

The Freethinker

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MUCH recent discussion which has taken place, among Secularists and elsewhere, must have led many to ask questions concerning the future of the Freethought movement. On the one hand, it has inherited a tradition of anti-biblicism and anti-theology which gave it point and meaning in the past. On the other, new forces springing from a wider humanism have sought to be inclusive and to raise questions lying far beyond the old boundaries.

Secularism, like much else in the contemporary world, is in a state of flux and change. Two world wars have unsettled the general cultural climate and the Secularist is forced to ask himself how far he can bring his major contentions into harmony with the vista

opened out by contemporary culture. The problem is difficult to face and not easy to resolve, calling as it does for an assessment of the secularist past and its relationship to the emerging future.

Secularism in the Past

The background of English secularism lay in the troubled years which followed the French Revolution. Atheistic ideas from France had then blended with a native opposition to ecclesiastical demands. A glance at the anti-clerical literature of the time reveals the extent to which demands for tithe and church rates gave point and meaning to the social challenge of Freethinkers. As a movement, secularism was essentially working-class simply because it was the operatives of the new industrial towns who were hit the hardest by the power of the established Church. The new movements of political radicalism, such as Owenism and Chartism, went far to encourage and assist the Secularist demand that the whole of social and political life should be regarded from a secular perspective. Gradually, the Secularist became a specialised figure within the wider radical picture, challenging as he did the contemporary nexus of church and state because he denied both the validity of a religious interpretation of life and a political order based upon a church-state relationship. His anti-biblicism was very much of the type inherited from Thomas Paine and had point in a society where, to the astonishment of the young Engels, the verbal inspiration of the Bible was still among the coinage of intellectual currency taken seriously. The earlier writings of Bradlaugh, for example, concerned themselves with a defence of anti-theism in ideology and an attack upon the biblical narrative as representing good history or sound morality.

The career of Bradlaugh was of outstanding importance within this Secularist evolution. Under his tutelage, secularism became something more than a mere anti-religious attack. His active concern with law reform, with questions of land ownership or with the population question as an issue within political economy, went far to transfer the movement which he headed into a positive political grouping functioning within the radical wing of the Liberal Party. Bradlaugh was a great Englishman whose republican gorge arose at the sight of German princelings. He was likewise a great parliamentarian who could fight out the

constitutional issues raised by secularism. The movement as he saw it was of a social order and content. Its membership swelled and it was reckoned that he was an influence, direct or indirect, upon a very large section of English radicalism. At his death in 1891, secularism had made its mark through his personal victories. True, it was still anti-theological and anti-biblical but its general social implications were of far wider moment.

It was after the death of Bradlaugh that times began to change. Middle-class agnosticism had likewise arrived within the intellectual orbit and tended to organise itself. Indeed, through its publications and the like, it had a vast influence and did a great deal to

undermine the older orthodoxy. Modernist movements possessed the churches themselves and, for educated Christians, fundamentalism became a thing of the past. Attacks on, for example, Moses or David, had once been telling in making out the case against the prevailing fundamentalism. They now lost all point when anti-Christianity found itself opposing modernist Christian advocates. The vital questions became far more in accord with those raised by the new biblical scholarship of a Harnack, a Loisy or a Schweitzer. Again, society was changing in its estimates. The rise of Socialism and of Labour political movements had gone far towards allying the old radical spirit with the new motives and explorations of the Labour Party. The Secularist of 1880 tended to have joined one of the new Labour movements by 1900 and to pursue his secularity in a different context. By 1897, the *Reformer*, a new rationalistic magazine, was carrying in its first volume an article by George Standring, a leading figure in Bradlaugh's movement, discussing the decline of secularism. Again, from the days of Robert Owen, the secularist movement sought to educate. But its educational policies were now pursued over a far wider and less committed field by the University Extension movement or the Workers Educational Association.

The Task Today

It would be futile to deny historically that secularism underwent a considerable decline. Its political radicalism had now passed into other channels and the parent movement was left alone with anti-theology and anti-biblicism. This was a sufficient content so long as the old theology and biblicism were taken seriously at large. There could still be forceful debates and the issue of strongly worded literature. But a day was to come when theology and biblicism were alike to play little part in the generalised public mind. The non-Roman Churches proved to be adaptable and compromising. Indeed, a time was to be reached when it would be possible for them not only to accommodate themselves to a far-reaching radical biblical criticism but even to atheism. The Roman Catholic Church represented an enclosed system of thought and the usual secularist attack passed it by. As fundamentalism wilted, it seemed more and more likely that the work of the Secularist was largely done. Certainly, it would appear

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Future of Secularism

By F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

to be true that the particular inherited outlook and propaganda of the Secularist of some half a century ago would have little reference to the present day.

Yet it is also true that the assertion of a secular view of life and society is still something standing in absolute and uncompromising opposition to the viewpoint adopted by any form of religious mysticism. This is the undying content of the secularist movement at any period. The vital task of the present is not to give to secularism "a new look". Indeed, such an aim would probably prove to be fatal to its best interests. It is to state this basic non-supernatural proposition in a form relevant to the intellectual climate of 1965. Few would probably deny that this particular intellectual climate is marked by a major interest in the sociological aspects of life. A secularism which is relevant to it must be one which is concerned to the utmost with the social nexus binding together individuals into contemporary society. A concern with education, civil liberties and the like is a specialised concern with issues which find their natural environment in the social setting.

It is likewise of crucial importance to recognise that the social material has changed vastly within contemporary life. Old class divisions have become blurred and indistinct. It is no longer possible to talk as of old about working-class movements with the same sureness of boundary. Education has increased considerably and the age of the paperback has seen a vast growth in the spread of knowledge. The underlying question is not whether secularism shall become respectable. In fact, it is difficult to see exactly what such a purpose would mean. But it is essential that secularism should be in accord with the best contemporary scholarship related to the subjects with which it deals. If, for example, the Secularist wishes to talk about the Bible and gets no further than a tirade in the old "Bible-bashing" style, he has clearly ended up in a mere futility which can do nothing but harm to the cause which he claims to represent. It is far more important to know the Hebrew-Christian literature in its historical setting from the standpoint of modern criticism, and to be able to form assessments accordingly. Again, in dealing with the major Churches, the Secularist is dealing with vast property-owning corporations. His concern must be with the effect of these corporations upon contemporary society. An appeal to history is only going to ring true if it has the sureness of a scholarly touch. It was for this reason that the late Dr. G. G. Coulton was so masterly an opponent for the Roman Catholic Church to face. It may well be that the greatest task which secularism must undertake during the next generation is that of the nursing and encouraging of a secularist spirit of exact scholarship able to puncture ecclesiasticism at its weakest points, those at which it makes its contacts with society.

It is not without interest that the secularist movement of the days of Paine, Hetherington or Carlile was first and foremost an anti-ecclesiastical movement and not a mere tirade of "Bible-smashing". Some of its most important work was done in its attack upon tithes, its battle for the liberties of the press or its securing the abolition of such an ecclesiastical prerogative as church rates. Once again, the secularist task has become today one of opposition to the ecclesiastical influences within the social order. It is a task which is not made the easier by the fact that a vast increase in a generalised secularity has robbed the specifically religious controversy of point for a great many people. But the issues are still there to be faced and, as the National Secular Society approaches the second century of its existence, its greatest achievement will lie in the extent to which it can overcome existing ecclesiastical legacies by relating a non-religious secularism to the climate of the time.

Philosophy of Science—Some Facets

8—CAUSE AND THEOLOGY

By DOUGLAS BRAMWELL

IN this series certain implications of the philosophy of science of special interest to freethinkers have been mentioned. The subject matter of the three previous articles—causation—is particularly rich in such implications. As a diversion, this article will discuss a few of these.

There is an argument for the existence of God that depends on the idea of causation. The argument runs: all things are caused and, therefore, if a chain of causes stretching back to infinity is to be avoided there must be a first cause. This first cause is known as God.

If it is accepted that there is a first cause, then there is no rule against calling it God. But it is dangerous; the name carries with it far more meaning than is implied by the argument. If, instead, it were called "Cause No. 1" the priests would not be so interested in the existence of a first cause.

But even the first cause need not be accepted. What is the objection to an infinite chain of causes; what reason is there to assume that the causal chain had a beginning in time?

A more subtle variation of the "causal argument" is to postulate that the world's causes form a hierarchy. Thus a man is dependent on causal relationships with factors in his environment; those factors, in turn, are dependent on other factors; and so on. Unless there is a prime cause, God, the argument continues, this causal hierarchy would need to be infinite, which is impossible.

This time the infinite regress is certainly objectionable. The weakness now seems to be that the causal structure need not be regarded as hierarchic—a series of ascending importance—but merely as interrelated. Following a chain of causal factors one could then ultimately return to the factor started with—albeit at an earlier point in time. A simple example of mutual independence of causes is the speed of a steam engine and its governor, or any other feed-back mechanism. Each is dependent on the other; neither is hierarchically superior to the other.

A further, and more sound, variation of the causal argument is due to Whitehead and was outlined in an article *THE FREETHINKER* dated February 26th. Again the concept of God that emerges is of little use to the Churches.

A Christian doctrine which well illustrates how logic is ignored for the sake of doctrine is the belief that although man has freewill God knows all his future acts.

The usual defence of this position is that God is somehow timeless and sees the whole of time, including all our free decisions, together.

Now, either future events already exist in some sense or they do not. If they do, then there are no free choices left to be made. If they do not, then they have yet to be decided and they cannot be known. A thing cannot both "be" and "not be".

If there is really free choice, then the most that a God could know would be the alternative courses of action open to each decision-making organism.

VISIT TO LEWES

THE National Secular Society and the Thomas Paine Society are organising a visit to Lewes, Sussex—where Paine's house still stands—on Sunday, July 25th. A coach will depart from central London at 9.30 a.m. Further details will be announced later.

A Critique of Christian Origins

By F. A. RIDLEY

ABOUT the middle of the 2nd century onwards, the secular literature of the Roman Empire began to take periodical notice of a new oriental cult of Jewish origin, the Church or cult of Jesus the Messiah or (in Greek) Christ. From about this time on, Roman and Greek writers like the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and Lucian of Samasata make occasional references to this Christian sect which already appeared to enjoy a respectable antiquity, its initial foundation being ascribed with some consistency to the much earlier reign of the Emperor Tiberius (14-37), whose local representative in Judaea was the procurator Pontius Pilate.

Rather later, towards the end of the 2nd century, a document technically described (from the name of its modern editor) as the Muratorian MS, and apparently dated between about 180 and 200, gives a list of sacred scriptures held in special reverence by the Church of Rome: a list broadly but not completely identical with the present New Testament. (As late as the 4th century the oldest MS, the Codex Sinaiticus, now in the British Museum, also presents some points of idfference with the New Testament.)

About the same time, a Greek-speaking writer, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, mentions (for the first time apparently) the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as being canonical, authoritative documents recognised as such by the orthodox Christian Church, though not apparently by some already heretical sects upon the fringe of Christianity. Soon after, a canonical New (i.e. Christian, as distinct from Jewish) Testament became recognised by the whole orthodox Church virtually identical with the one we have today. Such is all, or virtually all, that is known for certain about Christianity up to about the year 200.

If we are to accept the Christian account, Christianity itself had already been in existence for a century and a half between the initial life and death of Jesus Christ and the official recognition (around 180) of the four canonical gospels which alone describe his life, teaching and death. This is a fairly long time; nevertheless, the so-called New Testament still remains the only professedly first-hand account of Christian origins. How far, if at all, are these documents historical?

Estimates in the critical circles of biblical scholarship vary widely from total acceptance to total denial. This failure to agree on nearly every problem raised in the New Testament may perhaps be held to prove that where informed opinion differs so widely, little or nothing can be stated with certainty. That is, the vast corpus of critical literature relating to Christian origins surely deals mainly with conjecture rather than with facts. Upon one conclusion at least, practically all non-fundamentalist New Testament scholars are agreed. Whatever the amount of historical truth that the New Testament, and in particular the Gospels contain, they tell us far more about what their early Christian contemporaries thought about Christian origins than they do about the actual Christian origins themselves.

For modern critical scholarship entirely endorses that acute comment of Celsus—perhaps the first scientific secular critic of the Christian cult at the end of the 2nd century—that the Christians had themselves “edited” their Gospels “once, twice, several times” (Cf. Celsus, *The True Word*, part of which is preserved in the reply of the Christian scholar, Origen in the 3rd century). No doubt the Christian censorship disposed effectively of the remainder.

Prior to about the middle of the 2nd century, by which

time the Christian Church was already a going concern and as such was beginning to emerge from the mists of legend that still surrounded its formative years, secular sources that may be held to shed light on Christian origins are singularly meagre. However, it would appear that some chiefly mythicist scholars tend to make too much of the apparent paucity of evidence (I describe as mythicist those who deny that there is any historical basis to the Gospels, an extreme and, in my opinion at least, improbable view). For after all, how is it possible at this time of day to know for certain that no other literary sources were ever available? For in dealing with the corpus of classical literature, and very particularly with any secular literature which has any bearing on Christian origins, it is always necessary to remember that the entire surviving literature of antiquity has had to weather not only the vagaries of wind and weather, but also a thousand years of Christian censorship.

In the light of this important fact, one should not make—as again some chiefly mythicist scholars tend to do sometimes—too much of the “argument from silence”. For no doubt any critical reference to Christian origins that too obviously contravened the orthodox Christian tradition would have had short shrift from the ubiquitous censorship of the Catholic Church in the Ages of Faith. Actually the references to Christianity during its earliest years *may* have been much more numerous and explicit than any we now possess; in fact the more explicit they were, the more likely surely is it that they would have been suppressed.

Rather ironically, just as there were four Gospels, so there were also four secular witnesses of Christian origins: the Jewish historian, Josephus (end of 1st century), and three Roman writers: Tacitus, Pliny and Suetonius, who all wrote in the first quarter of the 2nd century.

Let us review them chronologically. Apart from a cryptic reference to the brother of the so-called Messiah, Josephus's sole extant reference to Jesus is in a passage which appears to be as obvious a Christian forgery as anything can well be. Even Mr. Paul Winter, who accepts it as partly genuine, has to assume that the query: “if he [Christ] can be called human” was interpolated by a Christian hand. With all due respect it appears extremely unlikely that an orthodox Jewish priest like Josephus could have ever described the founder of a rival cult as a wise man.

It is, however, probable that Josephus did refer to Jesus, since Origen, the relatively honest Christian Father explicitly tells us that Josephus rejected Christ's claims. But this surely presupposed some explicit reference, since silence implies consent. The conjecture of a famous Jewish scholar, the late Robert Eisler, seems much more likely: that Josephus's original text did contain a reference to Jesus, but a hostile one—perhaps ending in a sneer at the virgin birth, since it is followed in the extant text by a sneer at a similar pagan myth.

It seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that the accounts given by the Romans Tacitus and Pliny—our oldest non-Jewish references—are totally incompatible. For according to Tacitus, the Emperor Nero (56-68) a picturesque ruffian, put to death a huge multitude (*ingens multitudo*) of Christians under the most spectacular circumstances in AD 64; whereas about 112, Pliny, then governor of Bythnia (in Asia Minor), had to write to the reigning emperor, Trajan, (98-117) to ask what to do with the

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This Believing World

THE CURATE who refused to baptise his children until they were old enough to know what was happening, found a hearty supporter in a letter to the *Daily Express* (30/4/65). The lady writer welcomed his decision with three cheers. Whether baptism is a relic of the times when washing in the East was avoided as much as possible, and had to be enforced as a religious rite, or a relic of Aquarius, the water-bearer, of the signs of the Zodiac, is still unsettled, but in a country where water is plentiful, it is as useless as confirmation.

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THAT BEAUTIFUL and persistent Christian sect Jehovah's Witnesses, most of whom know precious little of Jehovah, anyway, find many supporters still in the Christian Church. For example, the Rev. P. M. Heckley who defends their "keenness" (*South East London Mercury*, 9/4/65), and the Rev. M. Hamilton Sharp who commends them in contrast to the "advocates [of religion] today of a high pressure and remote control evangelism". He believes that "there is no substitute for personal contact in the home", which the Witnesses practise.

★

IN FACT, the one thing that parsons are shunning more and more is visiting members of their "flock" in their own homes. It leaves the clergyman a target for inconvenient questions which he can't or prefers not to answer. The dear old days when a vicar was warmly welcomed in the home have gone with the past. That no doubt accounts for the lack of opposition to the "other" people who "hard-sell religion" on the doorstep.

★

HERE we have Dr. Reindorp, the Bishop of Guildford, instructing the readers of the *Sunday Mirror* (18/4/65), after nearly 1900 years of strenuous Christian teaching, what Christianity really is. He begins with "God reigns"—but we could safely bet that about the last thing he would do would be to support such a proposition publicly in debate. The lack of interest in Christianity and the emptiness of the churches must, make it painfully obvious to the Bishop that God does not reign.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society was held at 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1, on Wednesday, April 14th. Present Mr. D. H. Tribe who was in the chair, Mr. W. Griffiths (Treasurer), Messrs. Barker, Collins, Condon, Kuebart, Micklewright, Millar, Miller, Shannon, Sproule, and Timmins, Mrs. Collins, Mrs. McIlroy, Mrs. Venton, and the Secretary (Mr. W. McIlroy). Apologies were received from Messrs. L. Ebury and F. Warner. New members were admitted to Glasgow, Inverness, Marble Arch, North London and Parent branches. A tribute was paid to the late Mr. F. A. Hornibrook, a member of the Committee for many years who died recently. The President welcomed Mr. F. H. Amphlett Micklewright who was attending his first meeting. The Annual Conference agenda was endorsed. Mr. William Miller, Chairman of Birmingham branch, was elected a trustee of the Society. Financial reports for February and March were accepted. The annual financial statement of Manchester branch was also presented to the meeting, and congratulations were expressed to the branch and its officers. The Committee decided that the Society should affiliate to International Co-operation Year. Letters of protest would be sent to the United Nations and the Canadian High Commissioner regarding a decision by the Supreme Court of Ontario Province, that persons who apply for Canadian citizenship must believe in God. It was also decided to protest to the Finnish authorities about the prosecution of the author of *Midsummer Night's Dance*. Letters would be sent protesting against the prosecution of Mr. S. Smith, of Boston, Lincs., for refusing to pay part of his rates, as he objected to Boston Town Council giving £500 towards the restoration of Lincoln Cathedral. Mr. W. Shannon reported on the conference on Civil Liberties in Northern Ireland.

The next meeting was arranged for Wednesday, May 26th, 1965.

W. McI.

A CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

(Concluded from page 155)

Christians in his province whom he had apparently only just come into contact with, and about whom he appeared to know nothing except that they assembled early in the morning and sang a hymn to Christ *sicut Deo* (as though to a god).

How is it possible to reconcile these two accounts? For Pliny, a universally able and well-informed governor according to Trajan, also an unusually able and well-informed emperor, knows practically nothing about the Christians who, according to Pliny's contemporary, Tacitus, were already numerous in Rome under Nero half a century earlier. Surely these two statements are irreconcilable. One (or both) of the current texts of Tacitus and Pliny must surely have been tampered with by a Christian hand.

Our last "witness", Suetonius, writing a few years later (125) gives us an account of Christian origins in flat contradiction to all the others. For, at least if taken literally, Suetonius tells us that Christianity started in Rome, not Palestine. For the Emperor Claudius (41-56) expelled the Jews (or some Jews) from Rome "on account of a riot instigated by Chrestos [Christ]". Did Christianity start in a riot in the Jewish ghetto in Rome? But to prove this, one must identify "Chrestos" with *our* Christ.

Such are our rather negative conclusions. They appear to point unmistakably to the conclusion that the actual history of Christianity in the positive sense really only begins in the second half of the 2nd century. For before this we have only legend and conjecture. Even the historicity of Jesus is only probable (if at all) on circumstantial evidence. All that we know is that the Christian sect did actually originate in the 1st century, probably in Palestine (though even that is not quite certain, witness Suetonius above) and possibly under Tiberius and Pontius Pilate. For despite the vast pseudo-historical literature upon the subject of Christian origins, this is about all that is positively known of the formative era of Christianity prior to about 150, when the Christian Church first began to emerge from the domain of legend into that of authentic history. One can perhaps add that this rather unsatisfactory conclusion will probably remain until and unless the chance discovery of some early Christian counterpart to the Dead Sea Scrolls may enable us to review Christian origins in a more constructive context.

PINTER CONDEMNS SOUTH AFRICAN "PIRACY"

HAROLD PINTER, the playwright, in an interview published in the May issue of *Anti-Apartheid News* condemned the South African government's latest moves to beat the "cultural" boycott. He objected "very strongly indeed" to what he called a "piracy plan", though the move was in a way pathetic, "a gesture of panic". His instinct was "to say, in those terrible circumstances, let the theatre die . . . To hell with cultivated people, and to hell with the theatre, if the conditions under which so many Africans live are not to change." Mr. Pinter added that he would support extension of the anti-apartheid ban to films if such a proposal came up before the Screenwriters' Guild. *Anti-Apartheid News*, which is the organ of the Anti-Apartheid Movement of 89 Charlotte Street, London, W.1, has a circulation of nearly 20,000. Membership is 10s. per year.

GOD

God the Father, God the Son,
And Holy Ghost (that's three not One)
We have read about the life he led
And now I say Thank God he's dead . . .

LOUIS MACKAY (aged 14)

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, May 16th, 6.45 p.m.: D. S. WRIGHT, "Psychology and Religion".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, May 16th, 11 a.m.: Dr. JOHN LEWIS: Teilhard de Chardin and *The Phenomenon of Man*.

Notes and News

THE congregation of the Society of Jesus is meeting in Rome to elect a General, a new "Black Pope", who will control the 36,000 members of the most powerful of Roman Catholic orders. No Italian has been elected for 75 years, but two of the fancied candidates—Father Paolo Dezza and Father Roberto Tucci—are Italian; the present acting General, Father John Swain, is a Canadian. The new General will be the twenty-eighth successor to St. Ignatius Loyola, and there is good reason to think that he will be elected quickly. During the voting the fathers live only on bread and water!

★

THE American Jewish Committee reacted with "sadness and disappointment" to reports that the Vatican Council's draft declaration on the Jews would be altered before the Council reconvened on September 17th (*Jewish Chronicle*, 30/4/65). The President of the Committee, Mr. Morris B. Abram prayed that the "vast forces of enlightenment in the Church would prevail." Dr. Joachim Prinz, for the American Jewish Congress, pointed out that the intended statement should be seen, not as an effort to exonerate the Jews from the charge of deicide, "but as a means of exonerating the Church from the role its teachings have played in anti-semitism and the horrors resulting from it." But the Jews had no part to play in the decisions; they could only await "with patience and dignity an act of the Catholic conscience . . .".

THE "most stinging comment"—as the *Jewish Chronicle* described it—came however from Professor Rabbi Joshua Heschel. The deicide charge was the "most dreadful calumny ever uttered", the Rabbi said. It had resulted in "rivers of blood and mountains of human ashes". To millions of Christians and to "the overwhelming majority of Roman Catholic bishops" it was "absurd, monstrous and unhistorical and the supreme repudiation of the gospel of love." The weakening of the Council's document in any of its aspects "would remain for all time as one of the major contributions to anti-semitism", and Rabbi Heschel prayed that "Satan may never witness such a triumph".

★

RABBI HESCHEL had described the Vatican Council's draft declaration as "inspired by a grandeur of conscience and the spirit of love". Edward Keating, editor of the liberal Catholic monthly, *Ramparts*, had a different view. Instead of the 2,500 priests "getting down on their knees" to the Jews, they had "decided to forgive" them for crucifying Jesus. Mr. Keating regarded this as arrogant and a "bitter irony". If he were a Jew he would "throw it back in the faces of the churchmen".

★

"IT IS customary to sniff at 'crude atheism'", said Ivor Brown in the *Humanist* (May). "But is it really so contemptible a practice to put into words which all can understand the doubts and questionings which others have stated at greater length, with more learning, but not always with more clarity?" And Mr. Brown described the "spirited" public debates as a pleasant part of his "further education". The open-air Atheists of that time risked imprisonment, because the Blasphemy Laws were being enforced, and one of the speakers that Mr. Brown heard had been more than once in jail. "Some governing body, I think the LCC had note-takers eager to get hold of actionable remarks". But Mr. Brown is mistaken in saying that they were "chiefly waiting of course for observations on the Virgin Mary". Satirical remarks about God or Jesus Christ would be just as likely to incur a blasphemy prosecution.

★

THE Spanish Church has a great opportunity to inspire a Christian Democrat movement in Spain similar to that in other European and Latin American countries, according to Hugh Thomas (*New Society*, 29/4/65) "The Church's overall position has rarely been stronger", Mr. Thomas said, "as much from the weakness of any other institution as from its own qualities". Catholicism is, of course, the state religion taught in all schools, and out of 12,000 books published last year 1,300 were religious. "The Church runs no fewer than 1,600 newspapers and periodicals (out of 2,100), of which 45 are dailies (out of 100 in Spain). It has 1,000 cinemas out of 8,500." But the "pervasive influence" of the Church is not to be confused with "explicit subscription to Catholic belief". Mr. Thomas gave the proportion of priests in the population as one to 1,250 (one to 2,000 in some places) compared with one to 800 in 1931, and referred to an "overall alienation". In the future, however, he thought the Church would be "more likely to be confronted with apathy than with the violent anti-clericalism of the past".

★

IT IS still likely that the socialists would be the largest party in a democratic Spain. "But it would clearly be advantageous", Mr. Thomas thought, "to find themselves faced in *constructive* opposition by a Christian Democratic movement around which the bourgeoisie could constitutionally gather . . .". The italics are ours.

Easter (3)

By GEORGE R. GOODMAN

IN THE Babylonian section of the British Museum is the translation of a tablet found in Babylon referring to their god Bel—whom the Israelites called Baal (see the various theological encyclopedias)—estimated to belong to a period of 1500 BC (possibly much older) and recording a "Passion drama" which is so similar to the Gospel account that it is quite obvious that the New Testament fabricators copied it almost word for word.

Here they are (Cf. also Findlay's *Rock of Truth*):—

Babylonian Legend
Bel is taken prisoner.
Bel is tried in the Hall of Justice.
Bel is smitten.
Bel is led away to the Mount.

With Bel are taken two malefactors, one of whom is released.

After Bel has gone to the Mount,—the City breaks out in tumult.

Bel's clothes are carried away.

Bel goes down into the Mount and disappears from life.

A weeping woman seeks him at the gate of burial.

Bel is brought back to life.

Christian Legend
Jesus is taken prisoner.
Jesus is tried in the hall of Pilate.
Jesus is scourged.
Jesus is led away to Golgotha.

With Jesus two malefactors are led away; another, Barabbas, is released.

At the death of Jesus, the veil of the Temple is rent; the dead come forth from the graves and enter the City.

Jesus's robe is divided amongst the soldiers.

Jesus, from the grave, goes down into the realm of the dead.

Mary Magdalene comes weeping to the tomb to seek Jesus.

Jesus rises from the grave alive.

By far the choicest sentence in the Christian legend is "the dead came forth from the graves and entered the City".

Did the graves have electrically operated lids and who pushed the buttons? Whose graves were selected? As flesh decomposes quickly in the East, was there a team of plastic surgeons to cover the skeletons with flesh? Who supplied the brains, motor nerves and blood plasma? As the brigade of the dead was stark naked, who clothed them?

Did Moss Bros. have a branch at the cemetery and did they supply the garments "on tick", seeing that it was such a holy occasion? Did the jolly dead return to their graves or commingle with the local lads and lassies, having the night out? (Like some football players?)

Reasoning is singularly absent in people indoctrinated with theological absurdities and the more fantastical these are, the more they are ready to believe them. "*Credo Quia Absurdum*",—"I believe it, because it is absurd" is a favourite maxim of the highly orthodox.

But to come back to the Babylonian legend. If it should be thought that their Passion drama was an isolated case, it will presently be shown that the Egyptian Jesus, Iesu, came even nearer to the Gospel one and that there can be no doubt that the whole story—with its many priest-invented accretions—referred to annual solar events, dramatising the waning and waxing of the Sun's rays and the consequent disappearance and reappearance of vegetation, corn and vine which, to all nations around the Mediterranean, was of vital importance.

Not only were there corn-gods and corn-mothers in Southern Europe, but all districts in our Northern parts too, had—and *still have*—their spring and harvest customs which are merely a perpetuation of their treasured ancient beliefs that remained quite untouched, despite the flood of superimposed ecclesiastical rituals and doctrines. (*Vide* Sir James G. Frazer's monumental work *The Golden*

Bough, showing that magic and religion went hand in hand.)

The observant reader may now ask: *why* is it that the alleged crucifixion and death of a mythical Christ is celebrated in the spring, the wrong time of the year?

Originally, it was celebrated, in Egypt for instance, in the autumn where it rightly belongs, as the autumn equinox is the natural "date line" for the decline and death in nature.

At that time, the Egyptian priests threw down the Tat or Tau Cross (which the Church, later on, turned into the "Cross of St. Anthony"—but it existed already in Egypt for thousands of years prior to our era) and erected it again at the solstice or at the spring equinox, because it symbolised *life* not death!

When the Christian creeds were manufactured, it was decided that the devotees could not possibly be expected to wait for the resurrection of their alleged Saviour a period of six months—which would have given the game away! Furthermore, such a sane course would have left little room for mystery and magic, stirring the imagination and emotions—all of which form such an essential part of Roman Catholicism and are, in fact, the very basis of all Christian denominations which propagate the idea of a "crucified Saviour" whose death and resurrection are celebrated and whose body and blood are consumed.

A clear intimation of the resurrection on the third day is seen in an Egyptian text in the *Book of the Dead* which runs: "I will arrange for you to go to the river when you die and to come to life again on the third day".

Mary searches for Jesus for three days, as Isis sought the hidden Horus. But the Egyptians were told that the period of disappearance was actually six months, because they learned that Isis had lost her child at the autumn equinox and found him again at the equinox of spring. Also, they had an ancient festival of "Hiding the Tau-cross" in the Nile and six months later a ceremony of "Finding the Cross".

The Egyptian Jesus, Iesu, also had a "Mary and Martha", viz. Isis and Nephthys (in an earlier cult Apt and Hathor), the two protectors of the hidden babe. They are also the two sisters who weep for him.

Mary is the Egyptian Meri, in its plural form Merti, in Latin Mertae, in Hebrew and German Martha, in Italian Marta. The Egyptian Lazarus antedated the Gospel figure by several thousand years. In Egyptian it was "El-Azar" or Lord Osiris, in Latin it became "El-Azar-Us"; later on the "el" was dropped, leaving Lazarus whom Horus, the Christ, raised at Beth Anu, which became Beth-any in the Gospels. All irrefutable evidence that the Gospels were merely a re-script of ancient Egyptian literature.

Jesus was supposed to be born in Beth-lechem (the House of Bread)—this is just the astrological sign of Virgo; (hence that silly Virgin-birth), it is the home of the great star Spica, and *Spica* is Latin—the ear of wheat, which looks like a spike. Directly opposite the sign of Virgo is Pisces (the fishes), hence the Christ becomes the Fish-avator and the Bible just teems with the fish-typology or symbolism.

We have there the fishermen, the gold in the fish's mouth, the miraculous draught of fishes, the "fishers of men". And the Romans called the early Christians *Pisciculi*, which means "Little Fishes", i.e. members of the fish-cult. The Greeks called Jesus the "Big Fish" *Ichthys*,

and in the Catacombs, the fish-signs predominated, not the cross.

Fishes were on the Christ's forehead, at his feet or on a plate on the altar. In Aberdeen Cathedral is a stone showing two fishes in the manger, instead of a babe! Bishops and archbishops parade proudly with a huge representation of a fish-mouth on their head—but they call it a mitre!

Jesus is, of course, Greek for Joshua and we recall the phrase "Joshua, Son of Nun". But Nun is an Egyptian word and means: primeval space or the waters of the Nun. In the Hebrew alphabet the letter "N" is called and spelled "Nun" and means—of all things—"fish"!

If the Egyptians symbolised life by bread, as the first birth, and by fish, as the second, then it is not surprising that in ancient religious allegory the Christ figure is depicted as multiplying loaves and fishes and feeding a multitude with them!

In the *Book of the Dead* a passage gave to Anu the characteristic designation as the "place of multiplying bread". So here we have the prototype of the "miracle" of the loaves and fishes. And as the "body of the god" was broken into fragments to feed the participants of the ritual, it then transpires that the Eucharist is *Egyptian* in origin.

What does the Greek word *Eucharistein* mean? Simply to "say thanks" (or grace) for the "staff of life", i.e. bread. This little ceremony was practised by all tribes and nations in the East and is re-enacted by the head of every Jewish family every Friday evening in Britain, America or anywhere else, without the Catholic mumbo-jumbo. Excommunicated Catholics should provide their *own* sensible "communion" at home!

The Egyptian Jesus i.e. Horus, also turns water into wine. He puts grapes into the water and says: "the water of Teta is as wine, even as that of Ra". And during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles a similar ceremony is enacted.

No figure of a man on a cross appeared during the first six or seven centuries of our era. It was always the astrological lamb, because Aries (the lamb) was the sign of the age that preceded the Pisces (fishes) era. It was, therefore, literally a "hang-over".

But at the Council of Trullo (during the reign of Justinian II) it was decreed that the lamb should be superseded by the figure of a man. For, by that time, two centuries had already elapsed since the Council of Chalcedon (451), when a non-historical "Christ" had been elevated to the position of a "God-man", so that the Church's newly invented glamour figure should in no way be less than the many pagan Christs who had already preceded him.

For a millennium and a half, humanity has been stultified by the most brazen fraud that crazed bigots ever concocted. The lugubrious exhibition outside convents, churches and in South European country-lanes, of a blood-dripping "saviour" on a cross, must nowadays fill rational beings with a justified revulsion to orthodox religion.

The Church claims that she needs an ideal, hero-figure for her uneducated and superstitious adherents—a "man-god" who not only "forgives sins", but also looks after people in distress and sickness. Hence also the popularity (amongst women) of the emotional Madonna cult (Isis with Horus) in Catholic dioceses, and its psychological influence. The Church says that an ideal hero-figure is needed for people like Albert Schweitzer and his staff, St. Camillus Hospitals (manned entirely by monks), Little Sisters Hospitals, CND campaigners and others.

But Socrates, Plato, Kant, Goethe, Nietzsche and many more required no "Christ" in order to be *illuminati*.

CORRESPONDENCE

ATHEISTS AND AGNOSTICS

For the last twelve months I have been reading THE FREETHINKER and derive much pleasure from it. I was one of the people who were subjected to Catholic indoctrination throughout their education and know the terrible "fear of God" and the outsize guilt-complex with which one must live even as a child of ten or perhaps younger. It is a state of mind in which no sensitive person can exist sincerely for a long period.

At the age of sixteen, upon leaving school, I became what I should call a person sitting on the fence. Much of the dogma of the Church had by this time, become wholly unacceptable to me; such things as the ability to buy souls out of purgatory, the immaculate conception, the ludicrous fable of the Bible and above all the fact that I had to believe our ever-loving Almighty God could condemn a poor soul to an everlasting roasting for conscientiously failing to attend mass on one Sunday and dying unrepentant of this insignificant misdemeanour.

For ten years I sat upon this most uncomfortable fence with one motive and two reasons. The motive was indecision—leaving myself free to hop back into the arms of the mother Church in times of trouble or when the fear of death obsessed me. The two reasons were the fear of hell and the hope of eternal glory, deep-seated by Catholic brain-washing.

One of the major factors which contributed to my decision to burn my boats and choose mental freedom was the Church itself, for it must be the falsest institution in the whole of creation. The subtle way in which it can alter its doctrines to gain popularity and in doing so sell its fervent adherents down the river by then ordering them to believe in what it previously condemned can never cease to amaze. Similarly, one must be amazed at the way in which it can accredit its own inventions such as rigid observance of the sacraments, celibacy, etc., to the wishes of its gentle patron Jesus Christ.

To rid myself once and for all of the bonds of religion and belief in a god in any shape or form was, I should say, one of the greatest events in my life and my mental freedom and free access to unbiased logic are things I prize above all.

Now, after spending some time as a true member of the secular world, I must admit there is one element I find extremely disappointing. This is the pathetic rivalry between the Atheists and the Agnostics. I am far from being a philosopher and feel this is probably a good thing for I think in quoting too much one loses sight of one's objective. It seems to me that the Atheist always adopts a policy of aggression to the Agnostic, always accusing him of sitting on the fence, and the poor Agnostic has his work cut out defending his position instead of attacking. It is a great pity that atheism does not represent a logical point of view for, if it did, we could all be united under its banner.

How can any man state categorically that there is no supernatural being? In doing this the Atheist is being as dogmatic and illogical as the Christian, Jew, Buddhist or any other religious body. Admitted, there has never been a form of religion which can stand up to the test, nor will there ever be for supernatural, itself, is not compatible with nature, but, just as there is no proof for any form of infinite being there is none against.

The Agnostic is not a fence-sitter, he is far from it and does not deserve to be treated with discredit by Atheists. Anyone who has the intelligence to reject Christianity should have more sense than to bring extremism into a well ordered secular society.

Surely there is only one point of view any logical person could hold upon this subject. I have no knowledge of a supernatural being, there is no evidence for one nor has one irrevocably revealed himself to the satisfaction of the unbiased, therefore I have no reason to believe in one. Just as there is no evidence on behalf of such a being, there is no evidence which we could put forward to substantiate a claim that there is definitely no other existence in, perhaps, another dimension and our body is only a vehicle for some other impulse within us. I agree this is extremely unlikely but there has been no one alive yet who could comprehend the infinite.

In accusing Agnostics of sitting on the fence, the Atheist must only be expressing his own fear that his standpoint is too radical and in standing his ground he is likening himself to the gullible Christian.

The Churches rightly call their following a flock, for they are sheep-like in their acceptance of ideas which they cannot evaluate for themselves. Let us not have a flock of Atheists following some dogmatic philosophy which they feel too intelligent to reject.

MICHAEL R. EVANS.

NOT IMPORTANT

A life-long member of secular societies and a subscriber to THE FREETHINKER for more years than I can remember, I was mildly surprised that it was thought necessary to emphasise the

non-identity of THE FREETHINKER with the National Secular Society.

It almost seems that its main object was to prepare readers for what appeared in the two following numbers.

In these, a greatly disproportionate facility was given to a discussion of the trial of Jesus by Paul Winter.

Space in THE FREETHINKER is extremely valuable, and I don't think so much of it should be devoted to a matter such as this. After all, the question of whether Jesus lived; the manner of his trial and death is, from the Freethinker's standpoint, similar to the one whether the Stratford Shakespeare wrote the plays.

An interesting pastime, but not important. An equally long discussion on the events alleged to have taken place soon after his death, would have been more useful.

What Freethinkers are concerned about are the disastrous results to mankind over the years, consequent on millions of people having their lives managed for them on the belief that his intervention will make the difference between everlasting bliss and misery in the life to come; and their mistaken ideas of inherited sin and vicarious punishment.

J. G. CARTWRIGHT.

DAVID AND SOLOMON

Though I did not intend to take up any more of your valuable space on the above subject, I feel obliged to make some comments as Mr. Cutner so kindly alludes to me in his very interesting article.

According to D. Winton Thomas (Ed.) of *Documents from Old Testament Times*, p.46, the first biblical kings mentioned in contemporary Assyrian monuments are Ahab and Omri 9th century BC. Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC) mentions Ahab the Israelite as a member of a coalition against whom he fought at Karkar. Sanacherib's own contemporary records tell of his campaign in the west, boasting of, and no doubt exaggerating his exploits, his siege of Jerusalem, where Hezekiah himself was shut up like a bird in a cage. In addition Ahab and Omri are mentioned on the Moabite stone now in the Louvre.

If the historical existence is confirmed by contemporary records, I think we are justified in assuming the historical existence of Ahab's contemporary King Jehoshaphat of Judah who was only the 5th after Solomon.

If the priestly propagandists, or whoever wrote the stories, were out to create a non-existent idealist king, why did they charge him with several rather revolting crimes? Such as treacherous murder (2 Sam. 11) or human sacrifices (2 Sam. 21).

As regards archaeological evidence, we must remember that very little work has been done on the traditional temple site, due to the fanatical veneration for that spot and the building of the mosque. So we must give it the benefit of the doubt and accept the historicity of David and Solomon.

"BEN YEHUDA"

19th-CENTURY RATIONALISM

In the recent TV debate between Dr. Donald Soper and David Tribe it was amusing to note how often the former chirped "nineteenth-century materialism", as if this was all that was needed to refute Mr. Tribe's statements.

At present it seems popular for the "get-with-it" and "honest to x" brands of Christian to deride modern rationalism as being "Victorian", "Old-time irreligion". But let us not be intimidated by these devices, for the Christians have good reason for wishing to sweep Freethought under a carpet of generalised anti-Victorianism, in order that attention may be diverted from the nineteenth-century Christians' folly and cruelty in opposing almost every progressive idea and reform—evolution, anaesthetics, birth control, women's suffrage and education, to name a few. Today, the Christian Churches' political spokesmen are still opposing reform of the laws relating to divorce, abortion, homosexuality and Sunday observance!

Better "nineteenth-century" rationalism than medieval and twentieth-century taboos and totalitarianism!

NIGEL SINNOTT.

HELL

The concomitants of death occur in its approach. One may, fleetingly flirt with it in careless youth; "Freethinkers" (forgive the quotes), in their scorn of Heaven and Hell, may turn their eyes aside.

I can't forget a dear old uncle of mine, an Agnostic, who commented, back in the Thirties, on a letter I wrote to Chapman Cohen; "Dying is an unpleasant business". I thought this the understatement of a lifetime. I still think so; I think it the conclusive argument against anything called "Love", usually expressed in self interest, and I hope Mr. McCall will, eventually, know what to expect; and to brace himself up to it.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

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