

FREETHINKER

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MODERNISM

In his presidential address to the Convocation of Canterbury last week the Archbishop called on the Church of England to "encounter" the community more effectively. As pews empty and vocations dry up, all the denominations are anxiously trying to make Christianity more "relevant" to our day. The new Old Testament may not begin "In the beginning".

The Second Vatican Council made famous the phrase "The Church in the Modern World". Slick public relations turned this into "The Modern Church in the World". Though this phrase hardly applies to the corporate church, hierarchical discipline is breaking down. In many countries over half the Catholic families practise artificial family planning. Last week in Barcelona priests demonstrating for civil rights were charged by police. In Britain today, call a radical public meeting on the Pill, abortion, censorship, homosexuality racial integration—what you will—and it is usually possible to get an unexcommunicated Catholic on the platform. Sometimes he isn't recognisable as such—till he starts explaining how the moral law has been misunderstood. Many people, including some Humanists, are thus deceived into thinking that the Church itself has changed in fundamental matters and is now in the vanguard of progress.

Modernists everywhere

There is hardly a major religion or sect today without its modernists. The Editor was recently invited to the mosque at Woking. A service of "baptism" was held (not for him). To his amazement he was allowed to take colour transparencies of it, while the bareheaded Imam's wife—nudging forward in the line of women behind their men—once or twice broke into the litany with a suggestion. There was a sermon pointing out that, compared with the classical world and early Christianity, Islam gave women rights within the family equal to those of men. In the drawing-room afterwards the Imam explained that there were many accretions in Islamic law derived from the social customs of particular communities during a formative period, that *kosher* provisions could be ignored in the light of modern

abatoir techniques, that Persia had a great tradition of representational art, and so on. The Editor was almost persuaded that Secularism and Islam were two names for the same phenomenon.

Two weeks later, alas, he found an intelligent Muslim male in a class of foreign students angry that the subject of *purdah* could be discussed in any but reverential tones. No mention of transient social customs or its being actually for the *protection* of women. They did this because it was his religion and that was that! The same evening in another class, where even the Spanish and Italian Catholic girl students seemed to think Adam and Eve were mythological, the Muslim students spoke of them as if they lived next door and appeared not to have heard of the theory of evolution.

A career for you in the modern Army

Yet more recently at Salvation Army headquarters the Editor was talking to Brigadier Harry Dean, who thought the image of the Army presented in the FREETHINKER "Help!" number (March 11) was thirty or forty years out of date. The organisation is now democratically run, the Joy Strings play pop, hellfire has run out of gas and he was horrified to read the literature on the subject still put out by the Catholic Truth Society, his wife looks sexy in her uniform, he reads the FREETHINKER and has based an important article on a piece by F. H. Snow, he calls himself a Humanist and an Existentialist, the Army has gone into business only to trail the spirit of Christ in the halls of mammoth and earn money to finance good works, the rôle of street marches and outdoor meetings and uniforms is being looked into but the bandsmen already do youth work when they doff their tubas. . . . In the end he admitted that he was in fact engaged in a campaign of modernisation and had some "reactionaries" to contend with.

Both these religious leaders were dedicated, able and genial men. But Brigadier Dean saw the force of outside objections to these refurbished images. Either the modernists are out of step with the main body of their movements and are in effect little better than public relations fronts, or the movements have so altered their essential character as to be quite superfluous in their present form. Better to abandon all claims to theology, renounce their history, and devote their assets entirely to social work.

Newtime religion

Side by side with genuine attempts at self-renewal and reform are the merely promotional. Two weeks ago the *Times Educational Supplement* published a picture of

INSIDE

ROME AND MARRIAGE	F. H. Amphlett Micklewright
HUMANIST BROADCAST	Kit Mouat
A MILLION OF US	F. J. Corina
WAYSIDE LAWYER	F. H. Amphlett Micklewright
THIS WORLD	LECTURE NOTICES
NO COMMENT	LETTERS

"contemporary" worship in an old church in Boston, Mass. It was organised by a graduate student of Harvard Divinity School to "translate traditional Christian concepts into the teenage idiom". Young people in the aisle were dancing the frug and watusi with African fervour. Some of the "congregation" in the place—thank heavens the architecture was Gothic—looked puzzled. What, they seemed to be thinking, had all this to do with Christianity? What, indeed!

Over the border in Montreal, Father Russell Schultz of St Dominic's parish has been most encouraged by attendance at his "hootenanny" or folk masses. Instead of the organ there are three guitars. Hymns are sung to the air of well known folk songs. During the Mass offerings representative of various walks of life are placed on the altar. On one sacred occasion they included a textbook from a student, a record from an enthusiastic disc fan and a mandolin from a musician. But few churches can rival our Established Church of England, "discovering new forms in which the life in Christ is lived" (Dr Ramsey).

Playing it the company way

The ton-up boys are revving up. A new machine, bigger, brasher, bolder snarls into line. The figure on it

ROME AND MARRIAGE

TO THE NON-ROMANIST, certain views concerning marriage held by the Roman Catholic Church are of the nature of a commonplace. For example, it is widely known that this church insists upon a mediaeval and sacramental view of marriage which refuses to permit of divorce as it is understood by the courts of this country. It is not so generally known that the Papacy has a canon law which permits of a whole series of permissible nullifications quite unknown to English law. The whole question is also carried far beyond the exact legal issues of divorce and nullity. The canon law lays down the specific proposition that the only marriage recognised as valid in the eyes of the church is one which has been conducted by a Roman Catholic priest with the appropriate ceremonies. It is true that, in the Middle Ages, a common law marriage whereby the couple declared each other married in front of witnesses was recognised, but this amount of laxity did not survive the decrees of the Council of Trent.

In England, the question of the mixed marriage often brings these points to the fore. It is customary for the Roman Catholic bishop to make a diocesan demand that the marriage shall take place in a Roman Catholic church, that the non-Romanist partner shall agree to any children being brought up as Romanists, and that the Romanist partner shall do all in his or her power to convert the other to the Roman Catholic faith. These conditions are stringent and at once open the door for priestly entry into the household together with priestly direction and interference. Indeed, anybody not a Roman Catholic would be well advised to think out the position very carefully before making promises of this kind. He would be well advised also to remember that such promises are not contractual in any legal sense and could not be enforced in an English court of law.

Ne temere

What is also not so widely recognised is that the Roman Catholic law of marriage is governed by the *Ne temere* decree promulgated by the Papacy some half a century

grimaces behind his goggles. His jeans are, if possible, the local vicar. . . . The deanery garden party is due to be greasier, his leather jacket more studded. He is of course opened in two minutes. The guest of honour hasn't yet arrived. Anxious eyes scan the road. Suddenly the bishop swoops out the sky in a helicopter. All is well. . . . The Morris and Fords and Jaguars glide by. The occupants lean out, incredulous. A bathing beauty is trundling by on a vegetable barrow. Yes, it's the Rev. Nicolas Stacey witnessing for Jesus. . . . Pleasure-glutted West Enders seek coffee bars with new gimmicks. Why not coffee from a coffin? The country church can do even better. Why not beer from the real thing? . . . Nine missionary societies seek commitment. They stage an exhibition of work. But who will come to anything so dull? Let's liven it up with huge pierced hands round the doorways, headless figures with a baby round the font, a time-card to punch as you go out giving yourself to God. Good, but not enough. Import a few strip club nude posters and have the whole thing opened by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Happily you can still escape to the eternal verities of that age-old guardian of European civilisation and culture. Slip into a Catholic art shop and buy yourself some plaster figures of the Virgin and Jesus showing His Bleeding Heart.

F. H. Amphlett Micklewright

or more ago. The terms of this decree are clear and absolute. The only valid marriage is one which is celebrated in a Roman Catholic church before a Roman Catholic priest. All other purported marriages are invalid. Such a decree applies in theory to everybody and not merely to members of the Roman Catholic Church. It is not difficult to imagine the trouble caused by such a decree in a country like Malta where the local law recognises the rights of Roman Catholic canon law. A curious case *Chapelle v Chapelle* [1950] came before the English Probate Court. The man was domiciled in Malta and the woman in England. They married in England in 1931 in a register office and lived in Malta till 1941, when the husband joined the forces. The wife returned to England and cohabited with another man. In 1944, a Maltese Court pronounced the marriage null and void *ab initio* for non-compliance with the canon law of the husband's domicile, where the *Ne temere* decree prevails. In 1950, the husband petitioned in England for a divorce, thus raising the preliminary issue of the Maltese decree of nullity.

Not in England

In *Chapelle v Chapelle*, the English court held that the clericalist Maltese decree could not be recognised. Although this decision has been much criticised by lawyers upon other technical grounds, it is an important refusal by the English legal system to recognise a decree of nullity based upon the Roman Catholic canon law. Equally important is it to realise that the canon law is not recognised by English law as being a valid legal system at all. Set aside by Parliament in the reign of Henry VIII, it has never since had any place in England save for the Anglican Canons of 1604 as amended by later statutes. But the non-Catholic who is contemplating a mixed marriage outside the Roman Catholic church would do well to recall that this decree exists side by side with canon law. So far as England is concerned, it has not been promulgated in this country. Roman Catholic writers are apt to

say that this is because of local legal difficulties, the truth being that its promulgation here would render the person responsible liable to proceedings for criminal libel!

So far, there is no evidence that the Roman Catholic Church has sought to promulgate it here. But, nonetheless, when the customary arrogance and impertinence of Roman Catholic clergy in this country are recalled, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that one day some such attempt may be made. In the same way, if a non-Romanist marries a Romanist in a register office, he would do well to recall the case of *Chapelle v Chapelle* and continue to live in England. The parties in the *Chapelle* case with a foot in both countries found themselves in the unenviable position of being married in England and not married in Malta.

Trouble in Liverpool

But the position in England did flare up in 1931 in Liverpool, a city notorious for its religious quarrels. The facts were first exposed by the Church of England bishop, Dr David, in his controversy with the Roman Catholic Archbishop Downey. They led to a series of lectures and comment by Dr G. G. Coulton, which the learned mediaevalist published in his book *In Defence of the Reformation*. It is interesting that Dr Coulton's lectures were never answered although he was attacked in the Roman Catholic press in vulgar language which can only be described as the garbage of controversy. Dr Coulton had no difficulty in showing that it was customary for the Roman Catholic clergy of Liverpool to tell Romanists who had married non-Romanists outside the Roman Catholic Church that they were not married in the eyes of the church. It is not difficult to imagine the extent to which ordinary people understood this statement as merely meaning that they were not married and that their children were illegitimate. Considerable domestic disharmony and unhappiness had been caused by these clerical activities. Unfortunately, as Dr Coulton pointed out, it was impossible to do more than to make the facts known. Any church has a right, within the law, to make regulations, however anti-social they may be, for its own members. It would be interesting to know how far the position in Liverpool in 1931 still prevails in areas where there is a large Roman Catholic population. Perhaps freethinkers in possession of the facts would do well to make them known and available.

The attitude taken by the Roman Catholic Church is one which can scarcely call for toleration. It means that persons validly married by the laws of England are subjected to the imputation that there is something wrong with their marriage. The state of affairs in Spain, Portugal, Malta and similar countries or, with regard to the permission of divorce, in Southern Ireland should be a firm and lasting warning against the incursions of any form of Catholic social teaching into the English constitution. Incidentally, it should be a firm warning to those *soi-disant* humanists who wish to play around in some measure with the Vatican.

Vigilance

The Catholic Emancipation Acts, 1829-1927, did not seek to emancipate forces designed to act towards the subversion of a non-Romanist constitution. Every step should be taken to defend the constitution of the country against Roman Catholic incursions. At the same time, the freethought movement might well take further steps. It has done good work in such matters as family planning and divorce law reform. It should acquaint itself with the *Ne temere* decree and its wider implications. A great deal could be done if some register were kept of cases where the Roman Catholic clergy act as did their brethren in

Liverpool in 1931. The widest publicity should be given to any such activity. At the same time, it should never cease to make clear the point that the canon law has neither meaning nor validity in this country. When a Roman Catholic priest enters a household and starts making an appeal to canon law to cast doubt upon the marriage, he is merely playing a confidence trick upon those whom he induces to listen to him.

But perhaps the most serious charge is that the Roman Catholic clergy habitually cast doubts upon the validity of marriages which are fully recognised as valid by the law of the country. They assert, for example, as did the Maltese court, that the marriage is invalid in the eyes of the church as it is contrary to canon law.

Perhaps the freethought movement could do far worse than to agitate for a change in the criminal law which would render it a criminal offence to cast doubt upon the validity of any marriage valid by the laws of England or to purport to perform any sort of so-called marriage ceremony over anybody already validly married in the eyes of the law. Such a legal change would stamp out once and for all the sort of conduct which was observed openly at Liverpool. It is annoying enough to find Roman Catholics interfering to prevent legal reform in such matters as family planning, abortion or divorce. But it should certainly be a criminal offence to go further and to cast doubt upon the validity of subsisting marriages recognised by the law. In the meanwhile, till so desirable a reform takes place, if any freethinker is annoyed in this manner, he should invoke the Justices of the Peace Act, 1361, and take proceedings against the reverend offender for conduct liable to cause a breach of the peace!

Marriage law reform has always been a part of the interest of the freethought movement. It has many facets and calls for much attention. But at least one facet is also a facet of the clash between Papist and non-Catholic with the accompanying warning that freedom of thought must mean the eradication of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in every direction in which it may spread.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

CENTENARY LECTURES THE MEANING AND VALUE OF FREETHOUGHT

Chairman: DAVID TRIBE

Friday, May 27th
FREETHOUGHT AND PHILOSOPHY
H. J. BLACKHAM PAUL FOULKES

Friday, June 10th
FREETHOUGHT AND SCIENCE
Dr. E. H. HUTTEN Dr. DAVID STEWART
Dr LAWRENCE KOTKAS

Friday, June 24th
FREETHOUGHT AND LAW REFORM
DIANE MUNDAY ANTONY GREY

Friday, July 8th
FREETHOUGHT AND LIBERTY
TOM SARGENT AVRIL FOX JAMES SHEPHERD
MARTIN ENNALS

Friday, July 22nd
FREETHOUGHT AND SOCIAL WORK
PETER FRYER KERSTINE RICHARDS

Friday, August 5th
FREETHOUGHT AND THE ARTS
OSWELL BLAKESTON PETER COTES JOAN MILLER
JOHN CALDER KATHLEEN EWART

Meetings commence at 7.30 p.m.
CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE, LONDON, WC1

THIS WORLD

Looking at Television

A NATIONAL CONFERENCE to "stimulate discussion about the ways in which teachers and lecturers can take more account of television as a cultural force" was held at the National Film Theatre on May 7. The speakers were sociologist J. D. Halloran, film-maker Peter Watkins, headmaster, A. P. Higgins and adult educationalist Roy Shaw. Though three of the four were Catholics, nothing was said that Humanists could object to and much would be enthusiastically applauded.

MR Halloran traced the psychological origins of the demand for censorship, based on the belief that somebody else will be corrupted or trying to atone for forces at work in oneself. In controlled experiments people's reactions changed with different programmes, but there was to date no sociological evidence that their behaviour was actually influenced. They might learn techniques for crime but not motivations. From Mr Higgin's tapes it was seen how well 14 or 15-year-olds in a Nottingham Catholic secondary modern school could discuss Peter Watkins's **Culloden** and a Tony Hancock excerpt. Mr Shaw, Chairman of TRACK, made light-hearted references to Mrs Mary Whitehouse, but Mr Watkins struck a pessimistic note.

When did you last see a television programme posing the question, "Where are we going?"

IN 53½ hours viewing of BBC1 and BBC2 between April 23 and 29 he found only 7 hours 10 minutes of serious probing, documentaries and discussions and only ½ to 1 hour which really stuck its neck out. Producers are always looking over their shoulders.

I believe we are entering a period of no questions any more.

HTA AGM

THE following day was the AGM of the Humanist Teachers' Association, now 160 strong. As Don Baker is returning to Bechuanaland in September for a further period of two years, John White was elected Chairman. Dorothy Roberts and "Mac" Denison were re-elected Secretary and Treasurer.

SECULARIST Ray Bott, lecturer at the Froebel Institute, was well-received guest speaker. He pointed out that Christianity does not recognise the social pressures in society against co-operation and love or how social experience transforms the human animal into a human individual. Referring to the work of Professor Kingsley Davis and Jean Paget, he explained how children pass in four stages from a purely egocentric standpoint to one of rationality and moral realism. Authoritarianism reinforces egocentricity and thus retards development. In this way RI was a positive hindrance to moral maturation.

A suggested syllabus for a course in moral education for secondary modern schools was distributed. It was generally felt that while moral stories were useful in primary schools, a formal syllabus, which might include abstract ideas and formal injunctions, would not be.

Humanist Holidays

MRS MARJORIE MEPHAM, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, invites bookings for a Humanist holiday camp in Snowdonia during August. Unaccompanied children aged 10 and over are taken during the first two weeks. The cost will be about £6 per week, with reductions to those who bring their own tents. Please send 3s booking fee per party and 10s deposit per person per week.

THERE are still some vacancies for the indoor holiday centre at Aberystwyth August 13-27, mainly for the second week.

Punch-Up

FREEHINKERS have always been able to laugh at themselves, and *Punch*, May 4, gives them an opportunity. The centre page spread is given over to the following topic:

The National Secular Society has asked the Minister of Education to replace Religious Instruction and Worship at schools with a Syllabus of SOCIAL MORALITY AND CITIZENSHIP.

THERE is an extract from the *Eton Secular Hymn Book*, concluding

Till all peoples, from the far
Regions where the icebergs are
to the isles of coral,
Daily grow more secular,
Daily grow more moral.

AFTER a Parliamentary Report comes an extract from a school report:

SOCIAL MORALITY: Fair. Still lacks outward and visible sign of inward and secular grace.

A straight talk from the Supervisor of Morals, who recommends lots of healthy exercise to keep one's mind off religion, is followed by OLD BOYS' NEWS with "congratulations to J. J. P. Cobb-Rawlings ('58) on being unfrocked". A stained glass window at Trinity College, Cambridge, depicts Bertrand Russell in patriarchal pose striking a rock from which flow Logic, Rationalism, Doubt, Disbelief and Agnosticism. In an examination paper on the subject three of the questions are

- Draw a sketch map of the journeys of Tom Paine (*a minor blemish here as the faithful always say "Thomas"*).
- Provide three brief arguments that can be used with equal validity to refute a belief in water divining, faith-healing and life after death.
- Write brief notes on any three of the following: Bernard Shaw, flying saucers, Brigid Brophy, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, H. G. Wells, The Epilogue, Saints, ESP, Ghosts, *The New Statesman*.

Penalties on Opinion

AFTER the savage sentences on two Russian writers comes a vicious sentence on the South African lawyer, 58-year-old Abram Fischer. He received life imprisonment for "conspiring to commit sabotage". Whatever the literal truth of this allegation there is no doubt that he would like to see the "overthrow of the régime". In this he is not alone. But 8 years of the sentence sprang not from any overt acts or suspected plots but simply his membership of the South African Communist Party. This is a party that the late Dr Edward Roux thought worth leaving, but libertarians will maintain Mr Fischer's right to join. From his defence speech:

I shall be able to bear with fortitude any sentence which this court may impose on me. It will be a fortitude strengthened by this knowledge at least, that for 25 years I have taken no part, not even by passive acceptance, in that hideous system of discrimination which we have erected in this country and which has become a byword in the civilised world today.

TRYING to help Naga reconciliation as member of a Peace Mission, the Rev Michael Scott has been expelled by the Indian Government and all his documents and recordings confiscated.

Can't Be Turned On and Off

CHIEF JUSTICE EARL WARREN of the US has recommended an institute of law and ethics. He points out that people will not obey a law they do not respect, and that law with an ethical basis will help mould the thinking of individuals. Shock waves of violence are always seen

FREETHINKER

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

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.

Manchester Branch NSS (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.

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

INDOOR

Havering Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre) Gubbins Lane), Tuesday, May 24th, 8 p.m.: W. H. PEARCE, "Historic Houses of Essex and Suffolk".

West Ham and District Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead Green, E11). Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.

Humanist Letter Network (International): send s.a.e. to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

THIS WORLD *continued*

after wars, which lead to deterioration in civilization. While not necessarily pacifists, Humanists will agree that it is difficult to orientate certain individuals in society when they are decorated for violence one day and punished for it the next.

Humanisation

THE HOME OFFICE is to allow more prisoners to work outside during the last 6 months of their term, so that they may support their families and save something for release. It will also aid reabsorption and enhance self-respect. At the same time working conditions in side prisons are to be changed and the number of industries cut from 36 to 9.

WEXHAM PARK HOSPITAL near Slough is to have single-storeyed wards and provision in the children's unit for mothers to sleep in with their children.

Swings and Roundabouts

THE SIMON POPULATION TRUST is promoting voluntary sterilisation for men along lines popular in many other countries. It consists of vasectomy, an operation which is usually reversible but is most to be recommended when the family is already of sufficient size.

AT the same time the Ministry of Health has taken a retrograde step. The Minister seemed strangely unable to understand objections by MPs, notably Mr Leo Abse. Doctors are now allowed to charge patients for the Pill if prescribed on "social" instead of medical grounds. It is always tempting for Governments to get money for what people would willingly pay for if they had to. But such short-sighted policies overlook the fact that the first people who will do without the Pill if it isn't free are those on small incomes who are least able on "social" grounds to have more children.

NO COMMENT

"Myra went to a secondary modern school, stayed on and took a commercial course. At 13 she saw a boy drown in a canal; this had a profound effect on her. She became religious, thought of becoming a Roman Catholic and received instruction. Later she became a bit flighty and unstable"—*Observer*, May 8.

"A mass march and a mass Mass were the climax this week of Poland's millennium celebrations. . . . One of the organising priests claimed that two and a half million pilgrims had come by Tuesday. Most foreign journalists estimated between 300,000 and 600,000. . . . Beer was served from lorries throughout the proceedings. Every now and then one of the drinkers would put down his mug, walk a few yards and fall on his knees in prayer, then return to the truck and his drinking companions. Many people went so far as to drink and sing hymns at the same time"—*Sunday Times*, May 8.

WAYSIDE LAWYER

F. H. Amphlett Micklewright

AS reported in the FREETHINKER (April 29), the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council has ruled that the freedom given to an individual under a Constitution to propagate ideas includes the freedom to circulate those ideas. Admittedly, Privy Council judgements are not precedent; but they are of highly persuasive authority. The freethinker has a constitutional right to propagate his ideas. He therefore has a right to circulate them. Attempts to keep the FREETHINKER out of public libraries or to ban secular humanists from the radio fall sharply under criticism by means of this important judgement.

The condemnation by the highest court hearing overseas appeals of religio-political discrimination is one which all freethinkers should remember. It goes far towards supporting their own claims for freedom to circulate their ideas just as it warns them against what they may expect if clericalist domination is ever exercised in England again.

THE TALBOT HOTEL, KIRKGATE, BRADFORD

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
SATURDAY, MAY 28TH, 7 P.M.

CONFERENCE DINNER

Speakers include

DAVID TRIBE, F. J. CORINA
and Dr CYRIL BIBBY

Tickets 7/6 (members) and 10/6 (non-members) from
Head Office, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1

ANNUAL CONFERENCE (members only)
SUNDAY, MAY 29TH at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

HUMANIST BROADCAST

Kit Mouat

(This is the text of a broadcast given in *Woman's Hour* on March 29. It was introduced as follows:

You may remember hearing other people in this occasional series whose views are within the Christian tradition, and on Friday we heard a personal account of conversion to Christianity. Today our speaker is a Humanist. She is Kit Mouat, author of *What Humanism Is About* and *Humanism in Women*, and she contributes to several papers and periodicals. She came to our studio recently and told us her own Humanist approach to life.)

"MY CONVICTIONS are fundamentally secular and Humanist. My beliefs are positive, and as I accept the positive responsibilities of Secular Humanism, I inevitably reject all forms of Christianity from the Pope's to Dr. Robinson's. I grew up in a home of co-existence, my agnostic father had broken away from the Non-conformist Church, but he never tried to convert my Christian mother. When I was 16 I watched my mother die. She left a letter to say that I might feel closer to her if I read the New Testament. I read it many times but it's her laughter that I remember and Jesus seems to have no sense of humour. I didn't find any concern for beauty either in the Gospels, apart from the language they are written in. But as I grew up I had all the aesthetic nourishment anyone could want, in the ballet, which was to be my career, in music and the visual arts, in nature and in poetry. The idea of a God, male female, or abstract, seemed quite irrelevant to me and it still does, so I call myself an Atheist.

Work of Freethinkers

Both my parents were busy with voluntary work for the local community and I took this sort of activity for granted. The shadow of war and the shadow of unemployment, slums and poverty could not easily be shrugged off in the thirties. I was asking questions about the very existence of Jesus and I only gradually discovered the books that answered them. This sort of book is rarely found in libraries or shops. Christians made so many claims I wanted to know if they were justified, and I decided for myself that usually they were not justified. I found it exhilarating and comforting that countless great men and women, as well as ordinary people, had come to the same conclusion. I began to see how much had been done to increase the freedom and happiness of mankind by Freethinkers as well as by Christians, and I realised how much responsibility for suffering lay in the Christian message and teaching.

As I grew up I never came in contact with another Humanist, but I knew where I wanted to belong. It became more and more important to me to recognise the difference between dreams and reality and between fact and fiction and to avoid labelling fiction, truth. I believe as a Humanist that it is essential to educate people for maturity, and the development of the whole personality, and I think that all indoctrination whether it be Communist or Christian makes a mockery of education. I do not think children should be denied the freedom to make up their own minds, and they must be given the opportunity to avoid hypocrisy and pretence. These in the Humanist view are basic human rights, and they are far too often denied to our children today. As an Atheist I have of course been threatened with all kinds of horrors after death, but if you don't believe in dragons they can't frighten you. I believe that death is no more to be feared than sleep. What matters is not death, or any world to come, but life in this world here and now.

Christianity male-dominated

For five war years I enjoyed a man's freedom in the WRENS, I think I was probably a Feminist before I was a Humanist. Even if Jesus had attracted me as a hero figure, which he never did, I would have been put off by the masculine structure of the Christian faith with its Father God, only Son, Male disciples, Popes and Clergy. In Humanism there is no automatic privilege granted to one sex, race or nationality, we don't look back a mere 2,000 years into a sudden dark, but feel ourselves part of the whole evolution of Man. There is for us no chosen people, no absolute truth, our country and period of history take their place in the five thousand or more years since man began to educate to create, to care for the suffering and to preach love, justice and wisdom.

Humanism brings us down to size, but not as miserable sinners. We accept responsibility for what is wrong with the world, but don't rely on any supernatural being or power to help or hinder us, we are all involved. At the same time Humanism brings confidence for mankind, and mankind alone wins the credit for all that has been achieved in terms of compassion, ingenuity and vision. We know that man is a social animal prepared to cooperate for mutual benefit. I believe that if we don't make our own purpose in life then it will have none, it's as simple as that. And this is I think a powerful incentive to living fully, and trying to provide the opportunity for others to live with an equal satisfaction. For far too long men have justified every form of cruelty by reference to the Bible or to the so-called Divine Will, as it is interpreted by priests.

Humanism and social work

Even today reform of our cruel law on abortion and homosexuality is obstructed for theological reasons. As a Humanist I want every child that is born to be a wanted child, but education in contraception is also hindered for theological reasons. This shocks me just as deeply, I am sure, as any Christian can be shocked by blasphemy. Of course morality matters, but morality is not dependent on belief in a God or a creed, it never has been. It seems to me we are still gagged and bound by Christian assumptions about what people are, what they want, and what they should be. We have to learn to re-think and to challenge these assumptions all the way.

I have been married to a most tolerant Christian for 17 years, and I hope that our teenage son has learned that people who disagree can love and respect one another. Toleration and democracy are an essential part of Secular Humanism, a Humanist dictatorship would be a contradiction in terms. But genuine toleration I think depends on a clear understanding of differences in beliefs and motives. We don't achieve anything by pretending that differences don't exist. Instead of such toleration in this country, I am afraid, we often make do with apathy based on ignorance.

Harriet Martineau described her escape to Atheism like this: 'I lingered long in the stages of speculation and taste but at length I found myself, with the last link of the chain snapped, a free rover on the broad bright breezy common of the universe'.

For me this sums up Humanism as an attitude of mind and as a way of life in which I find emotional comfort, intellectual stimulation, and a driving force for living."

A MILLION OF US

F. J. Corina

ACCORDING to the *Sunday Citizen* for Easter Sunday, a Gallup survey conducted on behalf of ITV religious broadcasting authorities shows that 85 per cent of the nation "believes in God", but only 2 per cent state "categorically that they do not". From this, it would seem that 13 per cent fall into the class usually described as "don't know", and no doubt would embrace anyone from hesitant agnostic to other forms of intellectual castration.

There are several other breakdowns in the survey, including such illuminating comparisons as how many say their prayers and how many think babies should be baptised. But it is the 2 per cent "have nots" and the 85 per cent "haves" that I am concerned with at the moment. To make any sound analysis from the figures quoted, one would need to know just what sort of questions were asked, and as we are told nothing of this, one is entitled to be suspicious, especially of such a statement as only 4 per cent are "against religion in schools".

"Rejected" atheists

But the hot-cross bun for survey stupidity should go to the amazing discovery from the inquiry that "the person most rejected as a potential neighbour is the atheist". Distributed throughout the total population, 2 per cent of any class, even criminals, would find it difficult to make their presence apparent to the point of being "the most rejected as potential neighbours". The more one thinks about this the more fascinating it becomes! How does one reject the atheist as a potential neighbour? Does one openly challenge the newcomer to the street or district by asking him on moving-in day, "By the way, old boy, are you . . . er . . . an atheist?" and if the answer is "yes" does one then make it clear that the newcomer is less welcome than, say, a coloured neighbour might be to the average godly white, or a Jew to the average Christian, or a bus conductor in uniform to the average middle class godly commuter? Or, whisper it softly, even in these days of pontifical kisses at the top, a Catholic to the average Protestant, and *vice versa*?

On balance I should have thought the atheist neighbour would be the most difficult to distinguish of all "different" people. The Jew, or Catholic, is much more likely to betray his difference by some easily detectable religious custom or insignia. The coloured man needs only to be seen, and the bus conductor, or other common person whose work necessitates some disgusting state-provided uniform, like the electricity man or postman, stands out a mile in any god-fearing neighbourhood. Whereas the atheist, sinister enough, but without marks to betray him outwardly (for we gave up wearing horns early this century) can infiltrate anonymously into any neighbourhood and pursue his fell deeds without a breath of suspicion, so long as he keeps his FREETHINKER tucked well under the cushion of his easy chair when the Christian neighbour pops in for a chat, or to borrow something. His absence from church on Sunday would never arouse suspicion, for Dr Gallup tells us that 95 per cent of people do not think churchgoing necessary for the good and useful life, and only 10 per cent of God's hordes of believers bother to go to church themselves, anyhow.

Atheist status in North

So how do you winkle out that horrid 2 per cent to make it clear that you reject them as potential neighbours? Or is Dr Gallup just talking a lot of nonsense, evoked by asinine questions that would be allowed only in a religious

survey? My own experience of neighbourly relationships with atheists is quite the opposite, and here I am far more competent to judge than Dr Gallup. In the North of England at any rate the atheist long ago ceased to be a figure of neighbourly anathema. Maybe the South has not caught up yet, but in the North people who have any feelings at all in the matter are usually proud, in a curiously inverted way, of having a known atheist live amongst them. He can, indeed, become quite a showpiece.

That's him! Over there! Nice chap, really. Very sincere, you know. Of course, I don't share all his views, but at least you do know where he stands, and that's more than you can say about a lot of the parsons.

I think the evil eye passed from the atheist to the Communist in this country at the start of the Cold War, more than 20 years ago. Fashions change, of course, in the "rejection" of minorities as in other things. I can certainly affirm from wide experience that in the North the atheist is not only an acceptable neighbour, but often a publicly respected figure. I think it has something to do with the atheist being something a lot of people really envy, but somehow dare not be themselves. Never to my knowledge has there ever been a rate reduction appeal based on "loss of amenity" because of the presence of atheists in the neighbourhood. Never has the value of a house dropped because the one next door held an atheist. As the best known atheist in the West Riding I can personally vouch that in the past two years, as God called his own to him and nearby residences became vacant, there was an almighty rush to acquire them despite my known presence in the neighbourhood. So one can only assume Dr Gallup has been asking the wrong questions, in the wrong places, or of the wrong people.

Voices for sanity

Now, that 2 per cent doesn't seem much, does it? But it does mean that there are more than a million of us *willing to own up to being godless*: and the real significance lies in those italics! Not, in my submission, a million undesirables, unfit to be the neighbours of our godly fellows, but a million voices for sanity; a million examples of how to live without the gods—and be that much more civilised, at least; a million examples of the truth that man is capable of extricating himself from the humiliating quagmire of superstition in which 85 per cent of Britain is still floundering in varying degrees of ignorance; a million testimonials to the fact that man has the inherent capacity to get off his knees and stand on his feet and speak out in defiance of the greatest Lying Brainwashing Conspiracy of all time!

A million of us who in one way or another, sometimes by our very presence ("Seems a decent sort of fellow for all that"), sometimes by our activities ("He may be an atheist but he does a damn sight more good than that toffee-nosed priest"), or sometimes by our words ("He talks more sense about religion than those who believe in it"), act as a constant corrosive against the nonsense, humbug and hypocrisy of the Black Militia. A million of us who must have contributed in no small measure to the conclusion that even Gallup had to concede in his report to ITV—"Britain, while not a non-Christian country, will not accept church-going as means of expressing faith".

If that were the only fruit of the first hundred years of the NSS and its allies it has been worthwhile, and is good to think about. But we must permit ourselves only a glance backward. Our work still lies ahead.

LETTERS

Joanna Southcott's Box

IT IS REGRETTABLE that encyclopaedias are not always to be relied on. A small box easily lifted by one man was opened on July 11, 1927, at Church House, Westminster, under the auspices of the late Harry Price of the Society for Psychical Research and, as you say, found to contain nothing of moment. What grounds existed for connecting this box in any way whatever with Joanna Southcott were not disclosed, nor could be ascertained.

This Society immediately issued a denial that Joanna Southcott's Box had been opened and has continued to do so ever since. Unfortunately the "opening" made a good newspaper story and was well written up and even accepted by publishers of encyclopaedias. Once these are published, however erroneous, there seems to be nothing that can be done. Thus the lie prevailed against the Truth—as might be expected in a devil's world. It might, however, have been thought to be obvious that this was not a Box of Scaled Writings, weighing 156 lb.

We are quite satisfied that the Box has been handed down in safe keeping since Joanna's day, and will be available when the Bishops call for it—such being the Will of God.

PANACEA SOCIETY

Believe It or Not—Credo Again

UNFORTUNATELY I missed the notice written by the mysterious Mr Oswald Blakeston; but in my review of *Credo* I purposely mentioned "sensuous body or delphic clarity" to show that I had considered categories. The difference for me between (say) Browning and Mr Douglas is that I feel Browning is often inspired—although a great deal could have been presented more tellingly in prose—but that with *Credo* the communication is patient craftsmanship rather than inspiration. Maybe I played it down a little as I realise that once a book has been submitted to an editor for criticism, there is nothing an author can do, if he believes in free opinion, about an unfavourable review; and as the man with the last word, I wanted to err on the side of charity.

I hope that as a critic I am not so obtuse that, after reading Mr Douglas, I could imagine he would care for the short story he mentions; but as the editor did not submit it to him for criticism, his personal reactions are irrelevant to this discussion. Anyway, this is certainly my last word in this matter. My one pleasure is all the publicity my notice of *Credo* has brought the author.

OSWELL BLAKESTON

(This belief has also died—Ed.)

World Peace and Esperanto

I THOUGHT I made it clear in my letter of February 25 that Britic is a simplified version of English as spoken more or less well by 500 millions, including Glen P. Turner. But it is written phonetically with 27 ordinary letters, each one representing a single ordinary, but invariable sound. Speech thus becomes visible and shorter and there is no need to learn to spell. Hence it can be learnt by foreigners just as a child learns to speak.

It is sponsored by World Language Association, 17 Midland Road, Leeds 6, who will no doubt be glad to send information to anyone interested.

CYRIL HEYES

(This correspondence is now closed—Ed.)

Fluoridation

I TRUST you have had a large batch of correspondence about fluoride. I missed the item on March 11, but reading it now I should say "the present writer" knows that books are needed to deal with all the issues.

Out of all the chemical details and the rather limited work on results, there is one important factor. Natural fluoridation occurs in *deep waters containing many other trace elements*, whereas sodium fluoride is to be added to surfacewaters. Trials are obviously influenced by the very fact that teeth become a topic that parents discuss, who are more conscious of their children's eating and sucking habits.

While certain people are pushing and others have a fixed idea about using the public water supplies, there is little or no work being done on an *alternative*. There may well be a chemical better than fluoride that would need only annual painting on. Enough effort has already been wasted to show that in the end an alternative method or a complete change in habits is the only hope of saving children's teeth—and this would help adults as well, which fluoride does not!

JIM LITTLE

I RESPECT Francis Corina's qualms and scruples as regards the encroachment of centralised authority upon the individual, although he shows little consciousness of the distinction between liberty and freedom. Manipulating a heavily loaded argument—one reels under the blows of declamatory invective: "incessant brainwashing", "ready-made Whitehall rubber-stamp", "well-meaning bigheads"—he urges himself to an astonishing height of indignation. I trembled to turn the page.

However, one presumes he knows there are already 25 (approx.) chemicals in drinking water to make it hygienic and palatable, and decides he must draw a line at the 26th, though there is of course "pure" water obtainable from the chemist. But what are the "compulsory medicators" in "more sinister fields" that authority, the perennial bogey and potential "tyrannical master", might foist upon us?

He is unfortunate, but one's sympathy is somewhat dispelled by the questions begged and assumptions made in the article, superb though it is as highly-coloured diatribe.

A. M. CLEVELY

MAY I, at length and at last, as I have been wanting to do since the days of Chapman Cohen, recognise the FREETHINKER for what it has purported to be. Mr F. J. Corina's article on the dosing of our drinking-water in the interests of statistical "science", in reply to what I believe was an editorial in favour of this filthy notion, convinces me that, in publishing Mr Corina's objections, you are returning to radical freethought.

Please, now, give some objections to vivisection and cruelty to animals. I am sure these would be sincere. The Roman Church will gladly join your "monologue" in case you decline.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER

Bruno Statue

READERS may like to be reminded of the Bruno statue erected in Rome about 1889. In that year the NSS Conference agreed to send £60 towards it.

Anyone visiting that city during the summer holidays should make a point of going to the Campo di Fiore to see the statue, which was erected on the exact spot where Bruno was burned in 1600, and which was placed there in spite of extreme Papal opposition. Last year Joseph Lewis went and placed flowers there, and we did also. The people (stallholders, workers, etc) in the Campo were delighted. I feel that a gesture towards those people who pioneered the way to freedom and the spread of knowledge can only do good.

ELIZABETH COLLINS

OBITUARIES

WE REGRET to announce the sudden death of Mr William Frederick Trask at the age of 79. He had been a member of the National Secular Society and a FREETHINKER reader for many years.

Mr Trask was severely wounded during the 1914-18 war and was still receiving treatment at the time of his death. His wife cared for him with great devotion throughout the years. Mrs Trask also does much work behind the scenes for the FREETHINKER.

The deceased was a member of the Machine Gun Corps Old Comrades Association and a number of its members attended the funeral at South London Crematorium on May 2. Mr W. McIlroy, General Secretary of the NSS, conducted the committal ceremony.

MR JAMES TILLEY, a long-standing member of the National Secular Society, died recently in London. He is survived by his two sons. The funeral took place at Lewisham Crematorium on May 3.

ADVERTISEMENT

VATICAN IMPERIALISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY by Avro Manhattan (412 pp) (42s—40 per cent to FREETHINKER—plus 1/7 postage). At present obtainable in Great Britain only through Freethinker Bookshop (103 Borough High Street, London, SE1). American readers can obtain in America. A book you *must* read.

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.