.

Furthermore this last view does not lead us into the difficulties in which the Christian theologian inevitably lands. It seems that nature is not only wonderful but also terrifyingly impartial. The Christian has to explain

(Concluded on page 380)

This Believing World

So we are to have one of the world's greatest evangelists—the really greatest was Jesus—back in England in 1966! When Billy Graham was here last, he converted thousands of Christians to Christianity, and no doubt he will repeat this great *tour de force* again, but this time with the prayers of the Church Assembly behind him. At least, most of the Assembly, for the Bishop of Chester, seemed rather “unhappy about it all” (*Daily Express*, November 6th). In fact, he called it “a tall order” for the Church Assembly “to commend the crusade to all Christians”. However, thank God, the Assembly recommended every Christian to pray for Dr. Graham, and we guess he'll need it.

★

One thing one must admire in Dr. Robinson, the Bishop of Woolwich, is his courage. He is never afraid of using the word Atheist, a word which makes most of his fellow bishops shudder. At Edinburgh University the other day, he said that he used to add a little prayer when waiting to fly off in an aeroplane—but did this, he asked, “do credit to my trust in God?” “I think not,” he answered. “I suspect that this is where a Christian can be a practical Atheist—and trust the pilot”. Something like this has been said before—“Put your trust in God, my boys and keep your powder dry!” by Cromwell.

★

The once holy and very reverent clothes or habits worn by nuns were described as completely “outmoded” by Cardinal Suenens at the Vatican Council. He also urged the abolition of the “anachronistic usage of customs” among nuns (*Daily Mail*, November 12th). The rule of the cloister “was often an obstacle” for nuns trying to do useful work, he said. Naturally, another cardinal—Ruffini of Palermo—warned against excessive changes.

★

The Archbishop of Westminster will have to retire now “licking his bruises”. On contraception, Dr. Heenan has never swerved an inch. The Catholic Church was against it, and that was all that mattered. But the Vatican Council decided to discuss this “controversial question” in spite of the infallibility of former pronouncements, and the opposition of die-hard cardinals who were (like Dr. Heenan) still living in the 18th century on the problem. We have an idea that the Roman Church will have to think again on many other infallible pronouncements which are now seen to be no longer infallible.

★

Some of our national newspapers have a naughty predilection for printing “quotes” from disgruntled bishops who angrily resent the way people are no longer responding to their spiritual exhortations. For example, take this from the Bishop of Chelmsford: “The adherence of the people to religious observance has never, in relation to the total population, been lower. Numerically, the strength of the Church still lies in the countryside, and its weakness is most apparent in densely populated urban areas”. Of course. Going to church on a Sunday in the country is an institution, and worshippers are very rarely disturbed by doubts. In urban districts, lots of people prefer to think for themselves rather than allow the vicar to think for them. The result? Empty churches.

★

Police at Lowell, Massachusetts, have—we read in the *Daily Telegraph* (4/11/64), called in a 15-year-old “psychic” girl, Linda Anderson, to help them search for a missing five-year-old boy, Kenneth Mason. Linda's father is a hypnotist and he put her into a trance three

times while they were sitting in the back of a police car. At one stage, the *Telegraph* tells us, Linda said: “The boy is not in the river. He is in a house.” As yet, it seems, she hasn't stated specifically which house, but we may be sure that when Kenneth is found, somebody will claim that Linda knew where he was all the time.

REGINALD UNDERWOOD

ONCE again, this week, our Views and Opinions is written by Reginald Underwood. It will, alas be his last. Indeed it was almost certainly the last article that he wrote. I was posted to me on November 7th, and Reg died suddenly exactly a week later at the age of 70. His contributions to this paper will I know, be sadly missed. His freethinking friends have lost a kindly, generous and undoubtedly brilliant colleague—and a genuinely modest one.

It was characteristic of him to accompany each of his articles with a note that if I didn't like what he had written I could always tear it up. I hardly need say that I never did. He was a clear thinker and a fine writer. He had a splendid and often scintillating command of English. When he taught the language in a grammar school it was, he laughingly told me, more than a trial: it was a torture. “Most boys don't care two hoots about grammar”, he said, “and their logic against it is sometimes unassailable.”

He also taught the boys music, having himself been a concert pianist, well known on the Continent, before the last war. In this country he was better known as a writer, with his novels *Bachelor's Hall*, *Flame of Freedom* and *An Old Maid's Lights*. And in a real sense his life came full circle. “I still sleep in the room I was born in—and hope I shall die in it,” he said to me a little while ago. And his wish was fulfilled.

The truth, is that, despite his modern intellectual outlook, Reg disliked the present-day world and looked with nostalgia at the past. On a recent visit to London he deplored the “redevelopment” around St. Paul's Cathedral—in which respect, incidentally he was far from alone. He longed for the old city he knew during his student days. It was fifty years ago this month that he had his first short story published—in *The Sunday at Home*. He went on to write dozens of stories and other pieces for magazine, and for *The Queen*, *The Windsor*, and other periodicals that were then flourishing but have long since vanished. “What a different world that was”, he exclaimed. “and for me at any rate a hundred times preferable to the present!” He knew well a number of the literary figures of that time, and he was a close friend of Havelock Ellis, whom he often used to visit in Herne Hill.

Sad though he felt at the human predicament, it must however be said that Reg Underwood was a cheerful and charming companion with a fund of stories and a wealth of experience. Death undoubtedly came to him as a blessing—he had had more than enough of life—fortunately without suffering. At the same time, perhaps a little selfishly, I am glad he lived his three score years and ten, delighting us with his writing up to the very end.

COLIN McCALL

How Wonderful is Nature!

(Concluded from page 379)

away such things as earthquakes, carnivores parasites, disease and painful death as “mysteries” produced by an all-loving, omniscient and all-powerful god. The atheist on the other hand does not have to read into nature that which is not obviously there.

THE FREETHINKER

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1

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THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 17s. 6d.; half-year, 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d. In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.25, half-year, \$2.75; three months, \$1.40.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (Tie 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 29th, 6.45 p.m.: J. A. MILLAR, "Are All Christians Criminals?"
Havering Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, December 1st, 8 p.m.: COLIN SEAGER, "Can the Politician be a Rationalist?"
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberston Gate). Sunday, November 29th, 6.30 p.m.: C. E. B. ROBINSON, "West Indians in Britain".
Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1.), Sunday, November 29th, 7.30 p.m.: S. D. KUEBART, "Religion in Hitler Germany".
North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, November 27th, 7.15 p.m.: A meeting.
Portsmouth Humanist Society (Friends Meeting House, 25 Northwood Road, Hilsca, Portsmouth), Friday, November 27th, 7.30 p.m.: TOM BARFIELD, "Religion in Schools since the 1944 Education Act".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1.), Sunday, November 29th, Dr. MAURICE BURTON, "Truth and Error in Biological Science"
Tuesday, December 1st, TOM SARGENT "Justice and the Rule of Law".

Notes and News

"We permit ourselves to think, Holy Father, that you have come to give yet another proof of your affectionate regard for England and the English people", said the Archbishop of Westminster, when Pope Paul and an audience mainly of cardinals, bishops and nuns attended a Shakespearean recital in the Vatican auditorium on November 12th. The Pope's presence was, according to Dr. Heenan, symbolic of the traditional patronage of the Holy See. But this tradition had, as the *Guardian* reminded us (13/11/64), lapsed in the modern age so far as the performing arts are concerned. "No Pope, much less a parish priest, attends in Rome a theatre, film or a concert. All are forbidden." Pope Paul for his part, referred to "a high moral lesson to be found in Shakespeare's works." And it looked as though he intended to study the lesson (for his next encyclical?). When handed a copy of the first folio to admire, the Pope

tucked it under his arm and had to be asked to give it back.

★

THERE was, at the recital, a murmur in the audience at the forced conversion of Shylock—one of the scenes acted for the benefit of the Pope and his retinue—because of the difficulty the declaration on the Jews was having in reaching a final vote at the Vatican Council. Indeed, at least one English Catholic, who had high hopes of the Council now regards it as an "expensive and over publicised fiasco." Pope John XXIII's object in summoning the Council was, said Paul Johnson, "to bring the Church up to date" (*New Statesman*, 6/11/64). "All that it has so far demonstrated is that the Church, as at present organised, is totally incapable of dealing with any of the problems of the modern world." Mr. Johnson, in fact, is one of the few Catholics who openly recognises the dilemma of a church with an infallible head. The Pope had a simple choice: either he should send the Council packing or he should submit to its authority. Mr. Johnson even made the surely blasphemous suggestion that of those invited to the Council, the Holy Ghost was the only one who had "failed to turn up."

★

A *Glasgow Herald* editorial on November 9th brought letters in favour of secular education from Freethinker contributor E. G. Macfarlane and National Secular Society secretary W. J. McIlroy. The social effects of religious segregation in schools are pernicious, said Mr. Macfarlane. "Thus we support the idea of common schools where all children—whatever the beliefs of their parents—could meet together and grow up really knowing each other and learning to practise democracy." Moral education on a secular basis is one of the great needs of our time, wrote Mr. McIlroy, "but the statutory position given to religion in the school tends to put it in the place of moral education."

★

OF three letters published in the *Glasgow Herald* on the subject on November 16th, one supported Mr. Macfarlane and two criticised Mr. McIlroy. Alexander Hulton had "long since noticed that agnostics almost invariably describe themselves as humanist or secularist as these sound less odious and [are] calculated to win more widespread acceptance." And he looked in vain for any agnostic, who had "done more for posterity than St. Paul, St. Francis, or the man born to be king." D. Mehan found it difficult to see how "something which is subject to constant change", like social habits, "can be a basis for moral precepts." Perhaps Mr. McIlroy will send Mr. Mehan a copy of *Morals without Religion*, Margaret Knight's FREETHINKER article now issued as a leaflet by the National Secular Society.

★

MRS. KNIGHT will, of course, be one of the speakers at the final meeting of the National Secular Society's Secular Education Month in the Alliance Hall, Westminster on November 30th. Actor and playwright Harold Pinter (author of *The Caretaker*) and David Collis are the other speakers, and David Tribe, president of the Society will be in the chair. Messages of support have been received from another playwright, John Osborne, from Sir Herbert Read, and from several MPs.

NEXT WEEK

Oswell Blakeston
reviews

The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany

Convictions, Commitment and Coexistence

By DENIS COBELL

SOME months ago Mrs. Mouat suggested that the slogan "Convictions, Commitment and Coexistence" should be the basis for the image projected by Humanists. I think this is an excellent starting point, and one that Humanists should work into a more precise policy, though also one that is fraught with problems. Without the last objective in the list it would be only too easy to become excessively partisan, and thus ignore the best elements of conviction and commitment that exist in those whom we disagree with. But by adding this last objective there is a danger: if coexistence exceeds the limits of normal tolerance our convictions may become so diluted as to render them worthless.

In the middle of the twentieth century it has become essential to observe a tolerance that in the past would have seemed disloyal. The spread of international communications has made this necessary, the invention of nuclear weapons has made existence impossible without it. It is unfortunate that so many of the world's religious and political systems seek only their own selfish goals, rather than the greater good of all men. For example: how does one configure coexistence between organisations as disparate as MRA and the Progressive League? The reason why Humanists must maintain convictions is not alone to destroy the beliefs of others, but rather to complement them. Although Humanists believe that this life on earth is the only one we know, it is not of any practical value to belabour this point. But a conviction of this nature is equally valueless without commitment, which implies some activity on our part. Fortunately the aims of many religious believers do not conflict with those accepted by Humanists today. One notable exception to this is the Roman Catholic Church, which still permits and admires policies that can do little to progress the health and wealth of mankind.

To coexist with this church is not so great a problem in Britain as it is in Spain; and each country can be judged by its respective fruits. The Bishop of Lerida epitomised the Spanish intolerance recently when he said, "Religious freedom is inadmissible. It cannot exist." At the Vatican Council debate on birth control in October another Spanish bishop condemned contraception and said children should be accepted with "faith and joy. Large families were a source of recruits for priestly and religious life." The catastrophe which results when a nation succumbs to an overpowering dogmatic creed, occurs because its residents are lacking in conviction and commitment of their own human dignity. Loss of these convictions is the end product of too little secular education. Coexistence within the great Roman Catholic strongholds is too high a price to pay for the many who may possess convictions of a different order. The Roman Catholic Church is officially against allowing others to practise freely what they believe; where their power is sufficiently great they prohibit the voice of opposition. This, and their emphasis on obeying the "will of God" and his "moral laws" places them outside the normal limits of tolerance. To permit them the same freedoms as others may only ensnare us all. The means employed by Catholics to reach their distasteful ends may not seem very harmful in themselves; but it does not take long to perceive the logic-hating methods that lurk just beneath the surface.

Another great ideology which lays down dogmatic creeds is Communism. The anti-democratic methods of

this political system have been rejuvenated in the removal of Khrushchev in October. But in the case of Communism it is the means which are more noxious than the ends. However, since the multitude of uninitiated cannot distinguish between the vague and imprecise variations that differentiate means and ends, in their everyday living it is necessary to ensure that coexistence is also a policy of educating to produce an awareness of these false positions. This will encourage the formulation of convictions and commitments which are more conducive to a sane peaceful way of life.

Since our leaders in the West are dedicated to an attitude which is bitterly opposed to that dictated by rulers in the East, the problem of peaceful coexistence overrides the individual's consideration of way of repeating the famous dictum wrongly attributed to Bertrand Russell, "better Red than dead".

The reason I have jumped from one ideological pillar to another in grasshopper manner, and with similar disregard for the muddle I leave behind, is because I wish to draw attention to the ease one can mouth slogans without realising the problems created. I have written in this journal before, at length, that I think Humanists and fellow-travellers often view the world with an optimistic eye. Those very factors which might have brought men's aims into unison have frequently accomplished the opposite. Whilst we no longer allow our convictions and commitments to sanction civil wars, we have permitted them to create abysses unknown in the past history of man as I have outlined above. The need to provide a framework of government and church in Britain has never been greater.

Unfortunately, few Humanists are prepared to make the sacrifices needed to enact policies which might bring this about. Until they do, I fear we may have to add a fourth objective to our slogan—namely, compromise. There is always an element of defeat in this term, but that need not be. A wise compromise goes farther than coexistence which bases its tolerance on ignoring the claims of its opponents—as happens so frequently now. For the moment, though, the task is for all sympathisers with humanism to form a united front, and commit themselves to action upon convictions with which they are agree.

Why We Must Be Apostolic

By GILLIAN HAWTIN

RECENTLY I saw advertised a course of lectures which spoke of the "secular foundations" of our society. Are the foundations of our society really secular at all?

How many secular aims have yet to be won? Humanists, Ethicists, and *soi-disant* Rationalists are conducting, in some quarters, a sort of ecumenical campaign of their own. We need study groups, observation, knowledge of what the enemy is doing. Sometimes, it seems, we even need to recognise who our enemies are! We must alert ourselves, we must arm ourselves. We must see that the results of the second spring we are witnessing, wither into autumn, and decay into winter.

In 1902 a handful of nuns expelled from France arrived from Brittany, destitute at the quayside in Southampton. They were cared for by the Red Cross.

Wrong is Right

By D. W.

I SUSPECT that when the Roman Catholic Church eventually decides that the use of contraceptives is permissible there will be a burst of acclamation. The press, radio and television of the world will enthuse about the courage, commonsense and toleration of the Church. By overcoming all obstacles and enduring bitter internecine warfare the priests will have produced an enlightened decision. Many people think, of course, that the decision will come because the weight of public opinion has made it inevitable; but it will still be a progressive step. Millions of people will be relieved of the burden of guilt aroused by flouting church authority. The crippling fear of women whose health would be endangered by another child will be removed and it will be easier to provide assistance for those millions to whom another birth means poverty or even starvation.

Those who have kept to the teachings of the Church over the years may well have mixed feelings. Have the discomforts of abstinence, the miseries of having more children than one can support and the broken health of women all been in vain? Could the underdeveloped countries with their starving millions have been given help without jeopardising their immortal souls? If contraception is permissible, or even desirable, then millions of people have been submerged in such a welter of confusion and misery that it is scarcely conceivable that it should have been without good reason. If the Church wrongly condemned contraception in the past does not this indicate uncertainty about right and wrong? Perhaps the Church rightly condemned it in the past and approval is wrong?

Once an institution lays claim to certainty it chooses to defend an extremely vulnerable position. In ages past the Roman Catholic Church could defend this position with success, for wide communication was impossible and knowledge limited. With the increase in knowledge the Church must either abandon long held doctrines or take the risk of their falling into disrepute. However, a change of view does not mean that a mistake was made in the first place. It merely means that there has been a reinterpretation. In other words the Church always knew what was right but is now looking at it in a rather different way. The residue of truth remains unaffected; only the view of it is changed.

It is interesting to speculate on the attitude of Roman Catholics when contraception is approved. Will they really be able to change their attitudes almost overnight at the behest of their Church? Or will there be a surge of questioning of traditional views and a long cool look at what they are still asked to accept? The Church may find that it is better to adhere to traditional views and take the consequences. Then the obliging flock tend to look at religious truth as being on a different dimension to the truths of everyday life. After generations of indoctrination the absurdities of weekdays are regarded as being quite natural on Sundays. Practical morality is quite separate from theological morality to which lip service is paid because it cannot be applied to flesh and blood creatures anyway. This is the elaborate pretence of the Christian religion.

The hedging in of decisions on human behaviour by religious truths leads to distortion. Decisions which should properly be made on a commonsense basis, having regard to their influence on human happiness, are obscured by all kinds of nonsense. Speculation about the wishes of God and the views of long dead men, who may never

They next went to live in private houses in Welsh Calvinistic-Methodist Wales. They now have seven schools flourishing there, each with a high proportion of non-Catholic pupils. "Why when you were in such straits, did you not go to a more friendly area?" I asked of them. "The Bishop wanted us here," was the reply. The clergy are often Irish, that is, Celts, and, thus, nationalists too. The churches are dedicated to native Welsh saints—St. Padarn, St. David, St. Iltydd. There is nothing alien about Catholicism, runs the argument. Cambria was evangelised from Ireland in the early middle ages and it can be converted from Ireland again. Now the clergy learn Welsh, and fan Nationalist hopes.

Turn to England. In 1940, two members of an order which had a number of first-rate voluntary schools, sent two of their number to a city where no convent schools previously existed. They lodged there, then a small private house was bought from the funds of the order (religious houses, having continuing personality, are good financial securities) and opened with a small group of pupils. It is now a 12-stream grammar school of nearly 400, "recognised" by the Ministry of Education. Every year, some twenty or more girls leave that school attuned to Catholicism, even if not a single one has actually been received into the Church. Most will marry; their daughters will go back there, their sons (now prejudice has been dispelled) to the boys' Catholic school (founded about the same time). What is more, every one of these girls will hold neo-Catholic views on history, theology, biology, and social problems.

It has become socially respectable to be a Catholic. Any remnants of "siege mentality" of penal times are dissipated. Once emancipation was granted, the Catholics raised their head, and became vociferous. Now they must never be offended! Public libraries are full of Catholic books, but there is immediate protest if something offensive to them is not banned from the open shelves. Family planning may be advertised in the Underground, not only because it is against their doctrine, but because it is against "natural law" which is supposed to bind everybody.

What do we know of their finances? What reliable statistics do they publish? How are convents rated? I don't know and I can't find out. It is "bad form" to criticise Catholics—shows intolerance, y'now. Yet they are making their voice felt everywhere; there are invasions into the law, e.g. *Bourne v Keane* (1919); they unite and felt in the academic level, they make their presence in the workshop, the trade union. There are organised pressure groups everywhere. If they win one inch, they try for a second. If they gain only another half inch they bide their time. But inches grow into feet.

We see the continual expansion of the Catholic community in this country since the "Irish Question" in 1829 made our forefathers give them the freedom they had so prudently withheld before. There is only one answer to this. We also must be informed, each one of us. We must sell THE FREETHINKER alongside the *Universe* at main line stations, write letters to the press and our MPs. We, too, must be apostolic! And we must attack, attack, attack!

FINAL MEETING of the
SECULAR EDUCATION MONTH
The Alliance Hall, Caxton Street, London, S.W.1,
Monday, November 30th, 7.45 p.m.

Speakers:

MARGARET KNIGHT HAROLD PINTER
DAVID TRIBE DAVID COLLIS

Organised by the National Secular Society

have lived anyway, are held to be important when they are, in fact, distinguished only by their irrelevance. The theologians' sophistry about contraception deserves to have no more importance than an amusing intellectual parlour game. That the outcome of their deliberations should, in the twentieth century, have a profound effect on the quality of life of millions of people is tragic.

CORRESPONDENCE

HOLY HUMANISM

I thought "My Story" by "a Reverent Humanist" very funny indeed. Laughable, in fact.

Perhaps the next thing we shall be learning is that the Humanists have started singing "Faith of our Fathers" before they start their meetings. Let us hope that the article was written for a bit of a lark.

WILLIAM HARKIE

INNOCENT VICTIMS

If the Roman Catholic Church decides *now* that the Jews today (1964) cannot be blamed or punished because the Jews, about 2,000 years ago killed Jesus Christ, it is not clear how the Church can continue to blame (and punish) people (in 1964) because of the mythical original sin of the mythical Adam and Eve.

N. E. S. WEST

THE BOMBAY EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

You might be probably aware that an International Eucharistic Congress is to be held in Bombay, at the end of November 1964. The entire Catholic missionary organisation in India, controlled by the Pope in Rome is mobilised for the purpose. Missionary schools and educational institutions have been working hectically under the directions and orders of the Catholic clergy, extracting funds from non-Catholic students under pressure, for this congress—flouting the rules of the grant-in-aid code of our educational department. While there are several Catholic newspapers already in India—over a dozen in Bombay alone a special *Bulletin of the International Eucharistic Congress* is allowed to

be issued, in spite of the scarcity and strictest rationing of newsprint in India. And the most astonishing fact is that our central and state governments have got mixed up with this congress of the Catholics and are helping it in a way, which could be the envy of not only the other minority religious communities in India, but the major Hindu community itself.

I have addressed the following questions to Indian MPs. Please read this attached *appeal* carefully and then answer for yourself the following questions: 1. Why should our "secular government" extend all the help and facilities to this congress of Catholic proselytisers, whose professed aim is to "spread the Love for Christ in India" and to turn India into a Christ Land? 2. Do you know that the Catholic Church, headed by the Pope in Rome, has never regarded patriotism as a virtue, that the Catholics in India, were always coerced by their Church to be unpatriotic, unfaithful to their Motherland, that even today, as evidence by the hundreds of Catholic newspapers and journals in India, the Catholics have no love for our freedom, our ideals? 3. Do you know that *all* our neighbouring countries in Asia and Africa, knowing the aims and ambitions of the Catholic Church, have either curbed or totally banned the activities of the Catholic missionaries in their country? 4. Do you know that very recently the Roman Catholic Church, under the direct orders of the Pope, organised a plot to blow up the progressive government of Sirimao in Ceylon and that the Catholic Church was behind the assassination of her husband, Prime Minister Bandarnaiake? Do you know that the Roman Catholic Church has not only not recognised our liberation of Goa from Portuguese slavery but as a rebuff to us, the expelled Archbishop of Goa was promoted by the Pope to the position of a Cardinal? 6. Are you pining for "the love for Christ"? Do you want your mother and wife your sisters and daughters to embrace Christianity? . . .

We do not want another South Vietnam to be staged in India. We do not want here a conspiracy to blow up our independence as that in our neighbouring Ceylon. We do not want Fascism to be forced upon us. We do not want this International Eucharistic Congress of foreigners to be held in Bombay or anywhere in India.

BRAHMACHARI DATTAMURTI
(Bombay)

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