

# The Freethinker

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RECENTLY, in a discussion with a Roman Catholic intellectual of my acquaintance I advanced the view already endorsed, I assume, by the readers of THE FREETHINKER as by critical students everywhere, that the *real* crisis of contemporary religion is fundamentally a crisis of credibility. For unless the alleged truths of Christianity can be demonstrated rationally, all the organisational changes now so widely advocated from the Vatican Council to the South Bank will merely be so much waste of time and energy. My Roman Catholic associate, a man of fine and critical intellect agreed entirely with my above proposition. What the Roman Catholic Church needed today, he stated emphatically, was a new and convincing system of Christian apologetics in place of the massive medieval lumber evolved under far less sophisticated intellectual conditions, in what is almost a prehistoric age.

We agreed (from diametrically opposed views of course; but after all, people on opposite sides of a valley see much the same view) that what the Church needed first and foremost, was a new Thomas Aquinas to bring its theology and philosophy up to date, as the original Aquinas brought Christian apologetics into line with secular knowledge, then primarily based on Aristotle, in the 13th century. Rather to my surprise, my Catholic friend agreed with my description of St. Thomas as an impressive, but archaic, fossil, who bears much the same sort of relationship to the scientific culture and philosophy of today as the still physically impressive torsos of prehistoric dinosaurs and mammoths do to modern zoological organisms; an antedeluvian intellectual giant, like his master Aristotle; a man of encyclopedic intellect, but bogged down with the mental furniture of an age now dead and done with.

## Pre-evolutionary

I concur with this modernist view of Christianity, for surely the first test that one must apply to any doctrine claiming our intellectual adhesion, is not whether it is useful or plausible, but whether it is in fact, true; whether it actually corresponds with the facts as currently acknowledged. Now if one thing is transparently clear, as my Catholic friend frankly acknowledged (along it would appear with Catholic intellectuals such as the late Teilhard de Chardin SJ, and perhaps Pope John himself) is that this is not the case with Christian apologetics today; they are not even plausible in their officially-endorsed form. For example, the present official theological system endorsed at Rome is still that of Aquinas (1225-74) which takes as its initial starting point, a pre-evolutionary, entirely static (as well as geocentric) conception of the universe which today is as obsolete as the crossbows and battle axes of St. Thomas's medieval contemporaries.

Incidentally, if this be so in Catholic apologetics, the position of the Protestants appears to be even more futile, since it nowadays lacks even the appearance of logical consistency that still gives a superficial impressiveness to the Catholic Thomist system. It may be honest to God, but it is increasingly dishonest to man! For example,

listeners to TV recently had the diverting experience of hearing a famous Protestant theologian openly declare that the really important fact about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, was *not* (as one might naively suppose) that it was true, but that the earliest eye-witnesses, the Christian disciples, believed that it was—a mode of reasoning that surely could be used to demonstrate any miracle recorded anywhere from the ancient virgin birth of Alexander the

Great, to the modern (1914) legend of the angels of Mons. It is almost enough to bring Thomas Aquinas (who at least respected truth as he then understood it) back from his grave! To such a sorry pass indeed, have Protestant apologists now arrived, that they have

even found it necessary apparently, to invent a new verbal jargon in which the mystic term, "Blick," a kind of modern abracadabra, appears to figure prominently. These are surely and clearly the dog-days of Christian apologetics.

## "Queen of the Sciences"

This is not of course by any means the first time that Christianity has confronted contemporary intellectual crises. The science (i.e. pseudo-science) of theology itself, the science of divine things—later exalted in medieval times into "the queen of the sciences"—was originally evolved by the Church (the Pauline Epistle to the Romans represents perhaps its first *magnum opus*) in order to face contemporary Jewish and Pagan criticism. For primitive Christianity had no systematic theology. How could it possibly have had when its cardinal belief was that the end of the world and the return of the messiah in glory were due any day?

## Speculative Theology

When however, the messiah unaccountably failed to put in an appearance, then the Church had to come to terms with the world and civilisation, amidst which apparently, it was now due for a long stay. In the intellectual sphere, this took the form of theology which may be defined perhaps as a pseudo-science, unscientific in substance but logical in form (on broadly the same plane as its celestial contemporary astrology) in which essentially animistic ideas (largely derived from pre-Christian Egypt) were expressed in the logical terminology of classical Greek philosophy. Beginning, it would appear, with Paul and his Gnostic associates, who first introduced speculative theology into early Christianity, classical theology reached its zenith in the 4th century in the writings of St. Augustine and in the so-called Athanasian Creed, actually written by a disciple of St. Augustine. Since which distant epoch, the "divine science" has been reformed several times in order to reconcile it with contemporary secular knowledge. St. Thomas "reconciled" Christian theology with the professedly rationalistic philosophy of Aristotle, and Calvin, another disciple of St. Augustine logically developed the theory of predestination on the Protestant side.

In the 19th century, Cardinal Newman's theory of development has given what is, at least potentially, an

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

## The Crisis in Christian Apologetics

By F. A. RIDLEY

evolutionary basis for future Catholic theology, and it can, perhaps, be assumed that the next reformation of Christian theology will take Newman as its starting point. Already Teilhard de Chardin (unlike Newman a practical scientist himself, who combined the diverse roles of Jesuit and palaeontologist—he discovered Pekin man in the latter capacity) has put forward an ambitious synthesis of traditional Catholic theology with modern evolutionary science. At present, indeed, de Chardin still *non persona grata* at Rome (as St. Thomas Aquinas also was in his own lifetime) looks like eventually becoming the successor of St. Thomas as the “angelic doctor” of the next phase of liberal Catholicism.

#### Wanted—A New St. Thomas!

Be that as it may, one thing is certain: if Christian theology cannot be (in Newman’s phrase) developed to meet the unprecedented intellectual revolution of the 20th

century, it is already doomed. For, we repeat, the essential problem of today is one of truth, not merely of better organisation. To be sure, Rome already commands a superb world-wide organisation. In this precise connection, we recall the remark of the old Prussian general: “There are three and only three perfectly organised bodies in the world, the German General Staff, the Standard Oil Company and the Roman Catholic Church”.

But today, the crisis is beyond the scope of even the most perfect organisation, for it is an intellectual revolution far more profound than in even St. Thomas’s day that the Church must survive or else perish. Who will be its new Thomas Aquinas? Whoever he is, he is herewith assured, if successful in his difficult task of restoring Christianity to credibility, of a cardinal’s hat in this world and a celestial halo in the world to come. But I do not envy him his task!

## Matric Biology and the Dead Hand of Calvinism

By E. R. ROUX

(Recently dismissed from his post as Professor of Botany at the University of the Witwatersrand by the South African Minister of Justice)

IT IS admitted in most university circles that the standard of science teaching in South African high schools is, with few exceptions, appalling. Science is often taught by humdrum methods which were in vogue half a century ago. The spectacular advances of the post-war period are often completely unknown to the teachers or, if dimly known, incompletely comprehended by them. This is particularly so in the case of biology, which suffers from disabilities peculiarly South African.

The Joint Matriculation Board is a university institution in the sense that the universities are represented on it. It recently decided that matriculation syllabi needed revision. Committees were appointed to prepare drafts for new syllabi, and these drafts have now been circulated for criticism and comment. It is with the draft syllabus for biology that we are particularly concerned.

This syllabus is remarkable, not for what it says, for it says almost nothing, but for what it leaves out. In fact, it is a masterpiece of evasion. The good teacher who at the same time has an up-to-date knowledge of his subject, could, by following this syllabus (and if he were not constrained by the headmaster or the dominee on the school board), give an excellent course in biology; for he is not explicitly forbidden to teach anything. At the same time the bad teacher, relying on ancient school textbooks, would be perfectly happy; for there are no new words referring to things which he has never heard of or does not understand. There is nothing there to force him to read an up-to-date textbook, or a scientific periodical, or to make him feel the need to attend a refresher course.

The silence of the syllabus on the subject of modern biology is a concession to the stick-in-the-mud teacher, but there is another kind of silence which is more studied and of longer standing. This is the silence concerning developmental biology. Developmental biology is a polite term for what is considered in some South African educational circles an almost lewd expression, namely, evolutionary biology. Those who have drafted the syllabus have not only refrained from any overt mention of evolution; they have clearly avoided in the most meticulous way, mention of anything which might indirectly imply evolution. There is, for instance, no suggestion that plants or animals may be “primitive” or “advanced” in structure, no directives for the study of comparative

morphology, no hint that classification may imply phylogenetic relationship. Chromosomes, genes, and the laws of Mendel are mentioned, but not mutations, in spite of the fact that since Hiroshima all educated people know that genes are subject to mutation by radio activity, a fact which every modern school child should know something about. Is it hoped thus to avoid any possible implication that species are not invariable and fixed?

When the draft syllabus was placed before the biology committee of the Joint Matriculation Board at a recent meeting, the Natal representatives were daring enough to raise the question of the place of evolution in the syllabus. The Cape representatives were evasive, but the men from the Transvaal and the Orange Free State definitely said “no.” They declared that they would not tolerate even an indirect reference to the subject.

Now it is an interesting and significant fact that this line-up corresponds exactly with the influence of the Calvinist churches in the Transvaal and Orange Free State, not quite so strong in the Cape and weak in Natal. It is the dominees of the Dutch Reformed churches who have set their faces against evolution and are calling the tune, and so influential are they that scientists, against their better conscience, are forced to toe the line. As Professor Dart once said: “Evolution in South Africa is dynamite.” It goes without saying that Natal was overruled.

It is perhaps significant also that it was the Natal representatives who pleaded for the modernisation of the syllabus in other respects, for instance, for including some reference, however slight, to macromolecular biology and cell structure, a branch of study which has made the biology of 1964 as different from that of 1910 as modern physics is different from the physics of our grandfathers. Some of the Transvaal and Orange Free State representatives actually placed their hands over their ears (quite literally) when the macromolecules DNA and RNA were mentioned.

We may, therefore, take it that the dead hand of Calvinism will, for some time at least, continue to throttle the teaching of biology in our schools. An unhappy metaphor, you may say, for how can a dead hand throttle? However it cannot be gainsaid that there is something morbid about South African Calvinism.

[Reprinted from the South African *Rationalist*, November-December, 1964]

# The Religious Beliefs of Robert Burns

By NORMAN PATON

Robert Burns, the national poet of Scotland was born in the now immortalised thatched cottage, in Alloway, Ayrshire, on January 25th, 1759. He died in a Dumfries slum on July 21st, 1796. In his comparatively short life-span of 37 years 7 months, Burns was to learn the lesson that "man was made to mourn".

These turbulent toil-weary years cursed him with abject poverty, misfortune and ill health yet, as if in balance, gifted him with the genius that has fixed his name indelibly on world literature.

The Star that rules my luckless lot,  
Has fated me the Russet Coat  
And damned my fortune to the groat,  
But in requit  
Has blessed me wi' a random shot  
O' country wit.

Burns is beyond being merely the national bard of his country, he is a universal poet, the poet of humanity. The Russians have issued stamps commemorating his bicentenary, the Americans have erected statues to his memory, and the Chinese claim him as a descendant of their race! He was a favourite poet of communist Karl Marx, and was equally revered by capitalist Andrew Carnegie.

What then, were the religious beliefs of this man from impoverished farming stock. Burns was born into, reared and educated in an Ayrshire held in the grip of rigid Calvinist theology. He was indoctrinated in this fearsome religion of hell, devils and eternal suffering, imposed by a tyrannical God on those guilty of even the slightest misdemeanour. Indeed the creed of Calvinism was so brutal and terrifying, that the poet's father, staunch believer that he was, altered the family catechism, in order to portray Omnipotence with a more humane outlook.

However Robert, from all accounts, lived in fear of the Church and its henchmen until his early twenties, by which time he had thrown caution to the wind and committed the most grievest of sins, that of fornication. His penance was to stand on the cutty stool, in full view of the church congregation to be rebuked for his crime by the minister.

But Calvinism was splitting. Liberal "new lights" were arising, insisting upon a refinement of doctrine. Burns sided with them, writing his great satires at the expense of the "Holy Willies". By now he knew where he stood; he was fast becoming an enemy of the Kirk, and with his lampoons against Calvinism being passed around, he was a prickly thorn in its flesh.

Enclosing a copy of the famous *Holy Willie's Prayer* to the Rev. John McMath, a very liberal member of the clergy, who was later expelled, Burns wrote:

But I gae mad at their grimaces,  
Their sighin, cantin, grace-proud faces,  
Their three-mile prayers an' hauf-mile graces,  
Their raxin conscience,  
Whase greed, revenge an' pride disgraces  
Waur nor [worse than] their nonsense . . .  
O Pope, had I thy satire's darts  
To gie the rascals their deserts,  
I'd rip their rotten, hollow hearts,  
An' tell aloud  
Their jugglin, hocus-pocus arts  
To cheat the crowd!

God knows, I'm no the thing I should be,  
Nor am I even the thing I could be,  
But twenty times I rather would be  
An atheist clean  
Than under gospel colors hid be  
Just for a screen.

In an autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore he gives a clear picture of the religious views of his times. "Polemic divinity," he said, "was putting the country half mad, and I, ambitious of shining in conversation parties of Sundays, between sermons, at funerals etc., used a few years afterwards to puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and indiscretion, that I raised a hue and cry of heresy against me, which has not ceased to this hour."

From the same letter, which he wrote in his 28th year, in recollection of his childhood, he admits that an old woman who resided in the family, filled his head with folklore tales of ghosts, devils, faires, witches, dragons, etc., and that her tales had a strong effect on his imagination, "that to this hour in my nocturnal rambles I sometimes keep a sharp look out in suspicious places, and though nobody can be more sceptical than I am in such matters, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy, to shake off these idle terrors." Thankfully philosophy triumphed:

Poor gapin, glowerin Superstition!  
Waes me, she's in a sad condition!  
Fye! bring Black Jock, her state physician,  
To see her water!  
Alas there's ground for great suspicion  
She'll ne'er get better.

Burns's attitude toward superstition is an excellent criterion of his attitude to religion. The seeds of Calvinism had left their mark; for all his scepticism, philosophy and genius, the devilish doctrine of hellfire and brimstone had done irreparable damage to his boyish mind, and carried into manhood the latent fear that there might be something, even when in his common-sense approach he would deem it "old wives' tales". However, even if he couldn't quite shake off the shackles of religion, he was becoming more and more a deist, or what might be termed a mild agnostic.

To Mrs. Dunlop, one of his constant correspondents, until she took offence at the poet's political views, he confessed: "What a flattering idea then, is a world to come! Would to God I as firmly believed it, as I ardently wish it". The poet, however, must be on his guard when writing to that grand lady, who was of course a devout Christian. And, after so expressing his doubts of the hereafter, he softened considerably: "Jesus Christ, thou amiablest of characters, I trust thou art no impostor, and thy revelation of blissful scenes of existence beyond death and the grave, is not one of the many impositions which time after time have been palmed on credulous mankind." Yet the language is hardly that of a believing Christian. How many Christians, even today, address Jesus of Nazareth as "thou amiablest of characters"?

Burns of course often back-pedalled when necessity arose, a habit mistaken by loyal apologists, who would rescue the poet from his rebellious views in politics and religion by some quotation which has obviously been dashed off for safety's sake. Burns himself admitted this:

The shrinking Bard adown the alley skulks,  
And dreads a meeting worse than Woolwich hulks,  
Though there his heresies in Church and State  
Might well award him Muir and Palmer's fate.

Muir and Palmer were of course transported in "Woolwich hulks" to serve 15 years in the slave colony of Botany Bay.

Robert Burns was a genuine sympathiser with revolutionary France against the monarchy and aristocracy, and he attempted to send two cannons to the people's army,

(Concluded on page 32)

## This Believing World

The tribulations of Christianity appear to increase every day. The *Daily Sketch* had an article asking "Should Prayer be Compulsory?" at school. For, the paper informed us, "some children it seems, think it's all such a bore". Think of it! After all the solemn protestations in Parliament that prayers are absolutely necessary for the spiritual uplift of our children, the children themselves have the impudence to think them a bore!

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**And aren't they right?** The picture the *Daily Sketch* printed of some kiddies at prayer is pathetic, for of course they simply don't know what the prayers really mean, and they certainly don't know to whom they are addressed. (No more, for that matter, does the Pope!) What significance does the word "God" have for them? But like our archaic blasphemy laws, prayer is too firmly entrenched by Parliament to be abolished without a fierce fight.

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**A Roman Catholic primary school** has refused to enrol five-year-old twins unless their mother humbly changes her ways and attends church regularly. That, at least, is the excuse, but the real reason seems to be that "the school is now bursting at the seams", so great is the pressure of the children wanting to get in. The mother of the twins protests that she goes to church when she can—but the merciful and all-loving Roman Church is adamant. All or nothing is its motto. And why not?

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**We note that a Roman Catholic priest** has been allowed to preach in the parish church of Bexhill-on-Sea—and we cannot help wondering whether a Church of England parson will ever be allowed to preach in a Roman Catholic church? And we don't mean merely preaching a sermon carefully "vetted" for the occasion by the Roman Church. In fact, it would be a good deal more lively to hear a parson with strong views against Catholicism expressing them in a Catholic church and a Catholic priest explaining the errors of Protestantism to a Church of England congregation. Lively, but very discourteous.

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**Courteousness there seemed to be** however, in the preliminary announcements for the present week of prayer for Christian unity. The hierarchy in England and Wales has recommended Catholics not only "fervently" to observe the week in their own churches but "to gather with other Christians, in a suitable hall for joint prayer and talks from speakers of different denominations" (*The Guardian*, January 15th). Catholics are not yet "to gather" in non-Catholic churches, it will be noted, but in suitable halls. Still, the British Council of Churches is happy about the situation. For the first time, it said, "a call not just to pray but to pray together has gone out in the name of all the main church traditions." And if they're happy, why should we cavil.

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**We don't. We find it interesting, nevertheless** that whereas at Stafford for instance, non-Roman Catholic Christians have arranged to attend mass in a Catholic church, there is no announcement that Roman Catholics are to reciprocate. There will be some interchange of preachers: Methodist and Baptists ministers will preach in Canterbury Cathedral, and Protestants are to join in a united service in the Roman Catholic hall in the same city. And clergy and ministers are—we are told—using the week to get to know one another better. At Potters Bar, Middlesex, the Roman Catholic rector is entertaining other ministers

to supper before they go on to a united service. It no doubt sounds very promising to the ecumenically minded.

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**And we may, of course, expect** good TV coverage of the "Sunday Spectacular," the Trafalgar Square open air rally on January 24th.

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**We are glad to put on record a "quote"** from the *Daily Express* (January 4th) by the Rev. F. Watts, vicar of Carterton, Oxfordshire: "The joyless puritanical view of Christianity of the Lord's Day Observance Society will drive more decent people further from the Church than the Sunday showing of any of Brigitte Bardot's films ever can do". We are quite sure that no good Christian would be "driven" out of church by the French actress' films, but what Mr. Watts means, no doubt, is that the Lord's Day Observance Society is not a very good advertisement for Christianity. That may be so—but has Christianity ever been anything else but "joyless and puritanical"? Is not Jesus still the greatest man of sorrows that ever lived?

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## Victor Purcell

I got a great shock on arriving at Dr. Victor Purcell's club as his luncheon guest on January 7th, to hear he had died suddenly five days earlier.

The correspondence arising out of his allegation of a "fifth column" in the Humanist movement is now closed, but I must crave indulgence to record that we were coming together primarily to discuss this topic. Whatever the risk, I should have taken steps to reveal any real evidence he might have had. Now I suppose we shall never know what knowledge or speculation was disturbing him.

A couple of weeks earlier I was speaking to him on the phone and he seemed then to be in full possession of his powers. It was the occasion of the hanging debate, and he observed that people tend to become too emotional about "the sanctity of human life" and that the important issue was whether or not, pragmatically, hanging was a deterrent.

Dr. Purcell was one of the older generation of fast-vanishing academic Rationalists. They did not suffer fools gladly, and could sometimes seem austere and unfeeling to the conventionally sentimental. As the *Times* obituary said, he "acquired a reputation as a well-informed and vigorous controversialist on Far Eastern affairs . . . He could be no less polemical on other subjects dear to him, such as rationalism and humanism of which he was a vigorous defender . . . The truth was that Purcell enjoyed an argument: he relished enemies."

The truth was that men like Purcell were not cold calculators of expediency, but warmly, indeed passionately committed to humanity's greatest need, the search for truth. If they enjoyed an argument, it was because they had well-stocked minds, powers of lucid expression, intellectual integrity and moral courage—attributes becoming increasingly less fashionable, even in Humanist circles. And yet in the ultimate analysis they gained a respect and recognition—Dr. Purcell was awarded a CMG, elected to the Athenaeum, and accorded a *Times* leading obituary—which is seldom vouchsafed to lesser temporisers.

I am not qualified to assess his attainments as an orientalist, but I have no hesitation in saying that the works he published under the pseudonym of Myra Buttle are in the front rank of modern English satire.

D. H. TRIBE

## THE FREETHINKER

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### Lecture Notices, Etc.

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

#### 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, January 24th, 6.45 p.m.: Dr. M. COLE "The Necessity of Birth Control".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, January 24th, 6.30 p.m.: FRANCES MACRAE-GIBSON "Will Science Destroy Man?"

Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1.), Sunday January 24th, 7.30 p.m.: L. EBURY "The National Secular Society—Past, Present and Future".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday January 24th, 11 a.m.: Dr. E. POSER "Teaching Humanism to the Young." Tuesday, January 26th, 7.30 p.m.: MARTIN ENNALS "Civil Liberties in 1965."

### Notes and News

THIS IS a week of prayer for Christian unity, and at least one bishop of the Church of England has acknowledged the real motive behind ecumenism, namely the fear of atheism. The "great divide is not between different bodies of Christians but between Christians and the world which has rejected God," said the Bishop of Chester, Dr. G. A. Ellison, in his January diocesan leaflet (quoted in the Staffordshire *Evening Sentinel*, 31/12/64). It is vital that Christians should close their ranks and speak with one voice, Dr. Ellison said, in face of the "vast challenge to the whole concept of a God-centred world"; they must "cease to give the impression" that they think it more important to compete and point out each other's shortcomings than to "face together the forces of atheism and materialism". Prejudices and barriers must be broken down, church leaders must continue to consult, and parish priests should "pray, by name, for all the Roman Catholic clergy and Free Church ministers" in their parishes. In this way, the Bishop said, "we could do much to bring home to ourselves the need for unity and the responsibility which we have for promoting it on our own doorsteps".

UNITY seems, however, to have suffered a severe setback in Rome, where Pope Paul has committed what the Federal Council of Protestant Churches in Italy has called "a true scandal" (*The Guardian*, 6/1/65) with his alterations to the ecumenism document. The Italian Protestants find it "amazing" that Cardinal Bea's, Secretariat for Christian Unity and the entire Conciliar Assembly "did not find the necessary courage" to reject what is "not a matter of a simple correction" but a radical violation of the text which now says the contrary of what the bishops wanted it to say." In the original text the altered part read: "By the action of the Holy Spirit, in sacred Scripture the separated brethren find God who speaks to them in Christ." After the amendment imposed by the "higher authority" the text now reads (according to the Protestants): "The separated brethren, invoking the Holy Spirit, seek God in sacred Scripture, as if he spoke to them in Christ."

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"GOD speaking to evangelical Christians had been clearly affirmed" the Italian Protestants pointed out. Now it was expressed with "the dubitative and hypothetical formula 'as if' (in Latin, *quasi*)," which "is gravely offensive to the faith of the evangelical Christians and does violence to the most elementary of ecumenical principles." In fact, the meaning of the Pope's amendments was "intentionally anti-ecumenical." And the Protestants recalled the Pope's final "reactionary discourse" to the Vatican Council, when he stressed the "monarchic nature" of the Church and extolled the Virgin Mary as "Mother of the Church." So, said the *Guardian's* Rome correspondent, George Armstrong, the Federal Council of Protestant Churches in Italy "would appear to have written off the Vatican's ecumenical movement," at least as interpreted by Pope Paul VI.

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ALISTAIR COOKE, the *Guardian's* New York correspondent, has an irritating occasional habit of treating serious matters frivolously—of being over-clever, in fact. He reported on January 10th, for instance that, "The American people have now only ten days to wait before they are liberated from a recurring nightmare which most politicians have come to cherish almost as a staple of American folklore. It is the dire prospect that the White House might suddenly be inhabited by John W. McCormack, the 73-year-old Speaker of the House, a loyal party workhorse who does not boast a vast knowledge of the world outside the ninth district of Massachusetts . . ." (*The Guardian* 11/1/65). Mr. Cooke adequately explained Harry Truman's Succession Act of 1947 and its background; what he neglected to explain was the widespread fear of Speaker McCormack as President of the USA in the event of Lyndon Johnson's death. The danger lay not in Mr. McCormack's party loyalty but his church loyalty. He is a fervent Roman Catholic who has continually used his political influence in the cause of Rome—and often very definitely at the expense of his country. President McCormack would have been no joke.

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ONE could not possibly imagine him pledging, as President Johnson did in his State of the Union message, to "seek new ways to use our knowledge to help to deal with the explosion in world population and the growing scarcity in world resources." Officials have been drawing particular attention to this passage, the *Guardian's* Washington correspondent, Richard Scott reported (11/1/65), and they are confirming that it is the first time an American President has publicly acknowledged the US government's "intention officially to act in this field."

## The Crucifixion, a Libellous Accusation Against the Jews

By SOLOMON ZEITLIN

(Concluded from page 23)

It has been generally assumed that the libellous accusation against the Jews for their alleged guilt, the crucifixion of Jesus, has been the great cause for anti-Semitism. That the Jews crucified Jesus was taught in the schools and preached from the pulpits throughout the ages and has helped to foster animosity towards the Jews and brought great sorrow and dire sufferings upon an innocent people. Many Christians recognise the danger of anti-Semitism and honestly try to eliminate this cancer gnawing the vitals of civilisation.

Daane presents a remedy for the elimination of anti-Semitism. He writes:

The Jewish people would help eliminate anti-Semitism if they would admit, as honesty could do without violating the terms of the Jewish faith, that they did destroy a man. There is little, if indeed anything, of such an admission in current Jewish concern about anti-Semitism. Let Jews, if they must, regard Christ as only a man; But let them admit what honesty and integrity demand—the destruction of a man by their ancient leaders' insistence that he be put to death.

No one can admit that he has committed a crime in which he had no part. The Jewish people, even under duress of anti-Semitism, could not and would not admit that their religious leaders had any part in the crucifixion of Jesus. Daane wrote further that the report of the Anti-Defamation League shows that the liberal churches rather than the conservative and fundamental church are of the opinion that the Jews are not the "most responsible." According to Daane, anti-Semitism is anti-Gospel, and ultimately anti-Christ. He holds that both Gentiles and Jews were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. "The Jew," he writes, "is condemned only if he believes not—as is the unbelieving Gentile." He continues that the Gentile was saved by accepting Jesus and that the Jew can also be saved by accepting Jesus. He propagates "the reunion of Jew and Gentile in the oneness of the Church." He believes that to this ultimate union of Jew and Gentile "Anti-Semitism hinders the Gentile's calling to provoke the Jews to jealousy."

To repeat, this essay is written from the historical angle not from the theological view. I shall not enter into any theological examination, speculation and excogitation regarding Jewish and Christian theology. I have demonstrated that the Jews are guiltless and cannot be blamed for the crucifixion. *They do not need to be saved.* Judaism and Christianity are different, separate religions—each has its own theology. Though Christianity arose in Judaea and its founders were Jews, in the process of time Christianity became a Gentile religion. The roots of Christianity stem from Judaism. The founders of Christianity, to prove that Jesus is the true Messiah Christ, supported themselves on the Pentateuch and the prophets. The Hebrew Bible is holy to both the Jews and to the Christians, Jews and Christians alike draw deep inspiration from these books. Christianity has much in common with Judaism. Christianity arose as a Judaeo-Christian religion. These two religions can and will develop by coexistence and mutual appreciation.

The Jews do not wish to convert Christians to Judaism nor to be converted to Christianity. Shazar, President of Israel, when he recently met Pope Paul VI in Israel, proudly emphasised the prophetic words of Micah:

Let all the peoples walk each one in the name of his God, but we will walk in the name of Adonai, our God forever and ever.<sup>29</sup>

President Shazar uttered these eternal words in the name of the entire Jewry.

Daane wrote further that the membership of the liberal churches hold that the Jews were not "most responsible" for the crucifixion. It is a great satisfaction that the *Christian Advocate*, the official organ of the Methodist Church, in the editorial of January 22, 1948 on my book *Who Crucified Jesus?* said in part as follows:

Caiaphas, the high priest, who was responsible for hailing Jesus before Pilate, was a quisling, thoroughly hated by the Jews and despised even by the Romans. The Sanhedrin, which passed the judgment, was a political clique, quite separate and distinct from the religious group, of the same name, which ruled in all spiritual matters for the Jews. The execution was justified by the Romans on the ground that Jesus was an insurrectionist who plotted a rebellion against the empire, and the Christian church for 20 years was believed by the Romans to be a seditious organisation.

The editorial published in an official organ of one of the foremost orthodox churches shows sincere goodwill towards the Jewish people, a step taken by an orthodox church to remove the libellous accusation against an innocent people.

The Christian world must *atone* for their guilt towards the Jewish people for using the crucifixion of Jesus as a pretext for enslaving and persecuting the Jews throughout the ages. I do not mean that textual emendations or changes should be made in the Gospels in respect to the crucifixion of Jesus. The Gospels are holy for the Christians as the Hebrew Bible is holy for the Jews. What I do hold is that the Apostles' Creed, which was recited in the early days of Christianity and is still recited in many Protestant churches, should be followed. In this creed it is not stated that the Jews crucified Jesus.

Pope Pius XI, in one of his encyclicals said that in spirit we are all Semites. This attitude and spirit were followed by the great humanitarian and saintly Pope John XXIII. In the dark days of the holocaust when millions of Jews were destroyed in the gas chambers he interceded whenever he could and saved the lives of many. On Good Friday the Catholics, in praying for all peoples, have a prayer for *pro perfidis Judaeis* and they ask God to have mercy on the *Judaica perfidia*. Pope John XXIII ordered to omit the words *perfidis* and *perfidia* in the liturgy of Good Friday.

I trust that the Ecumenical Council will show goodwill to the mother religion by removing the unjustifiable stigma from the Jews by declaring in its schema that historically the Jews are not guilty of the crucifixion of Jesus. This would erase the guilt of the Church for the defamation of an innocent people.

In the early days of Christianity the authorities of the Church maintained that the Jews by their sufferings are a living testimony for the truth of the Church. The Church no longer needs a living testimony for its existence. It is well established. A better mutual understanding and appreciation between Christians and Jews are indispensable for the realisation of the ideas which came forth from the hills of Judaea.

## Dr. Zeitlin and Jesus

By H. CUTNER

LET me begin by saying that I cannot understand how such a brilliant scholar as Dr. Zeitlin, in spite of his long array of authorities, should show so little awareness (THE FREETHINKER, December 18th) of the large number of Christian theologians who have filled volumes of earnest and indeed reverent discussion on the subject of the dates of the birth of Jesus and his crucifixion. The books about both problems must surely run into hundreds.

But most of them, shirk, as does Dr. Zeitlin, the one indispensable basis of any problem about Jesus—the proof, the evidence, that the stories of the birth and death of Jesus as given in the Gospels are unimpeachable. There they stand, they claim, like the Rock of Gibraltar literally unshaken by the thunderous attacks of heretics and unbelievers. When Matthew or Luke says that an angel spoke, it *must* be believed for, for Jews and Christians alike, angels are veritable beings residing in heaven ready to obey Almighty God in everything.

Dr. Zeitlin does what almost every Christian scholar does—he takes for granted Matthew and Luke as genuine historians as far as the birth of Jesus is concerned, and he would have added Mark and John, but they give no details of the birth of Jesus. Of course, all the four deal in angels and miracles, and if Dr. Zeitlin believes in the Old Testament miracles, it is only a little step—a page or two—to swallow the New Testament ones also.

Now why does Dr. Zeitlin give us the details from the Gospels and the Church Fathers, Josephus, and other writers, in his search for the birth and crucifixion dates? The answer is very simple. Jews have during the past hundred years or so been increasingly anxious to make Jesus the greatest of all Jews in history. Dr. Klausner, who wrote a "life" of Jesus some thirty years or so ago, was so delighted that a Jew was being worshipped as a God, that he did his utmost in his book to prove what a fine God the Jew Jesus made. (Incidentally, it was Benjamin Disraeli who contemptuously pointed out many years ago that half Christendom worshipped a Jew, and half a Jewess.) The conception of Jesus of modern Jews is a far cry from that which was theirs for nearly 1900 years.

The way Dr. Zeitlin quotes Matthew suggests that he actually believes Matthew is giving us authentic history. He knows, or ought to know, that no one has ever discovered a Matthew anywhere. We know literally *nothing* about him. Nobody knows when he wrote his Gospel, or the date, or the language it was first written in. All we do know is that the first Church writer who mentions him and the other Gospel writers by name is Irenaeus, and the date given us in Church histories is 180AD. But we have *not* got the work of Irenaeus for he wrote it in Greek, except for a very few fragments. What we have is a translation—a poor one at that—in Latin. And though Dr. Zeitlin does mention that Irenaeus gives us a later date for the crucifixion of Jesus than can be inferred from the Gospels, he does not say anything definite about it. In truth, Irenaeus states that Jesus died "an old man"—not just at forty or fifty years of age—and says nothing in this connection that he was *crucified*. And Dr. Zeitlin's article does not mention that the word "crucifixion" does *not* occur in the Gospels; that the word in Greek translated "cross" is *not* cross but "stake".

In any case, when we come to the birth of Jesus, the fact remains that Matthew says Jesus was born in "the days of Herod", and therefore this must have been before

4BC; while Luke says it was when Cyrenius was governor of Syria, about 7AD, and the two dates have never been reconciled. Christian scholars have tried to do the impossible, and as they mostly disagree with each other and with Matthew and Luke, they have found that the exact date of the birth of Jesus is quite unknown. As Dr. Zeitlin remarks, it was unknown to the Church Fathers and it still remains unknown. Needless to say, Dr. Zeitlin does not bother about the *place* where Jesus was born. Was it Nazareth or Bethlehem? I think that I am right in saying that nearly every statement in the Gospel and Acts implies that Jesus was born in Nazareth, and not in Bethlehem. Jesus is called Jesus of Nazareth, and never Jesus of Bethlehem. As we now know that there never was a "Nazareth" in Judea or anywhere else in the time of Jesus, Dr. Zeitlin should try his erudition in solving that puzzle.

What about the date of the crucifixion? Dr. Zeitlin tells us that Jesus was crucified by the Romans as a "political offender," but as he gives no authority for the statement, it may as well be asserted here that the Gospels say it was for the crime of "blasphemy"—whatever that meant to the Romans. The dates he gives are between 30 and 35AD. What is the truth? Simply that nobody knows. Dr. Farrar said it was 30AD, while Renan plumped for 33AD, and I could give a dozen different dates from other authorities—mostly based on guesswork. John E. Remsburg, in his book *The Christ*, who did his best to find out, says that out of one hundred Christian authorities, "23 give 29AD, 18 give 30, 9 give 31, 7 give 32, 37 give 33, and 6 give 35AD." Dr. Zeitlin's nebulous date is just as good as any other, for *nobody* knows.

Obviously, Dr. Zeitlin believes, as nearly all Jews do, that there was a Jesus, that he did go about "doing good", and was crucified as told us by the Gospels. He seems blissfully unaware that almost every statement in them has been challenged, and most of them shown to be untrue. Outside the pages of the New Testament, we have no contemporary evidence whatever for anything in the life of Jesus.

But if anybody believes, as Dr. Zeitlin presumably does, in the God of the Old Testament with whom all things are possible, it is easy to believe in everything in the New. There is no *evidence* whatever for the existence of Moses, Noah, David, Solomon, and the other Old Testament heroes, nor is there for most of the characters in the New.

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### OBITUARY

Charles Stanley, who joined the North London Branch of the National Secular Society in 1958 as a result of its meetings at Tower Hill, has died in Guy's Hospital after a short but painful illness.

Mr. Stanley became deeply interested in the history of the Christian religion and in biblical criticism, and soon became a formidable controversialist, both with pen and speech. Even his opponents learned to respect him, for his accuracy and his erudition.

We can only express our deep sense of loss, by stating his sterling qualities. He hated cant and hypocrisy and was fearless in condemnation of them. He was the most loyal of friends, kind true and honourable. We will miss him more than words can convey.

The General Secretary of the National Secular Society conducted the secular service at South London crematorium on January 12th.

L. AND E. EBURY

## THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF ROBERT BURNS

(Concluded from page 27)

an extremely dangerous action, considering that he was employed by the British government as an exciseman. Here he is in revolutionary mood:

Proud Priests and Bishops we'll translate  
And canonise as Martyrs;  
The guillotine on Peers shall wait;  
And Knights shall hang in garters;  
Those Despots long have trod us down,  
And Judges are their engines;  
Such wretched minions of the Crown  
Demand the People's vengeance!

Many quotations could be given depicting Burns's views on the clergy, on the church and on religion. To list a few at random:

The Kirk an' State may join, and tell,  
To do sic things I maunna;  
The Kirk an' State can go to Hell  
And I'll gae to my Anna.

Hypocrisy, in mercy spare it!  
That Holy robe O, dinna tear it!  
Spare't for their sakes, wha aften wear it  
The lads in black.

Peg Nicholuson was a good bay mare  
An' the Priest he rode her sair  
Much oppress'd and bruis'd she was,  
As priest-rid cattle are.

Burns's contempt for the Calvinist doctrine helped to revolutionise the religious beliefs of his country. He took the Calvinist devil and teased him, ridiculed him, banished him from theology—then pitied the fallen "Prince of Darkness". Emerson summed it up completely—"neither Luther nor Latimer did more damage to fake theology, than did this brave singer".

Though Christians are fond of laying claim to him, the evidence is quite conclusive that Robert Burns was not in any way a Christian; he was, as I have said, a deist with agnostic tendencies, extremely radical in his epoch. Nowhere are his beliefs so clearly stated than they are in this quotation from one of his letters. "All my fears and cares are of this world: if there is another, an honest man has nothing to fear from it. I hate a man that wishes to be a deist: but, I fear every fair, unprejudiced enquirer, must in some degree be a sceptic."

## CORRESPONDENCE

### MORAL EDUCATION

I should like to add a few words to Mrs. Margaret Knight's remarks on Roman Catholic education

First, its unhealthy influence not only lowers the level of the scholars' acquirement and standard of judgment, but conditions them into a secret—but solid—hatred of non-Catholics. It is appalling to trace the ferments of social mistrust that cannot be cured by good sense or normal human intercourse. There is a sort of bad colour or bad odour about the infidel that is rarely quite dissipated even in people who have repudiated the Church. Any person with social experience will know this sort of muffled hatred which is poison to intellectual or social understanding.

Second, Mrs. Knight appears to believe that moral education in the school—or the family for that matter—is a difficult subject when RI is abandoned. Such education ought to come from example: morals are caught, not taught. Of course, but the occasions of such natural education are few and far between—the more so when the educator is faced with so many pupils—and they can never be predicted. That is why I think that a sort of moral course should be provided, in spite of some misgivings.

I modestly submit that there may be afforded a sensible, normal course of secular moral education. I remember the first pages of a school manual of moral instruction used many years ago in French public schools. An explorer finds himself alone in a desert of ice; after losing his last match he sees that he will die of cold far from any help. But he does not indulge in sheer despair and lament. Alone, he looks at himself facing death as a man, with dignity and courage. Such is the respect of mankind

within the man, a striking example of faith in humanity. All morality is the expression of that faith, is it not higher than all the commands of a duty? Thus having before us what is the principle of morality, the self respect of man, why not examine the relations of the individual with his neighbour and the society to which he owes much more than he can reproach? His station in nature too, within the animal world; his own circle of domestic companions and the larger one of independent beings? No morality without the feeling of one's own valour and the sense of life within "life." And this can be approached in consistent teaching.

Such are the bases on which it seems, to an old teacher, possible to build an effective secular moral teaching in the school.

LOUIS DOREAU  
(Chagny, France).

### FEED THE MINDS

A few days ago I received an elegant coloured brochure entitled *Feed the Minds of Millions on the Bible and Christian Literature*. Why it was sent to me, I cannot imagine, as I have never had any religious connections.

I cannot think of anything less suitable on which to feed the minds of millions than the intolerance, violence and cruelty of the Bible.

(MRS.) M. WATSON

### BULLFIGHTING

Rolf Hochhuth in *The Representative* blames the Pope for silence, when a word from him might have saved the Jews. A similar situation, of lesser importance exists today involving needless cruelty to animals practised in Spain, Portugal and Latin America, namely the sadistic sport of bullfighting. A word from the hierarchy could easily stop this but the countries involved are bulwarks of the Roman Church so expediency seals lips. But surely it is unethical to tolerate wanton, needless cruelty.

A stoic philosopher and later a Christian monk were both martyred trying to stop the Roman games. Is there today a Christian or a humanist who dares to try to stop the bullfights by jumping into the arena?

Many young women are bullfight fans (after mass!). Children may accompany their parents to be educated in cruelty and to harden their hearts. Would Jesus have patronised a bullfight? Should tourists do so? While the Roman Church may condemn bullfights in theory, in practice it does nothing to stop them.

(DR.) R. LITTLE

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