

# FREETHINKER

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## ACTS OF GOD, GORILLAS AND DOGS

THE RSPCA HAS REPORTED that every year in this country more than a quarter of a million healthy dogs are destroyed as unwanted. The existence of the Society owes much to the 18th-century rationalists. Christians believed of course, that animals had no "souls" and so weren't worth bothering about. Although this country was the first to organise such "prevention of cruelty", the Church was so apathetic that the Bill was resisted and derided for many years. The Pope refused to sanction the society, because it was, he said, based on "theoretical error". There is nothing theoretical, however, about the cruelty that did and does go on. The National Secular Society has, as one of its Objects and Principles, "The extension of the moral law to animals so as to secure for the legal protection against cruelty, including all types of blood sports". It is a concern which leads many Humanists to be vegetarians, and others to wish they had the moral courage to follow suit.

No Christian, surely, could continue to believe in the orthodox Christian God when they have seen a dog in a thunderstorm, its ears back and body trembling, barking in fury at the growling but unseen sky-monster. Dogs shut in a room at night when there is a storm scratch frantically to escape. Their "Creator" never informed them that sudden flashes are not necessarily harmful and that the sky-din cannot hurt. Human soothing and stroking is better than nothing; man-made drugs may help, but nothing will convince the animal that the Great Dog Almighty, with its Infinite Bladder and capacity for making rains, is up to any good at all. The storm is not "supernatural"; it is just the enemy, out of reach and loaded with terror. The barking stops and the dog whines, cowers and crawls into the dark, forced to suffer because of its inherent lack of understanding. It's something, perhaps, that no one has thought up a "Fall of Dog from Grace" to explain it all . . .

The dog has "sense". It turns away from the sky where the storm comes from, towards those who have proved that they understand at least something of animal needs.

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Its two-legged brother-man still tries to identify the Unknown with one All-Purpose Godly Cause, kneeling to "it" for protection from the evils for which it must be held responsible. It is like asking a cigarette manufacturer to save humanity from lung cancer.

At lot still needs to be done if animals are to be saved, not so much from the unknown as from the neglect, money-making, and sentimental vices of human beings. Like humans, there are just too many of them. Perhaps a combination of family planning and more expensive licences (as suggested by the RSPCA), with the very lonely and OAPs exempted, and propaganda to condemn the iniquities of toy breeding would help, but first and foremost there is the need for more education. This country is not full of animal-lovers; it is full of sentimental people who would rather leave their fortunes to cats' homes than to starving children, but who, all the same, do not hesitate to degrade or ignore the basic animal dignity.

"Morgan", in the film of that name, identified himself with a gorilla; but it was mostly the celluloid King-Kong brand, not the real animal as described so winningly by George Schaller in his *The Year of the Gorilla* (Collins, 1965). Sir Julian Huxley is quoted as saying

"It is . . . both scientifically legitimate and operationally necessary to ascribe mind, in the sense of a subjective awareness, to higher animals. This is obvious as regards the anthropoid apes; they not only possess very similar bodies and sense-organs to ours, but also manifest similar behaviour, with a quite similar range of emotional expression, as anybody can see in the zoo; a range of curiosity, anger, alertness, affection, jealousy, fear, pain, and pleasure. . . . We just cannot really understand or properly interpret the behaviour of elephants or dogs or cats or porpoises unless we do so to some extent in mental terms. This is not anthropomorphism: it is merely an extension of the principles of comparative study that have been so fruitful in comparative physiology, comparative cytology and other biological fields."

And Schaller describes the gorilla community as a dictatorship of tolerant and gentle males who win not only the obedience but also the affection of the females and the young. They are lenient fathers; only the females quarrel, with annoyed barks. Gorillas mate only when the females want to and make the first approach. The babies may stay with their mothers (and even be suckled) up to the age of 18 months, and the "adolescents" leave the group when jealousy is likely to occur between the adults. Gorillas frown when annoyed, bite their lips when uncertain, and the young have tantrums if thwarted. Gorillas are vegetarians and are only fierce in defence, when the females cover their heads with their arms and make no attempt to retaliate. They often die from respiratory diseases, catching colds most frequently in the periods of heavy rain. "If gorillas had a religion", writes Schaller, "they would be sun-worshippers . . ." as were primitive

men. But the "link" is still "missing". The gorilla is "an evolutionary dead-end". Schaller speaks for all of us when he writes:

"... man should show some ethical and moral responsibility towards creatures which resembled him so closely in body and mind. Then man has never learned to treat even his own kind with compassion."

Not even the dog he dotes on. Dogs he brings into his home until they become a bore and are dumped without means of identification somewhere in the country. Dogs which then become a financial burden on the community, a danger to road-users and sheep, and have to be destroyed in their tens of thousands.

## A BATTLE WON FOR INTEGRITY

ON SUNDAY 12th JUNE, 1966 eighty per cent of the sixth-formers of Worcester College for the Blind insisted that in the interests of maintaining their integrity, and in the exercise of their consciences, their attendance at College Chapel should be voluntary. College tradition had made such attendance compulsory, and the Headmaster suggested that any action on the part of the sixth form in violation of this tradition could result in their expulsion.

This year Worcester College is celebrating its Centenary. Entrance to the College (the only school in the UK and Commonwealth giving education at secondary level to blind boys going on to university) is wholly on the basis of academic ability and certification as a blind person. If the Headmaster carried out his threat he would make it virtually impossible for these boys to continue their education elsewhere, and equally unlikely that they would be able to go to the universities, which have already accepted them on the contingency of success in their "A" level examinations. In fact, if expelled, they would presumably be unable even to sit their "A" levels, as Worcester College alone has facilities enabling blind candidates to sit for the various Boards' examinations.

Recent leavers from the College have won, and are winning, honours and distinctions at Oxford, Birmingham, Reading, Sussex, Leeds, Nottingham and Liverpool Universities. Graduates are making distinguished contributions to the intellectual professional and cultural life of Great Britain and the Commonwealth.

During the last year the students' annual *The Pimpernel* has published articles written by the boys ridiculing the Establishment, substituting a new image for the blind in place of the pious "stick-bible-and-basket" image of the bible-thumpers and the RNIB, and revealing that at least two-thirds of the sixth-formers were revolted by the Labour Government's support of the US in Vietnam. The Headmaster was embarrassed, but, being rather proud of his boys, took the attitude of disagreeing with what had been said but approving their right to say it. The 1965 *Pimpernel* sold four times as many copies as any previous issue, but for the first time the RNIB failed to put it into Braille, not by direct refusal but by offering excuses and evasions.

It was a hard-hitting article about Vietnam in the 1966 annual, along with an analysis of Capitalism v. Socialism and a really telling polemic against religious coercion inherent in the 1944 Education Act that brought about the crisis. The Headmaster tried to persuade the Editor,

No, the "dumpers" are most unlikely to be Christians intent on preserving their faith. If you ask them if there is any proof at all of the non-existence of their God which they could accept, the answer is none. Such is the force and the weakness of their belief. But at least Dr Schweitzer, the exponent of "Reverence for Life" from malarial mosquitoes and white ants to Africans, maintained that he could "find nothing in the world to show that God governs and directs it". (Gabriel Langfeldt). One thing is certain, if we don't do something (as the RSPCA put it) to "help remove the stigma of the neglected or stray and unwanted animals", no amount of praying or faith will do it for us.

Eddie Harper, to withdraw some of the copy, but he and his Board refused. Although throughout the year the prefects had been trying to persuade the Headmaster to make chapel attendance on Sunday a voluntary procedure, there being, so far as they knew, no legal requirement for "assembled worship" on that day, the Headmaster's attitude hardened. When the sixth-formers suggested that they might stay away from chapel unless attendance were made voluntary, there was an outburst of anger and the comment, "Do you realise that I could expel every one of you, and be backed by the Board of Governors and the RNIB?"

(The Head of the Science Department has since reported to Miss Brigid Brophy—who told the Editor—that the sixth formers won their case. The FREETHINKER would like to salute and to thank them for the encouragement they will give through these pages to so many other students fighting the same battles. This story was unfortunately *not* taken up by the Press.)

NOTE: The situation regarding books for non-sighted non-Christians is not satisfactory. In the RNIB Braille catalogue of books, 13 of the 102 pages are taken up by religion, including the Bible, Prayer Books, Missals, Psalters, the Catholic Truth Society's booklets, Peace With God by Billy Graham and the Mothers' Union Service Book. The suggestion seems to be (as it so often is) that if the customers are not Christians, then they ought to be. Would anyone who is informed on the situation regarding facilities for blind Freethinkers or Humanists, please get in touch with the Editor who will be interested and grateful.

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

## GENTENARY LECTURES THE MEANING AND VALUE OF FREETHOUGHT

Chairman: DAVID TRIBE

Friday, July 22nd

FREETHOUGHT AND SOCIAL WORK  
PETER FRYER KIRSTINE 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

## HOW I BECAME AN ATHEIST

Marion Waine

YOU HAVE SEEN MY NATIVE LAND, perhaps, as you travelled by rail between the manufacturing centre of any large city and the pretty gardens of the semi-detached belt. Our nearest gardens were a 'bus ride away. We were surrounded by thousands of people who liked to call themselves middle-class, mostly ruled by Victorian grandmothers, everybody's relations, who had the world neatly arranged for us.

First, they said there was the Upper-Class, moneyed people and employers, who lived in country houses. They liked us, their employees, to show honesty, sobriety and respectability, and we were in their clumsy, unpredictable hands. Below them, many families like mine, standing back a little from the dishonest and part-criminal, held grimly on to steady jobs, for lack of honesty meant police interviews, stretches "away", and children in reform schools; drunkenness meant immediate dismissal and loss of respectability, that step downwards which they were determined never to take.

### Sunday Schools for virtue

The middle-class drove their children to Sunday Schools in their search for help in teaching the necessary virtues. There young girls from twelve years old upwards taught me that Jesus, a meek and mild person who lived a long time ago, was born at Christmas time and loved children like me. For myself I added that he never got dirty and wore a straw hat. His father, God, a strange figure lurking above me, saw everything and had his own ways of catching me out.

I did not think it strange that my parents were not churchgoers; grown-ups weren't, except Catholics, who were different. They obeyed their priests and they had big families, which was their business. We were great on minding our own business.

So my world remained secure and neat until, at the age of nine, through the provisions of some ancient charity, I was suddenly pitchforked into a grammar school. This was supposed to be my first step into the Upper-Class, and I didn't like it. God, Arnold of Rugby and Rudyard Kipling were the rulers here, and very odd I found it. Scripture now consisted of psalms to learn (with a mystery called "pointing" which I never mastered), as well as characters called Mephibosheth and Ahitub. Ever since then I have had more biblical knowledge that I have known how to use.

### Class solidarity

One event which marked my new status was the General Strike of 1926, when we walked miles to school or daringly hitched rides on lorries; regular attendance was made both a point of honour and a sign of solidarity with the Upper-Class. If our parents were on strike we never mentioned it.

By now I had been confirmed, was taking Communion regularly, and, passing through an adolescent devotional phase, was trying to love the gang of louts who terrified me purposely on my way to school. A mission organiser (and born busybody), I was making arrangements for recently returned missionaries and local clergy to visit and lecture to selected classes. (One of the clergy from my own district caused subdued barracking by referring to his

parish as "a slum". He must have needed subscriptions badly, poor man, but we regarded this as an inexcusable baring of our origins.) After the lectures the headmistress, the visitor and I took tea together.

And so came my Waterloo. Picture a cheerful young woman freshly returned from China, but probably, further back from Cheltenham and Girton. Casually placing her cup, she said in her high, innocent voice, "If only we could teach them how very wrong it is to sell their children whenever there is a famine . . ." Now, I knew a little about poverty and quite a few families where the birth of a new baby had meant something very like starvation for its brothers and sisters, which put me on the side of the Chinese. Suddenly I was shaken by the thought that this pleasant young woman did not know that when honesty and hard work are not enough to keep starving people alive, then their struggle to survive will be pitiless. To me she appeared Upper-Class. To those poor Chinese, had she been preaching an Upper-Class God?

### Discovering Atheism

Thinking at last, I searched out several devotional and unsatisfactory books from the Public Library, trying to find out more about the nature of God. Still puzzled, I found Bernard Shaw's *The Black Girl and Her Search for God*, then J. S. Mill and Thomas Paine. Some of these writers, it seemed, did not believe that God existed at all, which answered my questions all at one blow.

Panic set in. Although I stopped reading and began to pray, my belief slipped rapidly away. It was time to ask for advice. The vicar said that everyone doubted sometimes (which was news to me) and it was best to behave as though one had faith and to pray harder for its return. So I did, until one evening during the "Stations of the Cross" service I walked out in near-hysteria. My Divinity teacher said she was busy, and lent me a book I had read already. My parents looked at each other and laughed. Only my grandmother was left, the stalwart of my civilisation, and she sniffed, "All that stuff's all right for them that like it", she said.

### Through guilt and loneliness to peace and comfort

The worst things about unbelief, I found, were guilt and loneliness, until I reached a Teachers' Training College where, practically penniless, the students spent their spare time in talk and I found others like myself. Gradually the Bible became just a book, God somebody else's idea, and Jesus, that haunting figure of my childhood, a pathetic man of two thousand years ago. The first time I said, "I am an atheist" meant such relief and peace to me that a friend, who was trying to re-convert me at the time, gave up in despair. "If you weren't so happy," she said, "I might be able to do something with you."

So now, after thirty years, I can smile at my thought that God might be Upper-Class, an image created from a youthful mental prison, and express my grateful thanks at last to the little missionary who helped me to think my way out of it.

[Next week in this series John Shaw describes how he Became a Humanist.]

## NEWS AND NOTES

WHETHER RUTH FIRST were a Communist, Tory, Anarchist, Roman Catholic, Quaker or Humanist would make no difference to the monstrous inhumanity of the South African 90-Day Law by which she was put into solitary confinement for 117 days. That law has now been repealed and replaced by one that is even worse. Whatever the faults of the TV production in which Mrs First acted her own story in the hands of the 1966-style Inquisitors, these facts came over clearly enough. But are we to presume that the producer omitted all reference to her Communist views because, if they had been revealed, the viewers might have sympathised more with the persecutors than with the victim? If this is so, then there is also "something rotten in the state of Great Britain" and no mistake.

### The right to die with dignity

BBC 2's programme on Euthanasia on Wednesday, 29th June was disappointing, although two doctors spoke realistically and compassionately against the law which demands that we all be kept alive as long as possible, no matter what torture, degradation or despair is involved. One would like to think that the Roman Catholic who spoke so glibly and inaccurately from the calculating theological point of view, had been chosen deliberately to persuade viewers into a more charitable state of mind; but, as material giving an Anglican clergyman's views in favour of reform of the law was cut completely, this was hard to believe. It was also unfortunate that the last interview was with a man whose desire for death seemed to reflect most on the absurd notion that the man has only one place in the home, and that is as Head of the House. Confined to a wheel chair and reduced to the subordinate position traditionally allotted to women, life for this man was clearly doubly impossible. One felt that the answer to his problems need not necessarily include either euthanasia or the opportunity for suicide, but a fresh draft of air about male and female companionship with no Top Dogs. The subject of euthanasia should surely not be limited to BBC 2. When will the Powers that Be accept that the problems of Birth, Death and Sex are really more deserving of serious attention than Sport or Property? Religions have denigrated the value of this life in favour of a life to come, and have distorted death so that it must either be ignored or glorified; they have much to answer for.

### "Quasi"? "masquerading"? "cloak"?

MR HAROLD WILSON has condemned the Rev Ian Paisley and his Protestant supporters in Ulster as a "quasi-Fascist organisation masquerading behind a clerical cloak", which is surely carrying Courtesy among Christians beyond reasonable limits. The *Sunday Times* pointed out that

"... the bigotry is not all on one side in Ulster. The Catholic minority contains militants, too, and their insistence on separate schools teaching the Irish language and Gaelic games has hardly helped to produce one nation..."

nor, of course, is Mr Wilson trying to produce "one United Kingdom" with his demands for even more money for segregated schools, which are surely the root cause of such mutual Christian hatreds. It is an ugly business and it needs attacking, at the roots.

### Vatican denial of Communist accusation

THE VATICAN has described as "unfounded and gravely

offensive" the Communist reports that it has shares in a Danish firm manufacturing contraceptives. You pay your money and you make your choice...

### God's Representative

THE IDEA of Pope Paul solemnly studying the conclusions from his commission on birth control is rather like trying to visualise an elderly, unmarried Deaconess studying a Women's Institute report on prostate gland operations, and deciding whether men shall be allowed to have such operations with anaesthetics or not. Only it is very hard to imagine anyone taking such a pronouncement seriously. And quite right too...

### Rationalist wedding in Ceylon

THE FIRST EVER was in May between Mr and Mrs Balasubramaniam, who took the oath in English and Tamil exchanged rings and were married. No priests, prayers or hymns. Mr Abraham Kavour of the Ceylon RPA presided and advised the couple to "have as many children as you like, and not as many as you can have..." (*The Times of Ceylon*).

### Methodist facts and figures

THE DECLINE in members of the Methodist Church has lately been about 9,000 or 10,000 each year. Total membership is now 701,306 with a loss during 1965 of 10,959. There is also serious falling off in lay preachers (the *Guardian* reports). Mr T. Goodhall, Methodist Church Press Officer, said that, "This is not in any way restricted to Methodism. It is a problem confronting the Church throughout Europe..." We can be quite sure, however, that Christians will think of some way of keeping up their spirits, even if it is only by trying to persuade Humanists that there really isn't any difference between believers and non-believers who share some of the same ethics.

### The "best tunes" don't seem to help

THE PRESENT INTAKE of the Salvation Army's College is one third less than 10 years ago, while the Church Assembly has blamed the decline in Anglican recruitment on "the intellectual uncertainty and secularism which is widespread at the present time" which is "linked with a diminution in the number of committed Christians and a shortage of converted men in the ranks of the church at large..." No mention, of course, of any possible increase in intellectual integrity or the rejection of false creeds. But then there is no cause for complacency on the part of the non-religious until this, too, can be proved.

### So that's the trouble...

RUTH GRAHAM has told a reporter of *The Times* that when her husband, Billy, speaks at home "nobody argues". No wonder he looks so smug and so happy, and no wonder he is so scared of those who are prepared and anxious to argue with him and who have had lots of practice.

### Curious classification

UNDER "AMUSEMENTS GUIDE" the *Evening Standard* has advertised "Transcendental Meditation" of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi "for people in every walk of life..."

"To be well is the purpose of all being... Yet mankind in general is ignorant as to what constitutes human well-being." FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE (1820-1910)

## THE TROUBLE WITH ROBERTS

Phyllis K. Graham

"WHAT IS, AFTER ALL, THE VALUE OF ALL THE REFORMS OF VATICAN II IF A MAN CAN BE LIBELLED BY A BROTHER-BISHOP AND BE DENIED REPARATION?" John M. Todd puts the question in his preface to "*Archbishop Roberts, SJ*", the biographical sketch of this controversial churchman by David Abner Hurn, published by Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966. The vital issue of human justice in conflict with religious officialdom is the main theme throughout these frankly revealing personal studies.

"If you can be treated like this," exclaims a distinguished Catholic layman and publisher, "what happens to ordinary priests and laity?"

What, indeed. We find here a staggering exposition of the sort of thing that goes on all the time, everywhere, behind the arrogant façade of One-Holy-Catholic-and-Apostolic Infallibility. That other practical truth-teller, Dr Anne Biezanek, has given us a searing account of the hell provided here and now by Holy Mother Church for the married laity. I quote her conclusion here because it is a shrewd insight into the Kremlin-structure of ecclesiastical tyranny examined in this present book.

### Fetid horror

"This is the ultimate position of fetid horror that the priests have brought the people to. But . . . the priests themselves are by no means free agents. It is the authoritarianism and totalitarianism of the Roman Canon Law that has worked this outrage on reason, truth and religion alike."

She voices the misery of a laity unable to express its agonised struggle between conscience and the claims of Church law, a laity in bondage to a priesthood which refuses to help or understand. *Why* it refuses is made painfully clear to her by repeated experience; it has also been poignantly expressed by the Archbishop: "What I have found so shocking is that obedience is rendered in sheer fear." The priests behave heartlessly because they are not free to do otherwise . . . they are equally in bondage to fear and to higher authority.

A high dignitary and famous public figure like Archbishop Roberts cannot, of course, be pulped and pushed down the oubliette with quite such all-out efficiency. Especially when he happens to be an Englishman: a rugged John Bull in appearance and Anglo-Saxon to the core, with a passion for the sea and a preference for travelling on tankers alongside the crew and living as one of them "with a towel round his waist in the tropics the same as the rest". Somewhere in this burly Briton is a devastating dab of ice-cold French logic from his mother's Huguenot forbears: and that, with a sardonic sense of humour and an *enfant terrible* capacity for posing untraditional questions, makes him too formidable an adversary to be silenced. Vatican II indeed did its best by circumventing all his efforts to speak at the Council; but since there is a Press and general public eager to hear what the Church would prefer to leave unsaid, the views of Thomas Roberts have gone round the world and left the Vatican looking more foolish than before.

### The sleeping monster

Yet the juggernaut set in motion to subdue the tongue and quell the spirit of this mitred son of Loyola is identical with that which hounds to ruin the obscure priest or torments the member of the laity who dares to set conscience against "immutable law". It has been well said, "The Inquisition is not dead, but sleepeth". It woke to full vigour in the Second World War. If public outcry checked

its activities, and Pope John's ecumenical lullaby put it to sleep again, its current rôle must be described as purposeful somnambulism. It is chiefly the reform of this "sleeping" monster, more gracefully entitled "the Holy Office", which preoccupies this present victim of its secret machinations. And *secret* is the operative word.

The Archbishop is speaking from the pain of personal experience, as well as for every member of the Church seeking justice and human rights, when he says:

"In theory, anyone delated to the Holy Office is assured of a fair trial. Yet, despite the safeguards laid down clearly, in practice the present application of secrecy to judicial proceedings of the Holy Office results in the denial of justice to persons wrongly accused."

"Once an accusation has been made—be it lodged on high enough authority—the defendant is powerless. Not only is he unable to protest himself, but if he attempts to do so his action is regarded as a fresh crime. At the root of this perversion of justice is the obsession with secrecy most characteristic of the Holy Office."

This secrecy blocks the course of justice as fatally in the matrimonial courts, causing endless delays and unnecessary suffering. It surrounds the Curia like the clouds on Sinai, preventing investigation and frustrating the reform of Canon Law.

### Vendetta

In 1960 a positive vendetta launched by the hierarchy against its "odd man out" involved him in a series of libellous accusations, leading, among other things, to an unjustified attack by the Holy Office on certain passages in his book *Black Popes* (published 1953) as "scandalous". After consulting two eminent Catholic lawyers he decided to lay his case before the Pope. In a personal interview, December 1960, Pope John promised an enquiry, but the promise was never fulfilled. Nothing has been done since to clear the Archbishop's name. On the contrary he has been consistently cold-shouldered, snubbed, passed over and ignored in public celebrations, subjected to the false position of a man not convicted yet under a cloud of suspicion and hostility. The Vatican could disperse this cloud entirely, but for its own perverse reasons it will not. In fact the present pontiff, far from wishing to redeem the broken promise of his predecessor, has gone out of his way to worsen the position. The shameful treatment of Archbishop Roberts during the eucharistic celebrations in Bombay in 1964 will stand out as a monument to papal malice and ingratitude, long after its victim has been fully reinstated by the sane course of human justice. To gauge the full significance of this sorry showpiece one must read in detail the whole story of Bombay and its Archbishop, from way back in 1937 when a Jesuit accepted a mitre and the tough job that went with it.

That particular job, for which Mother India as well as Mother Church owes him a great debt, is long ago fulfilled and finished; but the Jesuit now seventy-three and domiciled at Farm Street is a tough guy whose "jobs" will only end with his last breath. This book is one of them. Although written by another "under a pseudonym lest others suffer from association with him" it contains much from his writings, expounds his views and above all "lays his case" before the uncommitted public and as many of his co-religionists who will listen. With this in mind he asks the reader "to be part of a jury and to pass a verdict on contemporary ecclesiastical methods".

(To be concluded next week)

## GOD IS A BIG ST BERNARD!

Francis J. Corina

*Francis J. Corina was born in 1904 and, thanks to ex-communicated ex-RC parents, has never been anything but a Freethinker. He joined the NSS in 1920, founded the Bradford Society in 1929 and has been lecturing on Freethought for 40 years. Author of several books and a journalist, he edited the Freethought News 1947-53.*

ALTHOUGH 1966 is the centenary year of the National Secular Society, the ninth centenary of the Norman Conquest, and the centenary of the wonderful discovery of fish and chips, all these, and other things are as naught compared with the world-shaking event of 1966—Malcolm Muggeridge has found God!

Or, to be strictly accurate, God has found Malcolm Muggeridge, because Malcolm says he never really looked for God, never felt he needed one, never felt (until now) the need to invent one. The trouble was that Malcolm didn't know God. Play hard-to-get with God, pretend you're not looking for Him, that you don't care, and by god he'll soon be after you, as Malcolm now knows.

One wonders why God was such an interminable time adoring it, however, for Malcolm is in his early sixties and his presence on this earth, especially since the advent of television, has not been exactly unknown. Malcolm has been abroad on the pictorial air for quite a time now, first expounding his own thoughts to the world as if he were God himself, and later elucidating the thoughts of others, like some Heavenly inquisitor conducting preliminary examinations in preparation for the supreme decisions of Judgment Day.

And what was God doing not to notice Malcolm recently strolling in the Vatican gardens in the company of no less than Cardinal Heenan, head of God's Own Church in Britain? Or was that when He did notice Malcolm, for the first time, and overhearing the talk (some of which we heard on television) thought, as some of us did, that the time was near for Malcolm to be discovered by the Lord in all his (Malcolm's) glory?

It might seem hard to believe that God found Malcolm; easier to think that it was Malcolm who found God, despite his assurances, for we know that man is notorious for finding what he wants, whereas God never seems to make His desires plain, judging by the way theologians tussle together about Him. But if we are to take Malcolm at his word we must accept that it was God who found him. Billy Graham should consult Malcolm on this point. He would get many more converts if he could send God chasing for them instead of asking the reluctant ones to come to Christ.

"I am driven to the conclusion that God wants me . . . God comes padding after me like a Hound of Heaven"—*New Statesman*, May 6, 1966.

If words mean anything at all that is very clear indeed. God wants Muggeridge, so God goes after him stalking him in the fashion of some Heavenly Great Dane, Celestial Bloodhound, or perhaps a Big St Bernard, panting, baying, salivating, and sniffing out the odour of Muggeridge sanctity that has become more and more detectable of late, eager for the final capture.

Ah, but wait a moment, you cynics! It's not that easy. When Mr Muggeridge uses these anthropomorphic terms he doesn't quite mean what he says. If you take those words literally you just don't understand what M.M. is saying. The fact that he doesn't, either, is unimportant. It sounds good to others who are fond of God. Gets you on the Heavenly band-wagon. And the technique is just right for a former sceptic in process of conversion. Talk a lot of intellectual balderdash, such as "the great absc-

lutes, like life and death, and good and evil", or write some almost delusional piffle, and say that *that* is God, and you will be accepted into the fold of religious respectability, for all that is asked today, in the crumbling ruins of conventional religion, is that you call *something* God so that the folly, stupidity and even, sometimes the downright villainy, of those who live by it shall not be exposed.

If you think "almost delusional piffle" is a hard phrase, remember that Mr Muggeridge shouldn't mind. He has given many hard knocks to other people's nonsense and should be prepared to take some for his own. Can one really treat his vapourings with respect? Judge for yourself. One cannot be fairer than to quote his own words.

"What can be said with certainty is that, once the confrontation has been experienced—the rocky summit climbed, the interminable desert crossed—an unimaginably delectable vista presents itself, so vast, so luminous, so enchanting, that the small ecstasies of human love, and the small satisfactions of human achievement, by comparison pale into insignificance. Out of tactical despair comes an overwhelming strategic happiness, enfolded in which one is made aware that every aspect of the universe, from a tiny grain of sand to the light-years which measure its immeasurable dimensions, from the minutest single living cell to the most complex human organism, are intimately related, all deserving of reverence and respect; all shining like glow-worms, with an intrinsic light, and, at the same time, caught in all encompassing radiance, like dust in a sunbeam. This sense of oneness, with the consequent release from the burdens of self, I take to be God—something which indubitably exists . . ."

Amen, Mr Muggeridge!

If any Freethinker can swallow that—especially measuring the immeasurable, and crossing an interminable desert—without choking, he's a better man than I am. So I will let the matter rest now, with Mr Muggeridge safe in the "endless arms" of God, if I may borrow his style for a moment.

Except for the concluding thought that when, a quarter century ago, the sceptical Dr Cyril Joad found God, too (curiously, in somewhat similar economic circumstances—"a little fame some money", as Mr Muggeridge says) it was treated rather sensationally by the publicity merchants. Is it a sign of what Billy Graham calls our increasing secularisation that Malcolm Muggeridge's "conversion" has hardly caused a ripple on the pond? One hopes so, but all the same Freethinkers had better keep a sharp look out for padding bloodhounds and St. Bernards! And Malcolm should stop watching the dust in sunbeams!

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

LUNCHEON - WREATH-LAYING CEREMONY AT  
THE BRADLAUGH STATUE - PUBLIC MEETING

## CENTENARY RALLY

### NORTHAMPTON

SUNDAY, JULY 17th

Speakers include:

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER      DAVID COLLIS  
REGINALD PAGET, QC, MP      DAVID TRIBE  
Dr DAVID KERR, MP      HECTOR HAWTON

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## 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.  
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

British Humanist Association, Fourth Annual Conference, City of Leicester College of Education, August 26th-29th. RICHARD HAUSER, MARGARET KNIGHT, JOE SANDERS, MICHAEL NICHOLSON, "Aggression". Details from 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8.  
Humanist Housing Association, Sunday, July 10th, 3 p.m., Blackham House, 35 Worple Road, Wimbledon. Garden Party.  
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, July 17th, 11 a.m.: JAMES F. HORNBACK, "How Dead is God in the USA?"  
Unity Theatre, 1 Goldington Street, London, NW1. "Inherit the Wind" by ROBERT E. LEE and JEROME LAWRENCE. Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 7.45 p.m. until July 17th. Tickets, 3/6, 5/- and 7/6. Members only (membership 7/6 per year). Box office, EUSton 5391.  
West Hame 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.

## GOSPEL TRUTH!

Oswell Blakeston

IT WOULD be so easy for Jesus Christ never to have existed. His deeds are the deeds of Horus, his miracles a dramatisation of the signs of the zodiac, and his personal life is practically unrecorded. The Four Gospels, for what they are worth, cover only three years at the most; and the time it would have taken Jesus to utter all the discourses attributed to him has been estimated to be a few weeks all told. But Joel Carmichael, author of *The Death Of Jesus* (Pelican, 5s), accepts the assumption that Jesus was a man as well as the myth he became. Using the Gospels as his main source material, he aims to show that the story of Jesus is a very different one from that popularly presented.

It is amazing how the Gospels fall apart when a scrutiner is looking for coherence of fact rather than occasions for edification. Inevitably, the filling in of the gaps, the reconstruction of what might have happened, must be hypothesis; but Mr Carmichael brings immense ingenuity to his theory, and he certainly proves that the incoherence

of the Gospels is a tendentious incoherence, a rewriting of a story to suit a shift of emphasis, the magnification of a herald into a divinity.

### How it Began

What emerges from apparently clear statements in "the sacred texts" is that at first Mother Church was no church at all, merely a surviving group of Jews who combined belief in Jesus as a herald of the Second Coming with pious attendance at the Temple. For the Jews, there was no conflict here, no blasphemy. Had belief in the singularity of Jesus been confined to the Jerusalem Jewish community probably with the indefinite postponement of the Second Coming the cult would soon have been reabsorbed into the main current of Jewish religion and nothing more would have been heard of it. But when the Romans decided to crush the Jewish State and level the Temple, the story of the prophet was transplanted to the lush terrain of Graeco-Roman civilisation; and this was the beginning of Christianity proper.

If one looks with dispassionate concentration, as Mr Carmichael does, at numerous passages in the Gospels, one can see that Jesus was a devout Jew who addressed his message (the imminent material transformation of the material world) to the Jews of his own time and to no one else. The Romans were not particularly worried so long as Jesus preached non-violence; but the only logical explanation of the crucifixion—the Roman punishment carried out by Romans—is that Jesus took to violence and led an armed force when he entered Jerusalem.

### Behold, I Tell You a Mystery

Mr Carmichael builds up this proposition with exquisite care and erudite argument. Later, the story was exalted into a mystery in line with ancient pagan mysteries which Paul, like other Greek-speaking Jews, found so fascinating. Greek thought allowed the story of an executed rebel to be stream-lined into a democratized "new religion" through the divination of Christ, just as Greek thought made it possible for Paul to put over such a fantasy as the virgin birth—an idea absolutely foreign to Jewish culture. The Greeks were quite accustomed to the notion of gods raping men.

It is all most plausible, and Mr Carmichael says it with brilliant subtlety. For instance, he will pick on the lines in Luke 13, 31-33) which record that the Pharisees actually gave Jesus a friendly warning to escape from Herod. Now, Mr Carmichael contends, because this is contrary to the overall Gospel tradition with its written-in anti-Semitism, it is probably authentic and part of the earliest tradition which somehow survived the blue pencil.

The tragedy for us is, as Alfred Loisy wrote, that "what Jesus proclaimed was the Kingdom of God, and what arrived was the Church".

Naturally, it is because of lack of evidence that there have been thousands of "lives of Christ". An abundance of information would have restricted the possibilities. Yet one does not feel that Mr Carmichael is being too fanciful within his own scholarly framework. He keeps the rules, like a good writer of detective stories. If one can grant the possibility that Jesus lived, then here is "history" seen as fact and not as something understood only theologically by the devout. At least one can read this book with an intelligent interest comparable to that stimulated by (say) Sir Felix Aylmer's solution to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

## DAY OF REST?

John Shaw

"SO OFTEN CHURCH-GOING FOLK have expressed regret at missing particular TV programmes", writes staff reporter Malcolm Moore of the *Methodist Recorder*, "that there is a fair case to be made out for having the "telly" as permanent equipment . . . and to have a couple of television sets actually installed in the church." (*Methodist Recorder*, February 2, 1966.) "A usually successful method" he claims, "is to scrap evening worship as such, and to follow the programme . . . A Brains Trust, prayers, or an epilogue can round off the session."

As a guide to church-goers, the following is a typical selection of Sunday evening telly programmes:

	BBC 1	ITV
6.00 pm	Captain Pugwash (cartoon series).	
6.10	News and Weather.	
6.15	Meeting Point.	A girl called Moses (serial).
6.45	Sunday Story.	
6.50	Hymns.	
7.25	Sunday film.	Batman.
9.00	Norman Vaughan Show.	

(BBC 2 offers *Death is a Good Living* at 7.30 pm.)

At the end of the session, church-goers within reach of Leamington Spa can drop in at the "Sunday Special" at Trinity Church, where they will "find a typical coffee scene with eighty to a hundred young people relaxing over their drink and listening to a beat or folk group. This is the Gospel Coffee Bar, with the Gospel Four from the Manchester Catacombes, and the Gospeleaves from Birmingham".

Alternatively, the elderly, middle aged and young, who prefer a quiet Sunday evening, are assured of a warm welcome at their local branch of the National Secular Society!

## LETTERS

### Revaluation of Religion

I AM in complete agreement with Miss Graham's article *Revaluation of Religion*. The efforts of those who are compromising with Religion and making apologies for its past crimes are only prolonging its existence and making more difficult the task of eradicating this blot upon civilisation, the worst obstacle to the intellectual progress of man. A rose may smell as sweet by any other name and Religion will be just as obnoxious under any other title.

S. C. MERRIFIELD

### The International Congress: September 1st to 5th

Will those readers who are ready to help

- (1) as Translators, Interpreters, Guides, please contact Mr S. D. Kuebart, 233 High Street, Brentford;
- (2) as Stewards, please contact Mr George Leslie, 103 Borough High Street, SE1;
- (3) with publicity, and
- (4) the concert, please contact the Organising Secretary, Mr W. McIlroy, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

For some months past the World Union has been without secretary, Mlle Pardon, after over 40 years of devoted, unpaid service, has been obliged by increasing blindness to give up. If a reader with a knowledge of French and German and of keeping minutes would be prepared to *act as secretary temporarily* for the period of the Congress (i.e., for the two meetings of the International Council on the Friday and the Monday of the Congress) will he or she write to me at 23 Streathbourne Road, SW17.

Generally I have completed my part of the congress preparation. It is now the charge of the **The National Secular Society** to see that their guests are well received and that the congress is a success worthy of this Centenary year.

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

### Comfort from Facing Facts

I MUCH APPRECIATED the excellent article, "How I Became an Atheist" by Mrs Middleton, in the *FREETHINKER*, 1st July. A personal confession of the happiness that Atheism brought, of the "great burden" that fell from the writer's shoulders when she gave up belief in god is so very helpful to all those who, like myself, have been indoctrinated in the Christian Faith, but who now find that their minds will no longer accept these religious beliefs.

Atheism is often, by its opponents, said to be a sad negative philosophy. Mrs Middleton's article shows that the reverse is true and that, to become an atheist, is to find reality.

CHARLES HENNIS

### Freethinkers awake!

TO INCREASE the circulation of the *FREETHINKER* it is essential for the weekly to be produced so that its appeal is extended to everyday man, and women (and teenager) and not only to the already converted intellectual reader as at present. Nearly all who have attended elementary schooling, and in later life have had some measure of indoctrination forced upon them, are potential for conversion, providing they can be approached in a language they are capable of understanding.

The Bible, Old and New Testaments contain the language. As well as the hypnotic state which it has left its willing and unwilling students and followers, it also has another side of the picture. It is a document of immoral, obscene and false teaching. It has bred mental stupefaction, and afflicted the mind. The logical thinking condition of the individual has become impaired. Man's reason has been criminally assaulted. Those who have dominated their tyranny whether they are Pope, Priest, Rabbi, or Bishop, must be held guilty of driving the sheep to their abysmal mental destruction.

It is necessary to alert ourselves to the continued curriculum of Religious Instruction, and what it means to our progeny and to posterity. Let us have articles which can be understood by the ordinary person.

M. CYMBALIST

### Too much reverence for Mr Graham

I WAS SURPRISED to see that the *FREETHINKER* has fallen for the pap distributed by the Billy Graham organisation listing him as "Dr" Graham. Billy Graham's doctorate is from the Bob Jones University, a proprietary college with the standing of Woolworth's in the academic community.

ROBERT W. MCCOY  
President, American Humanist Association

### Myth or History?

IS THERE any evidence (outside the Bible narrative) of the existence of a historic King David? Or the other "greats" of the Old Testament? Could readers enlighten me through your columns?

WALTER STEINHARDT

## ADVERTISEMENT

### WANTED: TO BUY

"Jesus not a Myth" and "Thou Art Peter" by A. D. Howell Smith, by P. Kay, 8 Greenhill, Wembley Park, Middlesex. Telephone ARNold 6531.

## STOP PRESS!

PROFESSOR WALTER ARNSTEIN, author of *The Bradlaugh Case* has arrived in Britain and will be speaking at the National Secular Society Centenary rally at Northampton on Sunday, July 17th. Other speakers will be Dr David Kerr, MP, Reginald Paget QC, MP, David Tribe, C. Bradlaugh Bonner, David Collis, Hector Hawton and Councillor R. P. Dilleigh.

Details are available from NSS Head Office, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1 (Tel. HOP 2717).

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.