

FREETHINKER

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THE MIRAGE OF FREEDOM

CHRISTIANS often ask Humanists why they are so bothered about the 1944 Education Act, when they have the right to "opt" their children out of religious instruction and/or the compulsory worship in daily assembly. The answer in one form or another cannot be given too often, and it goes something like this.

Unlike Christians, Humanists do not want to label their children from birth with their own beliefs, ideologies and commitments, but consider it a fundamental right that they be given the information and opportunity necessary to choose their own convictions. Humanist parents and educationalists recognise the need of the young child to belong and to conform within its immediate group, and insist therefore that it is very important that the group imposes no orthodoxies that will threaten the happiness and sense of security of the child.

Christians who would not for a moment condone political indoctrination and who would suggest that religion is even more important than politics, claim to be puzzled by those of us who think (and state) that *all* indoctrination is out of place in anything deserving the name of education — especially when it is provided by the state for citizens who cannot all be expected to subscribe to one set of beliefs.

The problem is particularly acute when there is only one primary school in a neighbourhood, and that a denominational church school, holding church services, with denominational Christian teaching and an atmosphere geared to the support of its church-authority and local priesthood. But in all state schools the difficulties are much the same. When, we may ask, should parents start trying to take advantage of the "freedom" to opt their children out of an assembly that may be a structural part of the school life? Do we let our five-year-olds go to Bible and scripture lessons until they start coming home crying about Hell and Damnation? Supposing we have the sort of child who keeps its worries very much to itself, do we wait for problems to arise in eating or sleeping, and then, without perhaps knowing the real cause of the anxiety, suggest that it could be because a teacher is constantly implying that godless mothers and fathers live miserable lives? Do we

try to find out from the Headteacher just how the subject is taught, and thus from the word "go" risk labelling the child as belonging to parental oddities and perhaps lessen the chance of co-operation in other matters? Do we wait until the child is in real danger of believing what to us (and to most modern theologians) is arrant nonsense, and immoral to boot, which is being presented as "Truth" and "Morality"? And how do we explain to the child that whereas Miss So-and-So should be respected in matters of geography or biology, she is not being strictly honest, accurate or kind as regards religion? Do we perhaps wait until the child treats the whole business as a joke and begins to adopt an all-round cynical (or worse still hypocritical) attitude to life? Well, when *do* we decide to take advantage of this so-called freedom clause so graciously offered to us by Christians who want schools to serve their own doctrinal purposes and seem unable on this score to acknowledge what child-centred education is really about? And when we have made the decision, how do we prepare our children for the state of being left out of school assembly and even possibly sitting alone in a corridor during RI? With the majority of British children labelled at birth Anglican, Roman Catholic, or Jew, it may well appear a sign of weakness to classify a child as a "doesn't-know - but - trying - to - learn - to - think - for - himself - or - make-up-her-own-mind".

Nor do Humanists want their children to be "don't knows" for the rest of their lives. Indeed one of our objections to the 1944 provisions is that the choice is between indoctrination in Christianity and ignorance about it. Many of us know from experience that the child of the agnostic who learns to be tolerant but never learns the facts about religious creeds, faiths, history and obstruction, may in their 20's or 30's be swept away by propaganda or just aesthetics and land up still ignorant in the bosom of a church. Anyway, Humanists are not just non-Christians, we know quite clearly *why* we are not Christians, and we have (if we are fortunate) reached our positive position of Freethought and Secularism by thinking Christianity through to the bitter end. We want our children to know the part that Christianity has played in history and how it stands in relation to other religions and the evolution of Man. We want them also to learn the part that Freethought has played in the battle against tyrants and persecution, for the freedom of the individual, our society, the press and the world. And what are we offered for our children? Daily worship of a Christian god no Christian can prove exists, and which is rejected by all other religions and all the non-religious multitudes; religious indoctrination into beliefs that should be known, understood and critically analysed, but cannot be accepted as any sort of "truth" in the scientific sense; a system of morals which lies at the root of some of our society's worst disasters; an arrogant

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assumption that children who accept the Christian faith without question are somehow superior to (or just more fortunate than those who reject or have never heard of it. The natural logic and decency of the child is being threatened every time he or she asks questions that R.I. teachers dare not examine, never mind answer. Our children are, we should try and suggest to Christians, the victims of a terror of doubt which has been instilled into Christians by the very system of religious indoctrination to which we are now objecting. And object we must. It is partly because of our own apathy and even by our misguided toleration that children today are still caught in this vicious circle. Let those who argue against militancy face the facts: Christians are themselves as militant as ever, ever-watchful of their own privileges and financially able to protect them. If we do not militantly stand up to them, then our children's children will have every right to turn away in disgust at our mere preaching of Freethought and Humanism.

Schooling should be a matter of parental responsibility and co-operation between parents, teachers and children.

FREETHOUGHT AND WORLD COMMITMENT

Kathleen Tacchi-Morris

I SUPPOSE I have always been very lucky because I have never had any religion to get rid of. I was not allowed to go into any religious instruction at school until I was eight, and by then I had had lessons and read books with my father on evolution and the different religions in the world, so knew what it was all about. This had its difficulties of course. I was looked on as something queer by the teachers before I was eight, and afterwards, when I began to ask questions, I was not very popular because they could not answer them. My father and mother were often sent for and asked to curb my ways.

Familiar questions

I have never felt ashamed, or felt I had to apologise for not having any of the many religions, and when asked "What religion?" I have just said "I haven't any". There is usually a look of surprise or shock then some questions, nearly always the same; so I am used to it in any case.

"How can such a nice person not believe in God?" My answer is always: "Perhaps it is because I do not believe in your God that I am so nice."

"No wonder some people think you are a Communist." My answer to that one is: "I know Communists who are religious, and I know Tories and Liberals and Labour people who are Atheists or Humanists or Freethinkers or Agnostics".

"Don't you believe in an afterlife?" When I say no, I get all kinds of replies such as: "What is the point of living?", "If I did not think there was a better life to come I would not want to live for another minute" or "I want to meet my dear mother or father". When I ask where they think they are going after life, they mainly say they do not know, but they know it is better than on this earth. They can never give me any evidence.

Freethought and politics

This leads me to the reason why I think Freethinkers should not say the NSS is non-political. Religion and politics are bound together. It pays to keep the people religious and ignorant. If they think they are going to a better world, they do not bother about this one. Surely we want people to try to make this a better world in which to live.

This indeed is how it can be—except in the field of religion *the only compulsory subject*. Humanists are not the sort of people who readily "opt out" of anything. We don't take naturally to bans, censorship and indexes. The so-called freedom clause in the Education Act causes much heart-searching, although to Christians it may seem adequate. Secular-Humanists want to see state education as *secular* education, and insist that the teaching of religion is a matter for parents and the churches. If Christian parents are too ignorant or lazy to teach their own minority faith, then why should *our* children have to pay for their deficiencies? As it is at the moment, it is the conscientious parents who truly want intellectual maturity and a sense of responsibility for their children who are deprived, in order that the established religion of this country shall not lose face. If every Humanist parent took the matter seriously, however, something would have to be done.

(Religion and Ethics in Schools: The Case for Secular Education by David Tribe (Foreword by Lionel Elvin), price 1s 6d plus 6d postage, is available from the NSS, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.)

I have been trying to get women to take more interest in what is going on around them, not only in their own country but in all parts of the world. I have been successful in getting women's clubs and organisations to twin with towns abroad, or to study a country other than their own in all its aspects. This is making them more active in their own country. I have travelled to Communist countries and attended many of their conferences so as to know what they were doing to better the lives of their own generation and the next. I do this to try to get better co-operation between the women of the world, as they are the mothers of the next generation and they will have much say in what their children do and learn. It is time the mothers realised more now than ever before their great responsibilities in this respect.

The rôle of women

One woman said I was a man-hater because of the work I am doing with women. No one realises better than I that one half of a pair of scissors is no good without the other half. I therefore say women must be more active and able to help the men in all they do. Women have a point of view in all walks of life, and it is up to them to state it, and do something about it wherever and whenever they can. Yes, I agree there have been some wonderful women Freethinkers whom you have mentioned, but today there are not enough, and there must be ways found to help women to think freely on every subject, which includes Freethought of course.

I think women are more emotional than men and therefore inclined to take to a religion more easily, but once they learn the truth and become unafraid of their convictions, they are able to express their views well and in a way other women can understand. There should be more women Freethinkers teaching other women.

My disarmament campaign

I am sure more and more women are realising that one of the first things we must have is world disarmament. Apart from the dangers we are now in, the economy of the world is suffering from armaments manufacture.

We have all got to learn to live together in the world, or we will have to die together. There is no other alternative. Except perhaps for the people who are going to a better world after this one in any case. So you see why big armaments manufacturers and big financiers profit by making ignorant people not bother about this world. What humbug it all is!

THE WAY: AN INTRODUCTION TO HUMANISM (PART 1)

Stefan Tara

"Seek, and ye shall find, let go, and it is lost."

(Confucianism, Mencius xi, 6).

Stefan Tara (b. 1895) is Polish and a retired civil servant. He rejected the RC faith for Secular-Humanism five years ago.

NO ONE CAN PROVE that there is a God who created the Universe. Nor can anyone prove that there is some alternative "power" or "force". If there is a God, we know nothing about Him. We read about God in the scriptures, or we believe in God because somebody talks about him, somebody who also only knows about God from the scriptures. In fact, nobody knows what "it" is that we call "God", so how can we believe in what we know nothing about? We can only imagine.

We do not know how or when the world was brought into being. We only know that the universe exists and that there is life. We can also rightly think that the universe had no beginning at all. Its immensity prevents us from knowing where the end of it is, or if there is any end. We know that the Law of Gravitation keeps the universe together, but we also know that this Law is only a scientific and cosmological Theory of Relativity, and we do not know what that mysterious power is which is in constant action throughout the universe and which we call a "law". We know it only by its effects.

We also know that evolution preserves life by the natural selection of living organisms, and that man is a product of this evolution. We must remember, however, that evolution is also a theory, and assuming that it cannot begin if life does not exist, we have to admit that we do not know much about it. We can only suppose that there is a Power in living things which man does not yet understand and cannot name.

As we know nothing more about Creation, we should stop imagining and bring ourselves to reality; to man and his destiny.

Homo Sapiens

Man appeared on earth and, because he is distinguished from the rest of living creatures by his reason and conscience, he is able to do good and to arrange his life in peace and happiness. But man does not only do good; he also, alas, does evil. The darkness of ignorance deafens man's conscience and he forgets that we all, no matter of what race, are One Great Human Family. Absorbed by his own passions and greed, he causes hardship and suffering. Misled by many "truths", he comes to the crossroads and doesn't know which way to go. He hears the call that the right way is the way of the love of man, the way of mutual kindness, but misguided by his religious beliefs and blinded by selfishness, he cannot see it.

Love the only law

This way of life was shown by all the ancient Indian, Chinese and Hebrew sages, and by all the philosophers of the past and present. They have taught that man must purify himself and practice utter sincerity, that love is the only law of human life. But the earliest thinkers swerved from the truth by adoring their sages as divine beings, and then by organising this or that system of religion based on supernaturalism or mysticism. They borrowed and introduced practices from other religions of the times. And those who came after were so eager to impress on their followers a belief in life after death, in the sacredness

of ritual and in personal salvation, that love was forgotten, and religion finally became expressed only by the performance of religious ceremonies and rites, or by the reading of the scriptures. The moral maxims taught by their great teachers were neglected.

Most religions maintain that imperfection and sorrow are essential features of the world, and that man must obey the will of God or Heaven which is written (by man!) in the scriptures. Brahminism in India, for instance, teaches that this imperfection is the result of an unceasing conflict between the desires for self-preservation among men, and that man therefore must destroy this desire by asceticism and by the mortification of his body. This denial of life involves complete inactivity and purging of personal desires in order to gain the highest satisfaction of "peace and happiness".

Buddhists, however, rejecting asceticism and self-torture, tend to believe in liberation from the misery of the world by meditation; not by destroying the will to live, but nevertheless by ridding themselves of all desires in order to enter the passionless state of Nirvana, the state of declining individuality.

In contrast to the Chinese philosophy of Nature (Taoism) "to live in harmony with the forces at work in the world", Christians (deriving help and comfort from the idea of an "after-life") believe that they are all sinners and that their Christ possessed the nature of a God and redeemed them from sin in order to prepare them for immortality in the coming Kingdom of God, where they will live "as the angels of God in Heaven" (Matt.).

Those religious practices in India which undermine human health, the belief in the transmigration of souls (reincarnation), or the seeking of "salvation" through sectarian fanaticism, and the unsuccessful praying of Christians through so many centuries for the arrival of the Kingdom of God, not only deeply divide mankind but lead religionists to feel like pilgrims and strangers here in this world. The denial of life and the escape from the world (monasticism), or the fanatical waiting for the supernatural life "in the world to come" expecting nothing from this world, make all religionists (from a social point of view) unfit intellectually for a good life here on earth. This is why religion has not brought any improvement in man's behaviour and why the world is still in a sorry mess.

The earliest and most primitive religious man prayed:

Om! May He protect us both!
May He be pleased with us!
May we act manfully together!
Successful may our study be!
Let us not hate one another!
Om! Peace! Peace! Peace!

(Hinduism: the *Katha Upanisad*, p. 211.)

Centuries later the sages spoke these words:

"There is in the world now really no moral social order at all." (Confucianism, *The Conduct of Life*, p. 17.)
"... and the whole world lieth in wickedness."

(Christianity, St. John.)

So, alas, it is in our own time. After 2,000 years of Christianity and of other religions there is no change in the ways of man: Cain still kills Abel.

(To be continued next week)

CONGRESS DINNER

THE DINNER on September 3 was an undoubted success. The two main speakers were Kathleen Nott and Dr Faith Spicer, with representatives of four continents replying. Kathleen Nott, proposing a toast to the International Free-thought and Humanist Movement, introduced herself as an "embarrassed critic". Freethought (she quoted Bernard Shaw) is the only kind of thought that is worth while, and it is of paramount importance at this time when so many people seem to care more about being "with it". Indeed, the age we live in is marked by its pomposity and high-falutin' high-mindedness. We are afraid of being ourselves and are forever seeking psychological security. There is a certain contradiction, Miss Nott suggested, between being a Freethinker and subscribing to a movement, but in genuine Humanism there is always room for creative activity. Secularists and Humanists must give the lead at all times to all forms of heresy. The Secular-Humanist is a natural heretic, but, inasmuch as we are part of a Movement, we have to be careful not to try and form just another kind of church. We should concern ourselves essentially with the human species and not with 19th-century battles. We must all have the freedom to be wrong if it seems right to us to be wrong. . . . Scientific Humanism mustn't pin itself "to the pronouncements of boffins" but to the idea that "nothing human is strange or foreign to me . . ."

PROFESSOR LUCIA DE BROUCKERE (Belgium) replied—for "Europe", saying how similar are the problems faced by the atheist here and on the continent, from family planning and divorce to religious indoctrination in schools. We don't want to dwell on the past, but must remember that some of the 19th-century battles have not been won and others are only just beginning. We should not refuse to accept the handshake of Catholics under certain conditions, but there can be no compromise. Their call for "unity" is a spineless idea. We all want peace; the problem is how and what sort of peace. We must not forget the differences between us. Translating into French, the Professor said just four words: "A bas la calotte!"

MR PARLANE (New Zealand) spoke for Australasia and described the success of the Rationalist movement in his country. But even there, he said, the Roman Catholic church, with its considerable immigration, is attacking the very fabric of freedom in the secular-state education system. He appealed to Freethinkers for more money and more energy with which to fight reaction.

MR GEORGE FLICK (USA) spoke with humility as a citizen of a country 100 times the size of New Zealand with only one representative at the Congress, while France and Germany between them had produced 50. We must either live by Reason, he said, or some crazy people will push the button and that will be that. Our lives must be guided by reason, said Mr Flick, and they will be measured by results.

DR FAITH SPICER, Medical Director of the Brook Advisory Centre for Family Planning, who proposed the toast to "A Planned World Family", spoke with humour, wit and charm, with no holds barred. She came herself from a family of nine (now 46!) but is convinced that unless we speedily counteract the cutting down of the death-rate, the result will be disaster. In the past we have relied on famine, typhoons and bombs for population control. This is no longer good enough, but the **greatest problem is perhaps the strength of the human drive towards**

fecundity. Sexual intercourse is clearly related to the production of babies, and some women will, consciously or subconsciously, make sure that they become pregnant if they can. They will "forget" to take the pill, even IUDs will somehow be internally rejected by such women. The young unmarried very often become pregnant simply because they want to, and not out of ignorance about contraception. The individual needs of men and women must be respected, but these cannot be mutually understood unless couples can learn to communicate more with one another, and to talk more easily about the planning of their family. The individual, as well as society and world organisations, must be convinced that population control is *both necessary and good*. Our urge to create must be related to the needs of society and to the ability of the world to cope with the human beings who are being created.

MR DEODEKAR (India) replying for Asia, described how even the superstitious Hindu peasant will accept vasectomy, but then there is no priesthood to oppose it. Islam is more advanced than Christianity, and is not opposed to family planning. Buddhists take much the same views as the Hindus. While these backward religions support population control, the Church of Rome is its greatest obstacle, not only in Europe but also in the Catholic-controlled Indian states. And Roman Catholics are always trying to spread their influence in India as everywhere else. Rome attracts those who cannot or do not want to think for themselves and are ready to hand over their consciences. But we can talk to RCs, especially about their own religious absurdities, such as when American bishops banned the film of "Baby Doll" and the British bishops did not! We can well ask which of their priests have the absolute truth. We should also ask them why, if contraceptives are forbidden "so as to give God a chance", why God cannot deliberately wreck an artificial device if He wants to. If the pill is thought to be useful to the Church of Rome, it will be permitted; but, Mr Deodekar suggested, surely the only way to settle the problem would be to discover a drug which could be introduced into the incense . . . ! With this splendid idea for a "sacred weapon", the speeches ended with the sincere regret, that the continent of Africa had had no representative. Let us hope that this loss will be made good at the next Congress.

From BARBARA SMOKER, London, SE23

DEFINITION OF HUMANISM ON A POSTCARD

"HUMANISM" is based on the conviction that human experience is the sole source of man's knowledge and of his standards of desirability and morality. So the humanist way of reaching conclusions and deciding on practical action is the "scientific method"—that is, study of all the available facts rather than reliance on preconceived ideas.

Having rejected all doctrinaire systems of belief based on alleged supernatural revelation and infallible authority, humanists feel that human life, here and now, is worth making as happy as possible. It's up to human beings to improve the world in which they find themselves, for there is no god to do it for them and no future life in which the wrongs of this one will be redressed. However, this does not mean "I'm all right, Jack". Man, as a social animal, should be concerned with the whole of human environment, achievement, fulfilment, and dignity.

[Your own definition is invited in 150 words. Send to the Editor.]

H. G. WELLS AND RELIGION

Basil Mager

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21st was the centenary of the birth of H. G. Wells, one of the world's most prolific writers. He died in 1946, and in the period of post-war reconstruction, cold war, the wave of new nationalist feelings in Africa, and the "affluent society", his work fell into a phase of neglect. He had little time for anniversaries, centenaries and such celebrations, but it may be that 1966 will see an overdue revival of interest in his ideas, which have the greatest relevance to contemporary problems. His writing, lucid and lively, was always addressed to the common man, and he strove consistently to liberate the human mind from old habits and the tyranny of outworn traditions, so that his work is of interest to all who are concerned with the freedom of thought.

At the age of fifteen Wells was apprenticed to a draper in Southsea. In his *Experiment in Autobiography* he tells us:

"I was still much exercised by what might happen when my earthly apprenticeship as a whole, was over. It seemed to me much more important to know whether or no I was immortal than whether or no I was to make a satisfactory shop assistant. . . . On my matching expeditions, when I had to go from Southsea to the Landport Drapery Bazaar, I passed through some side streets in which an obscure but spirited newspaper shop displayed a copy of a weekly called the *Freethinker*. Each week had a cheerful blasphemous caricature, which fell in very agreeably with my derisive disposition. . . . When I could afford it I bought a copy. In regard to the religions it confirmed my worst suspicions but it left me altogether at a loss for some general statement of my relation to the stars."

Shortly afterwards Wells was taken to the Portsmouth Roman Catholic Cathedral:

"The theme was the extraordinary merit of our Saviour's sacrifice and the horror and torment of hell from which he had saved the elect. The preacher . . . was enjoying himself thoroughly. . . . For a little while his accomplished volubility carried me with him and then my mind broke into amazement and contempt. . . . this was the sort of thing to scare ten year olds. . . . I looked again at this gesticulating, voluble figure in the pulpit, earnest, intensely earnest—for his effect. Did this actor believe a word of the preposterous monstrosities he was pouring out? Could anyone believe it? And if not why did he do it? . . . A real fear of Christianity assailed me. It was not a joke; it was nothing funny as the *Freethinker* pretended. It was something immensely formidable. It was a tremendous human fact. I realised as if for the first time, the menace of these queer shaven men in lace and petticoats who had been intoning, responding and going through ritual gestures at me. I realised something dreadful about them. They were thrusting an incredible and ugly lie upon the world and the world was making no such resistance as I was disposed to make to this enthronement of cruelty."

Although he was to become tolerant—indeed sympathetic—towards some aspects of religious thought, this contempt of the organised worship of the supernatural was to remain with Wells throughout his life.

By the time of the first World War, he had already made his name as a writer of science fiction, as a novelist, as a journalist and as a prophet. He supported the war, and the emphasis of his writing was on the need for a just and lasting peace maintained by a League of Free Nations. He believed that the division of mankind into sovereign states was an anachronism which should be superseded by one World Authority responsible for managing and directing the economic and political affairs of the entire planet. From the time of the first World War until his death he used his many-sided genius to explain, elaborate and propagate this idea in every possible way.

No account of H. G. Wells and Religion, however brief, can ignore what we may call the religious phase through which he passed during and immediately after the first

World War, and during which he wrote *God, the Invisible King*. He deals with this at some length in his autobiography.

"Everywhere in those first years of disaster men were looking for some lodestar for their loyalty. I thought it was pitiful that they should pin their minds to 'King and Country' and such-like clap-trap, when they might live and die for greater ends, and I did my utmost to personify and animate a greater, remoter objective in *God, the Invisible King*."

Later, Wells regretted this phase:

"I wish, not so much for my own sake as for the sake of my more faithful readers, that I had never fallen into it; it confused and misled many of them and introduced a barren detour into my research for an effective direction for human affairs."

Disillusioned by the Treaty of Versailles, he became convinced of the need for a general history of the world which would show the inevitability of world federation. In 1920 he published the *Outline of History*, the most widely read of all his works. It dealt with the history of the world from its beginning; it is probably true to say that it explained evolution to a wider readership than any other single book (and in doing so aroused the bitter hostility of Belloc and other Catholic apologists). It also traced the development of religious ideas from prehistoric times, and the student of religion can still find no better account of its origins and growth. Wells showed how the fundamental ethical teachings of the great religions were in harmony with his own idea of universal brotherhood. Using the Latin derivation of the word (*religare*, to bind) Wells took religion to mean a complex force which binds men together in a common life, and to this force he was sympathetic. But he was also at pains to show how the teachings of the founders of the great religions have been distorted and given supernatural sanctions by their disciples.

Was Wells a religious man? This is an interesting question for the freethinker. The answer of course is that it depends what we mean by religion. If we go simply by the derivation of the word and take it to mean a binding force, then indeed Wells was deeply religious. But this special meaning of the word (which Wells himself used) is scarcely satisfactory, for the "correct" meaning of any word is the meaning which is most widely accepted. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, "religion" means "Human recognition of superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God entitled to obedience, effect of such recognition on conduct and mental attitude". In this sense—the correct one—Wells was anti-religious. A scientist by training, an atheist by conviction, he scornfully rejected any explanation of the universe, any inspiration of the future, which was based on the supernatural or mystical. His approach was unreservedly humanist.

Any freethinker who is concerned with applying scientific thought to the social problems of the modern world will find a study of Wells' ideas rewarding. Nearly all his novels are instructive as well as entertaining, and of his later works the following can be specially recommended: *The Outline of History*, *The World of William Clissold*, *What are We to Do with Our Lives?*, *Experiment in Autobiography*, *All Aboard for Ararat*. An anthology entitled *H. G. Wells, Journalism and Prophecy 1893-1946* was published last year by the Bodley Head.

[Extracts from *Experiment in Autobiography* are reproduced by kind permission of the Executors of H. G. Wells and Messrs Victor Gollancz, Ltd.]

BIRTH CONTROL AND THE CATHOLIC

Michael Gray

THE SOLE PURPOSE of marriage, according to the Roman Catholic Church, is the begetting and education of children in the true Christian (i.e., Catholic) tradition. The Church has stated that marriage for any other purpose is wrong, and that therefore the performance of the sexual act for any reason other than procreation is also wrong and sinful.

In his book *The Catholic Marriage Manual* (Robert Hale Ltd. 1960) the Rev George A. Kelly makes the usual feeble attempts to prove the sinfulness of using contraceptives by showing how their use is contrary to the laws of nature. He declares that the attitude of the Catholic Church to contraception has remained unchanged through the centuries, and quotes to support him St Augustine who stated that

"Intercourse, even with one legitimate wife, is unlawful and wicked where the conception of the offspring is prevented. Onan, the son of Juda, did this and the Lord killed him for it."

The Rev George Kelly then goes on to say that St Thomas Aquinas considered the sin so serious that it was "next to the killing of an unborn child, one of the greatest vices". St Thomas of course was that highly moral enlightened soul who considered the burning alive of heretics to be one of the greatest virtues.

The Law of God

The Rev George Kelly then makes it quite clear that the reason why the Church's teachings regarding the moral evil of birth control has not changed through the years and cannot change in the future, is because it is not just ecclesiastical law, but the law of God, and as such can never change. He states that "a couple using contraceptive devices at any time is guilty of serious sin because this interferes with nature in a serious way". Having proved that their use is unnatural he then assumes he has proved it wrong, as if the two words were synonymous.

The laws of nature that the Rev George Kelly is so very determined to preserve are those same laws that dictate that animals have to kill each other in order to survive, and that the dominant species, Man, is therefore the most successful killer. Presumably he sees nothing wrong with this as it is in accord with nature. But are we to consider therefore that such things as artificial limbs, skin grafting, brain surgery and blood transfusions are immoral and wrong, since they too are "unnatural"?

"Natural" birth control by unnatural means

Of course Catholics are allowed to limit the size of their family by two methods, either by the so-called "Rhythm Method", which is permissible since it is "natural" or by total abstinence from sexual intercourse (could anything be more unnatural?). The fact that the purpose is the same as when using artificial contraceptives, and that it is just a different (and in the case of the Rhythm Method notoriously less reliable) way of achieving the same end, does not seem to matter to the Church; it is the distinction between "natural" and "artificial" that they are concerned with. Nevertheless married Catholics are still being allowed to indulge in the sexual act in circumstances where the aim is not procreation, even though this is supposed to be the prime purpose of marriage.

Rightly or (in my opinion) wrongly the Catholic Church has always maintained the wickedness of using contraceptives. In his encyclical on Christian marriage in 1930 Pope Pius XI wrote:

"Any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offence against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of grave sin."

This view was also put forward by the Rev George Kelly in his book, which was granted the *Nihil Obstat* by the Censor Librorum and the Imprimatur by Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York (who also wrote the foreword), thus being officially declared "free from any doctrinal or moral error". According to the author "a thousand years from now Catholics may be eating meat on Friday, but at that time murder, adultery, and contraception will still be sins. These latter involve God's law and *not even the Pope* nor a large number of sinning couples can turn wrong into right" (my italics).

Papal sacrilege?

This being so it is impossible to understand why Pope Paul appointed his own experts to form a Papal Commission on Birth Control, unless he committed the unforgivable sacrilege of thinking that he could change God's law if necessary! (Incidentally it would be interesting to know how these "experts" on birth control, led by the [presumably] celibate Cardinal Ottaviani, became so expert in the subject.)

If and when the Pope decides to allow the use of artificial contraceptives, we are left with a fascinating speculation about the fate of those unhappy souls who were condemned to hell for their wickedness in using contraceptives in the past, when it was "one of the greatest vices". It would surely only be fair to organise a mass transmigration of these tortured souls from hell to heaven (possibly via Purgatory), as should also have happened when cremation was declared lawful after eighty years or so of being sinful—an event which sneaked by with amazingly little publicity. However, since it has always been taught that hell is a place of punishment where souls are sent for all eternity we must assume that there can be no reprieve for those already there. It would appear therefore that what you can go to hell for doing one day, you can do the next day and still get to heaven. It is of course possible that all those unfortunates who died with the grave sin on their soul of having used artificial contraceptives have been temporarily housed in Limbo while God patiently waits with the rest of us for the Pope's decision.

FREETHINKER FIGHTING FUND

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The FREETHINKER

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

APOLOGY

Owing to circumstances over which we should have had more control, the last letter on p. 296 of the FREETHINKER was not signed. It came from Mr F. H. Amphlett Micklewright. I apologise.—Ed.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

National Secular Society. Details of membership 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. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

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

OUTDOOR

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

Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street), 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.: MESSRS. COLLINS, DUIGNAN, MILLS and WOOD.

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

Bromley Discussion and Social Group (14 Great Elms Road, Bromley), September 23rd, 8 p.m., ALASTAIR WATSON, "A Christian Viewpoint"; September 30th, 8 p.m., MARGARET MCILROY, "Religion and the Rights of the Child".

National Secular Society, Public Debate, "The Sunday Observance Laws": LORD WILLIS and HAROLD LEGERTON. Caxton Hall, Caxton Street, London, SW1, Friday, November 4th, 7.30 p.m.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, September 25th, 3 p.m., Annual Reunion. Guest of Honour: Professor A. J. AYER.

Tunbridge Wells Humanist Group (Centre for Education and Art, Monson Road, Tunbridge Wells), Wednesday, September 28th, 8 p.m., H. J. BLACKHAM, Canon S. HOFFMAN, MICHAEL POLLARD (Chairman), "Religion in Schools Today".

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.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Harry G. Knight

FOR OVER 170 YEARS South Place has provided a platform for free expression of ideas. As a rallying point for the religious dissenter, the radical and political reformer and the trade union pioneer, and a haven of refuge for those oppressed by the Church and the State, it stood alone in London, an oasis in a vast desert of oppression.

The Society was established in 1793 as a body of Protestant Dissenters. Under its successive names or titles, i.e. Philadelphians, Universalists, Society of Religious Dissenters, South Place Unitarians, etc., there was a clear determination to study and keep abreast of the growing knowledge of the world, at whatever cost to traditional prejudice or opinion, and to do so in a spirit of tolerance.

Throughout its long history the Society attracted those who found the dogma and theology of the Church unacceptable, and who, over a century ago, preferred the

dangerous doctrine of freedom of thought and expression. In 1819, William Fox, the Minister of the Society, publicly protested against the imprisonment of Richard Carlile for selling the *Age of Reason*. "If they will reason," he said, "argue with them; if they write and publish, reply to them; but we must not abet or sanction their prosecution". This was a courageous utterance in those days. The Test Act was still a live issue in those days; general education had but small support, but at the head, attacking the one and supporting the other, were Fox and the Society. Over the years Fox acquired a great reputation as an orator, by his lectures to working men, and as a fiery, radical Member of Parliament. Benjamin Flowers also holds a place of honour in the Society. He was a member holding no office, yet he carried the dissenters views into his own business and was outspokenly hostile towards the war against the French Republic. For this he was sentenced for a breach of privilege to six months' imprisonment and fined £100. Robert Browning, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Thomas Campbell and John Forster are but a few of the names associated with Fox and the Society in the first half of the 19th century.

The Conway Era

In 1864 Moncure Conway became the leader, and added to the dissent of London the freedom he brought with him from his native America. South Place was then Unitarian, but Conway told his Committee in 1869, that he could no longer compose prayers, and substituted a meditative reading in their place. He had become wholly rationalist and a positive humanist. His sermons ceased to become theological and became anthropological. He lectured on all the new branches of learning and science, and brought many of the leaders in these fields into South Place. T. H. Huxley, John Tyndall and Charles Lyell are to name but a few from many. Conway was nothing if not aggressive against all he felt was opposed to freedom of expression and thought. He roundly condemned the House of Lords, was a solid champion of the then emerging trade unions, and was in the van of the fight against the Church over Forster's Education Bill. Wherever there was a radical cause, there could be found Conway and South Place.

In 1887 Stanton Coit became the leader of South Place on the recommendation of Conway, and its present title was born. But Coit was not the right man for the Society, and in 1891 he resigned, although the parting was in no way unfriendly. Conway returned to South Place as its leader for another 10 years until his death in 1907.

In this 110 years under the leadership of its forceful ministers, South Place became the centre of radical thought and opinion. Bradlaugh found solid support here in his claim for his parliamentary seat. Annie Besant and her daughter found a home with Mr and Mrs Conway, when they took flight from the Rev Frank Besant, and Conway was the first publicly to condemn those who spread the rumour of a Bradlaugh-Besant ménage. Charles Voysey, when tried for heresy, found his supporters here. In 1878 the Society organised the World Congress for Liberal Thinkers, which attracted eminent scientists and free-thinkers from all parts of the world.

Since its transfer to Conway Hall the Society has been more concerned with rational education and providing a platform for minority movements. During the last war the doors were thrown open to refugees from Nazi Europe, and it did much to rehabilitate them after their terrible experiences. Many of them are amongst the Society's active workers today.

Now we are planning to extend our activities. We know

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SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

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that revolutions are fought and won in people's minds, and believe that Humanism can bring about this revolution in human thinking and human values that can eventually provide a saner and safer world for mankind. Most of the abuses the Society fought over the years would appear to have been conquered, but this is far from the truth. The Church is still a powerful force that invades young, unformed minds at school, as well as being a powerful string-puller and coercive force. The forces of power and propaganda, that seek to condition and control people's minds, are, through the press, radio and television, more powerful today; and although authority no longer rules through terror, it has an impersonal power against which the individual is impotent.

There is no panacea for all human ills and weaknesses, neither do we want one; instead we need minds that are capable of making their own unconditioned judgments. As Ethical Humanists, we at South Place see our task as one of showing the man in the street how to cut through mythology and superstition and arrive at his or her own balanced judgment of what constitutes a sane, balanced life as an individual and a member of human society.

Utopian? Maybe, but better a vision to strive for than a narrow intellectualism that rejects God, yet takes over the rôle of divine infallibility for itself.

BOOK REVIEW

G. L. Simons

Equality

IT is a common cry that philosophers are an irrelevant breed, too much concerned with abstract quibbling, too little with everyday matters of importance. Sometimes the charge seems just. It is refreshing therefore when an attempt is made to relate philosophical enquiry to practical affairs.

John Wilson's *Equality* (Hutchinson, paperback 12s 6d, hard-case 30s) is such an attempt and is one in a series intended, according to the publisher's blurb, "to demonstrate, through the treatment of problems drawn from contemporary life, the practical relevance of philosophy".

Wilson approaches the problem of equality from within the British tradition of liberal empiricism, i.e., he is interested in the relationship between language and reality. To some extent *Equality* is an exercise in linguistic analysis, but it stops short of the point at which analysis becomes divorced from matters of practical concern.

The book is divided into five main parts. The first part examines equality as a political principle. Historical views are quoted, and an investigation conducted into whether or not equality exists in nature or as an "absolute principle". The second part is concerned with equality "as a fact", and questions are asked about how equality could be recognised in nature, whether degrees of "similarity" between individuals would be sufficient. The related question, concerning the "status" of people "as choosers and creators of value" is considered; the suggestions here are mildly pessimistic. Wilson seems to doubt that the egalitarian can find empirical evidence or sound argument to justify giving everyone equal status in the sense discussed.

In the third part equality is considered as a "formal principle"; in particular it is related to a possible interpretation of morality, i.e., is equality presupposed in ethical theory? Questions about orthodox liberalism are also raised: What constitutes democracy? How is it to be recognised? Can tolerance and moderation be given an objective meaning? And how is equality to be interpreted?

In the fourth part Wilson comments "... if there is anything in the notion of treating people as equal which is ideally justifiable, this is likely to be so not only because that is what rational people would desire, but also because that is what would *make people rational*" (page 152). The second chapter in part four is, it seems to me, the most constructive in the book. It is suggested that the qualities of "fraternity, communication and love" belong with

"treating people as equals". Equality is "a logical prerequisite for these ideals". Hence Wilson does not attempt to justify equality in any *a priori* fashion but tries to show how it belongs within the particular concept of *liberal* society. Little attempt is made to justify such things as fraternity, love, etc. Wilson claims that fraternity is a "greater means of satisfaction than, say, sadism or masochism" (page 156). As a general rule this is obviously questionable, and if equality is to be justified in such a way, we are back with the old business of individual taste being the only sanction. Wilson would maintain that treating people as equals is necessary for a satisfying life; it seems to me that in particular cases this thesis is demonstrably false.

The fifth part of the book considers the specific problems of power politics, class distinction and equality between the sexes. The tone is rather diffident and inconclusive. This of course fits in with what Wilson sees to be his rôle. He seeks to clarify concepts and enable people to think out their own positions rather than to impose his own views.

I cannot help feeling that he falls between two stools. In seeking to make philosophy practically relevant, he fails to attain the rigour necessary in a purely theoretical work and lacks the empirical content that a practical investigation requires. There is padding and occasional banality.

To me the chief merit in the work is that equality—and liberty, democracy, etc.—are shown to be involved topics, more complex than would appear from their easy use in everyday political clichés. But I feel that the analysis of equality is superficial: far too little attention is given to economic aspects, social organisation and politics.

Equality may stimulate other efforts. If so—and this would be good—I hope that they are logically tighter and factually fuller.

LETTERS**Tribute to Charles Bradlaugh Bonner**

THE death of my old friend, Charles Bradlaugh Bonner, has shortened the ranks of the "Old Guard" and has deprived Free-thought of one of its most influential members and workers for the Cause he had at heart.

I have known him for over forty years, and like all who knew him, can never forget his invariable kindness, his ever-ready help, and his old-world courtesy to friend and foe alike.

He made International Free-thought his life work, and was never happier than when promoting its Conferences all over the world. In addition, his proficiency in French—and Latin for that matter—made him a first-class translator of a number of French Free-thought works. His translations always read as if they were originals.

H. CUTNER

A Christian's view of RI

AS A regular Christian reader of your paper, may I comment on Margaret McIlroy's *Christians Consider School Religion*. Like all others of her ilk she makes "much ado about nothing". Having myself been subjected to RI in school I have only one recollection of it, and that of being held up to ridicule in class for daring to tell the teacher I preferred to believe the Bible account of creation to his clearly atheist views.

The idea of teachers "trying to convert children", is too ridiculous. In our Scottish schools, any teacher who has such ideas will very soon find out that the authorities frown on the very idea.

Don't Freethinkers (whom I personally think, think very little), know that they can opt out of RI, my father would not allow me to take "the catechism" forty odd years ago. Legislation won't make either Christians, nor Freethinkers, and what is called RI is loaded on the atheist side, in my humble opinion.

Why don't atheists advocate something constructive? Since they claim to be such a large majority, "God is dead", "the Bible out of date", etc., etc. Do what we Christians have done for years, provide our children and all others who wish it, with real religious instruction, at our own cost.

To all of you this Christian Fundamentalist says this is a free country, the best way to combat error, is to teach truth. We committed Christians who have long since learned that an ounce of energy is worth a ton of words, since the knowledge of God, is of first importance in practice, which is what our atheist friends do not, they are so busy condemning others, they are doing nothing but talk.

CHARLES MCKAY

(This is a fairly typical example of letters received from Christians although being in red, blue and green ink, rather more cheerful than most.—Ed.)