

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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THE point is sometimes made that one is too ready to criticise the Roman Catholic Church. It is suggested that freethinkers and others who are definitely and emphatically anti-clerical are over-ready to find fault and not to point out the benefits of the Papal Church to humanity at large. This criticism has recently been made of the present writer and it is suggested that he lacks personal acquaintance with the Roman Church and that he is too ready to make ill-informed criticisms of it. A consideration of this criticism has led him to set forth some of his freethinking charges against the Roman Catholic Church in the form of an indictment of its effects upon practical life.

I indict the Roman Catholic Church because it claims an infallibility of doctrine. At first sight, this may appear to be a matter for Roman Catholics themselves. It may appear to be of little moment that the Council of Trent, supported by the Vatican Council of 1870, decreed the Church to be infallible. Yet, a consideration of the result of this belief within the field of toleration will illustrate its results for human life. An infallible body holds the sole truth necessary for human salvation. It is therefore entitled to stamp out error. As a result, it has a black record for persecution and intolerance. It is possible to recall the Marian persecutions in England to recall a policy stained with blood. But it is also possible to recall the persecutions of French Huguenots or, more recently, the wartime record of the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia or the persecution of Protestants in Spain. Viewed at the national level, the Church is an intolerant and persecuting body, a fact underlined by the recent history of toleration in Spain and the Iberian Peninsula generally.

## **Ignorant Arrogance**

I indict the Roman Catholic Church because it pursues its intolerant policy at the local and personal level. The conception of "No faith with heretics" may be one which is not officially taught as a dogma. But one has only got to enter into personal relationships with individual Roman Catholics to witness the psychological effects of a belief acted upon and commonly held. As individuals, they are usually to be distinguished by their tight-lipped bigotry and their ignorant arrogance. Wherever they enter, as into the state education system, trouble may be expected. It is a fact known to the present writer that the "no faith with heretics" idea has to be pursued to a length whereby individual Roman Catholics will attempt to secure the dismissal of Protestant or freethinking employees, frequently using underhanded means to seek to achieve their end. We have known this happen both in the educational world and elsewhere. One need not look only to the Roman Catholic rabbit-warrens to be found in the slums of Glasgow or Liverpool to justify the remark. Again, the claim of Catholic belief that the Church possesses an infallible doctrinal basis has led inevitably in practice at a time of change to a reckless indifference to truth as a whole. As Dr. G. G. Coulton pointed out again and again, there is

a marked and lasting difference between "Catholic truth" and "historical truth". Cardinal Gasquet or Fr. Thurston, SJ did not stand alone among Catholic historians who were wont to adapt their facts as it might suit them so to do. Indeed, it is a great pity that Dr. Coulton's many pamphlets upon the subject are now out of print and unobtainable. The freethought movement might do far worse than to bring some of them back into circulation. Such medieval

trades as those rooted in forged decretals or title deeds or in faked relics have emerged in the modern world into similar faking of fact where historical justification is needed for the Church's claims. A very good example was to be found some thirty years ago

in the efforts of the Westminster Catholic Federation to secure unhistorical and doctored changes in the school history books. It is merely a fact that an examination of this controversy over the years will justify the remark of the distinguished Unitarian divine, Dr. Martineau, that there is one grace which the Roman Catholic Church always fails to reach and it is the grace of veracity.

## **Pressure Groups**

I indict the Roman Catholic Church because of its effects upon society generally. As it stands in relationship to the outside world, it works as a semi-secret society pursuing its own ends. It would be a good thing if more non-Roman Catholics knew of the existence and the activities of such bodies as the Knights of St. Columbus or of the Challenor Club. It is difficult to believe that they would be satisfied with the social effects of Roman Catholic pressure groups upon society generally. This pressure which the Church exercises generally is extended to such fields as education where Roman Catholicism has claimed completely undemocratic advantages by a demand for the right to contract out of the state system. It has been seen in the influence which the Church seeks to wield in the political field through the creation of pressure groups of members of Parliament, local councillors and the like. As is well known to readers of THE FREETHINKER, it is to be seen in the activities of the Roman Catholic Church in opposition to demands for family planning material to be circulated publicly and advice given where it is desired. Reform of the laws concerning abortion and divorce have become matters of public interest, but any activity in these directions is forced to withstand the bitter opposition of the Roman Catholic Church. Not content with legislating for its own members, this Church is only too anxious to impose its authoritarianism wherever it can secure its will.

I indict the Roman Catholic Church for its policy over mixed marriages. It may be perfectly true that the *Ne Temere* decree of 1907 did not apply to England. This concession was not due to Christian charity but to the far more certain fact that there is a law of criminal libel in this country, that the English legal system does not recognise the existence of the so-called Canon Law and that the writ of an English court of justice could even reach a Roman Catholic bishop. But it is a fact that stringent

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

## *I Indict the Papists*

By F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT



conditions are laid down concerning the marriage and that a failure to obey these conditions or to be married before a Roman Catholic priest means that one is not married in the eyes of the Church. Readers of Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* will recall that the point arises in the novel. But it may also be recalled that it is not unknown for priests in the less literate districts to pervert this canonical statement into a statement that the two people are merely not married, with the consequent upset and unhappiness which such a slanderous statement could create. Many years ago, it was activity of this type which led to a controversy between the Anglican Bishop David of Liverpool and the Roman Catholic Archbishop Downey, a controversy which led at least one observer to remark that, whilst Dr. David argued like an English gentleman, Dr. Downey argued like a Roman Catholic priest. The time has arrived when it should be made a criminal offence for anybody to claim that there is anything wrong in any way with any marriage which is recognised by the laws of England. It is the Common Law of England, the Royal law, and not the bastard Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church which controls the English scene. It should be strengthened in order to deal firmly with persons who behave in this manner.

### Crime

Above all, I indict the Roman Catholic Church because it has produced the Roman Catholics of England. There are a certain number of exceptions to any generalised statement but I am bound to look upon the communities of Papists as they exist in England today. In many cases, they compose the most ignorant classes within the community. They make a contribution to the crime rate, both at the adult and the juvenile level, out of all proportion to their numbers. The chairman of the London Sessions, Mr. R. E. Seaton, remarked some years ago on the extent to which crime in London was due to Irish immigrants and it must never be forgotten that these immigrants are Roman Catholic to a man. A great deal is said by Roman Catholics concerning their battle for strict and traditional sex morals, but they keep quiet about the bastardy rates among their own women. A disregard for truth at the academic level is illustrative of a more general disregard where non-Catholics be concerned. Intolerant arrogance is the order of the day. One cannot forget that, some years ago in his book, *The Faith of a Catholic*, the late Mgr. R. A. Knox remarked that it was the duty of Protestants to tolerate Catholics since toleration was part of their creed. There was no like provision in Catholic belief so that Catholics are under no duty to tolerate Protestants. It is this illiberal bigotry which illustrates the situation in Spain, Portugal and other Roman Catholic countries today.

Wake up, John Bull, your freedom is at stake so far as this issue be concerned! The country is flooded with priests, monks and nuns. They claim prerogatives out of all proportion to their real numbers. A sect of dissenters possessing high but self-styled titles are demanding special privileges which can only lead in the end to the sacrifice of democratic liberty at the hands of the Papal Church. John Bull made a bad mistake when in 1829, he passed the Catholic Emancipation Act. He was giving an official recognition to a foreign pontiff not invariably friendly to the government of this country. The result is that the Roman Catholic has a divided allegiance and is ready to follow the crypto-fascist policies of the Papacy. A very good example is to be seen in the support given during the Spanish Civil War by the Roman Catholic Church in England to the murderous banditry of General Franco. As Lord Brookeborough once remarked of the Northern

Irish situation, ninety-nine per cent of Roman Catholics are disloyal. One has only to recall that this situation exists in England today within a position where Catholics are in a minority. Imagination boggles at the position which would come about if these people attained a majority within the English secular state. The situation is not one which can be dealt with by old-fashioned Protestant methods, for the rise of liberal rationalism has undercut the authority of the Protestant theology. The vagueness of religious ethicists or reverent agnostics is worse than useless and it may even lead them to go cap in hand to the Vatican for discussion and recognition. A fighting and militant freethought movement seeing the Roman Catholic Church as a curse within European civilisation can alone provoke sufficient militancy in response to claims which are unhistorical, frequently anti-social and in some cases wholly immoral when measured by the decencies of a democratic society.

## Religion in US Schools

THE UNITED STATES Supreme Court in the *Schempp* case removed the notion that religion in the public school curriculum is forbidden. The decision made clear that responsible teaching about religion is a legitimate concern of the schools. This is a challenge to the schools to search for appropriate means to deal effectively with religion as one of history's greatest influences on the lives of men. Many have not done this, but some are cautiously and conscientiously exploring the Court's invitation to teach objectively about religion.

In Fort Wayne, Indiana, for example, 30 South Side High School seniors enrolled in "The Bible as Literature", an elective course added for the second semester of the 1964-65 school year. The course quickly spread to about 20 Indiana public high schools.

Several Pennsylvania school districts asked the advice of the State Department of Public Instruction on establishment of Bible courses during the 1965-66 school year. The Lewistown School District proposed to schedule two courses — one on the "Development of Religions" for grades 9 through 12, and the other on "Lives of Great Religious Leaders" for grades 7 through 9. Upper Darby Senior High School was expected to give a course on "Bible History and Literature".

The Board of Education of the Bath-Richfield School District in Bath, Ohio, has adopted a statement of principles which permits the teaching of religion in subject areas (literature, history) provided it is objective and that no indoctrination accompanies the instruction. According to the adopted policy, "The American heritage cannot be understood or appreciated without knowledge of the great religious and church influences."

Bible readings are permissible along with readings of poetry, essays, and other great literature. Prayers may not be a part of the directed school programme, but "spontaneous expressions of devotion" will not be suppressed.

Members of the senior class will be granted use of school property for baccalaureate programmes, which they will be permitted to sponsor; but attendance must be voluntary, and the school board will incur no financial obligation.

Board President James S. Jackson explained to Americans United the reasoning behind the baccalaureate policy: "The board agreed that we could no longer officially sponsor the baccalaureate service nor pay the

(Concluded on page 340)



# Playing Games

By F. H. SNOW

ACCORDING to my observation, the outstanding feature of human society is its great restlessness. Urgency expresses itself everywhere. To kill time, fill time, is the chief concern—after that of getting a living—of the majority of persons, and a multiplicity of pursuits engages their leisure, in order to appease the demon of unrest.

Religions found fertile soil in which to spread their roots, in those ancient times when amenities were scarce. Nowadays those roots get much less nourishment, in spite of many sedulous gardeners. Superstition has largely lost its savour as means of expelling boredom, and modern knowledge, though obstructed as far as possible by its religious opponents, has been the major force in its dethronement as sovereign salve. Though a good many continue to rely on pious observances, far more get up to all manner of "worldly" diversions. As I see it, the whole human family save a particular class of idiot, indulges in some game or hobby—dress it up in what other terms one will—where-with to assuage its occupational thirst.

What, in simple language, are the religious bodies engaged in but glorified pastimes? These differ from each other, but are basically the same antidote for the restlessness inherent in mankind. While the bulk of civilised peoples divert themselves secularly, the devoutly religious have their special form of entertainment, although they do not, of course, acknowledged it as such. But what are religious observances, providing consolation and mental refreshment, but recreative media? Their practisers gratify their egos as do those who seek secular satisfactions, and are participants in a mighty, if largely unfashionable hobby.

To my mind, this game-playing is most strikingly illustrated by the Salvation Army. The uniformed members of this organisation, marching to the beat of the big drum and the blowing of cornets, impress me as big children enjoying a favourite game. It's a little pathetic to see them standing in a circle in the street, trumpeting away and singing of Jesus to an audience of one or two, or of none. How can it fail to penetrate into their heads, I wonder, that they are just performing for themselves—that all their dressing up, drum banging, trumpeting and preaching for so little, is a hollow farce, and that their belief in an almighty Lord who would suffer such nonsense is one huge absurdity.

They appear incapable of any such thought. Wrapped up in their sublime game, with its brigadiers, colonels, majors and captains (sergeants and corporals are curiously missing from this imitation army), they continue to play at soldiers, with the prospect of bliss in the sky at the end of their service, and thoroughly enjoy themselves, having gloriously solved the problem of banishing care by unloading it on their Blessed Redeemer.

An what a game our Catholic friends have, with their rosaries, statues, confessionals, indulgencies, masses and terribly fascinating ritual. They have a king with three crowns on his head, and hosts of saints looking down from Heaven, able to work wonders for the asking. There's plenty to keep them interested, and they don't have to do anything about it with their brains.

The great diversity of means by which the demon of unrest is exorcised makes an absorbing study. A lot of people in this land spend an extraordinary amount of time at Bingo; a vast number watches television programmes; cars and coaches transport multitudes on outings; sport figures largely in the minds of millions. Almost everyone

has a time-filling hobby. The Bingo addict with eyes glued on the numbered card, the angler, plying rod and line, the hiker, the television fan, public-house habitue, excursionist, all derive pleasurable reinforcement against insidiously attacking boredom along with the mystic and conventional religionist. The latter, indeed runs with the hare and hounds when so inclined, and augments his spiritual palliative with secular ones.

The Atheist falls, least of all, into the category of those who have need to numb their irksomeness with alluring expedients. He has rejected the religious soporific on deliberate grounds—gone against it not through indifference or unreasoning prejudice, or instinctive preference for the comforts materialism affords, but because of carefully considered objections to unscientific belief. His philosophy has been acquired through ruthless self-analysis and hostility to the objectively incredible in all fields of thought. The humanities are his paramount concern, and furnish him with ample mental exercise. His essential reflectiveness fortifies him, in great degree, against restless urges. Least of all types, I think, he has need to resort to time-killing diversions although, from my knowledge of Atheist friends, he is by no means insensitive to the normal pleasures. I would absolve the great majority of his kind from needing to get a "kick" out of something. Fearless introspection governs the Atheist's moods, and his commitment to the campaign for world emancipation from superstitious faiths and their hindrance of human reforms, is hardly of the nature of a pastime.

I am not competent to pronounce on the delights of Bingo, but it seems to me that lovers of that absorbing, if scarcely brainy game, television watchers, public-house haunters, fresh-air zealots, awheel and afoot, and participants in the many other secular pastimes, still the worm of unrest to no less profit than the uniformed automatons that blare their trumpets to invisible audiences and shout salvation to unheeding ears. It seems to me that the ordinary man, minding his own business and enjoying his simple relaxations, makes a greater contribution to international brotherhood than missionising churchianity, immersed in its age-old diversion of shuttering the people's eyes against the searchlight of reason, with regard to its vaunted God.

But still, humanity in general lacks a stabilising philosophy, and until the intellect of its swarming millions is educationally developed, will incompletely cope with its inherent restlessness. Until, equipped with the faculty of objective thinking; of honest self-examination; of unremitting opposition to both religious and secular sophistry; of total acceptance of the arbitrament of reason—in short until able to avail himself of the rationalist armoury against the unintelligent pressures bequeathed him through centuries of mental misbreeding, the normal person will fail to realise the full potential of the outstanding intelligence on our speck in the universe, and extract the major benefit from his amenities.

Not only so, but the superstitions that have come down from the dark ages will receive continuous incentive to impose themselves on modernity. Complacent ignorance will furnish personnel for religion's games. Salvationists will trumpet, votary candles burn, supplicants kneel before statues and altars, prayer-wheels whirl, for many generations, unless the voice of freethought can be brought to the ordinary man's ear, clearly and strongly.

(Continued on page 343)



## This Believing World

BERNARD BRADEN gave us in *On the Braden Beat*, (ATV October 2nd) a delightful parody of the four Biblical Professors answering viewer's questions; and, just as they did he demolished Christianity with every answer. The show was good enough to make faithful Christians very, very angry, for if there is one thing which their religion cannot stand, it is being laughed at! Can't we have more of these parodies?

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THE visit of the Pope to the USA was a triumph, not for Christianity, as some people think, but for the publicity experts in the Vatican. It more than put the Pope on the map, especially his plea for peace which was delivered in such a way as to give one the impression that he was the first man who made it. But if one reflects upon this clever advertisement for the Vatican, one is forced to ask whatever did that institution do in the past for peace? What is it doing now except uttering platitudes?

★

ALTHOUGH hundreds of millions of people must have undergone it in the past, the Bishop of Woolwich, Dr. John Robinson, (*South London Press*, 1/10/65) has only just found out that there is "hidden uncertainty" about the question of confirmation. Now we learn that Dr. Robinson has always suspected that "we confirm too many people". Stout unbelievers like us—and many who are not unbelievers—have never really found out what confirmation ever does except give the clergy a little more unnecessary work. Incidentally, most of the inmates of our prisons must have been confirmed at one time or another, and what good did it do them?

★

THE writer of the London *Evening News* "Saturday Reflection" has discovered (25/9/65) that St. Matthew who was, according to Holy Writ, a "publican", was actually "what we now call a white collar worker". In the Gospels, he is not actually shown in a pub, but "at the receipt of custom"—a distinction only understood by a thoroughgoing Christian. However, Matthew invited his fellow tax-collectors to "a great feast" in honour of Jesus, and with that inimitable turn of phrase which makes "our Lord" so great, Jesus insisted that he "came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance". And what does this prove? Why simply that "our Lord disregarded public opinion". Why? "In order to draw such people closer to their heavenly Father". Yet even these days, people resist the trip to their "Heavenly Father" for as long as they can.

★

WILL it be believed? At a school's morning assembly two pop records were played instead of prayers and hymns (*Daily Mirror*, 30/9/65). And the impudence of doing such a thing was made greater because the mighty BBC itself had actually banned one of the records. One of the governors of the school described the affair as "appalling". In spite of this, another governor declared he would stand by the headmaster. But what would the students who are never consulted say? They would rather, we are sure, prefer to hear one pop record than a hundred fervent prayers.

★

OVER a hundred miniature bottles of whisky, gin, vodka and brandy were we learn from an unidentified newspaper cutting—"blessed at the altar of the 1,000-year-old St. Michael's Church at St. Albans (Herts)" on October 10th. They were the gifts of licensees in the town, who held a special service to coincide with the church's harvest festival. And two licensees read the lessons. The miniatures will,

we are informed, "be added to the harvest produce to be distributed to old people in the parish". But why only miniature bottles? Is a Christian licensee's spirit of charity under-proof?

### RELIGION IN U S SCHOOLS

(Concluded from page 338)

minister. However, if a class on its own initiative may hold a dance, a play, or a basketball game why may not the seniors hold their own service prior to commencement? . . . Obviously, attendance must not be required."

Perhaps one of the most creative and ambitious programmes in the country is that conducted by a high school English teacher in Newton, Massachusetts, Thayer S. Warshaw. He has introduced the Bible as "a source book for the humanities".

Professor Warshaw declares: "A knowledge of the Bible is essential to the pupil's understanding of allusions in literature, in music, and in the fine arts; in news media, in entertainment, and in cultured conversation."

His procedure is simple. Three times a week the pupils have reading assignments from some portion of the Bible. Two ground rules apply: interpretation must not be discussed, and the King James Version will be used because of its familiarity.

In discussions of the Bible passages the pupils hear about John Steinbeck's Nobel prize-winning *The Pearl*; Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*; John Milton's *Paradise Lost*; Ernest Hemingway's Nobel prize-winning *The Old Man and the Sea*; Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, with its Ishmael, Ahab, and Elijah; William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*; Marc Connelly's *Green Pastures*; and scores of other great works.

The classes also learn the origin of such expressions as "the patience of Job", "a doubting Thomas", "a Nimrod", "a Judas", "a Jonah", "a Lazar", "an Ananias", and "Adam's apple".

Pupils hear music ranging from Negro spirituals and folk songs to oratorios like Handel's *Messiah*. There are "canvasses by Titian, Rubens, Veronese, Tiepolo, Rembrandt, El Greco, Murillo, Brueghel, and Bosch; murals by Michelangelo, Donatello, del Verrocchio, and Bernini; reliefs by Brunelleschi and Ghiberti; engravings by Dürer, Doré, and Lucas van Leyden; and movie stills of a Hollywood Biblical epic." All these art forms require some Biblical knowledge for a full appreciation.

At the end of the study the pupils are given a chance to express themselves on paper. One wrote: "Today especially, when the Bible — and whether to read it in schools — is seemingly forever in and out of courts in our country, how can a person form an intelligent opinion if he doesn't even know what is inside the covers? Since the laws of our land are based in part on those in Scripture, doesn't it seem reasonable that it would profit a person to study the Book [the Bible] that has had such an effect on our country?"

[Reprinted from *Church and State*, September 1965]

### REVISED VERSION

Because of the late harvest the congregation at the parish church at Ladock, near Truro, Cornwall, refused to sing the line of the hymn "All is safely gathered in" at their harvest festival service. Instead, by agreement with the vicar, the Rev. Edwin Urquhart, they sang "Some is safely gathered in".

—*Sunday Express* (10/10/65)



## THE FREETHINKER

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### Lecture Notices, Etc.

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

#### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. J. W. BARKER, L. EBURY, J. A. MILLAR and C. E. WOOD.

(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch NSS (Platt Fields), Sunday, 3 p.m.: MESSRS. CLARE, MILLS and WOOD. (Car Park, Victoria Street), 8 p.m.: MESSRS. COLLINS, WOODCOCK, and others.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead)—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.

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

#### INDOOR

Bristol Humanist Group (Kelmescott, 4 Portland Street, Clifton), Sunday, October 24th, 7.45 p.m.: Informal Discussion.

Kingston and Surbiton Branches NSS (The White Hart Hotel, Kingston Bridge), Friday, October 22nd, 8 p.m.: Mrs. A. J. WALKER, "Freethought in Poetry".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, October 24th, 6.30 p.m.: B. B. PINDER, "More Holiday Pictures".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, October 24th, 7.30 p.m.: Professor HYMAN LEVY, "The American Situation".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, October 24th, 11 a.m.: LORD SORESENSEN, "Democracy on Trial".

Tuesday, October 26th, 7.30 p.m.: NORMAN SHEPPARD, "Education for Responsibility and Good Conscience".

### Notes and News

HUMANISTS, said Professor A. J. Ayer, President of the British Humanist Association, in a BBC interview on October 9th, are trying to solve the great human problems of our time, and there was no necessary reason why they should not co-operate with Christians and others who were working for the same ends. But he was opposed to the tenets of the Christian faith because he believed them to be false. Humanism was, in fact, a belief in the sufficiency of human reasoning as the basis of personal and social life, and a refusal to rely on belief in the existence of God. It was not negative, though Humanists were certainly opposed to theological belief. The basis of Humanism was positive: a belief in man's capacity to live a good life and help others to do so. The interview, with Kenneth Harris, was the first of a series of six to be broadcast on Saturday mornings.

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SO WE were not entirely alone in being unimpressed by Pope Paul VI's address to the United Nations! It reminded the nominally Roman Catholic editor of the *New Statesman*, Paul Johnson, of a speech by Sir Anthony Eden: "it said the right things in a totally unmemorable way". Indeed the only point at which the Pope "departed from universally accepted clichés was in his reference to birth control, where he appeared to come down on the

side of the reactionaries" (8/10/65). The suggestion that we should increase food supplies rather than limit births was, Mr. Johnson said, "one of the hoariest fallacies of our time. We have to do both simultaneously". Moreover, the Pope's rejection of birth control was "inconsistent with his plea for peace". Population increase is "a primary cause of international tension".

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THE POPE might reply that people should use the so-called "natural" methods of birth control, but these were far too complicated. And Mr. Johnson recalled that an American Catholic lady was "so worried by her inability to practice the complex 'rhythm' method that she suffered a recurrent dream in which a cardinal sat on the end of her bed working a set of traffic lights!"

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TROG'S cartoon in the *Observer* (10/10/65) showed two Catholic prelates—one Chinese—against the background of the Vatican and with the Pope in the foreground. "And if the Holy Father *does* go to China", the Chinese prelate was saying, "it should help him make up his mind about birth control".

★

COME to think of it, Michael Frayn, Trog's colleague on the *Observer*, was another who was unimpressed by Pope Paul's speech. "I'm glad the Pope's against war", Mr. Frayn wrote. "Because so am I, and so is Horace Morris, and so are quite a number of other people I know". All the same he thought it only fair to point out that the Pope was not the first to declare himself in favour of peace. The TV actor Patrick McGoohan had done so in the *TV Times* but "by some fluke" he missed the headlines.

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SOME *New Statesman* readers—one non-Catholic—had, we noted a fortnight ago, objected to Mr. Johnson's image of the Pope's hand reaching for the hot line to the Holy Ghost. Michael D. White of Paris, in a letter to the paper (8/10/65) found it disturbing that a non-Catholic should be upset by the remark which "tasteless or not" was true. According to Catholic dogma, Mr. White pointed out, the Pope can speak infallibly on faith or morals and "it is odd that he should be reluctant to avail himself of this facility" to make a pronouncement on birth control. But Mr. White's second point was more serious: "Apart from the *New Statesman*, there seems to be no public forum in which any criticism or confutation of the Catholic Church can now be made". There ought not, Mr. White said, "to be any more danger from the Catholic Church in England than there is from the Communist Party" but Catholic influence seemed to be growing and the position would only be healthy "so long as the Pope is taken no more seriously by non-Catholics than 'Uncle Joe' or 'Mr. K' were by non-communists".

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THERE were only 9,000 Muslims in this country in 1889, when the Begum Shah Jehan gave £15,000 for a British mosque in Woking, Surrey. Now, mainly due to post-war immigration, the number is 175,000. Another mosque is planned for a site in Regent's Park presented by King George VI in 1944, but it has not yet materialised. One design was rejected by the Royal Fine Arts Commission in the 1950s because it clashed with the Nash terraces. Recently, the *Sunday Times* reported (10/10/65) that the Malasian and Pakistani High Commissioners and the Ambassadors of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Republic (who comprise the planning sub-committee of the Central London Mosque) had decided to throw open for competition the design for the new mosque. So a minaret may yet rise over the trees in Regent's Park.



# The Enigma of Morality

By LEON SPAIN  
(USA)

CONTROVERSIAL expressions have recently been given "voice" in THE FREETHINKER pertaining to the pros and cons of the matter of morality, with particular emphasis upon Christian morality—or what is popularly acknowledged to be Christian morality. And while Christian theology, in its cardinal dogmas and ramifications, has been laid to rest, at least among many professed Rationalists, Atheists, Agnostics and Freethinkers, the ghost of Christianity, in its "moral guise", arises for more or less post-humous justification, and also, to cause controversy among the Rationalist fraternity of the present day.

I cannot claim to pass criticism upon the pros and cons of Christian morality with calm, Olympian detachment, and without a vestige of partiality. But from my point of vantage I feel that what is commonly called Christian morality will be more difficult to put to rest than the body of dogma from which supposedly it emanated. It seems, further, that the acknowledged preachments of Christianity are not merely the social stock-in-trade of conventional spokesmen for Christianity, but that many who profess the Rationalist attitude are to some degree bedevilled by the time-honoured shibboleths and mottoes of Judaeo-Christian morality.

I believe, however, that the esteem which undoubted Rationalists have evinced, at least for some aspects of Christian morals and ethics, is a hold-over from childhood indoctrination, or from ideas which they have imbibed from the context of their social environment. Early childhood training exercises an unconscious influence, and sentimental attachments instilled early in life are hard to dispense with. A professed Atheist of my acquaintance experiences what he terms "a nostalgia and sentimental reflex" when he visits the scenes of his childhood and early upbringing. I feel that I am fortunate when I say that I had few, if any, childhood preconceptions to abandon with regard to Sunday school or religious morality, or the principal aspects of religious dogmas which are overtly or subtly indoctrinated during childhood, and even throughout life.

Theologians, in many instances and among the highest rank, candidly admit that their basic dogmas and tenets have been undermined with the inexorable march of verified knowledge and discovery; but they aim to keep the domain of what they term morals and ethics forever in their stewardship. They are the temporal means of conveyance of divine revelation, at least in regard to man's relationship to his fellow man, and the duties and obligations which he owes "his Creator", "the Infinite", or "the Absolute". Just how these terrestrial mortals have arrogated to themselves the super-human function of being the pipe-lines to the Infinite or the Absolute, will be better left for them to explain; but it is difficult for me to conceive—with my human limitations—what information, spurious or authentic derived from the Infinite or Absolute would be of any value with respect to human relationships in all their diversity.

However, just as the theologians have relinquished their monopoly in expounding upon the founding of the universe, and the interpretations of many of its functions, so they will be compelled to relinquish their credentials as being the custodians of official morality. But it must not be overlooked that, while our current crop of theological authorities are, by and large, laying principal stress upon

the greater need for "Christian morals and ethics", more than a little dose of theological superstition is held in store for the uncritical, unwary, or anyone else who is receptive to it.

Christian morality is the morality, *par excellence*, of the ideal of celibacy, total human self-denial, and complete scorn for the body and its needs. It is wrong to regard it as the initiator and prompter of the sex ethic of monogamy, although Christianity is always seemingly credited with this. The interpolations which modern spokesmen for Christianity are rendering in its behalf, with regard to the issue of sex, are nothing more than the interpretations and pronouncements of a more enlightened day and age, and are not to be found in Christian doctrines from its earliest days and growth. Christian morals, divorced from its antiquated sex ethic, cannot be justified as a social doctrine. For just as it put a blight upon the relationship of the sexes during the height of its social power, so it has rendered a distinct disservice to the evolution of human society by its alleged "eternal decrees", and the supercilious and dictatorial attitude of its official spokesmen.

The Ten Commandments, which have been held forth as the foundation of all future ethical codes, were most conducive to an early static society. And fulsome praise of the Sermon on the Mount is just as nonsensical as the contents of the Sermon itself. It is ridiculous in its essence, and would be more ridiculous if it were ever applied. The Sermon on the Mount can hardly be said to extol the finer traits of human character, and could, if put into complete practice, well-nigh cause individual disintegration of character, and be further conducive to the fullest inroads of crime in modern society. It is, I feel, more than a little mistaken to say that Christianity enhanced human dignity and promoted mutual respect among men and women, for, among other things, it did not condemn slavery, it held women in the most abject inferiority and contempt, and has done more than its share to promote dissension and strife since its official establishment.

Christian morals, it cannot be denied, have always had undertones and overtones of the morality of Mrs. Grundy. It was so pre-occupied with the Puritanical aspects of sex, that it had nothing else to offer in the way of guidance in human affairs. In the minds of most people, morals are principally, or entirely, identified with matters pertaining to sexual relationships and the conditions under which these are accordingly governed. I feel there is a vast area of thought dealing with the "hows", "oughts", and "shoulds" of human relationships, and that that aspect of human relationships dealing with sexual affairs is only a part—and perhaps a small part—of the total. There is no denying that a wholesome and sounder sex ethic is both desirable and necessary in an evolving industrial civilisation, but official Christianity, has nothing constructive to offer.

Perhaps it could be facetiously commented that the founders of Christianity and their numerous spokesmen, in their revelatory delusions and misunderstood physiological promptings, were receiving erroneous pipe-line information from the Infinite and the Absolute, in their dogmatic preachments of an absolute sex ethic or morality, applicable to all places and time. But progress will be made in the total sphere of human relations, and its basic causes will be secular.



# The Emperor's Clothes of Theology

By GREGORY S. SMELTERS

Do you remember the sartorial quacks in Hans Andersen's fairy-tale about "The Emperor's Clothes"? They painstakingly went through all the motions of wearing and making wonderful invisible clothes for the emperor to wear, and when they had finally dressed him up, and all the courtiers present were unctuously pretending to admire the garments, only a small child cried out, "The emperor is naked!"

For two millenia the Hebrew-Christian theologians have been going through all the identical motions—verbal, written, printed processes of describing and demonstrating their invisible article, "God". It is only now that, for the first time in the history of Christianity, a theologian shouts to his own brethren the obvious truth, "You're naked!", and wants them to be ridiculed by professional comedians!

The theologian is Dr. Thomas J. J. Altizer, Professor of Bible and Religion at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia; and in his contribution to *New Theology*, No. 1 (Edited by M. E. Marby and D. G. Peerman, New York: Macmillan) he writes: "The doctrine of God is the 'Emperor's Clothes' of modern theology, and it is a pity that no ironist has arisen to portray the nakedness of our own theologians".

All the 33 articles collected in two booklets (Nos. 1 and 2)—paperbacks by the editors of *The Christian Century* (USA) from current international work in theology and allied fields—perfectly illustrate the analogy with Andersen's fairy-tale. Starting with the first article, "How is Theology Possible?" by Professor John Macquarrie of Glasgow University, and ending with the last one, "Christ and Christ Figure in American Fiction", by Dr. R. Detweiler of Florida University, they all go through the complicated verbal weaving about "God"; but the god they all mean is the god of the Jewish-Christian Bible, the West Semitic god Yahweh (alias Jehovah) who incarnated himself into a Jew, called Yehoshuah the Anointed (Jesus the Christ) by the aid of his own breath-soul, called the Holy Ghost. "The God of Jesus and of His followers is indeed Yahweh of Moses and of Israel" (*Hebrew Religion*, by Oesterley and Robinson, SPCK, London, 1952).

The "Emperor's Clothes" is, then, the god Yahweh (alias Jesus), but—like the quacks and the courtiers in the fairy-tale—all the theologians pretend that their invisible article, "God", is not a myth of the Middle Eastern folklore.

A semantic muddle started two millenia ago with the translation of the Hebrew phrase *Yahweh ha-elohim* which meant "the mighty one Yahweh", into the Greek Septuagint as *Kyrios ho theos* ("Lord the god") and later into the Latin Vulgate as *Dominus Deus* ("Lord God"), ending up in European Bible versions as "the Lord God". So all this "god-talk" was rooted only in Greek and Latin, "god" there being a term for the highest rank of mythical beings, possessing a proper name. But the Hebrew *elohim* meant not "gods", but all mythical beings without distinction: gods, goddesses, angels, devils, demons, giants, ghosts (see *Oxford Hebrew-English Lexicon*). It was the influx of Gentiles into the Jewish-Christian Church that necessitated the introduction of a Trinitarian confession at baptism (Matthew 28, 19), whereas for a Jew whose belief in the Father Yahweh and Yahweh's *ruah* (breath-soul, or Holy Ghost) could be taken for granted, the con-

fession that Jesus was a heavenly "Anointed" sent by Yahweh had sufficed.

But this "Emperor's Clothes" illusion is not the only fallacy which makes "a distinction between godly and godless men, i.e. between those who believe in God revealed in Jesus Christ and those who do not so believe" (*New Theology* No. 2). All the theologians assume and talk of their omniscient and omnipotent "God", but again all pretend that *omniscient* does not cancel out *omnipotent*, as is obviously the case.

The sense of omniscience implies an eternal, unchangeable course of absolutely all events in the universe, including all the behaviour of the fancied omniscient being himself who allegedly knows all past, present, and future events. If his knowledge is true, then everything is bound to happen exactly as was truly foreknown, and nothing can be logically altered. The omniscient being himself is bound to be an automaton, helplessly following out his own foreknowledge about himself. He is not omnipotent to alter his true foreknowledge. Thus by the logic of the dogma of Yahweh's omniscience there unescapably follows that all worship and prayers are utterly useless, since absolutely nothing can be altered in the course of whatever is happening. But it is exactly the revenue from worship and prayers that sustains the Church; and the realisation among believers of their utter futility will speedily end organised religion among thinking people. Professor Nielsen (*New Theology*, No. 1) claims, too, that "Atheistic religion is irrational and therefore ought to be abandoned"!

I have outlined only two basic challenges of modern society to Christian religion. Further challenges are that "existence" is nothing at all if not existence in space-time-matter, since the opposite of "something-somewhere-sometime" is "nothing-nowhere-never"; and that "God" is a label whose referent is another label "Yahweh", or "Zeus", etc., which in turn have no referents at all in the universe. The theologians ignore these distinctions, and fallacies result.

This does not mean that *New Theology* Nos. 1 and 2 are not worthy of diligent study by Secularists. The articles are lively, interesting, startling, but their interest is all the sort the motions of those sartorial quacks could have claimed; the interest in studying a clever sleight-of-hand of a variety-show magician.

## PLAYING GAMES

(Continued from page 339)

Let us recognise that without the accession of enormous funds to the secular societies, this can not be brought about. One dedicated millionaire, financing the gratis introduction of rationalist publications to our vast community, would strikingly change the face of things. This fantastic contingency apart, means must be found to emulate the churches in harnessing themselves to big business interests, in order that the great sums necessary for the effective propagation of humanist ideals can be acquired.

Within our ranks it should be possible to find the acumen to launch commercial enterprises, which after the fashion of the big stores and supermarkets, could ultimately yield great profits. Within our ranks it should be possible to devise the means of raising capital for such enterprises. There must be people among us who run



lucrative businesses and have substantial funds at their command. Our cause would deserve to fail if it could enlist none such to lay the foundations of freethought's powerhouse. There must be the devotional will to win the material means of success that characterises the religious institutions.

Otherwise, when the spectres of primitive belief should have disappeared, we shall be but a whisper in the corridors of time, and the Churches will still be playing their games, inimical to intellectual progress and mankind's true amenities.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH

In *THE FREETHINKER* for October 8th it seems that T. Hill has let enthusiasm run away with him,  $13 \times 28 = 365\frac{1}{2}$  is a house that will not go. It is unfortunate for Mr. Hill that 13 months of 28 days will not add up correctly. It may "do" for him, but not for a mathematician. Unfortunately the earth turns  $365\frac{1}{4}$  times each time it circles the sun, which accounts for "twenty-nine days each leap year". There have been many attempts to reform the calendar, I think that 13 months has been mentioned before, but the odd quarter-day seems to fox most arrangements. It is evident that Mr. Hill's article was published without due consideration.

Thanks to Mr. Hill for making us think—but to little effect.

G. L. DICKINSON.

[An extra day every four years is, of course, a corollary of the 13-month calendar—ED].

### THE MAN JESUS

Mr. Smith's letter in *THE FREETHINKER* (8/10/65) reminds me of the time when, as a youth, I used to express my unbelief to some young evangelists who, like Mr. Smith were horrified. Was I not aware that Mr. Gladstone believed in every word and comma in the Bible? Did I have the impudence to disagree with Mr. Gladstone? Had I a millionth part of the intelligence of Mr. Gladstone?—and so on.

I am very pleased to tell Mr. Smith that I did not care two hoots for Mr. Gladstone, as even then big names did not scare me, nor do they now. I do not believe in devils, angels and the miracles of Jesus, though he wants us to do so because Sir James Frazer and Mr. R. Smith do. I insist on evidence, and Sir James never gives us any. Nor does Mr. Smith.

In any case, instead of writing a very laudatory introduction to Dr. Couchoud's book, Sir James should have annihilated it with argument.

Perhaps Mr. R. Smith would like to try.

H. CUTNER

May I with the Editor's permission pen a few notes on a point raised by Mr. Micklewright in his recent debate with Dr. Soper. The discussion was conducted in a friendly genial atmosphere that reflects credit on both sides. With our reviewer I agree that Dr. Soper was on the defensive, but in his opening remark on the historic Jesus Mr. Micklewright made a statement that seemed very weak indeed. What do we know of the historic Jesus except a few fragments collected thirty or forty years after his decease? A life of Jesus cannot be written because the knowledge for such an undertaking does not exist.

True! But if we are asked to reject an historic Jesus on these grounds then likewise we can dismiss many other figures from history on the same basis. After all what do we know of Plato or Aristotle or Plutarch or many other figures of the past, except a few fragments left by friends or interested parties. Would Mr. Micklewright be prepared to do this? I cannot think so. And thirty or forty years is not such a long time to reflect back on past events as many can testify. When Sir Walter Scott wrote *Waverley! A Tale of The '45* he was able to collect information from people who were alive during that sad episode in Scottish history.

Boswell was supplied with Johnsoniana by people who remembered Johnson when he was an infant. And Charles Dickens was able to recall incidents and places from his childhood days.

If the early Christians were illiterate, and this is by no means proven, then the faculty of memory was probably better developed than today. We have no reason to suppose that in this respect they were our inferiors. This of course can be disputed but I believe it a point worth considering.

Many "lives" of Jesus have been attempted since the days of

Dean Farrar and Ernest Renan but none of them can be called biography in the strict and literal sense. They are but attempts at reconstruction as every biblical scholar, both in and outside the Church admits today. What we call the Gospels are the scattered anecdotes or sayings or "Logics" collected long after their author had passed from the human scene. True many gaps appear in the story but someone made an attempt at bringing to remembrance the almost forgotten details of this wandering "Messiah".

In Mark 6, a remark by a bystander is recorded, "Is not this the carpenter the Son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?"

Had Jesus been a myth it seems to me that this passage would not have appeared in the Gospel narrative. And further the incident of the overthrow of the money changers in the temple is too realistic and in keeping with the general character of Jesus to be a solar or any other variant of the myth story.

One important detail is generally overlooked in this controversy regarding the historical Jesus. During the bitter struggle between the Roman and the Jew culminating in the fall of Jerusalem, 70 AD, many thousands of Jews were killed and many of the moderates left Palestine never to return. Thus other possible avenues of information were lost almost from the start. One seldom hears arguments about Apollo or Jupiter or the fairy land of ancient mythology—but no figure has ever roused such oceans of literature, argument and defence and denial as the person, known or unknown, who has gone down in history as Jesus of Nazareth.

This is an indisputable fact, and to dismiss the Gospels as mere fiction, including the Acts also, is not a reasoned analysis but wishful thinking which so many of the Mythicists are fond of.

No Mr. Micklewright! your defence of the Secularist standpoint was good, but in regard to the historical Jesus question your "thirty or forty years" will not do.

E. MARKLEY.

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