

The Freethinker

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"On Good Friday Jesus arose from the dead and on Easter Sunday he descended [sic] into heaven". This was the answer of a reasonably bright school leaver in a county secondary school to a question on the significance of Christianity's foremost celebrations. It is but one of innumerable cases which might be quoted to illustrate one or all of the following contentions: poor standards of religious teaching; complete apathy of students to the subject; irrelevance of Christianity to the daily lives of most people today.

Yet the 1944 Education Act makes the teaching of only one subject viz. "undenominational" religious instruction, a statutory requirement. It also imposes on the school the provision of an "undenominational" act of "collective worship" as part of morning assembly. In each local education authority area, religious instruction is taught according to a religio-political compromise known as an Agreed Syllabus, regardless of the teaching resources available and the special needs of the children in each of the schools involved. It is hardly surprising that few teachers choose to specialise in religious knowledge at training colleges, and most of those who do are themselves emotionally committed and unable to teach the subject impartially.

Apologists for the present situation are generally uninterested in impartiality. Most of them are quite blatant in assertions that religion is the mainspring of all education and that it is part of the purpose of Agreed Syllabuses to encourage children to join a church or Sunday school to practise religion in fellowship. Particularly do they insist that ethics cannot be taught except in relation to religion.

The Secular School
A secular school is sometimes described as one "where God is denied". It is not. It is a school where honesty and objectivity prevail, a neutral school in a free, pluralistic society, which teaches only what is capable of universal verification according to the highest standards available in each generation, and which leaves to the individual conscience formulation of views on ultimate reality. Have Christians so little confidence in their churches, Sunday schools and the quality of their message that they think children will automatically come to deny God unless subject to daily indoctrination at public expense?

Two of the most religious countries in the world, the United States and India, are among those which have a secular constitution, introduced as a civil liberties measure. James Madison, author of the First Amendment to the Constitution, bulwark of the American Secular State, made these memorable observations:

"It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties . . . Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other sects? That

the same authority which can force a citizen to contribute threepence only of his property for the support of any one establishment may force him to conform to any other establishment in all cases whatsoever?"

The white settlers of America had bitter experience of religious persecution in their European homelands, and wisely saw to it that religious bigotry did not victimise (officially at least) them or their children in their new country. Christians are quick to denounce Communists, for example, for indoctrination. Everyone recognises that political parties, advertisers and public relations consultants shall not be allowed to invade our schools and establish "brand loyalty"

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Secular Education

By DAVID TRIBE

at a tender age. Yet particular religious views are not only allowed to enter, but are now prevented by law from leaving.

Withdrawal and Opting Out

In some respects, Christianity is more controversial than party politics or advertising. Not only is it subject to dispute at the practical level—on grounds of utility, sociology or ethics—but its central teaching is quite frankly incredible in an age of scientific knowledge and historical research, so that most of its adherents today admit that it must be accepted "by faith". Though apologists state that education depends on religion, it is in fact the only part of the school curriculum from which a teacher or child can be "withdrawn" or "excused" on ideological grounds.

Quite clearly, if religious instruction were the lifesaving force it is sometimes represented to be, it would be quite wrong for a parent to be able to "deprive" his child of it. Yet "conscience clauses" have been written into the act. In practice, of course, they are entirely unsatisfactory. Though parents belonging to sects—Roman Catholic and a wide variety of fundamentalist Protestants—which rightly do not regard either collective worship or RI as "undenominational," seem prepared to withdraw their children, many Humanist parents are reluctant to have their children excused for fear that they may be embarrassed by feeling isolated and "special" or even victimised.

In many primary schools, where it is generally believed that, especially in the early years, subjects should be taught by the class teacher, particularly in matters which relate to a child's attitude to life, teachers who opt out of worship and RI often fail to get any appointment. In secondary schools they antagonise colleagues who have to deputise. It is almost certain that a teacher who declines to conduct or even attend morning worship will never gain a headship or deputy-headship. What happens in practice is that many teachers conceal their real views.

The truth is that the Christian churches have never been particularly interested in the generally accepted criteria of sound education. Indeed, it would not be overstating the case to say that they have usually opposed them. When Christianity became the official ideology of the Roman

Empire in 324, it took steps to close down the independent philosophical schools and institutions of secular learning. Such education as survived was the preserve of a clerical élite, whose task it was to impose uniformity of religious belief on all citizens, who were otherwise quite uneducated. This was in the biblical tradition of being "fools for Christ's sake" and believing that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God". England would have had state education in 1807 instead of 1870 if it were not for opposition by the bench of bishops. The churches established day schools only to forestall state or independent organisations and to try to keep all learning under clerical domination.

Philosophically, there is no support for Christianity, Judaism, or other religions — many of which are now, by the way, represented in this country—outside the organisations themselves. Christian theological ideas are suppositions which lack independent verification, and so properly come into the same category as astrology, spiritualism and demonology, which are excluded from school curricula. They are of interest only insofar as they illuminate history, sociology, anthropology, and allusions in art and literature. This they share with other world religions and various mythologies and quasi-religious cults. Any act of worship or RI syllabus based on them is clearly without acceptable intellectual credentials and should be eliminated from all county schools. Any mention of religion, as of politics, in history or other syllabuses must be completely impartial. So too should any course in comparative religion and philosophy for the upper school.

Ethics

If religious knowledge is itself poorly founded as an academic discipline the linking with it of ethics is even more unjustifiable. Religion concerns what is (or is supposed to be) so from a doctrinal viewpoint. Ethics concerns what ought to be so from social observation. The mere fact that a god decrees something as right or wrong does not mean that it is. Gods have often been depicted as bad. Man worships a god because he is bad and must be placated or good and must be praised, and thus arrogates to himself the right to decide independently by observation and reason what is bad or good. In theory today, if not in practice, the state does not demand religious belief of all its citizens, but it does demand social behaviour. This is a recognition that the two things are entirely different.

A lot of adolescent unrest may be attributed to the artificial linking of ethics with religion which occurs in our schools. The most delinquent age for males in this country is 14, when they are still at school, absorbing a 20-year-old heritage of universal RI. One of the reasons is almost certainly that they have then seen through the hypocrisy of the system, know that teachers do not believe what they have themselves been saying, and reject all aspects of "authority" with the religion they can no longer accept. Clearly, moral education must be treated as a separate subject with a social origin.

Denominational Schools

That religious dogmas, whether right or wrong, weaken rather than strengthen morality, is well shown by the high delinquency rate of religious, particularly Roman Catholic, schools throughout the world. These schools known as aided, special agreement and "controlled" voluntary schools in this country, not only teach denominational religion, but frequently present a slanted version of history, science, and particularly of sociology. They inevitably produce some element of xenophobia in their students, who see themselves in sectarian terms rather than

as national and world citizens. It is most unfortunate that children should be segregated in this way, and that parents should seek to impose on their children their own doctrinal views. It is outrageous that the whole community should be asked to foot the bill.

Yet in the "controlled" schools, many of which are Church of England primary schools in country areas served by only one school, no money is found by the denominations at all. The aided schools, mostly Catholic, have to find some money. Usually they claim that 25 per cent of the cost is found. Actually, this is 25 per cent of the alterations, repairs and "transferring" costs. The entire maintenance bill—including staff salary, even that paid to members of religious orders who have to hand it over to the order—is met by the local authority. For all voluntary schools in 1962-63 this maintenance bill was about £133m, much of it necessitated by wasteful duplication of facilities in areas with county schools.

Another contentious point is the public schools, many of them founded, as their name suggests, on national endowments and for the good of the nation. As part of their general programme of social conformity, they have compulsory chapel, beyond the reach even of unsatisfactory "conscience clauses".

We do not claim that secular education will automatically solve all the nation's educational problems. But it will certainly solve a large number of them.

Religious Use of Peyote Upheld

THE Supreme Court of California in a 5 to 1 decision has upheld use of a drug called peyote in connection with religious rites conducted by Navajo Indians. The decision held that to ban such use would interfere with the free exercise of religion as guaranteed by the First Amendment.

Peyote or mescal, or "medicine" as it is sometimes called by the Indians, is a drug derived from a cactus plant indigenous to southern Texas and Mexico. The fermented juice of this plant produces a form of intoxication in which pleasant hallucinations are experienced.

Its use in Indian religious practice is known to go back to the days of Columbus. It has become a problem for US officials. In a statement made public by Senator Carl Hayden (Democrat, Arizona), when he was still a Representative, the complaint was made that "around these peyotes a sort of religious cult was developed, and churches were organised, and preachers appointed, and even some church buildings erected."

The nature of the cult was explained in a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs by Albert Hensley, leader of the "Mescal Winnebagos." He explained that "to us [the peyote] is a portion of the body of Christ, even as the communion bread is believed to be a portion of Christ's body by other Christian denominations. It was given exclusively to Indians and God never intended that white men should understand it..."

Opinions differ as to how peyote affects the human system. It has been alleged that peyote is not a habit-forming drug and is therefore not a narcotic in the usual sense. On the other hand, it does effect a temporary divorce from reality. Some of its effects are not unlike those of alcoholic intoxication.

The Indians were attracted to peyote as a narcotic to escape from their misery and as a power that could conduct them, at least temporarily, to a happy hunting ground. The kind of hallucination produced by peyote is described by a scientist: "I gave myself over to the

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Education Commission Recommendations in Quebec

By LANJE GARDYEN

If the Government of Quebec Province, Canada, adopts the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Education—and early indications are that it will—it will spell the end of the dominant influence the Roman Catholic Church has traditionally held over Quebec's school system, says Gordon Pape in the *Montreal Gazette* (November 25th).

The Commission's report, prepared under the chairmanship of Msgr. A. M. Parent, one of Quebec's leading clerics, would sweep away virtually all remaining sources of direct church influence on the schools, substituting a highly centralised system which, while retaining its denominational character, would be under direct control of the new Ministry of Education.

The latest Parent report sounds the death knell for the classical colleges, traditional training grounds for Quebec's intellectual élite. It closes the door to any future religious domination in universities, normal schools, secondary schools, or the new "institutes", and it condemns over-emphasis on religion in elementary schools.

In short, it calls for an entirely new approach to French-Canadian education based on the demands of the 20th century rather than on an outdated traditionalism.

Fittingly enough, says Mr. Pape, the groundwork for this radical change in attitudes has been laid by liberal elements within the Church itself, under the leadership of Cardinal Leger. The evolution has in fact, been taking place for several years: religious orders have been gradually withdrawing from the teaching field, clerics have disappeared from such powerful bodies as the Montreal Catholic School Commission, and increasing emphasis has been laid on the "democratic" aspects of education.

Last year's first report of the Parent Commission crossed the border from evolution to revolution, however, calling for the abolition of the influential Catholic committee, and insisting on the establishment of a central Ministry of Education to run Quebec's schools.

Opposition to such radical changes was expected to be strong, and in fact the initial public outcry forced a six-month delay in the passage of Bill 60. But once again the Church itself provided important support for the measure. The assembly of bishops decided to go along with the reforms, provided certain amendments were made, and the voices of protest faded into the night. Now, with Bill 60 safely on the statute books, the Royal Commission wants to go the rest of the way.

The key to their latest move in providing full public control is the proposal to create a new system of "institutes" in Quebec, which in effect will mean the disappearance of the once-proud classical colleges.

For years the classical colleges, owned and directed by religious orders, were the only French-Canadian outlet to higher education, and today they still account for a large percentage of students entering university. But as the Commission points out, co-ordination between the colleges has been lacking, standards vary, and university entrance requirements suffer accordingly.

So, the Commission concludes, the colleges will have to go for the public good, absorbed along with other private institutions into the new system. The report closes the door to their continued functioning as private bodies on the post-secondary level by specifically asking that the new, state-controlled institutes be recognised as

the only acceptable level of pre-university training.

"The classical college authorities recognise that they can no longer maintain and raise the level of collegiate studies without a regrouping," the report says. "We are inviting the classical colleges to a regrouping that is perhaps wider than they thought of; instead of regrouping only among themselves, we are inviting them to integrate into vaster units." The Commission acknowledges this will entail "considerable sacrifices" but states flatly that the classical colleges and other private institutions "can no longer retain their old individual liberties and will be called upon to fuse with or integrate into larger units of one type or another."

The commissioners also state that "a sector or a complete level of education can no longer be completely turned over to the private sector." And with this principle in mind, the report goes to great lengths to ensure that all education components will remain in public hands in the future.

The Commission pointedly rules out any private domination, either religious or lay, of the new limited charter universities which will be set up, and in the case of Loyola College insists that the Jesuits divest themselves of control and that a public corporation be formed before charter is granted.

The 25 religious "normal" schools in the province, as well as 81 other public and private teacher training institutions, are to be eliminated and all teacher training handed over to the universities, according to standards set down by the Department of Education.

The secondary level classical courses offered by classical colleges are to be integrated into the regional school boards. Although the commission believes that the classical colleges might continue to function on this level, it suggests that a "modification of the private character" of many of these institutions may be necessary. The new institutes are to be exclusively public bodies, financed and controlled by the Ministry of Education.

The report even suggests there be a certain degree of "democratisation" in the administration of existing universities.

But a much larger degree of public control is not the Commission's only concern. Much stress is also laid on the over-emphasis on religion in elementary schools, on class time lost through compulsory attendance at masses, on too much religion in the textbooks. The commissioners in effect come down for a healthy interest in religion, but not a morbid preoccupation with it.

There is no question but that the changes the report advocates are radical, Mr. Pape says. But, if first reactions are any indication, it appears public opinion in most areas of Quebec may be ready to accept them as a necessary part of the great transition the province is experiencing.

J. B. S. HALDANE

The death of J. B. S. Haldane on December 1st at the age of 72, though expected, is a great blow to science and to freethought. Not the least of Professor Haldane's abilities was that of explaining and interpreting diverse developments in science for the layman. Though the number of these articles had decreased in recent years, he remained a regular contributor to the *Rationalist Annual*, and had already written for the 1965 issue.

This Believing World

On two occasions this year BBC TV has given us, during the religious hour on Sunday evenings, a sketch of the life of Henri Dunant—founder of one of the greatest organisations, in human history, the Red Cross—rendered by that distinguished actor, Rupert Davies. Dunant's tragic story was little known for, like so many benefactors of the human race, he was very badly treated, and indeed almost forgotten, though the Red Cross spread all over the world. But Mr. Davies never said a word about the religion of Henri Dunant, and most people no doubt believed him to be inspired by Jesus and Christianity. The truth that was carefully hidden on TV is that Dunant had no religion whatever—in other words, he was an Atheist. His Red Cross emblem was the reverse of the Swiss flag and has nothing to do with Jesus.

★

Thank God for the Vatican Council! It now allows all Catholics in this country to hear mass in English instead of the holy language which for the Vatican, is still Latin. Think of it, all Catholics will now be able to *understand* what they often used to gabble without understanding. Other countries can also use their own language. Will the ordinary churchgoer now be "exalted", or will he realise more than ever how he has been hoaxed with a lot of nonsense about miracles, angels, devils, hell, and heaven?

★

The Catholic Church in the past condemned the idea of the Holy Bible being translated so that everybody could understand it, and inflicted the severest penalties on the translators, including even burning alive. This was done to protect the Church's interests against the inevitable sequel, the Reformation and the beginning of the decline of Catholic power in all fields of human progress. That decline will now be further accelerated.

★

The Rector of Woolwich, the Rev. N. Stacey, wants the service of Remembrance Day dropped because it is "losing its grip". Our own attendance at the service was always rudely shaken when, after a deathly silence of two minutes, and the sudden booming of a gun, officers or sergeant majors or both began to *yell*—and how!—orders to the unlucky surrounding soldiers, possibly in the sacred name of discipline. Thus ended all reverence for the dead! But of course religion and militarism were always hand in hand. And anyhow—what good does Remembrance Day do now? Did it stop the Second World War?

★

Horror stricken, we must record that a church which was attended by Queen Mary in Beaumont-cum-Moze, near Clacton has actually been used for satanic practices. It was recently splashed with rabbit's blood, and a crucifix also smashed. Fortunately, the rector, the Rev. J. Clementson, was there ready to exorcise the foul spirits responsible. "Evil spirits, go back to your place and never return to us again", the vicar ordered; and we are glad to say the church is back to its pristine purity. Said Mr. Clementson "Our little church is clean again". Which shows that no evil spirit can stand up to a courageous parson defying him. But would not a vigorous clanging of church bells have done the trick as well? After all, that was their original purpose.

★

Epworth Press of London is publishing in 1965 a new edition of *The Hope of Immortality* by Dr. W. R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, and is anxious to discover "to what extent the questions people ask about life after

death have changed" since 1936, when the Dean first gave his talks over the radio. The firm therefore asked *Daily Telegraph* readers (November 28th) to write in about their problems, and Dr Matthews would "try to answer the most numerous and most pressing in his new final chapter." The natural question, we should think, would be to ask for evidence—as opposed to the hope—of immortality.

HINDUS AND THE POPE

BRAHMACHARI DATTAMURTI, the Hindu religious leader whose letter of protest against the Bombay Eucharistic Congress appeared in THE FREETHINKER a fortnight ago, called on the Pope to hand over one of India's principal Marian shrines to its "rightful owners, the Hindus." This token of penitence for atrocities "perpetrated by Portuguese and Catholic clergymen over three centuries" would, Dattamurti said, dispel fears about the intentions of the Catholic Church (*The Guardian*, 1/12/64) and he quoted a brochure on the shrine in question, Mount Mary, as saying that it was erected over a dismantled temple of the Hindu goddess, Durga Devi. Meanwhile the Central Executive of the All-India Association of Holy Men urged respect for the Pope as India's guest, but said that Christianity should not exploit the country's innocent and uneducated people by coercion and allurements.

RELIGIOUS USE OF PEYOTE UPHeld IN CALIFORNIA

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magnificent array of colours, ever changing, ever new, every conceivable combination or design... I was in the seventh heaven of ecstasy."

Among the Indians such ecstasies were regarded as an answer to their prayers. The general effect upon participants in the rites has been described as "demoralising and degrading." There have been many attempts to suppress the use of peyote. A former official of the Indian Bureau reports that "from 1905 complaints from Indian officials became so numerous that I was directed... to suppress it if possible."

The official reports that he finally succeeded in "annihilating the whole peyote business and for nearly a year there was no peyote to be had." The official adds that "finally politics got into the situation... and my work was ruined. The traffic was reopened..."

This was only one of the official efforts to enforce a ban on the use of peyote. The latest occurred in 1962 when police entered a "hogan" where peyote ceremonies were going on and made arrests, charging violation of the Health and Safety Code of California which forbids unauthorised possession of peyote.

Their action was sustained by the lower court, which found the defendants guilty. But the Supreme Court overturned its decision under the "free exercise" clause. The court found that this was strictly a First Amendment case: "Only if the application of the proscription improperly infringes upon the immunity of the First Amendment can defendants prevail; their case rests upon that Amendment, which is operative upon the states by means of the Fourteenth Amendment."

The court finally concluded that "since the defendants used in peyote in a *bona fide* pursuit of a religious faith, and since the practice does not frustrate a compelling interest of the state, the application of the statute properly defeated the immunity of the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States..."

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.
- London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS J. W. BARKER, L. EBURY, J. A. MILLAR and C. E. WOOD.
- (Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: L. EBURY.
- Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street.) Sunday Evenings
- Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.
- North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.
- Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY

INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, December 13th, 6.45 p.m.: T. D. SMITH, "The Christian Mythology".
- Havering Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, December 15th, 8 p.m.: DEREK LEE, "Communications—Their use and abuse"
- Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street), Sunday, December 13th, 3 p.m.: TOM HYSLOP, "Guy Aldred".
- Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, December 13th, 6.30 p.m.: R. W. MORRELL, "Jesus, Mythical or Historic?"
- Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1.), Sunday, December 13th, 7.30 p.m.: MAURICE BANNISTER, "Cash and Christmas".
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London W.C.1), Sunday, December 13th, 11 a.m.: MAURICE CRANSTON, "The Rights of Man and Civil Liberties". Tuesday, December 15th, 7.30 p.m.: EDWARD MARTELL, "The Defence of Freedom".

Notes and News

THERE is no point at this stage, said *Church and State* (November) in "rehearsing the replies of the presidential candidates regarding the subject matter of our telegrams." One item, however, seemed to bode ill for the future no matter which of the candidates had been elected. Although both Mr. Johnson and Mr. Goldwater dealt with the other issues raised by Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (the body which publishes the magazine) neither replied to the question: "Would you favour or oppose government assistance for birth control in foreign and domestic welfare programmes?" The candidates were, of course, afraid of the Roman Catholic Church and the "Catholic vote". *Church and State* believed that this attitude was unrealistic, because "Catholic people do not follow their priests on this issue. The priests know this and admit it in personal conversations. Even the priests themselves are shaken. They know they are wrong and are desperately

seeking a face-saving formula to reverse the position. A courageous president could help them and the world."

SIR JOHN NEWSOM recently told governors and managers of Westminster Archdiocese schools that as Catholics "our numbers are so small that we cannot justify the full range of grammar school education." He therefore advocated comprehensive schools "to get our children into a Catholic environment" and, he said, "we should persuade our local authorities to allow us to have them" (*Catholic Herald*, 27/11/64). It would be a good thing when Catholic Schools could get integrated into the national system, he went on. "If we haven't something to give the national educational system beyond running schools within it, then we're failing." But sisters had "a degree of consecration and devotion not often given to a secular. And the more people like that in the national system, the more influence we can give it. "According to Archbishop Beck of Liverpool (quoted in the same issue of the *Catholic Herald*), the provision of Catholic schools was a service which the Church renders to society." But not all members of society see it that way.

A SUGGESTION for the Roman Catholic "malcontents"—all members of the traditionalist party—appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* correspondence columns on November 30th. The writer, M. A. Lafrance of London, suggested the revival of "a colourful medieval tradition", the election of an anti-pope. The last such was Felix V (1439-1449) but Mr. Lafrance felt certain that "somewhere in Spain or Sicily" Felix VI was "waiting in the aisles."

THE church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields appears on a Chinese 8 yen stamp along with the heads of Marx and Engels. The stamp, illustrated in the *Daily Telegraph* (28/11/64) commemorates the centenary of the First International, and the Chinese press notice—we read—describes the church as "St. Martin's Meeting House." The building that should have been featured is "the old St. Martin's Hall, which stood in Long Acre" and was the scene of the founding of the First International in 1864. It had no connection with St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

ANOTHER new commemorative issue, the Malta three-penny independence stamp, bears, appropriately, the papal triple tiara, the Maltese cross and a dove (the Holy Ghost?).

BRIAN NICOL of Birkenhead, in a letter to the *Guardian* (28/11/64) rightly questioned Dr. Heenan's recent statement that in the case of mixed marriages, "There is usually no problem of conscience, for those who attend no church, in making a promise to allow the children to be brought up as Catholics." No one, Mr. Nicol pointed out, is in a position to know what is in the minds of most non-Catholics, non-churchgoing partners in mixed marriages, but he thought it unlikely that non-believers "can be very happy to see their children indoctrinated at an early age with a rigid point of view with which they do not themselves sympathise. But he also detected in the Archbishop's remarks, "the old insinuation that non-Christians, atheists, humanists, and the like have no conscience and few morals." Does it, he asked, "still need repeating that there is no religious monopoly on morality and that 'Christian' is not synonymous with 'good'?" Alas it does. As Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary notes, "Christian" is "often a vague term of approbation, a decent, respectable, kindly, charitably minded person."

Reverent Humanism

By F. M. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

MAYBE I am hopelessly out-of-date. Old battle-cries spring readily to my lips. I have no hesitation in saying that I am anti-clerical and anti-ecclesiastical. As I look back over the years, I see the development of a non-supernaturalist and rationalistic freedom of thought. It has become explicit in various figures and points of view. Offhand, I recall the development of Victorian agnosticism under such leaders as Huxley or Stephen. They developed the minds of men within the mould of the scientific method and applied this method to the humanities as well as to the physical sciences. The concept of evolution was a vast revolution in the whole of intellectual thought. I recall the secularist struggles of a Holyoake or a Bradlaugh which had the result of permitting the common man to speak his mind without fear of clerical intimidation through the force of law. In thought, one delights to share anew in the struggles of the past. But it is a disconcerting thing for me to remember that these struggles are still with us and show no signs of abating. Children are still indoctrinated in our schools and taught that a sound moral code can only be grounded upon outworn theological beliefs. The law still takes in theory its historic line over blasphemy and these legal decisions of the past could still be resurrected to cripple a freethought movement today. Our divorce legislation is still dominated by theological considerations of marriage as made in heaven. Opposition to a modification of the laws concerning abortion comes first and foremost from the traditional churches. Over the last half of the century, organised freethought has tended to lose ground in this country whilst the churches, however be their decrease in numbers, have bypassed the new learning, replaced serious scholarship with mere assertion, and have welded even more firmly their shackles upon the sphere of government and legislation.

I do not think that my picture is an untrue one. At the same time, I have watched with close interest the practical developments of a type of so-called humanism which some have espoused and have assisted in setting forth publicly as the true image of a concern for man and his life within this world. I well recall being urged not to be negative in my approach and not to say a word which might upset the Christians. There was much of charitable work in which the two sides might co-operate and a rift was to be avoided at all costs. Of course, it was natural that we should give way and allow the propaganda to be coated with the language of Christians theology. Again and again, I have been assured that the old battle-cries are out of date and merely Victorian. Nobody, I have been told, would be attracted to them today because they are the standards borne in past conflicts which are now resolved. Such publishing undertakings as the RPA Cheap Reprints or the Thinkers' Library belong to a distant past and represent intellectual viewpoints no longer necessary to reproduce. I remember remarking that, whilst such authors as Joseph McCabe are out of print, the Catholic Truth Society and like bodies flood the world with cheap and well-written literature setting forth a dogmatic theology. For some reason that I have never fathomed, it is assumed natural that such should be the case. It was a bad thing to seek to expel religion from the schools and to ground educational work upon a secular basis. On the contrary, all would be well if Humanists and Christians could combine to intro-

duce into the schools some teaching of comparative religion. Christians are tolerant, and it is easy to co-operate with them. Many Humanist teachers never find it necessary to withdraw from the religious part of assembly or to refuse to give religious instruction. It can all be interpreted so easily in terms of a reverent agnosticism! I might mention schools where a definite method of bullying had been adopted against those who had contracted out on grounds of unbelief; no doubt it was the truculence of the unbelieving which had caused the trouble!

Catholic Crisis

(A National Secular Society Statement)

RECENT events have highlighted what the National Secular Society and other organisations have been saying for a very long time, viz. that millions of humane and sincere people throughout the world have been persuaded by infant indoctrination and emotional appeal to support the Roman Catholic Church in the belief that it was an organisation with otherworldly orientation and concern for "spiritual values". They were not encouraged to change their opinion by the absurd vituperation of hysterical Protestant Fundamentalists to the effect that Rome was the "Beast", "Anti-Christ", or the "Scarlet Woman of the Apocalypse". Nor did the Medieval Inquisition and the more modern techniques of character-assassination and economic boycott of rebels and critics encourage the disenchanted to speak out. So it has taken almost 2,000 years to bring to the notice of sizeable numbers of the intelligent Catholic laity the true position inside their church.

The book *Objections to Roman Catholicism* and the published reports on the third session of the Second Vatican Council present a picture, endorsed by Catholics themselves, of political and social reaction, intrigue, broken promises, utter disregard for human happiness, bigotry, fanaticism, superstition and totalitarianism. Bogus relics are given credentials, the wishes of the laity and even of reforming bishops are utterly ignored. Catholic schools have highest crime-rate throughout the world, family planning is obstinately denied despite the world's population problems, censorship is rife. Nazism and Anti-Semitism are not effectively repudiated, religious liberty is not granted to non-Catholics, liberty of conscience is denied to Catholics, and the sacraments are wielded for political ends.

After conducting what amounted to an election campaign with a "reformist" ticket before his elevation, Pope Paul has presented a very different face since. Hitherto he has gone out of his way to defend his old mentor, pro-Fascist Pius XII, against charges by Rolf Hochhuth and others of cynical disregard for human welfare when set against the interests of the Catholic Church. He has also supported the Curia and the reactionaries of Italy and Spain against the more liberal elements at the Council, which has been packed off home with yet again almost nothing done. The newly proclaimed "collegiality" of the bishops and the Pope is, set beside the dogma of papal infallibility, essentially only another name for consultations which already existed. The schema on Ecumenism is nothing but a reaffirmation of the traditional expansionist policy of the Vatican, associated with the Counter-

Reformation and the designation of Britain as a "missionary" country.

Britain is traditionally a Protestant (not to say a sceptical) country, and we believe the overwhelming majority of its citizens want it to stay that way. How many Catholics, be it said, would want the Roman *Index* of forbidden books enforced here? Yet there are disturbing signs that the Church of England, still—despite its bare 6 per cent of Easter communicants—the established church of this land, is moving closer to Rome as both churches set about canon law reform. Certain publicity-hungry bishops never tire of praising the Vatican, visiting Rome and introducing papalist practices in their own dioceses. Though the Anglican Church is supposed to be effectively curbed by Parliament as the price it pays for its privileges and endowments, it is in fact becoming more progressively independent and more Catholic. The Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure removed the appeal from Church courts to the Privy Council. The Vestments Measure was one step towards the reintroduction of the mass. It behoves the nation to wake up and disestablish and disendow the Church of England as a matter of urgency.

Bath

By F. A. RIDLEY

I RECENTLY had occasion to visit Bath, that ancient West Country city amid the Mendip Hills which, since the beginning of this Christian era, has been a veritable repository of the chequered fortunes and changing face of English history. For with the possible exception of London itself, no English town has figured more constantly in the successive pages of English history or has been more prolific in famous names and historic buildings than has this ancient spa, first colonised by the Romans as far back as the first century. It was not the first time I had visited Bath; far from it, for I spent my earliest years in a small Wiltshire village only a few miles away, and it was there that I recall what must surely be my earliest memory, the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. Consequently I can truthfully say that I have known Bath (or at least its vicinity) since the Victorian age.

Bath, however, is much older than that, in fact its known history is almost coeval with the Christian religion of which it houses one of the most splendid shrines, Bath Abbey (founded at the end of the 15th century). But Bath has known older gods (and goddesses) than Christ, just as it knew older founders than the English. For the Romans were here from about the middle of the first century on, when Vespasian, (afterwards emperor) first subjugated the West Country to Roman rule. Julius Caesar made two flying raids on Britain in 54-53 BC, but the permanent conquest of Britain did not begin until AD 44. In Bath, known in Latin as *Aqua Solis*, the Romans quickly noted the medical character of the perpetual warm water that gushed up from underground sources, and established a spa there which—at least, if we may judge from the impressive excavated remains—must have been one of the show places during the approximate four centuries of Roman rule of Ancient Britain. For the elaborate Roman baths, originally sacred to the goddess Minerva, are the most impressive extant relics of the Roman occupation to be found anywhere perhaps in this country. Embellished with lead mined by Roman engineers in the surrounding Mendip Hills are still displayed several Roman votive inscriptions in honour of dead Roman residents in *Aqua Solis*—mostly serving soldiers who were presumably stationed in or

around the then already fashionable spa, to which, no doubt, the Roman rulers of the island went on vacation or into retirement. In more recent centuries English proconsuls and ex-colonial governors eventually retired to spend their last years in the pleasurable surroundings of the West Country. In Bath Abbey, for example, a memorial plaque commemorates Admiral Phillips, Australia's first governor general.

In Roman Britain, whilst Bath appears then as now to have been chiefly known as a health spa, it seems also to have been a military centre of some importance, judging by the character of the votive inscriptions. One would appear to demonstrate that trades unicnism was not unknown in antiquity even in the Roman army itself. It commemorates a defunct Roman legionary, the costs of whose interment were defrayed by the Armourers' Guild. All the above are of Pagan persuasion being dedicated *Manibus Intransitibus* (i.e. to the infernal shades) and as far as I know no early Christian remains have been found in Roman Bath. When the Romans officially withdrew from Britain (c 410 AD), Bath seems to have continued as a Roman-Celtic settlement until it was finally sacked by the Saxons in 577—or, according to another account, by a band of Irish pirates.

However, during this little-known era when Britain along with Europe was sliding back into the Dark Ages, Bath had (or may have had) the most famous of all its famous residents: none other than King Arthur who, according to a later British chronicler (Gildas) defeated the English invaders at an unidentified place named Mons Badonis near Bath. How much truth there was in this legend we have no means of knowing, for the historicity of King Arthur has been as hotly disputed as that of say Robin Hood—or even Jesus Christ! Perhaps however, there actually was a Roman-trained leader of a British cavalry corps who did beat the Saxons somewhere near Bath (all the legends represent Arthur as a cavalry leader) and whom the all-transforming hand of time has eventually translated into the medieval hero of the Holy Grail and of the Round Table.

Since the Roman occupation "softly and silently vanished away", Bath has continued to flourish under successive Saxon and Norman regimes. In 973 the Saxon King Edgar was crowned king of all England by the famous Archbishop Dunstan. In 1499 Bath Abbey was founded with the active support of the first Tudor, Henry VII. Queen Elizabeth I visited Bath, which had already received its royal charter from Richard I in 1189. The 18th century was however the golden century as far as Bath was concerned. For this was when Beau Nash may almost be said to have made Bath the fashionable capital of England. It was certainly England's architectural capital. For it was under the early Hanoverian Georges (those least attractive of monarchs!) that a succession of gifted architects created those Regency streets and squares (Paragon, Royal Crescent and Queen Square to name only the best known) which rank among the show places of English architecture and today vie with the Roman baths of classical antiquity and the medieval glories of the abbey as Bath's principal cultural attractions.

Dr. Johnson, Jane Austen, Malthus and the younger Pitt are still the most famous of a glittering throng of visitors who made Bath a world-famous centre. In recent years that doyen of African rulers, Haile Selassie, the "Conquering Lion of Judah", took refuge there when Ethiopia was overrun in 1935 by the Fascist hordes of Mussolini. Pitt died there in 1806 broken-hearted by Napoleon's overwhelming victory at Austerlitz. Traditionally his last words were, "My country how I leave

my country!" But a volume of contemporary reminiscences which I once came across in the Library of the British Museum, records the most irreverent but probable story that the great statesman's last words were actually addressed to his butler and ran, "More port Jenkins, for God's sake, more port".

OBITUARY

Mr. Joe Hall one of the oldest members of the Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society, died on Saturday, November 21st in his 92nd year.

In his earlier days Mr. Hall was a staunch trade unionist and, in spite of deafness and almost complete blindness, he continued to express his freethought views in a very forcible manner to the end, of his long life.

The cremation took place at Yardley crematorium, where a secular service was conducted by William Miller.

We extend our sympathy to Mrs. Hall and her family.

FILMS

"THE NOVICE"

One of the finds of the 1964 Venice Festival and of the recent London Film Festival was Bruno Paolinelli's *La Suora Giovane* (*The Novice*).

The camera's leisurely panning over beautifully lit interiors and atmospheric exteriors is reminiscent of Antonioni, but without what I sometimes find irritatingly bizarre angle-shots in his work. The acting is uniformly distinguished. But most impressive of all is the dialogue both in (to the best of my discernment) Italian sound and English sub-titles.

Its story is daring, yet remarkably restrained; obvious, yet strikingly original. In England it impresses by its low-keyed sincerity, but it will undoubtedly cause a sensation in Italy and be execrated by the Curia.

It opens in the Turin apartment of a 40-year-old accountant observing a young woman in nun's habit waiting at the tram stop outside. He has often seen her there before, statuesque in the evening light. Like millions of men—and women—before him he finds her strangely fascinating. She stands so still, so calm, so solid in a world of noise, bustle and insecurity. Though not himself religious, he wonders what is the secret of her strength, her youthful wisdom. He wonders also, more from curiosity than lust, whether she wears underwear, whether she has any hair under her coil. He has drifted on through life via casual encounters and one unresolved and apparently unresolvable affair, hoping to settle down but unable to find a rock to anchor his life to. Irrationally he feels the solution to his problems may be found if only he can get to know this girl. But how do you walk up to and start talking to a nun? The opportunity soon arrives and is seized. The outcome is disturbing.

Beneath her immemorial habit and subdued habits Sister Serena is anything but serene. She is desperate. Almost twenty, she is on the eve of taking her final vows and forsaking the world for ever. Her family has made her spend hours in church on her knees every week, attend mass every day from the age of six, and even dyed her hair with camomile to make her a blond angel in advent dramas—all to give her a "vocation". It transpires that they are not even devout themselves. Her peasant father is openly sceptical, and her mother, a bankrupt shopkeeper's daughter in a remote priest-dominated village, resents having married "beneath her" and sees the Church as the only way of escape from peasant drudgery for her daughter.

Once in a convent the unfortunate girl is trapped. Allowed out only with a travelling pass and without even a few lira to buy stamps, and with all incoming and outgoing letters vetted by the Mother Superior, who has warned her that all men are Communists and that there is a secret retreat where the nuns will be safe if the election results are adverse, she has no idea where to turn. Having no belief in hell and little belief in Church dogmas at all save an emotional attachment to Jesus on the Cross, she sees ahead nothing but becoming in time like the old nuns—"red and fat liking big sweats".

The end is unresolved, but we assume that the accountant's ingrained procrastination will make him unable to act in time to save yet another "bride of Christ" from a living death.

I should like also to say a word about the final film in the Festival, Joseph Losey's *King and Country*, which will shortly be issued on general release. It is a savage, subtle account of a trial and sentence for desertion in the First World War, with a neat comment on the irrelevance and hypocrisy of the sacraments.

D.H.T.

CONWAY HALL

THE COMMITTEE of South Place Ethical Society is inviting applications from Humanists or Freethinkers for a part-time Secretary, due to the forthcoming retirement of Dr. D. J. Gibson on account of ill health. The main duties will be engaging lecturers, organising and chairing meetings and discussions, committees, public relations, etc.; and some voluntary work is involved. The remuneration is £350 per annum. Applications with details of past experience should be sent to the Executive Secretary, Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1.

CORRESPONDENCE

STERILISATION FORBIDDEN

A Roman Catholic woman was admitted recently to our local hospital in a state of complete collapse after the birth of her twelfth child. As the doctors considered that another pregnancy would prove fatal they advised sterilisation. However, her priest has forbidden the operation thereby condemning the woman to possible death leaving the twelve children motherless.

(Mrs.) M. A. WATSON

JOHN MACLEAN

I am much interested in the item that appeared in your November 20th issue on my old friend John Maclean.

I hope your readers will not have the impression that the authorities did try to poison him when he was in prison. The idea of being poisoned, and the difficulties with his wife, arose from tremendous strain that his battle with the authorities placed upon him.

It is somewhat of an exaggeration to say that the Scottish Labour College, now the National Council of Labour Colleges owes its existence to his untiring efforts. He played the leading part in the very early days of the Scottish Labour College, but later he lost interest and devoted his time to the unemployed.

The NCLC, of course, has been a much bigger organisation than the Scottish Labour College. The SLC became the NCLC's Scottish Division. It was the Plebs League that played the major part in establishing the Labour College Movement and, in fact, ran the first Labour College class ever held in Scotland before the Scottish Labour College was formed. That was taken by John S. Clarke, a member of the Plebs League in Edinburgh, who afterwards became a Glasgow MP and wrote one of the NCLC's text-books, *Marxism and History*.

I recall visiting John Maclean when he was a prisoner in Barlinnie Jail.

J. P. M. MILLAR.

General Secretary, National Council of Labour Colleges, Tillicoultry, Scotland.

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