

# FREETHINKER

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## THE SERMON ON (OR OFF) THE MOUNT

A REPORTER on the *Guardian* recently compared the FREETHINKER to a church magazine, and (if we are to be at all charitable) we can only presume that he was trying to compliment the clergy. Today, then, let me address you all after the fashion of the clergy as—

My dear Brethren,

I want to ask you in all seriousness, "When did you last read the passages in the New Testament referred to as 'The Sermon on the Mount'?" Years ago, you say? Then may I beg you, from the bottom of a heart overflowing with missionary zeal, to turn to your Bible *now* and to read it again? By such means, dear readers, Christians become Freethinkers and Freethinkers are confirmed in their conviction that the Christian faith is outstandingly irrelevant in 1966.

As you have no priests to guide you, let me try to help. You must not be concerned by the fact that Luke (vi, 17) insists that Jesus spoke "on level ground" having come "down the hill". As gospel contradictions go that is small fry. Anyway, "The Sermon on Level Ground" really doesn't sound so poetic, and if the Bible is not effective poetry, is unreliable historically and is disastrous as a guidance to morals, we might well ask (brethren) why it is still treated with so much reverence today. Indeed, the "sermon" is not really a sermon so much as a collection of sayings which are closely related to those of Lao Tzu (500 BC), the Jewish Talmud and the Old Testament. But it is a brave man who would try to prove that Jesus ever said anything original; that is, if he existed at all, as we are now assuming.

We are told that many people are "blest": the poor and the sorrowful, the gentle, the conscientious, the merciful and the peacemakers, and, of course, the martyrs who suffer "insults and every kind of calumny" for the sake of Jesus the evangelist. And if you are poor and persecuted, gentle and merciful, the chances are that you will gladly accept this small comfort, especially if there is no one else around to tell you that poverty is something to get rid of and sorrow and grief may not always be inevitable. The message of this Man on the Mount is reactionary: he upholds obedience to the existing law of morals, which, in

his view can never be changed or repealed. Anyone who challenges that law "will have the lowest place in the kingdom of heaven . . ." and who would be content with that?

In Leviticus we read "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart . . . thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge . . ." But Jesus adds the threat ". . . he who sneers at him will have to answer for it in the fires of hell". As for adultery, it isn't enough not to "sin" physically, for "if a man looks on a woman with a lustful eye, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart" and no doubt there were as many hearts full of adultery then as nowadays. If men divorced their wives for anything other than unchastity, that too was adultery, and anyone who married a divorced woman was also an adulterer, and back we are again on the short road to eternal-belsen. No matter how modern Christians re-interpret those "eternal fires", Jesus believed in them literally, and intended those who disagreed with him to suffer in them.

Quakers turn to this "sermon" to justify their refusal to take any sort of an oath. Protestants read it and protest that RCs "babble like heathen", and in their different church Christians all say that we should take "the plank" out of our own eyes before criticising the specks in our brothers', and then go on criticising with religious zeal. When Jesus told his audience that they should "turn the other cheek", he was merely echoing Confucius, who said (rather more constructively) "Recompense injury with justice and kindness with kindness", and Lao-Tzu who said "The good I would meet with goodness. The not-good I would also meet with goodness", but he makes no acknowledgment to those philosophers who, so long before him, had admitted that *they* were only passing on the wisdom of previous ages.

Although Jesus never got around to saying (as Buddha is said to have said) "Never think or say that your own religion is the best. Never denounce the religion of others. Do not decry other sects . . ." He is said to have said "Be careful not to make a show of your religion before men; if you do, no reward awaits you in your father's house in heaven . . ." and it is a great pity that so few Christians have taken this to heart. He also said ". . . when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in a secret place; and your Father who sees you" (wait for it) "will reward you . . ." This should surely be quoted on National Days of Prayer and on all other occasions when Christians are making a public display of their worship. It could well be used as an argument against compulsory prayers in schools. Humanists can also draw attention to the fact that their own arguments against prayer are put forward in the Sermon on the

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Mount, for (Jesus said) "Your Father knows what your needs are before you ask him . . ." which is logical enough with all that omnipotence and omni-presence. As for fasting, if you are going to go without meat, then you should do it where no one notices (same prizes as usual are offered).

"You cannot serve God and money . . ." has made very little impression, and "You cannot force people to serve a god without money" would have been more to the point. As for saving and making any sort of provision for the future, the sermon makes it clear that "only heathen" are concerned about such things; goodness knows, "Each day has troubles enough of its own" without our being anxious "about tomorrow". Let someone else worry about the bomb and its buttons, the population explosion and starving children, the epidemics and crime rate, abortions, education and slums. Why should human beings behave any more responsibly than the "birds of the air"?

## WHERE DIALOGUES CAN WORK

*Kenneth J. Ead (b. 1920) is an Atheist bus conductor who rejected Christianity (and the Exclusive Brethren) in his teens.*

RECENTLY I have been concerned about the amount of talk between Humanists and the Churches, I have feared that this intellectual involvement would mean nothing to my kind of people. It was only a short shift of the imagination, however, to realise that we are all probably more deeply involved in this than is apparent at first sight.

The very fact of going to work and mixing with people of different shades of opinion and beliefs, the very fact of the tolerance one meets and gives, proves that we have common ground. How many times a day, up and down the land, do Christians and Atheists, Anglicans and Agnostics, Roman Catholics and perhaps Buddhists, during the course of their work, discuss their beliefs and leave each other richer and better informed?

To bring this to a fine point, I am an Atheist with an abhorrence of religion and superstition, working amongst 700 men, some God-fearing, some God-less. My own workmate is a Church of England Christian, with a reverence for the church and its teaching. Yet he as Driver and I as Conductor, of the same bus, work together in unison and have a more than ordinary respect and esteem for each other. Side by side we fight common battles, as active Trade Unionists, as active Socialists and confer one with another about work and the benefits to be gained for workfellows as a whole. We realise that we have a great deal of common ground, and on this we have stood shoulder to shoulder.

If my colleague and I spend time on our discussions of aims, which we agree are correct and true, we also spend time on our differences too.

"How," I ask him, "can you believe something, for which there is no tangible proof?"

"How," he asks me, "can you live this life without hope?"

He speaks of an unshakeable "faith" in a Saviour who lived and died 2,000 years ago. A Saviour who died to save him (and me, for that matter) from wickedness and erring ways. When I point out to him that he doesn't impress me as being wicked or particularly sinful, he speaks of "Original Sin" and the necessity of being cleansed from carnal lusts and a certain innate wickedness in us all.

After some advice about not being a hypocrite and the equally ancient "do as you would be done by", we are warned to "enter by the narrow gate"; and you needn't look to the sermon for any encouragement to develop a broad outlook or an enquiring mind. But even believers who call Jesus "Lord!" should not rely too much on paradise; unless they advance the godly good-cause of narrowness they will be told at the Pearly Gates by the sermoniser himself, "I never knew you; out of my sight, you and your wicked ways . . .!"

"When Jesus had finished his discourse", we read, "the people were astounded at his teaching; unlike their own teachers, he taught with a note of authority . . ." But perhaps for "authority" we should just read "threats" . . . ?

And so, dear brethren, read Matthew 5, 6 and 7, I beseech you, and your Humanism and Freethinking will be strengthened and confirmed.

Your friend and editor.

K. J. Ead

"But," I tell him, "I have hope! I hope that when my days are done, I'll be able to look back and say that this world is a better place, not so much because of any small thing I have done but because the whole of mankind, in whom I have 'faith' is gradually moving towards a far, far better, happier, freer, ultimately more satisfying existence than was ever thought possible under the shackles of religion."

"But your faith," says he, "is misplaced. Your faith must be in Christ crucified, for eternal life and salvation."

I reply that I don't even believe in eternity, except as an entity that washes over all of us, as it does, without fear, or favour, over past, present and future.

"Your faith," I say, "can only be as a dream, and a dream of a very troubled sleep. My faith is tangible, its object visible, and the worthiness of both the 'faith' and its object can be seen and judged. You too put your 'faith' in people, or else you would not be an ardent Trade Unionist, nor work so hard for Socialism. You have some of my 'faith'! Why haven't I got some of yours?"

And so we return to our common ground, agreed on so much and determined to continue the pursuit of social justice together, but never without a respect for the other's sincerely held beliefs. So do I believe that I am daily committed to finding common ground, with Anglicans, Catholics and many another religionist, without in any whit currying favour, or selling out.

## BOOKS OF INTEREST

*A small Selection of Books from the Freethinker Bookshop.*

- Poverty in Sicily *Danilo Dolci* 8s 6d, postage 8d.  
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 Morals without Religion *Margaret Knight* 12s 6d., postage 8d.  
 103 . History of a House *Elizabeth Collins* 1s, postage 3d.  
 The Nun Who Lived Again *Phyllis K. Graham* 6d, postage 3d.

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## THE WAY: AN INTRODUCTION TO HUMANISM (PART 2)

Stefan Tara

MANKIND IS NOW at the parting of the ways. The problems of the growth of population and of general disarmament are still unsolved. Some people still believe that by praying we can save ourselves from the catastrophe of over-population and from extermination by the H-Bomb. But how can we avoid disaster if religious leaders only care for the inviolability of their doctrines, saying that birth control is against the Will of God or against the Law of Nature, and, while preaching "Thou shalt not kill", bless our armaments? If we were more realistic we should not wait for a miracle, but would make the most of ourselves here and now. This is the right and the duty of man, the only meaning and purpose of his existence. Our aim, the aim of human beings possessing intellect and conscience, is to create those conditions on our mother-earth whereby we can all live in peace and happiness.

### The Golden Rule

Six hundred years before Jesus, Confucius, an ancient pioneer of Humanism, found the secret of good life in men and their good relationships. His central ethical principle, "what you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others" is in reality nothing else but the teaching of Love. Jesus also formulated a law of human relationships in a similar form, "All things whatsoever ye would that man should do to you, do ye even to them:" (Matt.). This principle proclaimed down the centuries gave us the secret of a good life; there can be no Liberty and no Equality without love, as there is no Fraternity if it is not warmed by sincerity and by sympathy. The wisdom of all-embracing love is the expression of man's intellect, and none can be insensible to it just as no living organism can be indifferent to the rays of the sun.

So, as a good life consists of love, and as knowledge liberates us from fear, Humanism rejects all traditional religions as baseless and imposes on man the responsibility for his own life, for, "The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge." This maxim, this New Golden Rule, however, should not be expressed only by talking about love and by praising the virtues of science, but by living it simply together. We should, whether we be laymen or scientists, set ourselves an example and decide to work not for this or that ideology, but for the real good of mankind, to work for life and not for death, and to pay tribute to those who till the land and struggle with Nature in order to produce the bread that nourishes us.

We cannot expect everyone to be a superman, but the following ancient sayings can guide those who dedicate their activities to the good of man:

"Purity is for man, next to life, the greatest good, the purity that is procured by the law of Mazda to him who cleanses his own self with good thoughts, words and deeds." (Zoroastrianism: Zend-Avesta, *The Vendidad*, p. 55.)

"Eschew all evil; cherish good, cleanse your inmost thoughts, this is the teaching of Buddha." (Buddhism: *The Way of Virtue*, p. 48.)

"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." (The Bible, Romans.)

"To get rich is to be without love; to get love is to be without riches." (Confucianism: *Mencius* v. 3, p. 71.)

We have been witness to so many tragic human struggles and to so many far-reaching social and political changes,

that perhaps we are unable to appreciate the significance of it all to man who is passing through a decisive period in history. The crisis we are going through has above all a moral basis. Civilisation founded on the excessive development of egoistic aspirations is undergoing a shock. It may even collapse. But there is no doubt at all that it must be transformed, because, in spite of its undeniable achievements, it has not been able to assure us of the joy of living nor of the understanding of the purpose of life. We are living in a continual restlessness and in some undefined expectation. Man is surrounded by Ignorance, lurking in readiness to seize upon his selfish desires, to lead him down the slopes of the easy and wide high-ways of this modern Babylon. Sometimes it would seem that there is no return. But in every individual there is a hidden inner strength and the unlimited possibility for spiritual as well as intellectual progress.

### Religions and ideologies have failed

The sad history of humanity clearly shows that neither war nor revolution will bring peace because the cardinal fault lies not in the political and economic structures, but in man and in his relationships with his fellow men. Man knows this very well, but, hampered by a religious belief in individual rather than in social and international salvation, and in the ideal of the "common good" only and not in individual happiness, he is still following the wrong way of life. However, he is gradually beginning to understand that religion is not going hand-in-hand with science and that ideological doctrines are not in harmony with intellectual liberty. He knows now that his religious and ideological philosophies have failed, and if he wants to be on the right way he must build in himself a New Man by increasing his knowledge, widening his world-view and liberating himself from all religious and ideological fetters which are the chief obstacles to the advancement of intellectual and moral progress.

Man knows, too, that first of all he must restrain his passions and must suppress his personal and collective egoism, for only then will he be able to escape the exploitation of human ignorance and be free to advance in the right way—the way of life inspired by love. And he knows that this way of the love of man is the only way by which he will fill the earth with a new spirit, and be able to build a new and better world based on Secular-Humanism; a new world where all disputes between nations will be settled by Law and not by War, making it a fit place to live in and human life worth living. In this way man will bring himself in peace and happiness to the Brotherhood of Humanity.

"Is Goodness indeed so far away? If we really wanted goodness, we should find that it is at our very side . . ." (The analects of Confucius VII, 29, p. 129.)

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## NEWS AND NOTES

FREETHINKERS AND HUMANISTS should make a note now that at 7.30 on **Friday, 4th November**, there will be a public debate at the Caxton Hall, London, SW1, on the Sunday Observance Laws; the speakers will be Lord Willis and Harold Legerton (Secretary of the LDOS).

### A Tyrant is dead! (Long live tyranny?)

HOWEVER much we may deplore violence, the death of any tyrant is bound to raise the hope that tyranny will have died with him. This, alas, is not to be in South Africa, where Mr Vorster may well intensify the racialist policies of Dr Verwoerd. His statement that "We stand before the world as a small nation who believes in the values of Christianity and civilisation" will be little comfort to readers of this paper. Meanwhile, Bishop Boyle of Johannesburg has said that "Catholics will unite . . . in lamenting the death of a man who loved and laboured for his country". Cardinal McCann, Archbishop of Cape Town, referred to Dr Verwoerd as "a man of integrity and sincerity, a practising Christian who desired to achieve justice and the welfare of all according to his lights . . ." Not all clerics were so full of praise, but (lest it be forgotten) the man accused of the assassination (the *Guardian*, September 7) "always carried a Bible and was given to quoting biblical texts . . ."

### A much greater loss

MRS MARGARET SANGER, the great pioneer who coined the phrase "birth control" died on September 6th, aged 82. Socialist, editor, writer, nurse, friend of H. G. Wells and Havelock Ellis, Margaret Sanger set up her first birth control clinic in Brooklyn in 1916 and was promptly jailed; the first of eight arrests as a victim of the notorious Anthony Comstock, of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. One of her achievements was to secure the right for doctors to receive contraceptives through the post. The *Guardian* reports ". . . until she died she kept up a fusillade of letters and protests against the Vatican . . ." and, unlike Verwoerd, she had the honour to be numbered amongst its enemies.

### Cold feet as well as cold hearts in Rome?

THE CATHOLIC *Universe* (September 16) reports that the Pope has admitted that "a wave of doubt, unease and disquiet has affected many priests since the Vatican Council . . . often giving rise to a most varied, complex and disordered set of problems, which easily repudiate most respected habits of piety and ecclesiastical custom, till yesterday held deservedly in honour". The 75-year-old Cardinal Ottaviani, has sent a long letter to every RC bishop and head of religious order throughout the world, listing 10 "abuses of interpretation" and has asked for comment by Christmas. The Cardinal writes about morality, "Mistaken ideas . . . are circulating with regard to moral theology. Some people reject all ideas of objective morality, preaching the legitimacy of an 'expedient morality'. They are circulating perverse ideas on sexual matters and on marriage". The Abbot of Downside commented "When you have thousands of people beginning to think for themselves you are bound to get freak suggestions . . ." but he went on, "A reign of terror would be hard to face in the new climate of opinion which the Council created. We don't want a failure of nerve which could lead to repression". (*Observer*, September 18). The task is (as the Pope put it) "to avoid instability of thought . . ." or, as we might put it, freethinking and Secular-Humanism.

### Successor to BBC 3

"THE LATE SHOW" which is to start on October 15 is in the agnostic hands of Hugh Burnett of "Top Sacred" and "Beware of the Abbott" fame. The *Sun* (September 15) reports that "Bird will do his Wilson . . . and others who are likely to figure as targets in the programmes . . . are Mrs Whitehouse, the Archbishop of Canterbury and 'maybe the Pope from time to time' ". Even if this programme shares some of the weaknesses of its predecessors, it will come as a breath of fresh air. No doubt it will, like them, be attacked by our modern Anti-Vice Gang. Those readers who do not already support the COSMO GROUP (which exists "to oppose censorship, and in particular to resist restrictive pressure on radio and TV") can get further information from Murray Kaye, 14 The Greenway, Potters Bar, Herts., if they send a 9in x 4in sac. Or you can join at once by sending 5s to the Treasurer, 1 Strawberry Vale, Twickenham, Middlesex. Mrs Avril Fox, founder of the Cosmo Group, and her supporters, have already won our gratitude and respect in their battles for the freedom of thought and expression.

### More than meets the eye?

"BOYS ARE FAR FROM being anti-religious" (*Guardian*, September 9) "according to a survey by the National Association of Boys' Clubs. Twenty per cent of 450 boys reported attending church at least once a week, although almost half of the parents never went to church". A third of the boys say some kind of prayers and 27 per cent read the Bible regularly. "We must be grateful for the training which takes place in day schools" says the annual report. FREETHINKER readers will be as prepared as anyone for the last sentence, which reads, "We find that club and not always from home"!

### A stage in the right direction

WITH "BOYS" reported to be going religious, the Guide Movement is worried about the 14 per cent of adult leaders who have admitted that they weren't real church members, and a smattering who have even proclaimed agnosticism. The *Guardian* (September 15) goes on (with no misprints at all . . .) "Uncomfortable facts for an organisation which invokes religion in its promises. The working party pondered at length, then resolved not to turn the dissenters out. Which must make the Guides a stage more liberal than the Scouts, whose own new look lays it down firmly that every Scout leader must be an active Church member".

### Another Census in the USA

A FREETHINKER reader, Richard Stern, reports from New Jersey that only 35 atheists have been found in a census of 6,141 although he says that if the pollsters had walked one more mile, they would have found him and made it 36. The census was "being taken by students for the priesthood from the Immaculate Conception Seminary, Darlington". Mr Bynner's suggestion ("Letters", September 16) reminded us what very different results might be obtained by a different wording of such Poll questions. "When did you stop believing in God?" for instance, or, "How young were you when you stopped believing in a heavenly father-figure?" or "How many super-men do you believe in?" These are really no more "loaded" than the questionnaires on which so much seems to hang today.

(The Editor is very grateful to all those who so kindly send her press cuttings and is only sorry that more of them cannot be used).

## PRAYERS WITH EVERYTHING

David Tribe

AN interesting phenomenon, carefully shielded from debate, is now back in North Carolina. Apart from sinners, two special sorts of people come along to hear Billy Graham proclaim his Evangelistic Association: sociologists and actors. I fancy actors learn less than public speakers. Though a brilliant orator, the celebrated evangelist, like most professional colleagues, has *charisma* before a crowd yet lacks subtlety of gesture or mimicry, spontaneous humour or tenderness. But sociologists are always richly rewarded.

The crusade could have arisen only in America. Ostensibly the reverend doctor comes by invitation from a group of ministers and laymen in the country or state of operations, and all activities are controlled by a local Executive Committee. But one suspects scouts from the Minneapolis headquarters are forever scouring the world touting invitations, and the local committees are under close surveillance by BGEA men. Since his Harringay and Wembley triumphs of 1954-55, Dr Graham and his 375-strong staff had been preparing for a climactic return.

The result is American in style as well as planning, although the organisation boasts an international flavour with associates from Canada, England, Argentina, Australia, Ireland and India. Professionalism, efficiency and promotion are the hallmarks. Much is claimed for the star performers. Billy, we are told, could have been a big league baseball player, or a leading actor, or a national politician. That's as may be. In America these fields are intensely competitive. His talented gospel singer Ethel Waters, describes herself as being "at the top of the theatrical profession" when she joined the Crusade. In fact she appears to have been in both poor health and debt.

### Insurance against failure?

Most of the team began life as Baptists, among the most underprivileged of American churches, and went to colleges with the academic prestige of Bob Jones University. All of Graham's eight doctorates are honorary and from institutions unknown outside the US and unranked inside. Soloist George Beverly Shea was "an insurance man who switched from insuring lives to showing people how to insure their souls". One does not wish to underrate figures who have brought comfort and entertainment to millions throughout the world; but it can fairly be said that the whole company were originally people of modest talents, little originality, few prospects and much ambition. Religion may have satisfied an emotional need; it also satisfied a wish for prestige, security and—if one adds expense accounts to salary—affluence. At £7,000 per annum, Billy is not particularly highly paid by American professional middle-class standards, but few other professions would have been open to him. One of his most richly deserved honours was a 1958 citation as Salesman of the Year by the Sales Executive Club of New York. The evangelistic team might all have done well in business, but that needs capital and contacts, and is without the aestheticism they seem almost pathetically to hanker after.

Fortunately this £3.5 million per annum salvation industry is well served behind the scenes by businessmen and individual contributors, averaging £2. All crusades are locally supported, half coming from collections, the rest from organisations and individuals. Miss Waters observed of the 1957 Madison Square Garden Crusade that "God don't sponsor no flops". Neither do American businessmen.

The main fascination of the operation is its success. Doubly impressive in a country where spiritual as well as temporal credentials are often related to "God-given" blessings, from florid Mormonism and Christian Science to the soberer sects. With the similar traditions of Victorian England still alive, London understands this attitude.

### Best sellers

Superlatives chase one another through the Billy Graham success story. Between 1947 and 1966, 34,551,137 crusade attendances and 985,343 inquirers who "come forward to make decisions"; 1,400,000 copies of Dr Graham's *Peace with God* sold; 4,000,000 copies of his *World Aflame* printed; the *Hour of Decision* radio ministry heard on 1,000 stations, six networks, and by 25 million people weekly around the world; his syndicated newspaper column, *My Answer*, carried by 146 daily newspapers; major crusades in almost every state of the US and more than 60 foreign countries; a Billy Graham film shown somewhere in the world every 45 minutes. Intellectuals may jeer, bishops jibe (in private), vicars and pastors complain they see very few converts after the first two or three visits. But the campaigns grow bigger, the figures vaster, newspaper and TV coverage wider. What is the secret of this success, if it be not the Holy Spirit invoked by supporters?

For one thing, most of the "inquirers" are not converts in the usual sense, but churchmen and churchwomen on charabanc parties of "re-dedication". At his Monday and Thursday youth meetings, beats, mods and rockers are notably absent. But there are genuine conversions. It is often stated (for example, by Paul Ferris in the *Observer Magazine*, May 22) that Graham is offering the simple Elmer Gantry choice of Heaven or Hell. This is not so. The American "religion of comfortableness" is spreading throughout the world. Despite the Catholic Truth Society pamphlet *Hell* by the Very Rev Francis J. Ripley, Father Thomas Corbishley recently disowned the fiery furnace. If in the twentieth century the lights have gone out all over Europe, they have gone out in hell too. A gospel related to hell-fire today would do limited business. Rather significantly in a 123-word crusade glossary the word "hell" does not appear. Though not perhaps wishing to disown fundamentalism, Billy Graham does not in 1966, with the reluctant support of Anglican bishops, wish to promote it.

### Ole Time religion but contemporary fears

What then is his message? If not entirely fundamentalist, it is certainly anti-modernist. The New Theology, the New Morality, the Death of God Movement and other toys of professional theologians have not given the ordinary layman and evangelical minister that comfort, derived by their intellectual superiors, who want religious affiliations without theological dogmata. Douse the fires of hell but please gimme that ole time religion, says the Grahamite; I don't wanna be a Christian Atheist. At Earls Court in June this year there was fear, but not the fear of sulphur and brimstone. Subtler, less tangible, but nonetheless real fears. Contemporary fears. Fear of being abandoned in this world and the next, fear of inadequacy, fear of loneliness, fear of old age and sickness and examinations and passing from school to work or singleness to marriage or marriage to widowhood, fear of inflation, fear of nuclear war.

(Continued on page 312)

## **STRONG TO SAVE**

AT A SEASHORE service to mark the sorrow of Cornishfolk at the drowning of thirty-one persons when the yacht *Darwin* sank on the last day of July, the well-known hymn was sung:

"Eternal Father, strong to save  
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,  
Who bidst the mighty ocean deep  
Its own appointed limits keep,  
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee  
For those in peril on the sea."

Watching the televised scene, and listening to the recorded singing of those lines, I wondered if any who gave tongue to them, with the surge of the ocean in their ears, and the tragic fate of the *Darwin's* trippers freshly in mind, felt a qualm as to the ability to save anyone, of the God they supplicated. Highly probably none, I decided. To the simply-believing congregation by the sad sea, the fact that all aboard the yacht on its last sailing had been lost, would present no problem of faith. It would just not be in them to analyse their ideas about the Almighty Father and Loving Lord who dwelt above. Storm and shipwreck had taken cruel toll of human lives on many occasions. Thirty-one more bodies deprived of life by the hungry sea! It was just another very sorrowful thing.

### **The mystery of a callous deity**

The attitude of believers—even the most intelligent—towards the Power they revere as almighty goodness, has always baffled my understanding, even allowing for childhood indoctrination and unfamiliarity with scepticism's viewpoint. They maintain that this Power hears and answers prayer, helps those that serve him and performs many a life-saving or health-restoring miracle for the benefit of the faithful, on land and sea. At the same time, they explain away non-evidence of such things by saying he moves in mysterious ways and employs natural means to work his wonders. If a prayed-for patient is brought from death's door, God is responsible for it, through the agency of doctors. The survivors of earth, air and sea disasters owe their lives to him, though not a sign of supernatural action is apparent, and no matter what part fortune and the courage of human rescuers played in their escape.

Strong to save! It is perfectly reasonable that those who believe in the existence of an Almighty should credit him with being able to save anybody and anything. But those who most fervently voice that belief are mistrustful, in life's business, of persons and organisations that do not show evidence of what is claimed for them. They use their reason to discriminate between the true and false; they require results. The most religious are often shrewd bargainers. They do not believe that persons or organisations are "strong" to do something if appearances are against it. Yet they find no difficulty in crediting their God with power to work life-saving miracles. The enormous number of victims of sea and land disasters, and the utter lack of evidence of divinity's hand in survivals, count for nothing with these ordinary hard-headed folk against the claims made for the object of their worship.

This stark divergence of attitude is defended by the assertion that God exercises his will to save or not save. Apparently, then, he acts in flat contradiction of the merciful motives that inspire humans to save all possible, and

does not even exert his power in favour of his worshippers, who sink beneath the waves as helplessly as others. The plea is advanced that the Eternal Father chooses to call some to heaven earlier than nature's span permits, as sorrowing friends customarily aver. But what of the rest? To presume that God Almighty cuts off the lives of the "unsaved", depriving them thereby of the chance of salvation which would be theirs were they allowed to live on, is to show him in a shocking light. Christians would boggle at that, yet it is a conclusion which is as unavoidable as it is revolting.

### **The inhumanity of the personal God**

Faith being, however, the capacity to believe the unbelievable, where religion is concerned, or, more appositely, to blind oneself to the most glaring illogicalities, this mythical amalgam of benevolence and barbarity finds credence with the cunning and calculating, the shrewd and the simple, the cute and the crass. Despite the current trend to de-personalise God, fundamentalism is very much alive. With bishops splashing "holy" water on animals, crops, cars, and other things, jungle ritual affronts our scientific age. It wasn't to a nebulous something that mourners of the *Darwin's* dead sang their supplicating hymn, but to a real, live Person, high above the clouds, surrounded by saints and angels, cherubims and seraphims—a God so unquestionable that it didn't matter that he hadn't shown the slightest sign of his ability even to hear the cries addressed to him for those in peril on the sea.

Strong to save! The words have issued from many a hardy mariner's throat. They have resounded at the consigning of comrades' bodies to the deep; have ascended on the salty air at compulsory naval services. Ceremonial occasions apart, sailormen are not given to hymn-singing, and it may be that their reputed religiousness is mainly attributable to the sense of human helplessness conveyed by the vast ocean, which invests their childhood sky-god with power to preserve them from a watery grave. Though the sea serpent no longer undulates, the superstition of a celestial life-saver gambols tenaciously, to its Eternal Father signature tune.

The hymn has great emotional appeal. It points the need of a moral anchor in life's troubled waters. If the anchor of objective truth is to be substituted for that of delusion, freethinking minds must fully comprehend the strength of sentimentality in the maintenance of religious myth, and abate nothing in their campaign to destroy belief in a heavenly Lord, to which millions still cling, against all the canons of commonsense.

### **FREETHINKER FIGHTING FUND**

THE FREETHINKER is the only weekly Secularist-Humanist paper in the country. It is still only 6d. How much do YOU care how many people it reaches? To advertise we need money, and our expenses are ever-increasing. Whose copy are you reading now? Have you got a subscription? Couldn't you contribute something to the Fighting Fund, say 6d or 6s or £6 or £60? How much do you really care about Freethought and helping other people to hear about it? Do, please, help if you can.

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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, Platts Fields, 3 p.m. Car Park, Victoria Street, 8 p.m.: Messrs COLLINS DUIGNAN, MILLS and WOOD.

Mersseyside 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**

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group (Regency House, Oriental Place, Brighton), Sunday, October 2nd, 5.30 p.m.: M. D. RONIN, "An Introduction to Humanism".

Bromley Discussion and Social Group (14 Great Elms Road, Bromley), Friday, September 30th, 8 p.m.: MARGARET MCILROY, "Religion and the Rights of the Child".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester), Sunday, October 2nd, 6.30 p.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, "The Churches in Modern England".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, October 2nd, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "What is Humanism?"; Tuesday, October 4th, 6.30 p.m.: BARBARA BASSETT, "What is Sex?"

South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, October 2nd, 6.30 p.m.: Beethoven programme, London String Quartet. Admission 3/-.

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.

Birmingham Branch NSS (New Victoria Hall, Corporation Street), Sunday, 2nd October, 6.45 p.m.: A. F. M. BRIERLEY, "The Basis of Non-Religious Ethics".

Freedom of Vision. Hampstead Old Town Hall, Haverstock Hall, London, NW3, Sunday, 2nd October, 3 p.m.—10 p.m.: Teaching on Censorship and the Arts. Chairman, Ben Whitaker, MP. Admission 5/-.

**POX & CO.**

Denis Cobell

Denis Cobell (b. 1938) left Evangelical-Protestantism through reading Bertrand Russell and now describes himself as an Agnostic. He has been contributing to this paper since 1959.

THE ATTITUDE towards venereal diseases is more "permissive" now than when the public's outlook to sex was altogether more prohibitive. In the Victorian age VD sufferers were treated like lepers; the London "Lock" Hospital bore a name indicating public indignation at the unclean. Most of this was hypocritical: Kinsey found that there was little difference in the overall sex behaviour in

one age from another. Professor Carstairs, in an introduction to a recent book, *Venereal Diseases* by R. S. Morton (Pelican 3s 6d) reminds us that sickness and guilt were widely associated with all manner of diseases in the past—we have still not entirely rid ourselves of this connection when VD is mentioned. Carstairs is "permissive" in his approach to sex, but sees, as Dr Morton points out in this book, that VD is as much a social as a medical problem.

Readers of this journal will be pleased to note that this book does not offer religion as a panacea, distinguishing it from the British Medical Association's report on VD and young people published two years ago. The so-called massive increase in the incidence of venereal diseases is not borne out by graphs in this book: syphilis has drastically declined, and, despite fluctuations, gonorrhoea is only at the same level as 1930. During this thirty years there has been a population increase of approximately 30 per cent, and improved treatments have rendered VD far less dangerous! Indeed, Michael Schofield showed in his Nuffield Report on sexual behaviour of young people that the odds of a boy aged 15-19 catching gonorrhoea are 1:1,600, and a girl 1:1,000.

**The need for a means of immunization**

The small section of the community which is promiscuous and most liable to catch VD is also socially unstable in other aspects. Social workers have observed VD to be an illness often accompanied by a lack of security and search for meaning in life. Homosexuals are often unaware that they may contract VD. But, as Dr Morton wisely points out, no amount of education, or even high principles, can avoid a flood of sexual emotion; he concludes his book by proposing prophylaxis by immunization as the only medical hope of banishing diseases which have resisted the combined efforts of legal, moral, psychological, sociological, political and religious pundits. This discovery still eludes the experts.

**The need for more education**

This book is intended for the lay reader, but includes quite a large clinical section that possesses the rather heavy style often found in textbooks. The details of anatomy and physiology, and the dangerous effects of untreated venereal diseases, are therefore described without the usual exaggeration of the popular Press. Many young people would benefit greatly from an accurate knowledge of VD. It is unfortunate that the names and addresses of clinics—which cost the NHS about £1 million per annum to operate—are still located almost exclusively in WCs, and not in public libraries or post offices.

Dr Morton gives an interesting outline of the history of venereal diseases. Gonorrhoea has been evident in all European and Mediterranean cultures. But there is a dispute about syphilis: Dr Morton accepts the theory that it did not exist in Europe until Columbus returned from his voyage; however, it is probable that syphilis was known to the Chinese long before the Christian era, and several famous writers of the Greek and Roman civilisations give descriptions of symptoms consistent with syphilis. Archaeological recoveries from graves in Europe, Egypt and Japan have revealed pre-historic bones showing signs of possible syphilitic infection.

After Columbus returned to Europe in 1493, syphilis became epidemic—leading historians to believe that the disease did not exist here before then. The siege of Naples in 1495 brought mercenaries from many parts of Europe together, and circumstances encouraged sexual indulgence which resulted in syphilitic infection—later taken to their own countries by these soldiers. Until the introduction of antibiotics, the treatment of venereal diseases was lengthy

and far from satisfactory; thus the public's condemnation of sufferers could be somewhat justified on the grounds of these dangers. The expression "A plague on you, Sir" originally referred to the pox (syphilis).

In England, Dr Morton avers, the main reason for the continued prevalence of VD can be attributed not to prostitutes but to the "good time" girl and the immigration of large numbers of single males. However, the decline in danger of these diseases, from the days when syphilis was treated with mercury, can easily be found by comparing such authors as Henry Miller and Colin McInnes. In former times it was jestingly stated that one night with "Venus" led to a lifetime with "Mercury". Nowadays a few shots of penicillin from a friendly nurse may be all that is necessary.

## PRAYERS WITH EVERYTHING

(Continued from page 309)

At Wembley and Earls Court in England and during the great Denver campaign on American TV last year, I saw how personal became merged with national guilt, and guilt with despair. All the individual tries to do for himself, all the nations try to do round the conference table will come to nothing. Only Jesus offers the way out. The great emptying, passivity, openness spoken of by William James and Kierkegaard precede the fullness of conversion. But the sin is not related to real issues like violence and greed, V-bombers and Vietnam, the conversion to real reformation and tangible solutions. The operation is itself spiritual violence, the demand for salvation spiritual greed, national and world disasters mere selling points. Billy Graham is offering none of the tolerance and sympathy, reason and social justice, wisdom and world planning, education and penology on which the future depends. Though sincere and likeable in private, he is simply an apostle of doom with a vested interest in vice. The happier the world, the fewer conversions.

Now, as Dr Graham prepares to save Berlin, the churchless of Britain continue churchless, her local pastors pursue their ministry away from the arc lights and the admen, her Secular Humanists try to restore the light of reason.

## LETTERS

### Tribute to Charles Bradlaugh Bonner

IT WAS with a feeling of profound sorrow, that my wife and I learned from our President, Mr P. Campbell, of the death of Charles Bradlaugh Bonner. We will ever remember the occasion of our meeting this great leader of the World Freethought Movement, at the congress held in Brussels some seven years ago which was held in memory of that great humanitarian and valiant fighter for intellectual freedom, Francisco Ferrer.

Bradlaugh Bonner proudly led the procession of delegates from many lands to the monument erected many years ago, to the imperishable memory of Ferrer. The eloquent tribute of Bradlaugh Bonner to Ferrer, and to all that Ferrer stood for and for which he was finally murdered by the reactionary and corrupt Spanish government of that period, will ever be remembered.

Bradlaugh Bonner well merited the affectionate regard in which he was held by his fellow freethinkers. This unassuming and kindly man of such great intellectual gifts, set aside opportunities for financial gain in the business and academic sphere and chose to dedicate his talents to a lifetime of service to the Freethought Movement he had so much at heart.

My wife and I mourn the loss of a good friend and comrade in Charles Bradlaugh Bonner. His name is held in very high esteem by New Zealand Rationalists.

WALLACE NELSON, JP.  
(Past President, N.Z. Rationalist Association)

### Jehovah lives on

"DEATH BY HANGING, injection, shooting or gassing is necessary in society today." A quotation from a former Nazi official being tried for a war crime? No, this was said by a Scots church minister (police chaplain the Rev J. McCormack) in a speech at a memorial service in Glasgow on Tuesday, 6th September held in connection with the three shot London policemen.

Earlier he surprised and shocked some people by introducing a political point of view into a prayer: "Dear Lord, give us a Government with backbone and courage to protect and give security to men who are dedicated to preserve peace and order". After the service he admitted to being crafty and told the press that he had seen three hangings and attended six condemned men. "I wanted to call for the return of birching and hanging but did not want to do so in a prayer." At his home in Glasgow he expiated on the theme, "the present Labour Government does not have the backbone and courage to face up to the rising crime rate. After 40 years as a prison chaplain in Edinburgh and Glasgow I know that for brutal murders the hardened criminal would want the death penalty brought back . . ."

PETER KEARNEY

### Vietnam

AT THE outbreak of war against Germany in 1939 an Irish politician in the Dublin Parliament asked: "Who are we neutral against this time?" I am reminded of this when I contemplate the "neutrals" in the present class-war in Vietnam. May I quote from a recent *Wall Street Journal*:

"With one eye on the fierce fighting in Vietnam the (US) Army is charting a major modernisation programme. . . . Detailed plans already call for about 16 billion dollars of "Hardware" . . . over the next five years. . . . Both the Army's spending plans and those of the other services promise added zip for the nation's peppy economy. The accelerated Army purchasing alone, may, if nothing more, tend to delay the day of any business 'let-down'. If such tentative projects fail to receive a green light the total will be pared a bit but more significant in undoing present plans would be any cessation of hostilities in Vietnam whether springing from an agreed-on cease-fire or a unilateral dis-engagement by the Communist side."

This is proof enough of the cause and source of aggression to satisfy even those who don't want to know the facts of (*capitalist*) life! When a "backward" nation is un-lucky to have riches in its soil, the big Imperialist powers will discover plenty of reasons to save that "backward" nation from the "horrors of Communism"! The British practised that for 300 years. Now a bigger gangster carries on, this time with better weapons! Honest people choose sides when big issues are at stake.

Glasgow.

CHARLES DORAN

### Problems of unorthodox servicemen

I HAVE just taken out a subscription for the FREETHINKER. I hope nobody catches me reading it on board as anything like that is still considered to be "cranky" by the general run of people you find in the Navy. With reference to your "Report from Paris", this business of making out that Humanism is some sort of earthly religion seems wrong to me. I think the word "religion" needs a better definition than some people seem to give it.

"SAILOR"

### Conway Hall concert

I HAD the pleasure and privilege of attending the World Union concert on September 4. I would beg to be allowed (as a non-member, but as a music-lover, and a personally-convicted Freethinker) to express my total enjoyment of Chopin as rendered by the young pianist, Geoffrey Burford. Had I dared, I would have called for an encore of the "Minute Waltz". I enjoyed, too, the young performers of stringed instruments, and the very exciting Scarlatti from their wonderfully gifted mother. We ought to have very much more of this. I travelled, with my wife, a long way for this, and was amply rewarded.

Dorking.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER

### Appreciation

I WRITE to thank you for the article which was written for us on devils by Margaret McIlroy. I enjoyed it a great deal.

Hoxton.

FREDERICK JOHNSON

AUSTIN WALTERS

I SHOULD LIKE to see articles on astrothology. I would like to be informed please about the Labours of Hercules and Arthur's Twelve Knights.

JOHN GRANTHAM