

FREE THINKER

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POPULATION

Half the world's population is already poorly nourished. At present famine of crisis proportions is besetting both Africa (with prayers in segregated churches) and India. World population is still expected to double by the end of the century. But there are few signs that man is facing up to the magnitude of the problem.

In 1798 the Rev. Thomas Malthus (whose bicentenary this is) published his *Essay on the Principle of Population*. He pointed out that whereas food production increases arithmetically, populations expand geometrically. Pestilence, famine and wars intervene to keep them down. His commitment to theology made him accept these as tools of Providence, but he was rationalist enough to advocate late marriages and sexual abstinence.

Not till this century was his warning really heeded, and even now little effective action is being taken. Churchmen regarded contraception as both impious and obscene. It was not for man to interfere with living processes. Nineteenth century Whig historians and scientific rationalists were inclined to place overmuch reliance on a theory of inevitable progress and the infinite possibilities of science to transform the world. Marxists stated that the only thing required was to change economic relations in society and all epiphenomena would automatically improve. In the twentieth century Catholic writers encouraged the scientific myth that we were on the verge of a fantastic increase in food potential. A huge population was envisaged living on artichokes and fungi. Deserts, lacking trace elements and water or simply water, were quickly flooded in the mind's eye with river water pumped over mountains or desalinated sea water produced in limitless amounts by ZETA and other thermo-nuclear sources of energy. The problem, it was said, had been exaggerated. The world's population could in fact fit, shoulder to shoulder, in the Greater London Area.

Such enthusiasm is today as arid as the deserts it sought to transform overnight. After two world wars progress no longer seems inevitable. Scientific discoveries need capital and psychological involvement to translate them into reality. Fundamental Marxist theory is being challenged by party revisionists. Communism does not of itself make the rains fall and the seeds germinate. Mr. Khrushchev's virgin lands' barley grew well on paper but not on tundras. Even hungry people are surprisingly sensitive to aesthetics and do not wax lyrical over artichokes, fungi or foul-smelling fish concentrates. The eastern seaboard of the United States, the richest country in the world, has in the last five years

discovered a new source of deprivation—water, whose storage bids fair to out rival that of food as a challenge to civilisation. The claims made for ZETA have been found exaggerated, and the project has recently been dropped.

Demonstrating to people the irrationality of their beliefs has not always disabused them. For emotional reasons many are ready to take Kierkegaard's "leap of faith". Even those who abandon theology may still be grounded in related social attitudes and values acquired when young. Where no emancipation at all has occurred the problem is so much the worse. In the realm of food technology it may be disastrous. Regardless of protein needs Muslims must not eat pork; Hindus, beef; Jews, pork, shellfish or meat and dairy produce together; Jains and some Christian sects, any meat. Indeed, Jains are forbidden to destroy life, even locusts or disease-bearing lice and fleas. The acceptance of food may be dependent on the presence of the right ritual and ritualist. All work may stop, regardless of weather, during religious feasts. The same difficulties apply in the vital field of contraception.

"Offensive"

Thanks to the pioneering work of Knowlton, Carlile, Place, Bradlaugh, Besante and Stopes, this is now an accepted part of life in all civilised communities. But its acceptance has not been, and in many areas still is not, an easy transition. In Catholic theology it is a sort of murder, or a manipulation of the divine will. Though the practice has never been officially admitted, Catholics have often been encouraged to have large families to out-breed Protestants or other credal groups in the community. A similar attitude has existed in the past in the Soviet Union and China—outbreeding the capitalists. In these countries there was also the practical incentive to have a big population for immediate capital projects in areas backward in industrialisation. In many poor lands like India and much of the Muslim world, where different family relationships obtain from in the West, infant mortality is high, and no Welfare State exists, large families are regarded as signs of virility or social insurance for old age.

There is some hope that the Pope's theological and medical advisers may be coming round to accept the contraceptive pill through the argument that as a mere preventive of ovulation it is not "killing" gametes or zygotes. This would be a great step forward. But it must not be forgotten that the pill is relatively expensive,

needs timing on the part of the patient, and has not been entirely exonerated as a potential cause of hormone imbalance. Much simpler and cheaper, though less effective in individual cases—some of whom extrude it, while others gain no benefit—is the coil (loop), but this is the most “murderous” contraceptive of the lot.

For too many years governments and organisations have soft-pedalled on the family planning issue because some people, usually on religious grounds, have found it “offensive”. A few years ago British Transport Advertising removed perfectly harmless Family Planning Association posters from the London Underground for this reason. London Transport Advertising still forbids advertisements which “7. refer to religious or sacred subjects in a manner which might give offence or seek to use sites as a medium for religious controversy. . . II. . . . advertise contraceptives directly or indirectly”. Officially

the State or local authorities in Great Britain are unable to supply money for contraception unless advised on purely medical grounds. For many years the United Nations organs and special agencies were unable even to discuss the question because of the Catholic bloc vote.

Things are gradually changing. In Britain, GPs are now empowered to prescribe the pill under the NHS. The UN is giving contraceptive advice and materials in its technical aid programmes. Since 1956 China has waged war against the population explosion. President Johnson has recently promised more support for contraceptive programmes overseas. But the changes are not keeping pace with the problem. It is time to tell the pious or the reactionary that religion is a matter of views on ultimate reality, and that sociological phenomena, however pontificated on by prelates, are the proper concern of the State.

TELLY-GO-ROUND

Peter Cotes

EVERY now and again a “non-television personality” manages, by dint of sheer sincerity, to make a bigger impression than many of the more lauded “characters” who appear on both Channels with such monotonous regularity. Brigid Brophy is a case in point. In a recent **BBC 3** discussion on blood sports, Miss Brophy proved by her discomfort and a furious contempt for her opponent’s viewpoint, which she made no attempt to conceal, that she was one of the most “natural” contributors, and therefore one of the most important people engaged in discussing social topics to be seen on the goggle box. Upon this occasion she had for an opponent a fairly cool, calm and collected “with-it” MFH. The latter, at the start, carried all before him; with a relaxed manner and the voluble support of the majority in the audience he was enabled to get the bloodsport brigade more than its fair share of not only the camera but the verbal argument. However—and this is the curious thing about television—sincerity is one’s greatest asset. You can have your cheer leaders, your glossy smiles and stock arguments by your side, but when you are up against the type of argument produced by a sincere rationalist, your superficial case falls to the ground, the smile starts to disappear, the voice loses its good-tempered ring and soon Brigid had her man reeling. The moral of all this is that audiences can be smitten over the head and the companies can make their own stars by polishing up their popularity before they polish their publicity. Truth will out; there is nothing like the telly for being an ally to the Brophys, the Mossmans, the Camerons and the Kennedys. But more of the latter anon.

Now that John Freeman isn’t here to “face” it out we’re grateful for every honest endeavour, and this is what Cliff Michelmore produces in **24 Hours**. There have been some brisk features recently. One that I recall with particular pleasure was an argument between the son of the Ian Smith Minister of “Justice”, who appeared to lose his temper completely against the halting, rational and “non-personality” Colin Legum who was, like Miss Brophy and for many of the same reasons, both uncomfortable and ill at ease. Truth won here again by a nose when it should have won by at least a narrow head.

better than the light entertainment features and most of the plays on either Channel. Incidentally, what has happened lately to that poor casebook of **Finlay’s**? The two docs are “mugging” and only occasionally does the odd supporting performance bring the bonnie banks of Tannochbrae to Telly Centre. In a recent episode, quaintly titled **They Do It In Africa**, an outstanding cameo performance came from Fiona Duncan, an actress with a curious glow, an inner light, who managed to lift a trite tale off the ground and give it some semblance of reality. The longer plays have not fared much better of late. **Gordon of Khartoum**, one of the Wednesday Play series, despite a reasonable, down-to-earth story by Robin Maugham, was a bit of a scramble; a desperate attempt to put a quart into a pint pot. Much better was **The Man on Her Back**, adapted from a William Sansom novel by Peter Luke and directed with fine finesse and eye for detail by Waris Hussein. Grown-up stuff this about down-grown people; sleazy, pathetic and comic, all in turn.

Many important programmes come on far too late for the majority of viewers.. Take **Dialogue with Doubt**, a series of discussions between an atheist and a parson. With only five minutes allocated, the first of these started around midnight with the able Lord Soper “arguing the toss” with the uncompromising Ludovic Kennedy. Richard Hoggart chaired this civilised discussion between two evolved people which was truly rewarding viewing and listening. It should be produced in pamphlet form by the NSS or the BHA if the religious press won’t do it. The series, six in all, is unscripted and upon such occasions tape recorders could be useful possessions, although the following week when Colin Wilson faced another parson he proved a pigmy in comparison to Kennedy. The latter’s conviction and sincerity cannot be withstood. Certainly the telly is no help to the lad who wrote **The Outsider** but who keeps his apparent sincerity decently under cover.

Wilson had his prototype in many of the people present at the **Discussion of the Arts** programme, screened by the BBC, who decried, deplored and derided, and merely succeeded in opening doors to philistines who, at the very

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These discussion programmes are, on the whole, much

WHY I AM NOT A CHRISTIAN

Maurice Jones

(Concluded from page 31)

In fact, when you come to think of it, the structure of the Christian religion is a mere patchwork of other faiths. Christian festivals are pagan festivals; the Virgin Birth corresponds to Greek gods cohabiting with mortals; the Holy Trinity is a rehash of Isis, Osiris, and Horus, or the Hindu Trimurti (triad or trinity) of Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu. The ceremonial consumption of bread and wine was practised by worshippers of the ancient Persian god Mithra, thousands of years before Christ was even thought of. Mithra was the Sun God and so on Sun-days the faithful would chant his praises and their petitions before candle-lit altars.

The resurrection idea appeals to man's conceit and sentimentality. How nice to live forever — in eternal bliss, of course — and to see all one's old friends again in the happiest possible circumstances! But immortality appealed equally to the Mithraics, the Egyptians, and the Hindus long before Christ had promised it to his élite; and theirs are religions which the Christian rejects, or regards as vastly inferior to his own.

Neither is concern for one's fellows a monopoly of Christians, though most of them would like to think so. Any kindness is arrogantly labelled a "Christian act". Charity was extolled as a cardinal virtue long before Christ preached it. To me it is sheer presumption to claim that every good must spring from the source that Christians have elected to recognise.

Their God also created in his wisdom the bed bug, the typhoid germ, tuberculosis, the cancerous cell, the congenital idiot, the sex-maniac who can rape and murder little girls. He created in his image men and women capable of unspeakable cruelty and thousands of creatures whose only purpose, seemingly, is to be killed and eaten by other creatures. He created the weasel which kills for sheer blood. He created pestilence, fire, flood and famine. Dirt, disease, depravity and hatred must surely be the work of his hand no less than love and beauty.

Christians may argue that this earthly life is but a brief and unimportant interlude; that it is merely a necessary preliminary to the hereafter. But I see no sign that Christians are any more indifferent to worldly goods than other men. They dislike pain as much as most, visit the doctor as often, and take their medicine as regularly. They remember with gratitude that their Saviour healed the sick, and pray that he may reach down from Paradise and do the same for them and theirs. In short, this earthly life is as important to Christians as to anyone else.

Why, then, is all this suffering necessary? It is hard to understand why spirit beings, presumably pure and un-sullied in Heaven, have to enter earthly bodies for a short period of perhaps intensive misery, only to return to their Maker.

Some, but by no means all, of man's suffering is caused by man himself. This Christians comfortably explain by saying that God gave man free will. But of course man hasn't free will as Schopenhauer realised when he said: "A man can surely do what he wills to do, but he cannot determine what he wills."

Broadly, we know little about the formative influences from the moment when we first groped our way from primeval slime on to dry land. Reactions were shaped in us then over which we have no control. Specifically, what

control has an ugly dwarf over his personality; or a neurotic, or a myopic, or an idiot? Has the child from a broken home the same choice to be gracious as the pampered darling of doting parents? Has the Pygmy the same choice as the American tycoon? Has the moron the same choice as the intellectual, the cripple as the Olympic champion?

We can, indeed, do as we will; but what we will is largely determined for us by circumstances beyond our control.

And after this chaotic willy-nilly our souls return to Paradise. But what is a soul? If it is the breath of life, then a cockroach has it. If it is the mind, then, just as the mind can be radically altered by a blow on the head or the removal of a lobe of the brain or starvation of oxygen, then surely the mind ceases to exist when blood ceases to nourish the brain and decomposition sets in. If the soul is the personality — the ego — then what of the personality of the congenital idiot; or the man who, once intelligent, is reduced to idiocy; or the child who dies within a few hours of being born?

If the soul is none of these, what is it?

All this we are asked to accept: The Virgin Birth, the Miracles, the Resurrection. But these things happened hundreds of years ago, recorded by simple credulous folk, who had, moreover, the compelling vested interest of not wishing to feel that they had been duped. These things are hard to believe. I see no point in believing them. They are incapable of verification. Nothing of that kind happens today. I refuse to accept other people's mystical experiences as evidence for me. My God would speak to ME, not expect me to be content with a vicarious communication through the ecstasies of others.

Christians are simply no better than other people. History testifies to their having been at times considerably worse than many. They still pray that their soldiers may kill more successfully than the other man in battle.

Now, the usual argument is that one must not blame the religion for the shortcomings of its adherents. This particular form of evasion I reject. I take a pragmatic view. If a political system fails to work or offends because of the brutality or callousness of its exponents, we vote it out or fight it if necessary. So with religion. If I can point to a religion which, after 2,000 years, has left its followers — with all their pratings and mumbo-jumbo and two bob in the collection box for another week's sharp business practice and bawdy stories — if this religion has left them no better than the pagans and agnostics and atheists and apathetics, then I say that this religion is a failure, and the sooner those who practise it learn to rely upon themselves and their own inner resources instead of supernatural aid, the better.

The prayer book says: "O God who knowest our needs before we ask them . . ." Today the scientist has taken over that rôle. While people pray for fair weather for the harvest, or dance before their totem poles for rain, it is the meteorologist who not only knoweth their needs but knoweth also the answers. How many Christians would prefer prayer to the services of a competent surgeon or an adequate supply of antibiotics? And how did the surgeon get his skill and the physician his antibiotics? Was it through God's guidance or from scientific research?

THIS WORLD

Important Correction

IN the leading article on "Law Reform" in last week's issue, the sentence "But these things are newsworthy because they are typical" should of course have read "But these things are newsworthy because they are atypical". The Anglican report is *Fatherless by Law*.

University in Exile

AT St. John's, New York, largest Catholic university in the United States, 100 faculty members are on strike. This is in support of 31 colleagues dismissed "without notice, explanation or right of appeal" (*Observer*, January 23) because they asked the trustees, the Vincentian Fathers, to introduce democratic processes into their administration. Leader of the strikers is the Rev. Professor Peter O'Reilly, who has described the mass dismissals as "an atrocity unheard of in any academic institution". A rival administration has been set up in a small private school and messages of support received from all over the world.

They Like Franco

THE Spanish bishops have issued a document supporting the Government and all it stands for. In answer, the clandestine Spanish Trade Union Federation of Workers is reported to have issued a manifesto drawing attention to Schema 13 of the Ecumenical Council, which decrees that the Church is not tied to any social or economic system. The manifesto reaffirms the right to form trades unions and condemns dictatorship. It is very easy, outsiders will note, to pass liberal schemata which cannot meaningfully apply in areas where the Catholic Church has no political power, and which do not apply in areas where the Vatican has a Concordat with the régime.

Gadarene Swine

A report of the Italian Ministry of Health compares mental hospitals in that country with Nazi concentration camps or the pits of Dante's inferno. Overcrowding, understaffing and bureaucracy are defects that can be found in the hospital systems of most, if not all, countries, but there can be few places where anything like the Italian disclosures are applicable. The following is from a *Times* résumé (January 21):

New patients are stripped, all personal objects are taken away, and they are then dressed in old, regulation uniforms. This is followed by the "psychological stripping". Nothing that he or she says will be given any value. No one will listen. Protest results in punishment. In some hospitals the afternoon brings the lengthy business of tying up the patients: it is completed only when the last of them, whether violent or not, is immobilised. They are then given sedative drugs. These are distributed with "an implacable equality", so that those who do not require them receive them as well as those who are violent, sometimes being given ten times the dose advisable.

Is it a coincidence that Italy has a tradition of Church "charity" rather than a modern Welfare State, and that its official creed enshrines Scriptures which represent mental illness as the outcome of demon possession?

Scientology

IT has been reported (*Freedom*, January 15) that, hours after the Psychological Practices Act became law, Melbourne police raided the Scientology premises and seized files and documents. The reason given was that they contained material which could give rise to blackmail. But the Australian correspondent alleges that it was "a Catholic plot" in that the TV interviewer who first con-

fronted the organisation, the Labour senator who called for an inquiry, and the QC who wrote its report were all Catholics.

The Catholic Church has always been hostile to brotherhoods and mystical and metaphysical cults other than its own. Freethinkers are unlikely to be over-sympathetic to Scientology, which savours more of a successful business

than a genuine philosophy. But its adherents are entitled to the same legal processes as any other section of the community. It is perhaps a little ironic that Catholics should take action against "psychological practices", as they have developed an unparalleled system of indoctrination and catharsis. Even the possibility of blackmail exists in the confessional. Quite apart from the question of whether priests recognise voices or always respect the vow the secrecy, the circumstances in many overcrowded churches are such that others in the queue cannot fail to overhear, especially where the priest is somewhat deaf.

All Things Bright and Beautiful

SOME primary school texts in science still end with the tribute: "Let us thank God for all the wonderful things He has made".

Protection of Consumers

A new Bill aims at protecting consumers against misleading advertisements for goods and services. Will it include the "Spiritualism Proves Survival" paragraphs that stare out at us from the most respectable of journals? And what of plugs for indulgences, astrologers, faith healers, fortune tellers, Subud, witch covens, the Aetherius Society and the rest of the spectrum of profitable phantasies?

Church Unity

JANUARY 25, the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, marked the end of a Church Unity Octave (8-day devotions) celebrated in many churches. In the service appeared the following versicle and response: "V. And I say unto thee: thou art Peter. R. And upon this rock I will build my Church." Were Nonconformists and Catholics thinking of quite the same thing?

Tribute from Tablet

AN interesting assessment of the Humanist movement appears in this Catholic intellectual weekly (January 22): "The Humanist attack was never more widely mounted nor more formidable than it is at the present time . . . Humanists, in an age when so much importance is attached to what the majority want, have begun to act on the basis that they, and not all the Christians put together, are now the majority; and that it is time to stop constantly deferring to the Christian minority with its prohibitions and inhibitions deriving from a theology which the majority have never dreamed of accepting."

NO COMMENT

"The Offertory last Sunday was only £210"—*Newsletter* (January 23) of St. Ignatius Church, South Tottenham.

"John Baldwinson of Swallowfield, Hammers Lane, Mill Hill, N.W.7, wishes it known that, because of its refusal so countenance safe and responsible birth control, and its wealth compared with the manifest poverty of many of its children, his conscience no longer allows him to recognize the authority of the Roman Catholic Church"—Personal Column of the *Times* (January 22).

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.

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

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

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (New Victoria Hotel, Corporation Street), Sunday, February 6th, 7 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

Bristol Humanist Group (Transport House, Victoria Street), Tuesday, February 8th, 7.30 p.m.: ERNEST POLACK, "Judaism".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75, Humberstone Gate), Sunday, February 6th, 6.30 p.m.: MARGARET SYMONS, "Practical Helps for Daily Living".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-Operative Education Centre, Heathcote Street), Sunday, February 6th, 2.30 p.m.: B. J. BARNETT, "Religion—A World Sickness".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, February 6th, 11 a.m.: PROFESSOR HYMAN LEVY, "The Conflict Between Public and Private Values".
Tuesday, February 8th, 7.30 p.m.: MADELEINE SIMS, "Education and Indoctrination".

TELLY-GO-ROUND

(Continued on page 34)

least, did know where they were going. The latter (city councillors, members of watch committees and the like) stated quite eloquently the reactionary point of view; and facts for their retrogressive cases were marshalled without any of the theatrical embellishments to which we were treated by the new theatre establishment. An exceedingly "theatrical" establishment. Apart from Annan, Snow and Casson, this was an almost worthless discussion, which got out of hand from the start and never pulled together. That the Chairman, Huw Wheldon, failed to co-ordinate the proceedings was due more to the childish exhibitionism of the unmethodical "method" boys, than to any lack of firmness on Wheldon's part. The ex-star of *Monitor* is a first-class showman, but when he edited that Sunday artistic treat he had the material; here the participants appeared to be more interested in showing-off and attitudinising than they were in discussing the arts.

On the other Channel the abysmal *Eamonn Andrews Show* has a week-night competitor in *Late Night London*, presumably designed as a reply to *24 Hours* (BBC 1) and *Late Night Line Up* (BBC 2). I think we must allow it a certain amount of leeway to play itself in. At present

only that cockney sage, jazz critic Benny Green, who takes it along under his genial wing, seems to have found a form still lacking in Eamonn's hotchpotch. These alleged "celebrity" parades can be trying affairs all round, but produce the occasional hit. *Tempo* has recommenced on Sunday afternoons and got away to a capital start with a profile of the American actor Zero Mostel. Zero's point that it is nowadays "chic" to be bewildered was well expressed; *not* to know is inverted snobbery, the successor in fashion to the view that everything that was incomprehensible must be good because it was found to be obscure. The comedian made fun of those intellectuals who liked finding such plays as Beckett's *Godot* difficult to understand. Zero glibly expressed the view that it was all hallucinatory, and I suppose this is as good an explanation as any other.

Although there was the glaring omission of the late Sean O'Casey's name from the BBC *Sunday Night* programme on Yeats, it cannot be denied that the baby screen stops being merely a goggle box when programmes such as Elgar in the past and Yeats in the present are screened. There must be unstinted praise for all concerned in the making of this centenary tribute to the great Irish poet (screened on January 23). I hope that Mrs. Whitehouse and her merry madcaps of purity maidens were veiwing. Perhaps they would have seen the one-eyed monster in a new light—and the BBC as less of a dirty-minded Uncle and more of a benelovent Aunt.

SHADOW PROPHET

Peter Cotes

AMONG NEW BOOKS recently received is one, *Friedrich Engels: The Shadow Prophet* (Pall Mall Press, 42s), which is a scholarly and readable work tracing as it does the life and work of Marx's lesser known partner. Such a story is very long overdue and in tracing the personal as well as political collaboration between the two "revolutionaries", author Grace Carlton has depicted in detail the humour, wisdom and obstinacy of a highly cultivated man, who has so frequently been overlooked by Marxists and many political writers of all hues. Mrs Carlton is clearly no Marxist, although her book will be as interesting to "disciples", even if only to disagree with, as it is fascinating to the more general reader. Certainly, as the first biography in years of Engels, the *Shadow Prophet*, it deserves a place as a work of reference, apart from its other qualities, on the shelf of the thoughtful reader.

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WINDOW ON THE WORLD

Otto Wolfgang

ON THE OCCASION of the resolution taken at the final session of the *Fédération Nationale des Libres Penseurs* de France, at Grenoble, *La Raison* drew attention to the taming of the Church: there was a time when she burnt not only the books she disapproved of but also their authors; when she excommunicated heretics and had them tortured, whilst nowadays she can merely torture and stretch her own dogmas.

The paper recalls the days of 1904 when the International Congress of Freethought met in Rome. This gave Pope Pius X such a shock that he fell ill. More than 5,000 Freethinkers from many lands — England, Germany, Belgium, Bohemia, Hungary, even Spain and Portugal, from Russia, USA and Tunisia had gathered in the "Holy City"; amongst them parliamentarians, senators, mayors, and scientists of renown, e.g. Lombroso, Haeckel, Novikoff, Bjoernson, etc. (Berthelot was ill but had sent a welcome letter). Carrying 2,000 banners and flags, the delegates marched through the centre of Rome to the Porta Pia.

The Congress over, *Osservatore Romano* published a papal letter expressing the Pontiff's grief and distress over the insult suffered by his own city, when "evil intentions" were openly discussed there. "Has Rome not been selected and elected to represent the majesty of the Faith?" To be sure, the "Forces of Satan" were impotent against the Holy Cross — wrote the Pope — but the mere fact that they were able to muster a pompous convocation in the Holy City was "an indelible provocation, a bold blasphemy which has caused Us bitter sorrow".

Something had to be done to restore the majesty and dominance of the "Only True Belief". On Thursday, September 29, 1904, Cardinal Respighi had the *Miserere*, the Litany of the Saints, recited in all the churches of Rome and the Holy Sacraments consecrated. This — be it noted — was St. Michael's Day (who, according to legend, killed Satan, the evil dragon).

A ridiculous revenge, and it did not help much. So nowadays, in order to camouflage her retreat and gain some respite, Holy Church feigns tolerance, sensibility and readiness to talk things over. Cardinal Koenig (which means "King") of Austria is inviting even atheists to a (frequently adjourned) "Dialogue" and he who accepts is sure to become the King's Court Fool.

The anti-Franco emigrant paper *Libertad para España* (M. Fernande Renquin, 25, rue du Sonnet, Bruxelles 8) writes on its front page that 63 leaders of Catholic organisations in Barcelona had complained in a letter to the Vatican Council that Franco's terror was leading to "a visible process of de-Christianisation, particularly amongst the intellectuals, the workers and the youth".

Another emigrant paper, called *Voice of Southern Sudan*, complains that, once again, people are at one another's throats for the glory of their respective god. The *Qur'an* teaches that the sword is a useful means for the spreading of the "only true" creed of Islam, so the Arabs of the North slaughter Christian negroes in the South who, they aver, had been converted through sheer economic bribery. The Prime Minister of the Sudan, Mohammed Ahmed Mahgoub, had the nerve to appeal to Pope Paul

requesting him to condemn the Southern nationalists and tell them to surrender their arms to the Sudanese Government.

According to *New Christian* (December 30, 1965), membership of the East German churches has declined during the past ten years, so for instance in Anhalt-Dessau from 423,000 (in 1954) to 350,000. Baptisms decreased from 5,700 to 2,400, Sunday school attendance from 23,000 to 11,000 children and church weddings from 2,100 to 860. Church attendance fell by 50 per cent (from 700,000 in 1954 to 350,000 in 1963). However, the remaining church members spent even more money (a 200 per cent increase) on religious propaganda.

St. John's University (with 13,000 students one of the largest Catholic universities in the USA) dismissed some two dozen teachers — including one monsignor — because they claimed academic freedom. Cardinal Spellman's office was charged with muzzling and exiling another priest, the Rev. Daniel Berrigan, for speaking out against US policy in Vietnam. The dismissal letters were sent out just before Christmas. One of the recipients was Mgr John G. Clancy who was formerly on the staff of the Vatican Secretariat of State. To dramatise their plight, some faculty members took out ads in national papers, offering their services for teaching jobs, and one professor called St. John's "an intellectual concentration camp" (*Newsweek*, December 27).

Good luck to Reverent Freethinkers who think they could make a deal with the Church!

At the instigation of Mgr Klepacz, leader of the group of liberal Catholic Poles (ZNAK) and protégé of Pope Paul, the Polish clergy invited their West German brethren to attend, in May 1966, the celebrations at Czestochova — the Polish Lourdes — on the occasion of the millenium of Poland's Christianisation. In their letter of invitation they said: "Let's try to forget and forgive. We must have a dialogue as the Vatican Council and the Pope require." The Germans accepted but Cardinal Wyszynsky, the Polish primate, fumes. For one reason — writes *Le Nouvel Observateur* (December 21) — he dislikes Germans, however Catholic. On the other hand, he wanted to invite the Pope to attend at the occasion. The Pope has accepted with the proviso that the Polish Government send the invitation and this is against Wyszynsky's plans to embarrass Mr Gomulka and the Polish Communist Party. But Pope Paul insists on the observance of political etiquette; if Gomulka extends his invitation, the Primate may stay away to illustrate his idea of "dialogue", which, when John XXIII first launched the idea, he described as a "decoy". The Polish Government has since refused Cardinal Wyszynsky an exit visa.

And finally an illustration of Christian tolerance. Herr Hoffmann, a lawyer in Frankfurt, bank manager, Social Democrat and atheist, found himself compelled to have his telephone calls vetted through the operator because of the many abusive callers.

Why the fury? He had gone to court to prevent his little son's being compelled to take part in the morning prayer of his class. And the High Court judge had to admit that it was unconstitutional to compel persons to

divulge their religious beliefs and that even majority will is restricted if it contravenes the basic rights of one single citizen.

The Social Democrats who are the ruling party in Hesse-Frankfurt behaved like our Labourites, who refuse to attack as a party the antiquated Sunday laws in this

country. They contribute 7.3 million DM per annum to religious schools and go out of their way to protest their good relations with Protestants and Catholics alike. "We have never left any doubt that, on a supra-denominational plane, we emphatically stand for prayer in school" (*Der Spiegel*, November 24, 1965).

SIGN OF THE CROSS

Reginald Deans

IN EVERY COUNTRY throughout the world and since the dawn of civilisation, a cross, with as many as 100 possible shapes, has been a common symbol representing innumerable myths and religions as well as, at times, a convenient instrument of execution.

Its popularity is due to its simplicity; indeed it is the simplest of all symbols. To make it or to recognise it requires the minimum of intelligence. It does not occur naturally; hence it represents something unusual, to mark a spot where something of value was hidden, a boundary, a meeting place, market or memorial. An upright stick with a crosspiece to it became something with a meaning to the most simple-minded. Even today, allowing people to make a cross, the mark of illiteracy, on a piece of paper every now and then, endows them with the feeling that they are helping to govern the country. This valuable right was gained after long and bitter struggle; and what a satisfactory substitute it has been for critical thinking.

In the Christian religion it is a reminder of the cross on which Jesus is supposed to have been crucified and of the more modern belief in a threefold God, although a cross has four points. The casual statement in some of the "Holy" Scriptures that "they crucified him" is usually accepted by Christians as evidence that Jesus was nailed to a cross. Hardly anyone bothers to consider the facts in detail. Let us examine them.

A crowd of people are clamouring before Pilate for the death of Jesus. The reply is "Take him away and do as you will with him". Can you hear the roar of approval from the excited crowd as they hustle him away? They could have stoned him to death whilst their blood was hot. It would have been quite easy. All the materials were ready to hand, and it was the Jewish custom too. But to crucify him they needed a cross. It is most unlikely there was one waiting to be used and in those days, when tools were few and primitive, the fabrication of a material cross could not be undertaken at short notice.

Most likely Jesus would be of average build, five to six feet tall. To sustain such a man would require a pole at least three or four inches in diameter. It would have been the greatest luck if there had been one of the right size in stock, so to speak. If he were to be nailed to a crosspiece as the story affirms, it would have had to be not less than five feet long and securely fastened to the upper end of the upright — by no means a simple job. To sustain the body as is usually pictured by inspired artists a hole at least three feet deep would have had to be dug and well rammed in; not a few minutes' task. And how fortunate if the necessary picks and spades had been available.

The total length of the upright must have been no less than ten feet and its weight, with the crosspiece, at least a

hundredweight. Yet a casual spectator, Simon Cyrene by name, was compelled to carry it to Calvary, a distance of well over half a mile, according to accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke (which are so similar that we are justified in suspecting they were copied from one another). Yet whenever we see a picture of Jesus being taken to his crucifixion, it is *he* who is carrying the cross — though nowhere near long enough for its purpose.

How the crosspiece was fastened to the upright we cannot tell. Tying it would hardly be good enough unless it were done thoroughly, which urgency would surely not allow. It is by no means easy to tie two thick poles together, especially with the materials that would be available in those days. To splice them together with the primitive tools of that age would have taken hours. So one way or another, by the time the cross had been made and erected, the hole dug and filled in, the parties must surely have lost interest. And let us not forget that two other crosses had to be made, transported and erected at the same time. To any practical man the story doesn't ring true.

An idea certain to add to a believer's emotions was the nailing of Jesus to the cross through his hands and feet. People who listened to the story would feel the nails going through their own hands; a state of mind that would readily enable them to believe it was true. But there is nothing about nails in the first three gospels. Only in John are nail "prints" mentioned.

But 2,000 years ago nails, at least of metal, which are what most people think of, must have been so rare and costly that it is most unlikely they were used. In those days, and long afterwards, "nails" were thick wooden pegs, and to receive them, holes had to be bored. A wooden nail could not have been driven into the cross or through his hands and feet without leaving far more than "prints". Nor would nails of any kind have supported a full-grown man. Indeed the whole story when carefully examined sounds most unlikely.

A far more credible account would be that once Pilate had given the go-ahead, they would have taken him to the nearest tree and hung him up and it would have been all over in a few minutes and everyone satisfied. This indeed is supported by Acts 5, 30 and 10, 39 which refer to Jesus, whom they "slew and hanged on a tree".

No, the story of the crucifixion won't bear detailed examination.

Just as a cross is the simplest of signs, it is also one of the most elementary ideas that untrained minds can grasp.

To priests and politicians it has always been most effective.

RELIGION IN SCHOOLS MEETING

William Mollroy

ALTHOUGH it was one of London's coldest nights for some years there was a large audience at a meeting in the Alliance Hall on January 18. It had been organised by the National Secular Society, and the speakers included members of the political parties represented in the House of Commons. They had been invited to give their personal views on the question of religion in the school. Mr David Tribe, President of the NSS and author of *Religion and Ethics in Schools*, also addressed the meeting.

Mr Ernest Armstrong, MP (Labour member for North West Durham and a former headmaster), strongly defended the provisions for religious instruction and worship in the 1944 Education Act. He said that religion had always played a major part in education, and if RI were to disappear from state schools there would be an enormous expansion of voluntary schools. He believed children should know something of our Christian heritage, but agreed that religion should be taught in a critical way.

Mr R. Gresham Cooke, MP (Conservative, Twickenham), denied that religious instruction in schools was indoctrination. He said that it would be political suicide to advocate its removal.

Mr Stephen Jakobi (Liberal Parliamentary candidate, Cities of London and Westminster) said that he had not firmly made up his mind on this question, but was disposed to endorse the NSS recommendations. Education should help a child get on in society. The great virtues were truth and tolerance, but religious observance often led to intolerance. He felt it was "mildly wrong" that sectarian schools should be paid for by public money.

Mr Tribe questioned the claim that the churches had played a major rôle in popular education. Many of the older educational establishments had been founded for the purpose of training an élite to rule the church and state. He said the question we must seriously ask was "Is Christianity true?". If not, it should not have a privileged position in schools. Morality needs a sure foundation, and should not be based on Christian teachings to which the majority of the population are not committed.

Mr Nigel Sinnott acted as chairman.

LETTERS

Papal Politics

THE Polish Catholic hierarchy's invitation to the West German bishops to visit Poland this year on the occasion of the thousandth anniversary of Polish Christianity (FREETHINKER, December 24) might well prove to be a very important event in postwar history.

According to the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, the Pope himself has forced the Polish bishops into this step by making his attendance at the Polish commemoration conditional on the presence of their German colleagues.

The invitation extended during the Vatican Council without the knowledge of the Polish government is clearly directed against the Polish State. It might well mean the resumption by Paul VI of the old papal pro-German policy aiming at the restoration of the Holy Roman Empire, of which Germany would be the heart. (FREETHINKER, April 30).

If this hypothesis is right, the papal move can be interpreted as an attempt to detach the first stone from the East European communist bulwark in its weakest spot, the Polish Republic with its powerful Catholic Church, in favour of German expansion.

A. M. VAN DER GIEZEN

All for Peace and Love?

FR. PARIS closes his letter (FREETHINKER, January 14th) with a siren song. Does he himself believe—writing from Malta as he does—that his church is "all for peace and love?" Gonzales, his boss, left no stone unturned to preach hatred against the Malta Labour Party and everyone who dared to vote for it. But "no one is compelled to believe if not by conscience" writes Fr. Paris. Commendable words, but let's see deeds. Would the church, say, renounce her monopoly on the air and fight for the beloved unbelievers' right to equality to get their own programmes? Sweet words don't cost anything. If he really means that "we should all unite in human brotherhood" in order to foster progress, all believers who in earnest subscribe to this aim are welcome. But this lies on a different plane, irrespective of belief or unbelief.

Unfortunately, the church as an organization has vested interests in conservative and retarding politics. In *Nice Matin* of January 10th I have read that the Polish Council of Ministers has refused an exit permit to Cardinal Wysinski because when in Rome he undertook *démarches* whose results were damaging to the interests of the State, whilst the episcopate steadfastly refuses to divulge the contents of some political correspondence with abroad which was sent without the knowledge or approval of the Government.

So long as the church interferes in politics she has to be treated as a political adversary.

MME H. YVONE BOYARD

FR. G. M. PARIS, O.P. of Malta and his letter must give all true Freethinkers much to chew over at their prayer-less breakfast. It is nice to know that the Pope has not only spoken of his children but also of his—well—what can I write?

The point of the words "unite in human brotherhood" is not exactly new. Many of the biggest beings in the name of the Lord have murdered for such a Cause. I agree with Father Paris; but I must divulge that my reading of the FREETHINKER has never taught me anything to dispel such an outlook. I look forward to such a fact being recorded in the wealthy *Universe*.

I have nothing against Roman Catholics as such: many I know are clean, upright people. But they have no right to claim that some of my rates and taxes should help support their children's education. I resent the B.B.C. taking my money and not giving Humanists more time to put the Humanist answer to modern questions.

Christianity is not for me. It is not for many more. More than the church is honest enough to admit.

Let us face modern truths and not live in the Dark Ages.

As Father Paris wrote, "That would be the way of light and salvation."

ARTHUR FRANCIS

OBITUARIES

HENRY IRVING, who died in Barnsley recently at 92, was one of the few traders I remember as a schoolboy 60 years ago. Besides carrying on the family business as a photographer and picture framer, he was a life member of the Barnsley Playgoers' Society and made his last stage appearance 11 years ago at the age of 81 and with only a week's notice. Some friends considered him to be a born actor.

His interest in Freethought was always to the fore in the many letters he wrote to the Readers' Forum of the *Barnsley Chronicle*.

Henry Irving was a most accomplished and versatile man and a good and jovial friend. The town is poorer by the loss of a man with individual views.

H.I.B.

WE regret to announce the death of Mr. Percy Turner, who was for many years a member of the National Secular Society and a *Freethinker* reader. He was aged 78, and had been in poor health for some time.

Mr. Turner was well known in the Leytonstone area of London. He generously supported local charities, and his name often appeared in the correspondence columns of East London newspapers. His wife died in 1964 and he is survived by two sons.

Mr. W. McIlroy, General Secretary of the National Secular Society, conducted the committal ceremony at the City of London Crematorium on January 21. Other NSS members in attendance were Messrs. E. Denning and G. Pratt, and Mrs. E. Warner.

W. McI.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Telephone: HOP 2717.