

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXV—No. 26

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

ON AUGUST 7th, 1814, Pope Pius VII (1800-1823) issued a papal bull known (as is customary) from its opening words as *Sollicitudo Omnium Ecclesiarum* (The love for all the Churches). In it the Pope, who had recently returned to Rome after several years of enforced residence in France as Napoleon's prisoner, revoked the earlier bull issued in 1773 by his predecessor, Clement XIV, (1769-1774), suppressing the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits.

In his bull of restoration, Pius spoke of the great results obtained by the Jesuit order, adding that he would be guilty of a grave crime if he were to reject the aid of the strong and experienced mariners who volunteered to rescue the barque of Peter from the winds and

waves. Upon which restoration, the German Protestant historian of the Papacy, G. Krueger, further comments: "From this point of view he was undoubtedly right, and those in power shared his appraisal. The following remarks of Victor Emmanuel I (of Savoy) who readmitted the Jesuits as early as 1815, have been handed down to us: 'I am persuaded that the Jesuits are alone able to defy a revolution. As I am resolved to use my last man and my last coin to crush the Revolution, it follows that I give the Jesuits liberty of action in my territories.'" The revolution here referred to is of course, the French Revolution which had overrun Europe under Napoleon.

One need only add that during the ultra-reactionary era of the Restoration after Napoleon's downfall—the generation of Metternich and of the Holy Alliance (1814-1848)—the restored Society of Jesus made itself so useful to the current reaction in both church and state that, writing a generation later, the great French liberal historian, Jules Michelet, was impelled to make the pungent comment: "Ask a man-in-the-street, the first passer-by, 'what are the Jesuits?' he will immediately reply, 'The Counter-Revolution'". Since when, the "Black Pope" (the General of the Jesuits) and his clerical bodyguard, have consistently pursued their self-chosen role as the Praetorian Guard or—to adopt a more modern simile—the SS men of the Vatican.

The Jesuits in 1965

Recently, the Society of Jesus has again made the headlines in the secular press. For a few weeks ago, the Jesuits elected a new general, the 27th (excluding their period of suppression in 1773-1814) successor of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Spanish founder and first general of the order (c 1490-1556). The new general is also a Spaniard, Father Arruba, the former Provincial of the order in Japan; a pagan land which, incidentally, has been the scene of some of the most spectacular alternative successes and failures in the chequered annals of the Jesuits. Not that one must imagine that the order though founded by a Spaniard, has ever been exclusively Spanish. For example, the last general was a Belgian and his predecessor was a Pole. For what a recent issue of the *Sunday Times* described as the "strongest, most secretive and best organised order within the Roman Catholic Church", whilst retaining to a remarkable degree its militant fanaticism, has long ago shed its

originally exclusively Spanish character and is now as cosmopolitan as the originally purely Roman Church.

The Old Guard versus Atheism

The Company of Jesus (to give it its original title) has now been officially in existence since 1540, with only that short break of 41 years after its suppression by Pope Clement XIV. Throughout this post-Reformation era—an era of practically uninterrupted crises as far as the Vatican

was concerned—the Jesuits, in their capacity as the militant "Old Guard" of the Church, have been called upon to face successively a whole series of enemies. For the great order originally organised on military lines by Loyola to fight Islam, the hereditary enemy

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

God's Last Champions

By F. A. RIDLEY

of Spain, and to recover Jerusalem by a fresh crusade, has been diverted by successive circumstances and by the advent in particular of the Reformation into turning its attention to a succession of enemies: Protestantism, Liberalism, anti-Clericalism of various kinds. Today, however, the newly-elected General has been given a fresh commission by Pope Paul VI himself (as already recorded in the columns of THE FREETHINKER). On the eve of the recent electoral congress, the Pope gave the assembled Jesuit fathers the special and urgent task of combating atheism, the new and most dangerous of all the recorded enemies of Holy Church.

In its hour of need in 1965—as in that earlier hour in 1814 when Pope Pius VII restored the order—the Papacy yet again calls upon the strong and experienced mariners who volunteer to rescue the barque of Peter from the winds and waves. And the new General should certainly be strong and experienced. He has served in various countries and was in Hiroshima when the first atomic bomb fell upon the Japanese city.

Modern Don Quixotes

That strange product of Spain, Ignatius of Loyola, has sometimes been compared with Cervantes's Don Quixote, and it is true that the Jesuits were largely responsible for the Counter-Reformation that saved the Church of Rome from what must have seemed at the time an impossible position. Today however, the odds against the future survival of either supernatural religion in general, or of Rome in particular, would appear to be far greater.

The Jesuits are evidently aware of the present dilemma of the Church. For after all, Teilhard de Chardin, probably the most important Catholic thinker of this century, emerged from their ranks. It is true that he is still *persona non grata* at Rome, but then so was St. Thomas in his own lifetime! But it does not at present look as if there exists any way of bolstering up the visibly tottering structure of the supernatural against the ceaseless blows of the scientific battering-ram.

We rather fear, therefore, that Pope Paul's exhortations were in vain. For the countryman of Don Quixote, in seeking to demolish scientific atheism with the rusty weapons of theology, will again merely imitate his prototype by charging windmills.

The Problem of Loneliness

By KIT MOUAT

LONELINESS is a major and inescapable human problem; if not in our own experience, then in our responsibility for others. There is no automatic preventive, but there is, nevertheless, a great deal we can do about it.

The opportunity for physical intercourse between the sexes has increased, but promiscuity may be no more than an attempt to solve the lack of any other sort of communication. It is so much easier to "make love" (as we euphemistically call it) than to make friends, and the value of friendship has been overshadowed by an unrealistic attitude to love, while sex is driven from gutter to pedestal and back again, and by itself cures nothing. Until genuine co-education provides children with an opportunity to understand the opposite sex, men and women will continue to misjudge or ignore each other's needs. We have barely begun to discover where we are dependent on one another, and where we need to separate. The image of the female living only for a male who is only truly masculine when away from women, is fading but will probably survive until women are able honestly to describe their own feelings without fear of hurting their men or facing their scorn. Inarticulateness and boredom are serious causes of loneliness both within and outside marriage.

Most women have loneliness thrust upon them. Leaving school for a job with constant companionship, they find themselves, on marrying (or at least at the birth of their children) alone in a home, their minds filled but not fulfilled in the company of small children and a part-time husband who needs most to escape the demands of relationships by the time he gets home in the evening. Even when the intellectual nourishment is maintained, with little or no opportunity for discussion, loneliness can take a powerful and painful grip, so that a woman may flounder in regrets and guilt at a time when she has been led to suppose she should be happiest.

Children who are neglected or in the care of the unloving, the physically handicapped, the lesbian and homosexual, the unmarried mother and all those who break and pay the cruel price of our code of respectability, the vagrant, the incurable social misfit and the ex-prisoner, can only be rescued from what all too often proves an intolerable loneliness by the sort of education that develops our imagination and compassion. Their suffering is a tragedy and peril in our society, where fear and prejudice go hand in hand with ignorance, and ignorance abounds. The reform of our laws about sex, sick benefits, pensions, punishment, women's place in society and so on are problems that are being tackled by the Secularist and Humanist organisations. In human terms we cannot afford to delay; in terms of national pride, we cannot continue to lag behind the more progressive (if less religious) countries of Europe.

No one, however, needs an organisation to tell him or her how to make life more tolerable for the least fortunate in the community. Matrons of hospitals will usually welcome offers from Humanists to visit and run errands for patients who have no visitors, and fellow Atheists and Agnostics may be the most grateful of all for a change from the unwanted but persistent attentions of the clergy. In mental hospitals where atheism may, even today, be considered one of the symptoms of instability, perhaps we could be especially grateful.

Then there is the loneliness that comes from frustration, professional or sexual, which cannot be dealt with without confession, and too often cannot be confessed for lack of

words or out of loyalty. We no longer turn to ignorant priests for an empty ritual of enquiry and absolution, but we have not yet learned how to listen to one another with a tolerable balance of responsibility and detachment. Somehow we have to learn, for intelligent listening with real sympathy may be the only cure that is needed. Too many people believe that advice (like dogma) has to be accepted without question instead of analysed. Overconfidence as much as inhibition can create indestructible barriers, but we do not have to be a success ourselves in order to help others through failure.

There is the loneliness, too, of anxiety; justified anxiety that cannot be shared with anyone, and those unnecessary fears of which we are ashamed but which are no easier to bear for being the product of our too eager imaginations. There is the loneliness of old age and of undeclared pain which frays the personality so that everyone within reach is scattered as if by tear gas. And there is the final and ultimate loneliness of death. The suspicion or certain knowledge of its coming to someone else when we can do nothing to help may prove the most profound loneliness of all.

Although at death loneliness and complete isolation may coincide, it may, for those with inner resources and an outer antenna to life, be for the first time. But there is another form of isolation suffered by the unorthodox who are out of touch with others who share their fundamental convictions and attitude of mind. In January 1964 I started the Humanist Letter Network International in order to try and put Humanists, Secularists, Atheists and Agnostics in touch by post with others of approximately the same age group and interests. The Network is entirely independent and self-supporting, but is at the service of the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society, the South Place Ethical Society and of all Humanists, Secularists, etc., whether members of an organisation or not. It grows rapidly with men and women from the age of 15 to 85, of all trades and professions, education and nationality. Widows and widowers, the divorced or separated, the housebound, the young who are unable to make contact with their church-going families, wives who cannot talk frankly with their ultra-religious husbands, all are enthusiastic about the potential companionship and intellectual exchange the Network offers. A very small fee is charged, and profits go to Secularist and Humanist projects such as the Agnostics Adoption Society or the school in Serowe, Bechuanaland.

If people who share the same language feel isolated from one another, how much greater is the loneliness suffered by the immigrant, the refugees or the displaced person who has never been fully integrated? How much more lonely must the non-Britishers in our midst feel when they cannot talk our language, and when their own social customs and courtesies do not coincide with our own? The very word "international" was coined by the great Atheist Jeremy Bentham, and only extending our loyalties from family to society, from country to world and from race to human race, can we hope to ease the loneliness we suffer ourselves or recognise in others.

Secular-Humanists have at once a special responsibility and, I believe, advantage. Essentially attached to a world that is gradually throwing off the religious shackles that prevent and threaten the scientific study of human needs,

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The Evidence for Jesus (2)

By GEORGES ORY

(Continued from page 196)

Tacitus associates the Christians with the burning of Rome in 64. If that had been so, if the Christians had been martyred by Nero at that time, the Fathers of the Church would scarcely have failed to write long chapters on the Neronian persecution. They did not; early Christian tradition is, on the contrary, mute on the subject. Neither the Epistles of Paul, nor of Peter, nor Revelation were aware of the collective martyrdom of Christians accused of having set fire to Rome. Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, even Melito, Bishop of Sardis about 170, who first among Christians alluded to Nero's cruelty, none of these mentions the persecution of Christians in 64. Tertullian, who made frequent use of Tacitus, did not find this passage in the edition which he knew. Two centuries after the pretended event, Lactantius, Origen, Eusebius and Jerome say that Peter and Paul fell victims to the Neronian fury, but they did not know that the Christians had been accused of setting fire to the city nor that a multitude of the faithful had been burned alive.

About 400, Sulpicius Severus repeated this accusation of Tacitus, but his text remained unknown to later writers. Nero and his crimes find no judgment in Dante. A silence of more than a thousand years concerning the persecution of Christians by Nero for setting fire to Rome is in itself a serious comment on the authenticity of the entry in Tacitus's *Annals* and in the *Chronicles* of Sulpicius Severus. The possibility of a forger inserting these lines into a MS he was copying in the 14th or 15th century cannot be thrust aside; all the more as Tacitus has no other reference to Christians save in this dubious context.

The name Christian certainly did not exist in 64; it was fabricated later in a pagan world to designate Gentile Christians and is first used by the Apologists Justin, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Minucius Felix, then by Ignatius, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, etc., i.e. not till c. AD 140; but after that date it may well have been applied to Jewish sectaries of the first century, thus allowing the new religion to be apparently of a good age.¹¹

We are told that "Christian" derives from "Christ", the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew "Messiah", meaning "anointed"; then we are told that the "anointed" man was Jesus, which does not necessarily follow. With equal right we can claim the early Christians and certain gnostics were at baptism "anointed" with oil, without reference to Jesus, in the name of the holy ghost or of the tree of life;¹² in the eyes of the pagans all these were "christs", ironically or scornfully as one might say the "oilies" or the "greasies", and not as the adepts of an unknown Jewish messiah, unknown that is to the Greek-speaking world. The title "chrestiani" is earlier than "christiani", and has nothing to do with "christ", "chrestus" means "good" or "agreeable".¹³

Hence we can affirm with certainty that the "Christians", as such, were unknown to pagan literature until AD 112—a very doubtful date—and to Christian literature before AD 140, a century after the supposed death of the founder in Jerusalem. This is confirmed by the discovery that anti-Christian polemic does not show itself until AD 160, the epoch of the disputes between Justin and the cynic philosopher Crescens. Justin also accuses "the princes of the priests and doctors" of the Jews of "profaning and blaspheming the Son of God throughout the world" (*Dial.*

Tryph. cxvii, n. 3). About 170, Celsus calls the Christian missionaries charlatans with an absurd doctrine and names a list of Christian sects, all gnostics, their rivalries and disputes. It is not one Christianity that he knows, but a multitude of Christianities of varying beliefs.¹⁴ In AD 130 Hadrian observed that the Alexandrian "christians" worshipped Serapis.¹⁵

At this time, the name of Jesus was still unknown to the Greek world although certain gnostic sects may have adopted him as their god about the years 115-120. As for the man, Jesus, he was quite unknown.

Are we to think that from the works of Jewish historians and of Greek and Roman writers all mention of Jesus has been expurgated by imperial censorship or by the rabbis and by the Fathers of the Church? There can be no doubt that on several occasions the books of the Bible have been destroyed and remade; Hebrew and Christian orthodoxy had caused to disappear a quantity of apocryphal, apocalyptic and gnostic works. Is it likely that every reference in every work should have been cut out? We find traces of other messiahs and, even in the New Testament there are clues to a Jesus who was not the traditional Saviour.

Had it been possible to destroy, revise, correct all the MSS, such treatment would surely have been impossible with regard to inscriptions, monuments and paintings. It was not until the end of the second century that the Christians had separate cemeteries in Rome, or even a third century, and nowhere in the Catacombs is encountered the Crucified Man Jesus; what is met with is, shoulder to shoulder with Orpheus and the Good Shepherd, the Celestial Christ, over whose beardless Greek face shines the aureole of the Sun Cross of Victory. Again we find the sacred supper of bread and fish which, not the Twelve, but the Seven are about to eat. The Marcionites, please note, ate fish and not meat. The earliest likely inscription which has come down to us is that of a Marcionite church at Lebaba near Damascus of date 318-319, and here is graved Chrestos (the Good) and not Christos (the Anointed); this is no Jesus.

That no profane author has attested the historicity of Jesus has been reversed into a statement that no such author has contested this. If these writers had never heard of Jesus they would have no grounds for denying his existence. Anyhow such a declaration overlooks the fact that we have gnostic pre-Christian fragments which teach of a spiritual Christ who was not yet humanised.

The writings of Celsus and Porphyry are known only by the refutations of their works; nevertheless we know that Celsus wrote of the Christians: "You relate fables and do not even give them verisimilitude . . . some of you have revised three or four times or even more often your evangelic texts in order to be able to deny what is objected to". Trypho too, wrote to Justin, "You follow a vain rumour and are yourselves the makers of your own Christ; even were he born and lived somewhere none would know of it" As for Porphyry, he asserted that the evangelists were the inventors and not the historians of the events they narrate concerning Jesus.

From this, we can observe that there were Gentiles who doubted the existence of Jesus, and that they were not the only sceptics. St. Jerome tells us that "in the time of the

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This Believing World

WHAT strange ideas the average parson or priest has about agnosticism. Here we have Dr. W. R. Matthews, the Dean of St. Paul's, writing a lot nonsense in the *Daily Telegraph* (15/5/65) such as "there are several kinds of Agnostic", but cheerfully assuring us that "all of them agree in not being Atheists; they do not deny the existence of God". The truth is, as G. W. Foote pointed out years ago, an Agnostic is merely an Atheist in a top hat. No Agnostic would ever admit that the Christian God, the God of the Bible, could possibly exist.

★
DR. MATTHEWS insists that "God is; and God is love" but the Agnostic, exactly like the Atheist, claims there is not a scrap of evidence for these two "glorious assertions" which the Dean considers "central to our faith". No doubt they are, but both Agnostics and Atheists have long since laughed them out of court. In other words both Agnostics and Atheists disbelieve in the existence of Dr. Matthews's God.

★
WE NOTE that those stout-hearted Christians, the American Ku Klux Klan, not satisfied with their astounding success in the USA, are going to do their utmost in England against Jews, Catholics and Negroes. And already they are reported to have fixed fiery crosses to the doors of a few coloured people. Those responsible are called a "lunatic fringe", but is there a lunatic fringe in the Klan? Is it not lunatic to the core?

★
RECENT documentaries on heaven and hell produced by the BBC for television were actually the work of Hugh Burnett who calls himself a "Methodist Agnostic". His father once edited the *Methodist Recorder*. Mr. Burnett says that "Church and Sunday school taught me my Agnosticism"; and in spite of his upbringing, "irrationality and wrong thinking of all kinds obsess him", (*Observer*, 28/3/65). He finds in Yoga "the same illogicalities and Dark Ages naiveté as the beliefs about Heaven and Hell".

★
THE THREE lost children who were found in a coal bunker a week or so after disappearing were found by accident. We cannot help asking, what had happened to all our famous spirit mediums? Did they not help the police? A few years hence, when everyone has forgotten it, the case may well be cited as one in which the Spiritualists played a big hand? Every now and then we are told of cases which took place over twenty years or so ago in which mediums did help the police—cases of course which cannot now be tested.

★
WE LEARN that Christian women are being faced with a difficult problem. Should they wear make-up? And the London *Evening Standard* (22/5/65) devoted nearly a column to the momentous question. As one lady pointed out, "if the Christian life is all that it should be, we should so radiate the indwelling of Jesus Christ that no make-up is needed in order to be attractive". This argument is all very well, theoretically, but we all know that make-up can certainly improve the attraction of a woman, whether she has Jesus indwelling or not.

★
WE WONDER incidently what has happened to the plea of women Roman Catholics that they should be allowed to preach. Year in and year out, women claim the same right to preach the word of God in nearly all Christian sects, but the male grip on religion is too strong. The ladies, it seems, have to be content with being Christianity's main supporters.

THE PROBLEM OF LONELINESS

(Concluded from page 202)

we must urgently encourage such research and learn how to deal with the results. We must also make sure that we do not substitute political dogmas for those of religion. Independent of gods and devils, we are used to taking the blame for "man's inhumanity to man" but we can also, with pride, give humanity and humanity alone the credit for what has been done by man for man. We know what can be done to ease the problem of loneliness if, with a warm heart, we put rational minds to it.

[The Humanist Letter Network (International) welcomes all enquiries, which are treated as confidential. Please send a stamped addressed envelope to Mrs. Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex, England.]

THE EVIDENCE FOR JESUS (2)

(Continued from page 203)

apostles even, when the blood of Jesus Christ in Judaea was not yet dry, it was pretended that the body of the Lord was merely a phantom (*Adv. Lucif.* 23) and this is corroborated by several passages in the New Testament, notably 1 John 4, 3 and 2 John 7, which attack those who do not believe in the man Jesus Christ "and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God".

A belief is no proof of an existence. If it were, Hercules, the Centaurs and the banshees of Ireland can all be said to have existed. Nor can doubt be hailed as a proof, any more than absence of reference. The burden of proof is on the believer; not that of disproof on the disbeliever.

(To be continued)

10. The authentic MS. of Sulpicius Severus was found by Florez in the middle of the 16th century in a MS. of the 13th century; in this there is no reference to the persecution of the Christians by Nero. The Emperor Hadrian wrote after 130 that in Egypt "the worshippers of Serapis are also Christians and those who are termed bishops of Christ are devotees of Serapis".

11. The god Serapis, was surnamed Chrestus and its adepts could quite well be confused with the Christians. The same title was given to the underworld mystery gods of Samothrace and also to Hermes, Osiris and Isis. See note 10.

12. 2 Cor., 1, 21; 1 John 2, 20; 27.

13. Chrestus was a name used in Rome in the third century. Ulpian, prefect of the pretorian in 222, had two colleagues one of whom was named Chrestus—and Justin wrote (*Apol.* i, 4) "merely by this name we are the best of men". For the Marcionites Jesus was the Good god (*Adamantios*, ii, 9). The "Christians" of Pliny and Trajan may have been just "paulians" adoring their Good god, celebrating his heavenly crucifixion and awaiting the end of the world. "Chrestus" is moreover the first form of the title appearing in the unique MS *Mediceus* of Tacitus which a scribe corrected by scratching out the "e" and writing "i" in its place.

14. The name "Christian" is found only three times in the New Testament and outside the Gospels; it is not met with in the Pauline Epistles, nor even in the writings of Polycarp and Tatian. Harnack (*Missions*, i, p. 97, n. 3) quoted by Goguel (*La naiss. du Chr.* p. 211, n. 4) cites an unpublished text speaking of "Christians and Jews who believe in Christ"; this suggests that Christian Jews were not the same as Christians.

15. See note 11 and add that Sulpicius Severus, referring to Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius as persecutors of the Christians wrote that under Antoninus (138-161), there was peace for the Churches though Antoninus repressed a rising of Jews in 155; so discriminating between Jews and Christians.

SPECIAL OFFER to readers of this paper. The Autobiography of Major Christopher Draper, D.S.C., entitled *The Mad Major*, First published in 1962 at 25s. A limited number offered at 10s. post paid. 230 pages fully illustrated and autographed from C. Draper, 2 Conway Street, London, W.1.

THE FREETHINKER

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

Telephone: HOP 0029

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year £1 17s. 6d.; half-year, 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d.

In USA and Canada: One year, \$5.25; half-year, \$2.75; three months, \$1.40.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

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

OUTDOOR

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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.

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Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS, (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, 27th June, 6.45 p.m.: Dr. J. FREMLIN, "The World Population Explosion".

South Place Ethical Society, (Conway Hall Humaist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, June 27th, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "Education in Living".

Notes and News

THE Archbishop of Canterbury, who was in Australia at the time, was shown in particularly jovial mood on the cover of the *Sydney Bulletin* (27/3/65). Dr. Ramsey, the magazine said, moved about the country with speed and informality: "a cracking pace" which didn't "fit in with the popular picture of him in Church circles in England". But "wearing a life-saver's cap at Bondi or drinking billy tea" didn't make Dr. Ramsey a "with-it, rock'n'roll vicar". He offered no popular comforts: faith was hard, religion was not a cult of happiness, some questions had no answers. And, when asked by British interviewer Daniel Farson about the extent to which the Church had lost touch with the people, the Archbishop replied that he would prefer to say that "the people have lost touch with religion and God".

★

A WEEK later the *Bulletin* published an interview in which Dr. Ramsey discounted the view that science had outdated religion. Both should be "taught and understood" because both were necessary for an understanding of the world and it was "necessary for both to understand each other". Today, far more people than previously ignored religion, but where people pay attention the Archbishop said, it was "for the purpose of respecting it". The most important part of his work, he believed, was the movement for Church unity, which he saw "coming in two stages". The first would be getting "really friendly relations between the Churches" so that they treated one another as allies, not rivals. This was really going ahead. The second was the actual unity of the Churches. This was moving slowly but was happening. In England, Dr. Ramsey said, "the Methodists and Anglicans are trying".

WE recalled the other day, during a discussion on India, that Nehru's specific request for a non-religious funeral had been completely disregarded. The same week, Kingsley Martin—writing on the Nehru Memorial Exhibition (*New Statesman*, 11/6/65)—remarked on the "ominous" affair. Nehru declared in his will "with all earnestness that I do not want any religious ceremonies performed for me after my death; they would be mere hypocrisy; even if performed as a matter of form". Yet those in authority, "though certainly not his daughter", did in fact, as Mr. Martin said, make an orthodox religious ceremony of the funeral of the first Prime Minister of secular India.

★

IN THE same issue of the *New Statesman* another Kingsley—Amis this time—reviewed Wayland Young's *Eros Denied* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 45s.), which has elsewhere been considered a little old hat. Mr. Amis doesn't agree with this judgment. He believed, like Mr. Young, that parents should tell their children as much as they want to know about sex as soon as they want to know it. As for how to tell them, "the question wouldn't arise at all unless the parent felt there was something disgraceful about what he had to tell". Or, as Mr. Young put it: when the question of sex comes up, we collectively say "Er . . ." instead of "Aha". Mr. Amis recalled reading about a police official who had been putting a stop to a teenage "vice ring" and who commented: "And all the girls showed a sickening familiarity with contraceptives". But why so sickened? Mr. Amis asked. The official ought to have said: "But all the girls showed a reassuring familiarity with contraceptives". Our collective morality, Mr. Amis concluded, "is based on an unwholesome mixture of envy and guilt, and for its repressive purposes, as for most such, the values of Christianity will come naturally and neatly to hand. No wonder the faith is so vigorous in its senescence".

★

TO THE *Guardian's* critic, Maurice Cranston, Mr. Young seemed, however, "rather like an aged warrior firing his rusty rifle in a war that has long been won" (11/6/65). And the young should be reminded that, "however bad repression is, the sublimation of sexual energy is the motor of most art and progress". This in turn was criticised by Kenneth Tynan as a hypothesis with no scientific basis of any kind (*The Guardian*, 14/6/65), the theory that "art and progress are contingent on continence" was, Mr. Tynan said, fantastic.

★

IT IS reported on page 207, that the USA is to issue a Thomas Paine commemorative stamp. And the hope is expressed that Britain should similarly honour the author of *Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason*. We doubt, personally, whether the great republican will ever appear with the monarch on a British stamp—or whether it would be congruous if he did. We notice, however, that the GPO is currently honouring the centenary of the Salvation Army. Not, it is true, with a stamp (perhaps the bearded "blood and fire" General Booth wasn't considered an appropriate companion for the Queen either) but in the franking. "The Salvation Army, 1865-1965, A Century of Service" it reads. Mr. Anthony Wedgwood Benn, who unveiled a London County Council plaque to Charles Bradlaugh a few years ago, might note for next year that the National Secular Society—which Bradlaugh founded—is only a year younger than the "Army".

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THIS Sunday (June 27th), the Ethical Union Housing Association is holding a garden party, from 3 to 5 p.m., at Burnet House, 8 Burgess Hill, London, the first house that the Association opened.

The Word "Mercy" and the Problem of Euthanasia

By MARVIN KOHL

ADVOCATES of voluntary euthanasia are committed to the view that in certain circumstances and with specific safeguards the taking of human life is merciful. Opponents, on the other hand, argue that an act of euthanasia is not an act of mercy and therefore should not be performed. Both parties to this dispute seem to agree that if an act is merciful it is morally justified. But they disagree about euthanasia being merciful.

To clarify the nature of this disagreement it is necessary to ask and answer two questions. 1. What, in this controversy is meant by the word "mercy"? 2. Is the proposition, "Some acts of euthanasia are merciful" true or false?

I shall maintain, first, that in this dispute the word "mercy" has been used equivocally, and second, that because of this equivocation we have at least two different propositions to consider, one of which is true, the other false. I believe the advocates and opponents of euthanasia are disputing two different points and, given the sense in which advocates of euthanasia use the word "mercy" it is true to say that "Some acts of euthanasia are merciful".

Consider the following situation: Two fluent English speakers, X and Y, appraise a case of euthanasia in which it is true (1) that the patient had excruciating pain; (2) that the patient had to die as a result of the conditions causing the pain; (3) that the patient, an adult, did voluntarily favour some means of "easy death"; (4) that the death was painless—and (5) that the physician was motivated solely by the desire to satisfy the patient's request for an "easy death". X and Y agree about the facts of this case. But they disagree about whether or not the doctor's act was merciful.

Puzzled by this apparent disagreement X and Y decide to paraphrase their remarks. That is, they decide to substitute other words for the word "mercy" without changing the original meaning of their respective statements. Instead of X saying "that was an act of mercy" he now says "that was the kindest possible treatment of an unfortunate individual". Instead of Y saying "that was not an act of mercy", he now says "that was an act of compassion and forbearance". This manoeuvre exposes the source of the misunderstanding. The word "mercy" being an abstract term is, more often than not, equivocated on when people argue that euthanasia is or is not merciful. Advocates of euthanasia tend to identify acts as being merciful only if they result in the kindest possible treatment of unfortunate individuals. Opponents tend to identify acts as being merciful if they result in compassionate and forbearing treatment. I think it obvious that when this is true the alleged disputants are making different but not contradictory assertions.

Of course this does not in any way imply that there are two and only two legitimate senses of the word "mercy". Other equivocations are possible but they are not as common. Nor does it imply that every disagreement can be reduced to a purely verbal disagreement. For this simply is not true. What I am suggesting is that there are cases where the only area of disagreement is whether or not a given type of act is merciful and that in many of these cases the disputants are not really at odds with each other.

Two objections usually arise at this point. One involves the notion that the word "mercy" has one and only one correct meaning. "Granted", the critic would say, "that

the word 'mercy' is often used equivocally. But it is one thing to say a word has been used in two different senses and still another to say that a word has been used in two equally good senses. Or, to put the matter somewhat differently, it is a mistake to suggest that both speakers have been equally duped by the language. The only one who has been duped is the speaker who points to the doctor's act and says "That is an act of mercy". What has he done that we must forgive? What impending punishment must we dispense with? What act of retribution must we abstain from? There simply is none. For a patient is innocent. Therefore it is a mistake to refer to an act, an act that involves an innocent patient, and say that "That was an act of mercy".

I believe that this criticism reflects a certain confusion and some errors of fact which I should like to clarify. It is certainly true that "compassion and forbearance" (or if one prefers "compassion and forbearance for an offender") is a perfectly legitimate sense of the word "mercy". To have mercy in this sense is to feel sorrow and pity for, as well as to overlook the guilt of, a being who deserves punishment. In this sense it is true to say that no treatment of a patient, that is, no treatment of someone who merely suffers can ever be merciful. But this in no way entails that it is a mistake to use the word in any other sense. By distinguishing between being merciful to the guilty and being merciful to those who suffer from disease and illness, one does not make a mistake. To use language differently is not necessarily to use it incorrectly.

The only adequate basis for correctness in a living language has to be the usage of native speakers of that language. Certain sequences of sounds have certain meaning only by virtue of the tacit agreement of the general community of speakers. This community can, under certain conditions, revoke its consent to established rules and set up new ones. Nevertheless, at any given time we can refer to the rules which are in force. We can also refer to violations of these rules.

A misdescription is just one of the possible kinds of violations. A misdescription occurs when a person uses a name to convey characteristics which a fluent English speaker would never associate with that name. It would, therefore, be a mistake if someone asks "What is mercy?" and you point to an act of painting and say: "That is mercy". But it is not a mistake to point to an act—an act which offers the kindest possible treatment to someone in great need—and say that "That is mercy". It is not a mistake because this is one way, a very common way, in which fluent English speakers use the word.

We now turn to the other objection. Here the critic makes a distinction between intention and fulfilment, between having kind intentions and being kind. He reminds us that wanting to be kind and being kind are two different things. And he maintains that the advocates of euthanasia neglect the more important question, of whether or not the actual killing is really kind. He concludes that euthanasia is not merciful because, with all the safeguards, the proposed act of killing is not kind.

Two reasons are usually offered in support of this objection. Each makes a different point. They are: (1) We are being kind only if we do what some God would do. And to be kind in His way is not to kill but cure. (2) The proposed act of killing is not kind because we cannot

prove, that is, we cannot provide empirical evidence that it is kind.

As to 1: If matching this God's ability to be kind is the only type of kindness the critic acknowledges, then he confuses kindness with perfection. But kindness is not synonymous with perfection. Every perfect act may be kind but not every kind act is perfect. The critic is demanding that we act as if we were living in a perfect world. Instead of asking "what should we do given our present situation", he asks, "what would we do if this were a perfect world". There is only one answer. If this were a perfect world he would not have to ask the question. I do not wish to be misunderstood. It is one thing to suggest that we emulate some God. It is another to demand that we do what this God himself would do or else do nothing. The latter demand is unreasonable. It is unreasonable because we are not gods. It is unreasonable because within the limits of human endeavour we can be kind.

As to 2: I think there is a reason why this criticism cannot be regarded as sufficient, but it seems not unlikely that it is partially correct. It is true that we cannot prove that an act is kind in the same way and to the same extent that we can prove, let us say, that an act is an act of running. But what follows from this? Only that it is usually more difficult to supply evidence for the former than the latter. It does not follow that we cannot supply evidence to show that a given act is kind.

Suppose we have a case of disseminated carcinoma metastasis before us. That is, a case of cancer where the cancerous cells have spread and have fully developed throughout the body. It is a case that meets all the conditions outlined earlier. We know (1) that the patient has excruciating pain; (2) that as a result of this condition it is beyond reasonable doubt, a reasonable medical doubt, that the patient has to die; (3) that the patient when told of his condition voluntarily favours some means of "easy death"; and (4) that aside from the desire to help the patient no other considerations are relevant. Now it is not easy to know all these things. And I am not suggesting that it is. Nor am I saying that such cases are as common as some advocates of euthanasia would have us believe. But that, if there are such cases then in these cases, it would be kind to kill. It would be kind because all the evidence indicates that this would be the most helpful thing that we can do.

In other words, I am claiming that there is a sense of the word "mercy" on the basis of which we can correctly say that a merciful act needs to be kind and that a kind act needs to be a helpful one. And that when we examine the evidence in cases like our cancer case, we know that the proposed act of euthanasia is the kindest possible treatment, because we know that it is the most helpful thing we can do.

Some of the material of this article, which appeared in the *American Rationalist* in April 1965, was presented before the Philosophy Club at Long Island University on November 19th, 1964. The author wishes to express his thanks to Mr. Robert Hoffman for his helpful comments.

ON BOTH SIDES?

YOU'VE got to decide—we are told in an anti-war ballad by the American folk-singer Bob Dylan—"if Judas Iscariot had God on his side". Which isn't quite so easy as Mr. Dylan might think. Certainly—assuming that we accept the Christian story—we must regard Judas's role in it as crucial, as part of God's scheme for man's salvation, Judas was, at least, the agent of God. Perhaps, in this instance as so often, God was on both sides!

THOMAS PAINE STAMP

FOR many years supporters of Thomas Paine in the United States of America have been campaigning for Paine's portrait to be on one of the country's postage stamps. News has been received that they have now been successful. Full details are not yet available, but the Thomas Paine stamp is to be one of a new series of 18 portrait stamps, ranging from 1 cent to 5 dollars, others in the series including Oliver Wendell Holmes, Einstein, Eugene O'Neill and architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The British postal authorities are so very much more conservative than the Americans in stamp design, yet the land of Paine's birth should not be too far behind the land of his adoption in this matter.

C.B.

THE VIRGIN'S SLIP

JOHN GRIGG (in the *Guardian*, 14/6/65) shared the following amusing story he had come across in *Paris in the Terror* by Stanley Loomis (Cape 30s.).

The Maréchale de Noailles, who had long been recognised as an authority on etiquette, went "harmlessly mad" in her dotage and "entered into a correspondence with the Virgin Mary in which she questioned the Queen of Heaven on the minutiae of precedence in the Kingdom of God".

Her confessor would answer these letters, signing them "Mary", but unfortunately in one of them he made "a small error of form", which did not escape the Maréchale. "One cannot expect too much of her", was the old lady's comment. "After all, she was only a bourgeoisie from Nazareth. It was through the marriage that she became attached to the House of David. Her husband, Joseph, would have known better".

CORRESPONDENCE

LORD'S DAY OBSERVANCE SOCIETY

May I take the liberty of seeking the hospitality of your columns to reply to the letter from Mr. John Shepherd of the 4th June?

I am glad to see that Mr. Shepherd has at last woken to the fact that the Lord's Day Observance Society is indeed a force to be reckoned with, that we do represent a considerable body of opinion in the United Kingdom, and that the large majority of Members of Parliament who have expressed an opinion on the subject of Lord's Day Observance are not so well disposed towards Mr. Shepherd's way of thinking. Mr. Shepherd has good reason to be upset over this state of affairs. Because he realises that facts and figures are against him, he resorts to insulting the intelligence and integrity of the Lord's Day Observance Society, and therefore of its Parliamentary supporters and the electorate who voted these Members into the Commons, by the use of such terms as "moronic" and "ghastly".

Mr. Shepherd concludes his letter by saying that he "was able to bring down in flames the West of England's Representative of the Lord's Day Observance Society" during a TV appearance. I think this self-congratulatory statement is based upon a bit of his own imagination rather than upon facts. In my travels through the West and South West of England and South Wales I have met and discussed with many people who, whilst disagreeing with the Lord's Day Observance Society, have nothing but contempt for Mr. Shepherd and the disgraceful behaviour he displayed that evening on ITV. His uncontrolled, unreasoned and unintelligible ravings did little to inspire folk who are anti-LDOS to support his so-called Sunday Freedom League. In his letter published in your paper, Mr. Shepherd says, ". . . I agree that dissertations on secularism should be scholarly, so giving dignity and poise to the subject . . ." I suggest that he takes a lesson from his own notebook.

Far from being a heap of charred remains, Mr. Shepherd, I am still very much alive to continue, by God's grace, the work He has called me to do.

ALBERT T. PETERS,

Western Divisional Organiser, Lord's Day Observance Society.

AGNOSTIC ADOPTION

A remark in Mr. Tribe's article on Agnostic Adoption (THE FREETHINKER 4/6/65), is perturbing to me as an Atheist. I quote: "Applicants will be judged on social and ethical merit, and will not

be subject to credal tests". Does this mean that a child whose natural parents may have held strong anti-religious feelings may be handed over to a Roman Catholic, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, Mohammedan, Hindu to adoptive parents of any of the multitude of superstitious beliefs? Even as an Atheist, I do not claim that applicants from these religious denominations can not offer a home of "social and ethical merit". My own home was of "social and ethical merit", it was Sandemanian.

At first glance this refusal to apply a "credal test" appears humane, but may it not defeat its own purpose? Is it not possible that religious bodies, in particular Catholics, may institute a campaign "to save these innocent souls" by applying to adopt children from the Agnostic Adoption Society in preference to any other adoption society?

EVA EBURY.

ATHEIST AND AGNOSTIC

The letter in the issue of June 4th reminds me that I have never seen the difficulty between the agnostic and the atheist. By derivation atheist is from the Greek *atheos* (meaning without a God). Has the agnostic God? I think not. So he is an atheist. There is no question of denying God but merely a refusal to accept the evidence put forward by those who assert that there is a God since it is inadequate.

Incidentally, I do not like the invention of terms designed to soften the impact of the word atheist and prefer to call myself an atheist rather than a Freethinker, Secularist, Rationalist or Humanist.

May I raise two points which might well be followed with more vigour when attacking the believers?

We should not let any Christian get away with the statement that he knows something such as "I know that my redeemer liveth". He knows nothing and should content himself with saying the far less forceful "I believe that my redeemer liveth".

Then there is the constant assertion by unbelievers that they think the ethics of Christianity are good. We should assert that the ethics of Christianity are inferior. The main basis is that one's conduct should be good because it results in a personal reward—"for great is your reward in Heaven". Good ethical conduct should not seek reward and in this respect the ethics of the atheist are superior to those of the Christian.

G. J. FINCH.

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, June 9th. Present Mr. D. H. Tribe who was in the chair, Messrs. Barker, Collins, Condon, Ebury, Kuebart, Leslie, Millar (Kingston), Miller (Birmingham), Shannon, Sproule, Mrs. Collins, Mrs. McIlroy, and the Secretary (Mr. W. McIlroy). Apologies were received from Mr. W. Griffiths and Mr. F. Warner.

New members were admitted to the Manchester and Parent branches. There was discussion on the resolutions passed at the Annual Conference and the action to be taken. Congratulations were expressed to the Members of Inverness branch who had campaigned for the operating of Sunday ferry services.

Messrs. W. Griffiths, R. Sproule and Mrs. E. Venton were elected to serve as the Benevolent Fund sub-committee. The President and Secretary with Messrs. W. Griffiths and F. H. Amphlett Micklewright and Mrs. E. Venton were elected to serve as the Conference Agenda Committee.

Two press releases were ratified, and it was announced that a shilling booklet on secular education would be available soon.

The next meeting was arranged for July 14th, 1965.

W.McI.

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