

The Freethinker

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No SOCIETY has ever been, or is, without behaviour norms, or *mores*, ideas of what is permitted or forbidden, ethical, moral, right or wrong. Religious systems, of which the Christian is possibly the most complex, and certainly the best known to us, claim authoritarian sanctions. Other systems are man-centred, and utilitarian. Only comparatively recently have researchers, schooled in anthropology and psychology, studied them objectively, and traced all to economic and other diverse social causes.

The Roman Catholic Church has claimed to be the unique, original and only form of Christianity. It is a truism that its critics turned this against itself by accusing it of obtaining within its amorphous nature the most vestiges of primitive absurdities. To regard it as a system of ethics is largely to read into it a later rationalism and modern enlightenment. Its central dogma concerns a Man-God who is consumed to enable mortals to make themselves God-Man. The fears of prehistoric man are projected into superstitions. It is rational to fear fire, but not to evolve an eternal hell. One may not move the saints by prayer, but one is moved by contemplation of the saints to prayer. Dying, He gave Himself for us, and by dying, mortification in the midst of life, we resolve ourselves back into Him. It is the ultimate in fetishism.

Priest or Policeman?

But few aim at complete immolation. For the everyday Christian the matter is reduced to going without salt in one's porridge when one has an exam to pass, or giving up the cinema in Lent when mother is ill. This amount of self-sacrifice does not impede natural vigorous human growth, the well-springs of physical and mental development. The ordinary Catholic family today, going to confession on Saturday evening, mass Sunday morning, and a sodality mid-week, adverts not in the least to the fact that its material surroundings are due to progress in the sciences made *in spite of* Christian traditionalism. But these ecclesiastical institutions exist, people born into them see their parents revere them from their earliest years, accept them as part of their needs and background. Since most people have a sense of what is right and decent, what is best eschewed, what is all right, what is caddish, in most likelihood they would lead lives precisely the same as if they were not sincere, yet in a sense, nominal adherents, of Christian Churches. It is a moot point whether the priest or the policeman keeps them in order in the last analysis. In short, I am claiming that most English Christian churchgoers lives are moulded by an environment which, both in its idealistic and its materialistic origins is not only non-Christian, but to an increasing degree, anti-Christian. If the reader protests there is little new in this, I agree, but I want to reiterate it for what follows.

For the vast number of churchgoers, even the "births, deaths and marriages" type, do not realise or advert to this. They project their feelings of decency, fair-play and ordinary common honesty on to their superstitious Christian mystery religion. The religion of mystery cults, magi,

miracles, is domesticated, through the processes of upbringing in home and school, to stand for all their ordinary, everyday needs. A universal religion, upwelling from the savageries of the remote past, does not equate too well with the complexities of contemporary technological society. But one must get on with life; there isn't time to work out all the discrepancies. In the lives of the more thoughtful, though, there almost certainly will occur a time

when the particularities of their religion are examined more minutely. I think then, that one of several things may occur.

The person takes the maxims of Christianity literally. He sells all he has, eschews his relatives, suppresses the desires of his

will, his mind, flesh and senses. This form of "life", being virtually incompatible with competitive careerism and civilised society, drains off its victim into a religious order.

Inconsistencies

Alternatively, the Christian may intensify some form of religious activity, but achieve a personal synthesis with his mode of life "in the world". These are usually very active types of people. Unless some very hard knock comes their way, their practicality tends to restrict them from seeing inconsistencies in their professions.

Now, if the first type of person, above has a strong emotive nature, physical strength, and a not particularly original caste of mind, they may last till the end. On the other hand, some may get an insight into the nature of their religion which they never had before, realise that if carried out to the letter, Christianity is not *possible*, and find their way to a secularism which realises the most practical religion to be self-help.

Religion and Sex

Now the Freethinker may clearly, and very truly, see that, essentially, Christian religion is inimical to sex. A Freethinker would doubtless argue much religious energy is sex-derived and sex-fed; sex accounts for ecstasies, flagellation, the more extreme forms of asceticism, and much sickly devotionism. Indeed, the major dogmas can be explained in terms of sex fantasies. To this, the Christian apologist replies that they are not manichees, that sex is God-given and must be given back to Him too, and attempts to draw a line between sanctified sex and morbidity.

Two things may be remembered. First, most ordinary everyday Christians of the type I have already attempted to describe—i.e. those that do not very closely associate logical objective belief with their way of life, in the sense, not of being hypocrites, but of missing implications—have a quite normal and healthy everyday attitude to sex. Secondly, there exists a second contradictory, saner tradition. The organised Churches have realised that the generations only continue through this means. Motherhood is honoured. A great deal of attention is given to family life. The centre of Christmas is a baby.

It is precisely because of the stress on the cohesion of family life, that the very concept of illegitimacy, recently

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Business of Morality

By GILLIAN HAWTIN

referred to in our correspondence columns, can have relevance only in relation to the traditional Christian view of legitimacy. Secularists and Freethinkers, standing outside this Christian view, rejecting sacramental marriage, believe marriage ideally subsists only as long as love, and believe the birth of children—whether one opts for quins with the aid of a fertility drug, or none at all—should be voluntary and regulated. For a family of nine to have a tenth child, in certain circumstances may be more immoral than for two young unmarried people to beget out of love. A person who does not recognise wedlock, cannot be shocked by children being born out of it! A love-child born out of wedlock is intrinsically more desirable than an unwanted child born within it. It is desirable that with time such should find social acceptance. It has been said that (it is counted as an expression of Christian liberalism) there are no illegitimate children, only illegitimate parents. I myself would like to quarrel with the statement that there are any illegitimate parents either—with one possible exception.

Common-Sense Morality

For to have children before the tree is ripe, seems to me a tragedy. Surely one is better able to cope, emotionally, mentally, materially, and provide those things all parents desire for their children, if one has first had as long a training as one's capacities merit, without the distractions and responsibilities of child-rearing? Still, even here, readers of recent correspondence in the *Times Educational Supplement* must appreciate that marriage for students will, of course, be an individual choice. But, even rejecting all supernaturalism, all preconceived, ecclesiastically-imposed notions, there may be strong prudential reasons for delaying having children, though not necessarily abstaining from sex. Reasons of study, or of finance, would seem to be among those to the forefront. This does not mean that sex *need* be delayed, though sometimes one rather wonders if the modern world has not gone too far in the other direction of making sex *compulsory*! There is healthy abstinence, and the promiscuity of *Brave New World*. If however, sex be not delayed, and procreation must, the obvious sheer basic necessity is an efficient contraceptive. This is a matter of medicine, of physiology. It is common sense. In the social context it is morality! At least it is *my* morality—a humane, utilitarian, common-sense morality.

For this reason I denounced in a previous article, the attempts of a small reactionary Roman Catholic group in Oxford to tell the Frank's commission that having babies out of wedlock was due to the shocking declension from Christian standards. Not to have an unwanted child either in or out of marriage, is common sense. But this common sense, to be carefully distinguished from Christian morality, is too often claimed as such.

Everyone's Heritage

Full, real, complete Christian sex morality is, as I have attempted to outline, at best dubious, at worst pernicious. But it ought to be borne in mind that the vast majority of ordinary Christians in present-day England hold only a very attenuated form of Christianity. In many cases it has shed almost every connection with its original, ascetic, mystery-religion origin. What people are really clinging on to is common sense which they confuse with the full-blooded Christianity that not one person in a million bothers with. If everyone who calls himself a Christian were to accept this, hook, line and sinker, the world would come to a standstill. Meanwhile, Christians are claiming that common-sense which is everyone's heritage as the monopoly of Christian ethics. We must expose their trick for what it is, and this can only be achieved by clear thinking, plain speaking and militant action.

Atheists Banners Forward Go

By DAN O'NEILL

ON THE day, so confidently, even jubilantly awaited by his fiercer Fundamentalist opponents, when the thunderbolt smacks down like an apocalyptic shot across his bows. George A. Woodcock, Britain's oldest atheist missionary, might start believing. If not, he has been frequently warned, a second will sizzle down after and Mr. Woodcock, his "atheist propaganda", and his banners shouting that "Atheism is the Truth" will be dispatched like some pantomime demon with only a hint of smoke and the smell of charred cardboard to mark his passing.

But knowing Manchester's weather as well as only a man who spends most of his life on street corners in the city can know it, Mr. Woodcock feels that even a couple of high-grade thunderbolts could have a perfectly natural explanation. It would take, he thinks, at least a large reproving finger wagging down at him from the clouds to get him back into a church shouting his "Hallelujahs" with the rest of the saved, shouting them as lustily as he did 60 years ago in the Young Man's Bible Class at Salford. Until this happens, he says, he will continue to propagate his irreligion as fervently as the deacons of that Bible Class dispensed *their* comforting beliefs.

"Every Sunday I used to go", he recalls. "Believed in it all. Jonah, The Whale. Everything. I was brought up to it". But that, he adds, was before he discovered Darwin and Huxley and his special apostle of disbelief, Robert Ingersoll. "I never went back to church after reading what they had to say. They made so much sense, you see".

It was wise for an atheist needing a job in 1905 to be discreet in his beliefs: Mr. Woodcock stayed at his work as a clerk in an insurance office because he refrained from trumpeting his message. "They wouldn't have liked me to make it too obvious", he explains. But he retired in 1947 and in that year, cardboard banners flapping, he started his crusade. Now although he is 80 "and starting to wither", he leaves his Oldham home four times a week to deliver the word.

He is accepted by the barrow boys and beggars who share his pitches: perhaps they have more customers, but Mr. Woodcock claims his share of converts. There are regulars, too, he says proudly, who collect their flesh-sustaining injections of atheism from him each week. They appear, like the diminutive man in an open-necked shirt revealing an impressively tangled amount of chest hair, to buy their copy of *THE FREETHINKER*, and melt away until next week. Sometimes they will return for more detailed explanations from their mentor.

Mr. Woodcock is a member of the National Secular Society and, says the Society's secretary, is one of the "two dozen" missionaries among the several thousand members. Mr. Woodcock, however, claims that he is unique. He is the only one who proselytises on what might be called a full-time basis. He is also the only one with banners, which he wears, in hat and waistcoat, wherever he goes.

The trouble with the placards, though, he says sadly, is that they attract what he calls the wilder element. "Oh, I've had hooligans steal my hat many times. They kick it down the street". He pauses reflectively: "They'd leave me alone if the signs said that Jesus loved me. You see, they think they can get away with it if the mock an atheist. Public opinion being what it is". Still, Mr. Woodcock admits that things are better now than they once were.

(Concluded on page 276)

On the Threshold

By GEORGE R. GOODMAN

A HOUSEWIFE'S sphere of influence begins on her side of the front doorstep and often differs greatly from that of her partner in marriage. For, despite living in this space-age, she is still the primitive female of ancient times, prone and susceptible to traditional taboos and tribal usages, first implanted at her mother's knees and then duly fanned during her impressionable school-years and teenage by silly playmates and the idle gossip of her mother's over-credulous acquaintances.

If a strictly orthodox housewife were asked why she was buying fish on Fridays, she would, in all probability, say that it is in memory of the Lord's Supper and the "miraculous draught of fishes", and that she had always been taught to abstain from eating meat on that day. What she does not know is that the so-called "Lord" is a completely imaginary figure, invented by the Church-fathers during the third century to bolster up the most absurd creeds that religiously-crazed minds ever concocted! In those early centuries, it was the ambition of every Patriarch to make up a set of creeds according to his own ideas and then to influence as many bishops as he could in order to have as many followers as possible.

Then there would be innumerable plots to prevail upon the governors of provinces, palace officials, emperors and their wives, to lend their soldiery in support of this or that bishop and his particular creed. It was an unending struggle between rival factions and, merely to read the history of the early Church with its constant persecutions and consequent butcheries, is enough to turn anybody away from orthodox religion and its madness.

Why do fishes have such a close connection with what is now called Christianity? Because it was a fish-cult, just as the preceding era was a lamb-cult, both derived from the reigning zodiacal signs Pisces and Aries. The central-figure was called by the contemporary Greeks Ichthys (big fish) and his followers minnows. Strange to say, they never dubbed themselves *pisciculi*, which is Latin for "little fishes"

Apart from the fact that the New Testament is full of the fish-typology, the followers of the sect had the fish emblem on their doorposts, their priests had a headdress in the shape of a fish mouth (later called a mitre), fishes were printed on their burial-urns (not crosses), their Jesus-figure was credited with multiplying fish by the basket-full, and bread too—all because he was "born" in Virgo (the stellar sign of bread—the star Spica meant a spike of wheat) and he functioned as the Avatar of the Pisces era. The word Avatar means "the descended deity in visible form", according to a dictionary explanation. No wonder then that (apart from bread) fish became a kind of a ritualistic meal on a certain day.

But why was the Friday chosen? According to the spinners of religious yarns, Friday was supposed to be the day when the "Christian Avatar" sacrificed himself for the "salvation" of the world—which was quite a consignment. The real explanation is not so fantastic as the ecclesiastical one. According to Hebrew and oriental custom, the Sabbath and all the festivals too, began at sundown of the previous day. Every Sabbath therefore starts at sundown on Friday evening. If one were to pay a surprise visit to an orthodox Jewish family, one would see on the table two specially baked loaves, elliptical in shape, covered with a richly embroidered velvet cloth, and flanked by two lighted candles.

The loaves, presumably allegorical of two torsos, are covered with poppy-seeds, symbolising fertility! Grace is said, and all participants, children too, receive from the head of the family a piece of the crisply baked loaf and sip a few drops of wine from a communal glass. The meal that follows (depending on the district) consists of stuffed fish, prepared with spices and served cold, or fried or boiled fish. Anyhow, no matter what denomination (or none), fish is still on the menu on Fridays, as a relic from the Piscean age!

Christian ecclesiasticism turned the homely little ceremony of eating a small piece of bread and sipping a few drops of wine into a fatuous "eucharist", an impressive word which lends itself so well to mystical hocus-pocus! Actually, it is Greek and merely means to give thanks or to say grace. But tell that to a celebrant . . .

When Leonardo da Vinci painted his famous tempera on the wall of a convent refectory at Milan (1498), he called it the holy supper (*la santa cena*), but the English deceivers went one better and called it the "last" supper, implying that next day the central figure would be crucified. In point of fact no crucifixion ever took place!

Only in one other language is that meal called the "last" supper. The Spaniards call it *ultima cena* but the French call it *la sainte cène*, the Germans *Heilige Abendmahl*, and the Dutch and Flemings *het heilige avondmaal*. All of these mean "the holy supper", except for the Spanish which copies the English.

Another peculiar tradition prevails amongst many people and denominations. A husband is by his clergy "enjoined" to sleep with his wife on Friday evenings. Here, again, we have a faint echo from ancient times, when ritualistic love-feasts were part and parcel of the people's life.

According to Church history, Agapae or love-feasts were closely associated with the eucharist, particularly amongst the early Christians. Apparently, these primitive devotees abused their licence to such an extent that the Church had to step in and separate the love-feasts from the eucharist! Later on, the love-making was suppressed altogether, but persisted until the eighth century. Even today, the carnival which precedes Lent, is famed for its libertinism, particularly on the Continent.

When the Bible was translated, the word *agapae* (meaning love) had become a "dirty" word, with the lamentable result that Paul's panegyric in praise of pure love—about the best chapter (1 Cor. 13) in all his letters—was utterly spoiled through the maudlin prudery of the timid translators who, throughout, substituted the anaemic word "charity" for the greatest of all, love!

Why does the bridegroom carry his bride over the doorstep as he enters his new home with her? Because, without being conscious of it, he is still the primitive aboriginal of 10,000 years ago, full of racial and tribal superstitions, imitating and accepting them, without in any way enquiring into their origin.

The ancient superstition was that it was unlucky to tread on to the doorstep. Why? Because the doorstep had already been invested with a high degree of magical powers by slaughtering an animal and, accompanied by the proper incantations, sprinkling its blood over the threshold and thus imparting to it the potent power to keep all evil spirits away!

(Continued on page 279)

This Believing World

WE ARE sorry to state that the once holy relics, associated with a great church, appear no longer to be popular. For instance, the Friends of St. Paul's have arranged their annual exhibition of the cathedral's treasures, but, according to the *London Evening Standard* (2/8/65), "most of the relics of this mighty church are, surprisingly, of recent times", and therefore, not surprisingly, no piece of the true cross is shown, no "stones from the Holy Sepulchre", "strands of Mary Magdalene's hair", nor even "drops of St. Paul's blood". But you can see, "the tall black wooden carved candlesticks", which "kept the vigil at both the Duke of Wellington's and Sir Winston Churchill's funerals".

★

THE truth is that most people these days—with the exception of Roman Catholics—treat the "holy relics" of the past with a loud guffaw. Even that solemn child of the Reformation the murderer of Servetus, John Calvin himself, provides for us in his *Treatise on Relics* one of the few religious works packed with astringent humour, enough to kill almost every religious relic ever preserved. We just laugh them out of court in our unbelieving ways.

★

IT COST nearly £30 to go to Lourdes through Europica Travel Ltd., which had been approved by the Roman Church, and recommended by its priests. Alas, the firm has gone into liquidation, and no money can be or will be returned, not even any insurance money. And the poor pilgrims are now holding the penniless baby, with no redress whatever. We cannot help wondering how such a thing could possibly happen with the firm under the special protection of the Virgin Mary herself. One can indeed understand a vulgar travel agency swindling the public, but a protégé of the Church—and of Lourdes! Has not the Church got troubles enough?

★

NO TRUE Christian can doubt that the most popular miracle Jesus ever performed was changing water into wine, especially for boozers who had "well drunk", as John so finely put it! Fortunately, some modern vicars defend wine-bibbing for, as the Rev. D. Strudwick, vicar of St. Clements, East Dulwich, claims (*South London Press*, 20/7/65), "Wine is an essential part of the greatest sacraments", and every pub-crawler would agree with him. Abstainers, of course, stress that the wine made by Jesus was "non-alcoholic", as if anybody could get "well drunk" on that stuff!

★

So, according to its vicar, the Rev. T. Thompson, St. Paul's Peckham, is in danger of becoming known as the "women's Church". And why? "Because the fathers in the parish seem to shun it". Well, if the fathers don't go, it looks as though they are *actually* shunning the church, not merely seeming to. The truth is, Mr. Thompson says, that they "regard religion as the woman's concern", and do not like "being known as churchgoers". In fact, "where religion is concerned" men can't be bothered, and "it costs a lot for a man to be known as a Christian at work". Mr. Thompson is to be congratulated on his plain-speaking, though, as far as we can see he has no remedy. He can only deplore the fact that for some men at least, "our blessed Lord" makes no appeal.

WITHOUT COMMENT

I once asked for a Knox translation of the New Testament at a "Bible" shop in Brighton and was told: "We sell only Christian literature here".

—Letter in *Daily Telegraph* (12/8/65)

ATHEIST BANNERS FORWARD GO

(Concluded from page 274)

People, he believes, are getting more tolerant and "the hooligans" tend to ignore him today.

There are other, less violent, opponents: they appear, says Mr. Woodcock, as determined to convert him as he is to convert them. "Ministers mainly. They'll argue with me. But some of them walk off in a huff. But some of them buy the paper and sometimes I think it would even be worth going to church to hear what they have to say after reading it".

The ministers and the Christian matrons who predict those sudden thunderbolts rarely make Mr. Woodcock lose his temper. "They've got their beliefs, I've got mine". It's the "sly ones" who infuriate him. These are the people who walk nonchalantly past him, turning zealously at the last minute to thrust their own brands of religious merchandise into his unwilling hands. "They're trying to convert me", he says with some astonishment. "After 60 years they're trying to change my mind".

"Where Are the Dead?" asks one determinedly sectarian tract Mr. Woodcock produces as evidence of his opponents' perfidy. It was thrust into his pocket by a furtive man who disappeared so abruptly that it seemed likely that he had heard rumours of the impending thunderbolt and expected it at any time. The tract provided Mr. Woodcock with some slight amusement. "You see? Even when they're preaching Christianity they can't help attacking other denominations".

There is a lot more tolerance, he believes, in THE FREETHINKER. He sells 70 copies a week and chuckles over articles on Catholics and contraception or the sharper essays on the profits in evangelism today. "It's a good paper", he says. "It was started in 1881 and has been going ever since". Several thousand copies of the paper are sold in 15 different countries, and the society says that it is the only one of its type in the language.

Mr. Woodcock also sells copies of what he calls "the book", the story in minute, eye straining print, of the Bible. He sells it in his fervour for 1s. 6d., a markdown of a shilling. "It destroys the myths", he explains. "It's pure reason". It is also, he hints, something of a literary H-bomb capable of destroying the most inflexible belief "in all the nonsense".

There is no material profit—nor, indeed, any comforting thought of future rewards—for the atheist missionary. Mr. Woodcock sends the money he receives for his books and newspapers to the headquarters of the National Secular Society. His only reward, he says, is the knowledge that he is preaching the truth. He lives with his wife on his old age pension and a retirement pension.

He will continue to march the streets of Manchester until the day he dies, he says. There are more converts to be made. Fortunately he has never had children and so has never been faced with the problems that might have arisen when the conflict between principle and domestic peace for the children's sake arrived.

Peace, it seems might have won: Mr. Woodcock's wife is a Unitarian and is one of the few people he has never tried to convert. He leaves his arguments, his hat, and his banners outside the living-room door. At 80 a man needs a relaxed home life, he explains, a little defensively.

(Reprinted from *The Guardian*)

MORALS WITHOUT RELIGION

and other essays

By MARGARET KNIGHT

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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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.

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North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead)—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY. Every Friday, 8 p.m.: L. EBURY and J. A. MILLAR.

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

Notes and News

WE ONLY met Willie Gallacher once when we spoke together on an anti-Christian motion at the London School of Economics a few years ago. Although over seventy, he delivered one of the liveliest speeches we have heard, and it was certainly no fault of his that the motion was lost. He proved a genial companion during dinner, and expressed his appreciation of THE FREETHINKER, which he read. He also wrote an occasional letter to us. In his earlier parliamentary days, of course, he could draw audiences of hundreds, and hold their attention by his sincerity and fervour. He was an emotional rather than an intellectual Communist, but he had the courage of his convictions. One could dispute his reasoning, but not his reasons.

GRANADA Television made a good job of Samuel Butler's *The Way of all Flesh*, adapted by Giles Cooper as the play of the week on August 16th. Despite the necessary compression into 85 minutes (we saw nothing of John and George Pontifex but began with Ernest's father Theobald, who was compelled to take orders against his will) it vividly recreated the sanctimonious Victorian hell that Butler so devastatingly exposed. Brian Wilde gave a fine performance as Theobald and the death of his wife (so concerned about respectability in heaven) was the outstanding scene in the play. Among the quotable remarks we noted Alethea's "It seems almost blasphemous to die after being prayed for by Dr. Skinner", and young Ernest's exclamation, "Well I don't see why Providence should mind Ellen having a baby" (Ellen, his future wife, was at that time the maid, and the baby was illegitimate). But it is Edward who best sums up Butler's attitude to religion: "So much for the power of prayer!"

THERE is little doubt, according to Brian Wicker, that "one of the problems that will exercise Catholics in the coming years is the celibacy of the clergy" (*The Guardian*, 12/8/65). The thin end of the wedge has already been driven into the traditional position, Mr. Wicker pointed out, by the reintroduction of a married diaconate and the ordination of a few married pastor-converts on the Continent. But he thought the contraception debate "likely in the long run to affect the issue more deeply than either of these moves". Recent writings on the sex question by Catholics had brought out into the open "the inappropriateness of celibate clergymen seeming to lay down the law to a married laity on matters of intimate sexual behaviour". We like that "seeming".

MR. WICKER was not suggesting, however that "clerical celibacy is always personally inhibiting or that it has not served the Church well in the past". He probably hasn't read H. C. Lea's *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*, and as a Roman Catholic he obviously had to put up some defence of the celibate state. He regarded it, nevertheless, as "marginal, not to say irrelevant to the priestly vocation as such".

FEW Freethinkers, we imagine, would disagree with the sentiments expressed by a woman in a letter to *Komsomolskaya Pravda* cited in the *Guardian* (16/8/65). There should be, the writer, G. Kelt, said, an end to "sledgehammer" tactics in the campaign to stamp out religion in Russia, and more use should be made of reason to propagate atheism. It was not sufficient to vilify priests by calling them "obscurantist" or "brakes on progress". Many priests were first-rate scientists, she added, as the example of the Polish astronomer and priest Copernicus proved. Here she falls into a common error, one she shares, for instance, with F. Sherwood Taylor in *Galileo and the Freedom of Thought*. As usual Joseph McCabe is a better guide.

REFERENCES in religious literature to "the devout Polish priest who made the great discovery of the revolution of the earth round the sun" must be corrected, McCabe said in his *Rationalist Encyclopedia*. Copernicus was of German, not Polish blood; "he was not a priest and not at all devout"; incidentally he did not discover the central position of the sun. "His uncle, one of the loose-living bishops of the time, got him elected—though he was not in orders and neither devout or virtuous—a canon of the cathedral solely in order to provide him with an income. He had graduated in medicine".

THE Old Bailey was the subject of Anthony Carson's "Around London" column in the *New Statesman* on August 13th. He recalled that the court stood on the site of Newgate Prison and how, in the old days, "condemned criminals were conducted in procession to St. Sepulchre's where a nosegay was given to the prisoner and he was urged to repent. Church bells were tolled and the procession continued down Snow Hill over the Fleet River along Tyburn Lane where the prisoner drank his last pint of porter or beer before execution".

WE can sympathise with the designers of road safety posters; they have a thankless task. But the latest effort—a little girl praying "... and keep us safe on the roads"—seems singularly inept. Unless it's an appeal to the gods behind the wheel.

WE wish to thank the Editor of the *Guardian* for permission to print the "profile" of George A. Woodcock, which first appeared in that paper on August 6th.

The Suppression of the Suppressionists

By R. C. R. ADKINS

"ARE we not brutes to call the act that makes us, brutish?" So wrote Montaigne three hundred years ago but, judging by the utterances of the Viewers and Listeners' Association, many still seem to think that sex is wrong although, as Pope Gregory said, it can be "excused" in marriage.

At the annual conference of the National Association of Head Teachers, the headmaster of Hurstmere Secondary Boys' School, Sidcup, Kent, said that "some so-called men of culture are advocating that literature, films and television should not be held in check by the ropes of convention". He added that these writers are advocating that sex should be brought out into the open.

The headmaster of St. Joseph's Primary School North Shields, Northumberland said: "These people are destroying the idea of monogamy and self-discipline in the young by their indulgent humanism, misapplied psychology and plain libertinism".

Is it however such a terrible thing to "bring sex out in the open?"

There is no evidence that sex crimes have increased but there is evidence that traditional moral attitudes can lead to serious inhibitions. A boy for example, who has been taught to think that sexual relations between men and women are somehow unclean may well become a homosexual.

A girl with strong religious background who has been told that sex is something which nice people do not discuss may dread the idea of intercourse. She may become a lesbian or she may marry but be completely sexually unresponsive.

Pre-marital intercourse is condemned by conventional moralists so that, according to this teaching, marriage is an essential prerequisite to sexual relations. A girl therefore, who naturally wants to undergo this experience, must get married first and, because she wants to gratify her curiosity, may rush into a completely unsuitable marriage which will bring her years of unhappiness. If however she already knew, before marriage, what sexual intercourse meant then she would be far more likely to choose the right partner for the physical side would not be the only consideration.

Is it indeed right to always condemn a yearning for acceptance and a joyous yielding to love. A refusal to surrender virginity may show a very limited conception of love.

It is also true that many psycho-analysts have reported cases where a brief experience of sex outside marriage has contributed to an improvement of sex in marriage.

All this does not take away from the fact that a happy married life blessed with children where the partners find their full happiness in each other is the great ideal. Promiscuity does not lead to happiness but equally so neither does a hard, and uncompromising, attitude to sex.

The suppressionists can do as much harm as the advocates of complete promiscuity. What we need is a balanced and sensible attitude to sex and the only way this can be achieved is by bringing sex out into the open.

At present we have in this country a very one-sided attitude to sex and by this I mean not that the BBC is "degrading the nation" as the Viewers and Listeners' Association appear to maintain but that we are still far too rigid—and hard—in our approach to sex.

We have to remember that men are still being sent to

prison because they are homosexuals while women who practise lesbianism are looked upon with disfavour. Not only therefore do we need to press for a change in the law so that there would no longer be any legal penalties in respect of sexual acts between consenting adults of the same sex but also for a change in social opinion so that a man could say that he was a homosexual, or a woman declare that she was a lesbian, without a finger of censure being lifted up against them.

A woman who has the misfortune to find that she has conceived an unwanted child has to resort to illegal and unqualified practitioners to obtain an abortion with grave risk to her own health.

We don't, it is true, seem to get many real summer days now but, on those rare occasions when the sun does shine a man—or woman—cannot expose his whole body to its health giving rays, even in places remote from built-up areas. Are we so ashamed of our bodies?

These are just a few of the things that are crying out for reform and which the suppressionists seem determined to maintain.

It is only by bringing things out in the open that we can see them as they really are and make a right judgment on them. This applies not only to sex but also to religion. Yet, as things are, Christians are most unfair to Humanists. The laws dealing with blasphemy make it illegal for atheists, or agnostics, to write, or speak, lightly about God. I fail to see how it can be blasphemous for him—or her—to poke fun at the Christian idea of God where a being who, on the one hand is supposed to be perfect love sends those who do not worship to a terrible, gruesome unbelievable Hell.

Christians, if they can find equal illogicality in the Humanist beliefs, are equally entitled to make fun of them but, as no jokes about these seem to be forthcoming, it appears that one of the differences between Humanism and Christianity lies in the logical approach of the former contrasted with the lack of logic of the latter.

Humanists should therefore have the same right as Christians to express their beliefs, without being restricted by outmoded laws on blasphemy on the BBC.

What we want is not suppression but expression—expression of our differing points of view so that the great enemy of mankind, ignorance is dispelled.

THEATRE

Magna Carta at the Mermaid

"Left-Handed Liberty", by John Arden now being performed at the Mermaid Theatre, London, was commissioned by the Corporation of London to commemorate the 750th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta by King John, and the Corporation have a right to be proud of the result of their initiative. We see the total untrustworthiness of John and most of the barons, and we see the dubious role of the Church—the Papacy emerging clearly as the enemy of all progress, despite the efforts of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Patrick Wymark as John is an amiable rascal, never suggesting the sadistic monster from whose brutal revenge—if contemporary records are to be believed—not even the children of nobles who had offended him were safe.

Memorable performances are given by Robert Edison as Pandolph, the Papal Legate and Sonia Dresdel, in a brief but electrifying appearance, as the Queen Mother.

M.McI.

ON THE THRESHOLD

(Continued from page 275)

The belief that the threshold must not be trodden on was, and still is, so widespread that there is hardly a country in the world that does not observe some custom in connection with it.

The reason for the reluctance, and even fear, of touching the threshold springs from the religious or superstitious belief that the doorstep is not only a spot dedicated to some god or goddess—and thus also imparts sanctuary to anyone coming into the house, palace or temple—but that there is even some danger attached to it, if a careless or irreverent person should tread or sit on it.

Therefore, the practice of carrying a wife at marriage into her husband's house, is simply a precaution, lest she should inadvertently come into contact with the doorstep, thereby annoying "the watchers and keepers of the threshold" and thus make her married life an unhappy one! But as the insurance premium is not too heavy (depending on circumstances) all parties concerned generally enjoy the payment of it.

It is, perhaps, not widely known that in country-districts in Britain (and elsewhere) it is customary that, if a woman has a miscarriage, the foetus is buried under the doorstep, the idea being that it will give the soul a chance to reincarnate and thus come again into the same family. The custom does not stop at human beings, but extends also to farm animals which are supposed to be subject to the same laws. If a cow in a large dairy produces a calf prematurely, the remainder of the cows in the same shed are only too likely to follow suit. The superstitious preventative is to bury the abortive calf, with its legs stretching up, under the doorstep of the cowhouse. This will prevent the same mischance befalling the remainder of the herd, the belief being that the spirit of the buried calf will enter into one of the cows passing over its body and will thus be born again.

Passover is the correlative feast of Easter. Why is it called thus? Because the Israelites had indicated their dwellings to the "Angel of Death" by slaughtering a lamb and sprinkling its blood over the doorposts. Therefore only the Egyptian first-born were killed. So the exaggerated tale goes.

The Israelites themselves *leapt* over the threshold, "after it had been sanctified with the blood of the threshold-covenant lamb". This sounds rather more like an African medicine-man's formula. No need to draw yourself up, saying that you, highly civilised and rational being, don't do anything of the sort. Of course you do or, better said, your women-folk do!

In most old-fashioned houses, the doorstep is made of sandstone which is often painted red or made red with a "red stone", or is highly polished in a crimson colour by means of a "cardinal paste"—allegorical of the blood of a slain animal, sacrificed to keep evil spirits away!

Orthodox Jews—and Muslims too—affix to the right side doorpost of their houses or flats, a small metal or wooden cylindrical object, about two inches long, called mezuzah. Inside is a small parchment scroll with a verse from the Old Testament or Koran. This fetish or talisman is credited with giving protection to the dwelling, in the same way as an amulet is alleged to give protection to its wearer.

On many old houses in Britain and on the Continent, one can see, cut into the main-beam across the front, the Latin words: *Nisi Dominus Frustra*, which are also in Edinburgh's Coat of Arms. They are from the 127th Psalm. Unless the Lord [build the house, they labour] in vain [that build it].

(To be Continued)

Religion in the Philippines

By GONZALO QUIOGUE (Manila)

IN THE Philippines when a Catholic meets a Freethinker on the street, the former makes the sign of the cross. Upon seeing this the Freethinker sadly shakes his head and murmurs to himself: "The poor devil! He'll do anything to reach heaven!"

In the 16th century Christianity was forced upon the pagan Filipinos by their Spanish conquerors. "Be a Christian or else" threatened the Spaniards. These *conquistadores* never had it so good. They could easily get lands and women. They prospered and grew healthy on the fat of the land. The hard-boiled Filipino pagans could not see why Jehovah, the Christian God, was better than Bathala, the Filipino God, but the Spanish conquerors argued: "Our God is more powerful than your so-called god. See, our God gave us guns, gunpowder and swords. Your god could give you only bolos, spears, bows and arrows. Sabe, Indio?"

For many moons scattered native groups called *Barangays* held weekly meetings with their chiefs. And eventually they realised it was wiser to give in to the demands of their conquerors. Thus Christianity was accepted by the Filipinos.

Today in Catholic churches in the Philippines a casual visitor will see atop the altar the image of Jesus Christ. At the left of this painting or carving is inscribed: "A true God". At the right, "A true man".

Sceptics call this a dual personality—a sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. It is said that God, through Mary, transformed Himself into a man, Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah of Christendom. But when Christ was dying on the cross, he said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

And referring to his torturers, he said: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!"

The dying Christ was obviously talking to Jehovah in heaven, regarded as God the Father. But there is only one God, Catholic eggheads insist, although Jesus Christ is also God. This problem had been supposedly solved by the invention of the Holy Trinity. One God with three personalities, and yet each personality a God, too. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Since there is only one God and the dying Christ was a part of that God, we can only conclude that the dying Christ talked to another part of that God! Catholic Filipinos, like most Catholics all over the world, think that the so-called mystery of the Holy Trinity is too profound for Freethinkers to understand. With the imaginary supernatural embellished in nonsensical mysteries nothing is impossible! The 32,000,000 God-believing Filipinos in 1965 are in the clutches of various religions as follows:

Catholics (Roman)	83.8 per cent
Protestants (American and English)	2.9 per cent
Aglipayans (Philippine Protestants)	5.2 per cent
Iglesia ni Kristo (Philippine Protestants)	1.0 per cent
Muslims	4.6 per cent
Buddhists (God-believing sects)1 per cent
Other religions	2.4 per cent

The number of Agnostics, Atheists, Rationalists and secular Humanists is not shown for two reasons: 1. The actual number of Freethinkers is relatively microscopic. 2. Freethinkers in the Philippines do not openly express their freethought, especially if it is atheistic. Most of them are university professors teaching natural science or philosophy, and they do not want to offend the God-believers who control the institution. A few years ago parents of students in the University of the Philippines excitedly

exhorted one another with: "Shall we let our sons and daughters be taught by atheists? Down with atheism!"

In a community of God-believers odium is commonly attached to atheism. Freethinking editors of newspapers and magazines behave likewise. They do not want to offend God-believing publishers, subscribers and advertisers. In the Philippines, as in other countries, God-believing employers knowingly or unknowingly freeze the atheism of their employees. Who can have the guts to express his freethought when his job depends on his silence? In most cases our stomachs are hopelessly in the grip of well-meaning, but misguided God-believing employers!

CORRESPONDENCE

CATHOLIC DELINQUENCY

It is almost impossible to obtain reliable and up-to-date figures on the relationship between juvenile delinquency and religious upbringing. We can, however, from data gathered during the past year, calculate the excessive number of Catholic children sent to approved schools, and the cost of their maintenance.

According to an article in the *Catholic Herald* for October 30th, 1964, "social workers have racked their brains for years to try to find out why the approved schools have such a high proportion of Catholic children—a quarter of the total—and why so many commit offences again so soon after they come out".

The recently issued White Paper on statistics relating to approved schools, remand homes and attendance centres for the year 1964, gives the number of new admissions to approved schools as 5,361. On a 10 per cent basis, the usually accepted figure, 536 of these should be Catholic, but there must actually be about 1,340. This means that in 1964 around 800 children were sent to approved schools who would presumably not have been there but for their Catholic upbringing.

The White Paper gives the weekly cost of maintenance as £15 3s. 6d. in 1963/4 and £16 13s. 5d. in 1964/5; an average of say £16 or £830 per annum; a total for one year of £664,000, shared equally between local authorities and the Exchequer. Nothing from the Church, naturally.

The following appeared in the *Catholic Herald* for November 20th, 1964: "At the annual meeting of the Catholic Moral Welfare Council, Fr. McCormack said many Catholics tended to shrug off the high percentages of Catholic delinquents by saying these were only nominal Catholics. But, he said, they were mistaken because figures he had obtained from Catholic approved schools showed that more than 90 per cent of the boys in them had spent from 3 to 10 years in Catholic schools". This is a clear indictment of the Catholic school system, especially when we learn that more than half the Catholic children are educated outside it.

Nothing will be done, of course, although the remedy is obvious. Cardinal Heenan told the Westminster branch of the Catholic Women's League: "We are about to spend enormous sums on Catholic schools in this diocese, more than ever before, millions . . . Many will say 'It is a waste of money', or 'Why bother at all?'. The answer is to keep the faith alive". (*Catholic Herald*, April 2nd, 1965).

Just so; never mind the damage to the children. And now the *New Statesman* (August 6th, 1965) reports a rumour that the Cardinal is to be offered a life peerage. For services to education?

R. J. CONDON.

JOSEPHUS ON JESUS

One time clergyman Mr. Micklewright, seems rather annoyed that I should quote from one of his rather obscure works, however, the passage was given because it served to underline the point I was seeking to make, and, Mr. Micklewright note, I did point out that you were a Secularist.

I am well aware of Mr. Micklewright's many changes during the course of his "intellectual development" or "mental evolution". As this has no bearing what-so-ever on the historicity or otherwise of Jesus, anymore than personal details about myself have, most of the questions Mr. Micklewright poses can be ignored. With reference to the FAES, this means Fellow of the Ancient Egypt Society. The Society was founded in the United States in the 1920s with Prof. Flinders Petrie as first President. The Saint Osmund Society was formed recently to encourage the use of and interest in Sarum Liturgy. As I very much doubt getting a

subscription out of Mr. Micklewright it would be a waste of time to give further details.

Mr. Cutner in his article "Where Stands Josephus?" takes issue with me for quoting from his book *Jesus—God, Man or Myth?* He claims that I have not read his book. Unfortunately the boot appears to be on the other foot for it is Mr. Cutner who displays a marked ignorance of his own published work. Mr. Cutner refers to my point drawn from page 3 of his book and states "Actually, I [Mr. Cutner] quoted Dupuis's opinion, and Mr. Strother quietly transferred that to me". The passage on page 3 I was referring to reads "The question we are to discuss is not whether, at the back of the Gospels, there was an obscure individual about whom we know literally nothing . . .". This passage is anything but a reference to Dupuis, who in fact is not mentioned on page 3 and only once on page 2. It is pointless commenting on the main part of Mr. Cutner's polemic, in particular when one reads comments such as "Even Christian scholars had to admit that *logically* the paragraph preceding the disputed passage and the one following could not be separated"; This is a typical example of setting up one's own nine-pins and knocking them down, scholarship it certainly is not.

(Rev.) C. STROTHER, FAES.

GOOD GOD!

In a recent visit to a small country town my eye was caught by a note outside the cathedral. It read:— "We need £200,000. Help Us To Save The Cathedral". Whether the ecclesiastical big-wigs will collect this enormous sum one can only leave to conjecture. The unconscious humour of it will probably be lost on the local believers.

The idea of Christians appealing to mere mortals to save God's own house is too funny for words.

E. MARKLEY.

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