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FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

THE BEATLES may be more popular than Jesus (as even Catholics have admitted) but there is no doubt about the invasive part that Jesus the Christian "Christ" ("annointed one") plays in the lives of most of us. He is, as it were, the soft soap of our religious brainwashing, "gentle, meek and mild" to the most sensitive minds. He is the buffer between Theism and anti-theism. He is the greatest stumbling block between religious confusion and a rationalist-secularist peace of mind. Even if we can boast of never having been consciously indoctrinated with a religious orthodoxy, the imprint will be there, be it the visual inheritance of a blonde, night-shirted and most un-Jewish shepherd-man, or the verbal memory of half-hearted prayers ending quite incomprehensibly with "For Jeeze Cryssake . . ."

Recently a Freethinker (male) reader (complaining about "the 'Myth of Jesus' nonsense") wrote that "Jesus is of course for nearly all Humanists, as Renan insisted, 'the greatest man who ever lived'. Long may he remain so". I hope he exaggerates with his "nearly all", but this is a very widely held opinion. The implication that it is possible to judge, and so decide on the very "best" (and presumably the very "worst") character is irrational enough, but he is assuming the "best" to be a man of whom we have no autobiographical data at all, and whose story has about as doubtful a ring of authenticity as it is possible to imagine. Most revealing of all is the "May he long remain so". Here is the intense desire for there to be a superman, never to be surpassed.

Gregory Smelters in his article of October 28th reminded us that it is not just Rationalists and Dead Sea Scroll scholars who have, after the most detailed study, decided that the New Testament hero Jesus may yet have to be listed as "fiction", but many Christian theologians. Indeed it is the religiously inclined Humanists today who will, it seems (usually without studying the matter one way or the other) go on insisting that there was a Gospel Jesus (surname Christ) who was the unique model of man for all time.

When I wrote my own book *What Humanism is About* I believed that this virtually Unitarian viewpoint was both a necessary stage between being a Christian and becoming a Humanist, and a bridge on which Christian and Humanist could meet. I would write that chapter differently now, for I believe that it is not so much a bridge between faith and unbelief as a trip-wire, and that agnostics (Christian or Humanist) need more help in tackling it.

Even if we cannot hope to bring the necessary scholarship to the task of sorting out the reality of Jesus from our inheritance of propaganda and wishful thinking, we can do something. Archibald Robertson's *Jesus: Myth of History?* is a good beginning. So is *The Churches and Modern Thought* by Vivian Phelps. T. H. Huxley wrote ". . . the evidence is such that the exact nature of the teachings and the convictions of Jesus is extremely uncertain . . .", and Joseph McCabe "On no other point in modern culture is there so flagrant a discrepancy between scholarship and general literature and belief . . ."

I would not claim to know what "nearly all" or even "most" Humanists believe, but after a great deal of reading, many of us would settle for a possible Jewish character, evangelist-cum-rabbi-cum-political rebel (or more than one), called Joshua or Jesus, upon whom the ancient religious mythology of virgin births, lambs, shepherds, stars, fishes, violent death and resurrection have been superimposed. This is not to detract in any way from the wisdom that is in the New Testament. Nor does it alter the fact that the pre-1961 translations are poetically good to read, even if one disagrees (as one must in the 20th century) with some of the ethics. But it does question that Jesus is deserving of a reverence we would not pay to, say, Mithra, Confucius or Buddha. And considering that perhaps the most bloody horrors of all time have been committed in the name of Jesus, the question is worth putting.

The argument is, of course, that Jesus is supremely important to believers, our families perhaps and friends, and no one has any right deliberately to hurt the feelings of others. Of course; but it is odd that "God" is considered less important than his "Son"; it is the swearing "Christ!" that produces shock rather than "God Almighty!"

My article about the Sermon on the Mount produced this reaction in one (up to then satisfied) woman reader, "I am not a believer, but I consider it in very poor taste, and quite unnecessarily offensive to the best elements of Christianity". Now the FREETHINKER is not a paper for believers, and, so far as I know, "elements" don't have feelings. A Dutch Freethinker got the point, how-

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ever, and was glad I had drawn attention to the fact that the Jesus of the Sermon was a reactionary, and that his wisdom was far from original. And a man who is still virtually a Christian wrote about the article, "I could have pushed it aside, but I could not do this—that would not have been fair. I just had to let it sink into my mind and let my brain deal with it. I found that after a few days it was creating quite a ferment in me. It was a bit painful at first, but it surely and gradually but steadily—drove out the devotion to Jesus that was still in me and replaced it by a much stronger adherence to Humanism". I suggest that it does take that sort of courage for many people to think honestly about Jesus, and sometimes Christians have more of it than do Humanists. Christians, after all, are conscious of how much they have to lose, whereas Humanists, who have tasted a freedom from religion, should be able to see what is to be gained.

Many people's feelings are hurt by hearing their political party leaders (or favourite actors, writers and so on) abused. These are living people who are being criticised, fairly or unfairly. But, it may be suggested, people's *religious* feelings are different. Aren't they only different because they are so riddled with fear? Fears that truth lies with our doubts and not with the sermons, that if Jesus wasn't a superman he was a liar (a fascinating argument), that mankind is so depraved that there has to be just one, perfect exception. And aren't these fears to be deplored as a direct result of the teaching that is still being

done by Christians today? "Believe" in him or you will not inherit the Kingdom of Fulfilment, "Follow" him or find yourself in a hell of your own making. His threats of 2,000 years ago are still having their effect—but not, I suggest, for the better.

This strange blend of celibate myth and man plays a curious part in twentieth century minds. He is (dare I write it even now?) the sacred pin-up in the empty hearts of women who have no men, and of men who are afraid of women. He who never spoke up for beauty or intellectual integrity provides the inspiration today for the sex-and-sin-obsessed Billy Grahams, the nail-biting, sobbing, frightened David Wilkersons, as well as for those who adopt the pleasanter attributes. Must the Christian superman be protected, then, even from the searching criticism of those of us who believe him to be a second-rate hero for a generation who should love life and want to think clearly; who don't want to be died for? Are those Humanists rational who answer "yes, yes, yes!" to that question?

Whether we like it or not, Jesus is still with us. The radio and TV, the schools and the press, go on praising his name. Although it may not be easy to accept him as one of a crowd, I believe that until we remove this Christian "Christ" from the spotlight, humanity will remain in the shadow. Let us all be free to choose our own heroes and have enough humility (and sense of humour) to accept criticism of our choice.

MADALYN MURRAY O'HAIR

John Shaw

IN UNITED STATES federal law there is nothing similar to sections 25 to 30 of the British 1944 Education Act which makes a daily act of worship legally compulsory in British schools, together with compulsory religious instruction. In America, up to 1963, a daily act of worship and Bible study in state schools was almost universal, but by tradition not by legal requirement.

In June 1963 a lone, middle-aged woman atheist challenged the legality of this tradition in the US Supreme Court, on the grounds that it violated the First Amendment of the United States Constitution which provides for the separation of church and state. The Supreme Court upheld her submission that such daily prayers and hymns were not lawful, and overnight Mrs Madalyn Murray O'Hair became the "most hated woman in America".

Subsequent events which happened to her as a result of this case make it difficult to realise that this is a very recent episode in the twentieth century. The ruthlessness and bitterness with which her opponents sought to destroy her is a timely reminder of the strength and influence of organised religion in its fight to retain control of educating a nation's young. In looking at her story, we might well think that in Britain such things could not happen; but can we be so sure?

The tidal wave

The first step on the road to persecution came for Madalyn Murray O'Hair in 1960, when her fourteen-year old son said, "Mother, you're an atheist, and I don't believe in God either, but every day in school I'm forced to say prayers, and I feel like a hypocrite. Why should I be compelled to betray my beliefs?" She decided to challenge compulsory school worship, quite unaware of "the tidal wave of virulent, vindictive, murderous hate that would thunder down on top of me and my family".

Immediately the suit was filed she lost her job, and every other job was closed to her. Her home was attacked, the family car wrecked, her two boys were continually beaten up, her father died of a heart attack following one of the assaults. She claims that her mail was tampered with, she received sack loads of abusive letters; she was called a bitch, a lesbian, a communist. Hundreds of letters threatened her life, her telephone rang throughout the night preventing sleep; depraved individuals mailed human excrement to her, and this type of activity went on for nearly three years. She was spat upon countless times; she sued in the local magistrates' court "armed with damning evidence and eye-witness testimony", but the culprits "were exonerated every time".

Finally, when a police patrol came to the house to arrest her son on a charge of contempt of court, she did not let him "go quietly", but remonstrated and was physically removed to a police car. In the fracas, "a policeman was kicked on the shin", and she was subsequently charged with assaulting a policeman, and, with additional charges of obstruction, the maximum penalty of ten years' imprisonment was sought against her. Bertrand Russell, at the time of her arrest, said "Her arbitrary arrest is outrageous. Her views as an atheist are shared by the intellectual community of all countries, and her persecution cannot be tolerated. I urgently request the immediate release of this brave and entirely admirable woman".

Released on bail, she and her family fled from the State of Maryland, facing a possible ten years in prison if she returned.

The price of victory

Her suit slowly moved along its legal way, and on the 17th June, 1963, the decision of the Supreme Court put an end to compulsory prayers and Bible study in US state schools. She had won; but at what a cost.

She fled to Hawaii for what she called "religious sanctuary from Christian persecution". She was soon having to face an extradition order to return her to Maryland and possible jail sentence. The Governor of Hawaii was a Roman Catholic, and immediately agreed to her extradition. She was prepared to flee from the United States, but her appeal against extradition succeeded on a legal technicality.

She is a graduate and an experienced social worker, but no employment was available. Reduced to washing dishes, she was dismissed when her identity became known.

Christianity—tax free

It is no wonder that the bitterness engendered in her caused her to look for means to hit back at the forces of superstition and intolerance, and she decided to challenge the anomaly that the US churches pay no taxes. This relates not only to ecclesiastical buildings, but extends to stocks and income from commercial investment held by the Christian churches.

She found, for example, that the Roman Catholic church owned Boston TV channel 38, and had recently sold it for 2.8 million dollars, none of it taxable because of the exemption given to the church. The same church owns WWL-TV in New Orleans, and yearly earns half-million dollars from this, also tax free. The Jesuits own the controlling stock in the Bank of America; the income from this is tax free. Loma Linda Food Products (rivals to Heinz 57 Varieties) another million-dollar concern, is owned by the Seventh-Day Adventists, whose resulting income is not taxed. The Mormons own controlling stock in the Union Pacific Railroad, and are also exempt from taxes. The Protestant Episcopal church owns the land that the Rockefeller Centre stands upon; the Baptists, Methodists and Congregationalists all hold land, property and commercial stock exempt from tax.

The exemption from tax which these several churches enjoy amounts to billions of dollars yearly. She instituted a suit in 1965 to end the practice of granting tax exemption to church owned property. It was found that there had never been a legal basis for this privilege, but it was based

on a tradition dating back to Colonial times. Many US lawyers concede that she will win, and one Supreme Court attorney says that "the churches face the biggest single blow ever suffered by organised religion in this country". Even the investments of Billy Graham would be affected. Her immediate target for the purpose of the suit is the Roman Catholic church in Maryland. Her success in this suit would affect ecclesiastical property and income in the whole of the United States.

Madalyn Murray O'Hair began as a lone atheist, and throughout her persecution and campaign has remained alone. She is not supported by Secular Societies in the USA. She has formed her own society—the Society of Separationalist—to help finance her activity. She claims she is desperately short of money. She is faced by the best brains in the legal profession purchased by the immense wealth of the Christian churches, who stand to lose incredibly should she succeed. Her suit has moved through the lower courts and now awaits the decision of the Supreme Court, to be published in October 1966, as to whether it is admissible for the Supreme Court to hear the case.

Her war is ours too

Some American secularists entirely disown her, but we in Britain, removed from the conflict, and thinking of our own similar problems, may agree that Senator Robert Kennedy's definition of courage applies to her: "For every ten men willing to face the guns of an enemy, there is only one willing to brave the disapproval of his fellows, the censure of his colleagues, the wrath of his society". Certainly we might agree with Bertrand Russell that "this is a brave and entirely admirable woman". Her war against superstition, injustice and privilege is our war too.

She has achieved the end of compulsory worship and religious instruction in US state schools, and this is a battle which we in Britain have still to win.

Regarding the "Tax the Churches" issue, if she succeeds in this she will have struck organised religion such a blow from which it might never recover.

Can one freethinker in one lifetime achieve any more?

Roger Green

RELIGION IN A GRAMMAR SCHOOL

EACH MORNING about eight hundred boys assemble in ***** Grammar School Central Hall to worship Almighty God in song and praise. At least that's how the Education Authorities think it should be. However, this is no nearer the truth than it would be if it were accepted that all were Buddhists. This form of compulsory religion is slowly but surely being eroded at the school where I am a prefect.

We all assemble each morning at 8.50 a.m. and stand up to sing praise to God as the principal strides up to his position on the stage. We then sit down at the end of two verses and listen to one of the resident clergy expound the truths of the Christian religion.

By now the majority of the assembly are so bored that a murmur among the boys soon becomes a general discussion. This continues as the Headmaster proceeds to rally us all together for the Lord's Prayer. The bowed assembly continue their conversation, unperturbed by the fact that their chatter is louder than the prayer they are all supposed to be saying. So, with a clatter of teachers' feet,

the assembly leaves and forgets its religious devotion until the next morning.

Any attempts that have been made by the boys to stop this mockery have been quietened by the voice of the Headmaster announcing that it is by law that we are thus assembled. I have not attempted a conscientious exemption from the assembly simply because it is much more amusing and satisfying to see that even the old-school tradition of compulsory Christianity is now crumbling around the feet of the school directors than to stand in a cold, draughty corridor.

OBITUARY

IT is with deep regret we have to announce the sudden death on November 3rd of Mrs Bradlaugh Bonner, the widow of Charles Bradlaugh Bonner who was President of the World Union of Freethinkers until his death in September this year. We extend our deepest sympathy to the sons and grandchildren who have suffered a double loss this year.

NEWS AND NOTES

ON OCTOBER 26 a BHA deputation of Mr H. J. Blackham (Chairman), Sir Gilbert Flemming, Lionel Elvin and Mrs Lena Jeger, MP, met Anthony Crosland (Secretary of State for the Department of Education and Science) "to discuss the government's proposed legislation to increase grants to voluntary schools". At the time of going to print it is not known what particular line they took.

From the latest appeal brochure of the Humanist Housing Association it might be assumed that the National Secular Society is not giving support to this excellent project. This is not so. The brochure just neglected to mention the NSS which will, I am sure, continue to publicise and give as much support as it can.

Hot Ayerism?

DEE WELLS (Mrs Ayer) produced a lively column in the *Sun* (Oct. 19) about the Anglican Sex Report, which trailed off into platitudes no cleric would be ashamed of. She gives Christianity the credit for "Thou shalt love thy neighbour", Schools, Medicine, Welfare, Democracy, Justice, Kindness and Love. "There is", she suggests, "a lovely place waiting for the Churches in the big grown-up world", if only they can learn some humility. What! with all those unearned bouquets from an agnostic?

John Grigg (*Guardian*, Oct. 27) courteously considered the centenary of the National Secular Society, and claims to be "in strong agreement" with most of its aims. He cannot accept, however, the basic assumption that "this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge". This seems to him to "have all the dogmatism of a religious creed without the psychological value which even the worst religious creed possesses". He goes on,

"Surely it is also true that an overwhelming majority of human beings believe there is an unseen Power which both created the world and shapes its destiny, and that the progress of mankind (as well as a great deal of its misery) is attributable to that belief".

But wouldn't the Communists say much the same about *their* beliefs? I don't know of any persecutions carried out on behalf of the NSS "Principle"; who can tell how many great servants of humanity it has inspired; it provides no justification for neglecting the misery of this world in the hope of a better world to come.

From the Rome front

ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS are campaigning against the Abortion Bill. Thousands of leaflets are being distributed, and public meetings are being packed with the Roman Catholic anti-abortionists. There seems no doubt that next time the Catholic MPs will vote as they have been told. Meanwhile twenty-five per cent of Irish RC doctors are prescribing the pill directly as a contraceptive . . . And while Pope Paul goes on trying to decide how to break the news that the Almighty has changed his mind about the Pill, he has bought the Indians a drilling rig costing £7,305. What price a well or two for the Sicilians? Charity, we are constantly led to presume, begins where conversions are most needed. "Canadian, French and Vietnamese RCs need no longer abstain from eating meat on Fridays, but only from January 1st, which is to give the fishermen's unions time to get over it" (*Catholic Herald*, Oct. 28). It's a pity that one's first thought is that someone in the Vatican must have shares in the butchery business. But then to some extent they have, haven't they, in Vietnam . . . ?

Unity versus Survival?

THE CATHOLIC "Fathers" are roused by the Anglican (unofficial) "Report on Sex and Morality". "Who wants unity after that?" said one. Fr. Bernard Häring, "one of the leading moral theologians in the world", has said that there were some extremists in the Catholic Church who might go along with the working party's views, but a few extremists do not change the attitude of a great religious community". Which is, after all, what we have been trying to convince some of our own colleagues about for some time. However the Anglican church itself has reaffirmed that sexual intercourse should be confined within the married state, and Anglican fornication is still taboo. Billy Graham (addressing a Berlin rally of 12,000) expressed his shock at the report, and the Rev A. R. Shillinglaw, secretary of the Church of Scotland, called it a "dangerous and pernicious document". But then the Church of Scotland looks elsewhere for its fleshly pleasures. It supports those who would use the birch, and the cat and would like to see hanging brought back to the Statute Book. The *Monthly Record* (Peter Kearney of Glasgow reports) recommends the views of "experienced police chiefs . . . of proved Christian character" who are "much more trustworthy advisers in these matters than the sentimentalists . . ." (ie, the non-floggers). Meanwhile discussion about the unauthorised report will continue. It makes no difference to us, but it cannot be easy for young Anglicans to know whether or not to fornicate, unless, of course like us Humanists, they rely on their own sense of responsibility, knowledge and charity to guide their actions.

Another Society

HAVELOCK ELLIS (1859-1939) spent seven years writing his seven volumes on "The Psychology of Sex". The first was pronounced "obscene" in London, and the other six had to be published in the USA. Dr Alex Comfort has been described in the Anglican Report as a "radical sex pundit". Havelock Ellis was perhaps the radical sex pioneer in this country, and also a Rationalist. Sydney Pepper of 93 Eversley Road, Upper Norwood, London, would like to hear from anyone interested in forming a Society to counteract the neglect of this great man, whose books are now mostly out of print.

Lock up your daughters

THE *Daily Telegraph* (Oct. 24) reports that

"Mr Robert Sabonjian, Mayor of Waukegan, Illinois, who is campaigning for the American Senate, wants all unmarried mothers gaoled and their children put into orphanages. He believes this is the only humane way to deal with illegitimacy."

Better still, just keep young women in kennels from the age of 11 until marriage: perhaps afterwards, too, and then the risk of the production of any more Sabonjians would be happily minimised.

Atonement?

THE BEATLES' MANAGEMENT is to be responsible for presenting the Oberammergau Passion play in Britain for the first time. We are told that the anti-semitism will be cut; but surely it is the very basis of the Christian story? Meanwhile the Vatican is expressing concern at the resurgence of the sort of National Socialism that was born and flourished in the Oberammergau district, and a Jesuit priest, Fr Ludwig Volk, writing in *Stimmen der Zeit*, maintains that the deep Nazi loyalties of Cardinal Bertram, Archbishop of Breslau (Head of the German Bishops' Conference during the last war) "prevented the bishops from banding together to denounce the Hitler régime" (*Catholic Herald*, Oct. 28).

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LAPSED CATHOLICS

Michael Gray

RECENTLY, while browsing through my local public library, I came across a book which looked familiar. On picking it up it turned out to be *Our Faith* (Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1956), a description of the Roman Catholic religion by John Heenan, then Bishop of Leeds, since promoted to bigger if not better things. Though normally the name of the author alone would have been enough to make me put the book down again, this time I hesitated. I did so because I had read the book before as part of my religious education at school when I was still myself a Roman Catholic, and in those days it had seemed to make sense. I wondered what it would seem like today, now that I have grown up (in more senses than one) and become an Atheist. Also it is very unusual to get the opportunity to see the same thing from two entirely different and opposite points of view.

Having escaped the carefully-cultivated ignorance of Catholic belief and found sanity in Atheism, I can now only shake my head in amazement at the stupidity and arrogance of Cardinal Heenan's words, which I had once accepted without question. Appropriately enough, the first chapter of the book deals with "lapsed Catholics" (which is the Catholic term for people who have seen through the sanctimonious façade of the One True Church). The Cardinal informs us of the reasons why people leave the faith—bad example at home, laziness, and mixing with "bad companions". These latter he defines as people who "pretend that there is no harm in doing things Catholics know to be wrong". (Note the use of the words "pretend" and "know"—typical examples of Catholic arrogance. People who disagree with Catholic teaching cannot of course be credited with sincerity—they are merely "pretending". And Catholics never "think" anything—they always "know".)

Wishful thinking

Having disposed of the reasons why people leave the Church, the Cardinal goes on to explain to us that

"it is not the boy or girl who really knows the faith who gives it up. The more you know about the Catholic Church, the less likely you are to leave it. Intelligent people—I mean clever people like scientists, scholars and writers"—though obviously not writers for the FREETHINKER—"rarely give up the faith. The more people study the Catholic religion, the more it satisfies them."

Here I have quoted verbatim and not reported the Cardinal's statements in my own words, so that I cannot be accused of twisting them to make them sound ridiculous. No amount of manipulation could have made them seem any more stupid than they already are; my own personal experience of Catholicism has already proved that.

Freethinkers might not be able to appreciate how anybody could swallow the gibberish in this book without choking, but we must remember that the Cardinal is preaching to the already converted, and also that the book is primarily intended for school-leavers of 15 or 16 years who have already been indoctrinated in the Catholic faith. The statements he makes which are so obviously ridiculous to thinking people are intended merely to confirm the prejudices of people who don't think, indeed who are not allowed to think. These insidious views are not given to them as opinions, but as *facts*, and they are taught never to question, but only to accept and obey. It is not really then so surprising that Catholics are unable to make their own moral judgments, but must always do and think what

their Church tells them to, when they are subjected to this kind of propaganda in the most gullible period of their lives, the years of childhood. **What good is liberty to a man if he is not allowed the freedom to follow his own conscience?**

Fortunately some of those brought up as Roman Catholics do learn to think for themselves and, like myself, they become "lapsed Catholics". In my search for God and Truth (which I visualised as one and the same) the more I found out about the Catholic faith, the more I was repelled by it, *not* satisfied, as the Cardinal maintained. Of course he did not intend that any of the unpleasant aspects should be included in the finding out about the faith. Catholic education does not cover those subjects—they are completely ignored, if not deliberately hidden. I was taught all about gentle Jesus and how he died for mankind, of a God of Love and Mercy waiting to give me my eternal reward in heaven, and of how Catholic missionaries went around the world spreading the faith amongst the heathens and bringing them education and medical aid, not to mention righting all the injustices that unbelievers always seemed to be responsible for. What I was not taught but found out for myself was that this God of Mercy always seemed to be looking the other way when his help was needed to alleviate suffering and to right injustices, which were very often the direct result of atrocities perpetrated by the Catholic Church in his name. My education never included any accounts of the horrors of the Inquisition, nor of the despicable action (or lack of it) of Pius XII in keeping silence while his ally Hitler, also a Catholic, embarked on his "Final Solution" to the "Jewish Problem"—thus being every bit as guilty of the murder of innocent millions as the Führer himself. The Vatican was apparently too busy making money from the war by selling raw materials for armaments *to both sides* through the Jesuits, to take time off to protest about the unspeakable Nazi atrocities against the Jews, even when they were being dragged from beneath the very windows of the Vatican itself to the horrors of Auschwitz.

Symbolic hand-washing

Cardinal Heenan has some interesting comments to make about the Nazis in his book:

"From time to time men who hate the Church band themselves together to destroy it. . . . One such movement started in Germany and was called the Nazi party, and its leader was Adolf Hitler. He . . . denied the rights of the Church . . . any political party which denies Man his freedom is bound to be the enemy of the Catholic Church." (Though not apparently any religious party.)

The Cardinal does not explain how he can reconcile these statements with the fact that the Vatican signed a Concordat with Hitler which it never revoked (even when the atrocities and murders were at their peak) and that the Pope knew perfectly well what was going on. Pius never opposed Hitler, and kept the Vatican "neutral" throughout the war. He did not even excommunicate any of the Catholics who were leading Nazis and instrumental in the various persecutions. All these facts, of course, were never even mentioned, let alone explained, by Cardinal Heenan, nor was I ever informed of them at any time during my "good Catholic 'education'".

The Cardinal maintains that once a person who has been a Catholic gives up his faith he can never be happy. The truth is of course that no thinking, humanitarian being

could ever be happy with such a cruel and ignorant faith, a faith with a longer and bloodier history of blatant disregard for human suffering than any other; that says we alone have the Ultimate Answer and that everybody else is wrong and must suffer accordingly, either in the eternal fires of hell or the not so eternal but much more painful fires of earth (as in the days of the Inquisition). Roman Catholicism is the most vicious form of that cancer called Christianity, a cancer that has been eating up mankind for nearly two thousand years. Even in our so-called enlightened age it causes millions unnecessary suffering with its pernicious doctrines on Divorce, Birth Control, Abortion, Euthanasia, etc.

The need for our understanding and opposition

Catholicism taught me many things while I was in its clutches. It taught me how to feel superior to those miserable people who had no Divine Answer, and how to dis-

criminate against non-Catholics (especially those loathsome creatures who blasphemed even to the extent of denying the very existence of God!). Above all it taught me how to feel guilty for sins I had not committed, and how to be ashamed of normal, human feelings—especially during the sensitive years of adolescence when condemnation was all that was forthcoming and understanding all that was needed. Those years were wasted in the service of a tyrant, and I shall not forget that. Nor can I forgive Catholicism for the burden of guilt it forced me to carry in those dark years, a burden which it will force millions more unfortunate, innocent children who are unlucky enough to be born into Catholic families, to bear unless we stop them. All who believe in the basic freedom and dignity of Man should never cease to oppose the Catholic Church wherever it raises its ugly head, and to condemn it for the cruelty, persecution, injustice, and above all the inhumanity which are its trademarks.

THE BISHOP OF WOOLWICH TALKS TO THE AGM OF THE ABORTION LAW REFORM ASSOCIATION,

OCTOBER 22nd, 1966

THE highlight of this meeting was the talk by Dr Robinson, the Bishop of Woolwich, and the showing of the excellent and moving ITV "This Week" film on abortion. Dr Robinson said that he was not speaking officially as a Bishop, but as a "concerned Christian and layman in the field of abortion". Nevertheless, he is a Bishop, with all the responsibility and power that this involves, and he cannot really expect this to be forgotten. What I found most strange was the way he sometimes uses "Love" instead of "I". Knowing that for him Love is "God", this method of speaking with divine authority is intriguing. Our task, he suggested was the Vanquishing of Lethargy by Love, and this must be done, not by contemplating what "ought" but by accepting the fact of what is. He summarised the facts as (a) anyone who wants an abortion badly enough will get it; the present law is unenforceable. (b) Discussion is now taking place about abortion within a new scientific setting, and is linked with the clinical aspects of contraception rather than with talk of infanticide and murder. Scientific advances will alter the whole perspective. (c) With regard to the population explosion, we can no longer refuse to control birth without accepting a formidable burden of responsibility. "Children are not a gift of the Lord which cannot be denied". (d) Although society must give all possible assistance to those parents who have handicapped children, we have to decide if we should force women to bear deformed babies.

Dr Robinson also dealt with the long-term goals: (1) The need to *maximise knowledge*. The establishment is buttressed by ignorance and fear, he said, but he presumably didn't include the Anglican Church in the "establishment". As soon as some abortion-producing pill is manufactured, the law will more easily be avoided, but the moral issues will remain the same. "Love" says "yes" to knowledge, he went on. But again this was very hard to square with his allegiance to a religious institution which says "no", unless one presumes that the Church is without "Love" (ie God) and perhaps should be without Dr Robinson. (2) The need to *maximise freedom*. "Love" has no interest in keeping people moral by Acts of Parliament. ("Love" and the Vatican are, then, at loggerheads, so what price Christian Unity?) (3) Abortion should cease to be a crime. And (4) abortion should be abolished. With the infallible contraceptive of the future, the Bishop seemed to think this would be possible. He did not discuss the points that

have been raised in the FREETHINKER about women who consciously or unconsciously reject contraception, even when unmarried. The Bishop deplored the way that attempts are still made to make people moral and women chaste by threats and even by the births of unwanted children. **He believed we might be entering an age when men and women would be sterile unless choosing to be fertile.**

From the Humanist point of view there was nothing we had not heard or thought about before, and little to disagree with in the Bishop's talk. During question time, however, it did seem as if "Love" was not wholly with us, and questions relating to the position of the Anglican Church and abortion were avoided. Dr Peter Draper raised the important question of moral education in schools, but Dr Robinson seems to imagine that all RE teachers are as progressive as he is and that Christians have been major pioneers in school sex education. (If only he and Professor Ayer would get around to seeing how the other half lives!) Nor had he any "loving" or practical answer to the question of women who find themselves on a doctor's list long before they know that his religious prejudices will prevent him giving advice about contraceptives or abortion. Professor Glanville Williams (who was most constructively chairing the meeting), emphasised that women may be led to believe that there are medical reasons for a decision which in fact rests only on these prejudices.

The meeting was especially interesting for those of us who had never heard the Bishop speaking "in the flesh" before. One feels that so long as he has long enough to study a situation, he will ignore the dictates of his church and come out on the liberal and progressive side, but that tradition and orthodoxy still have a strong hold when he is caught unawares. This is why, one supposes, he remains a Bishop. But it is good that although his dedication to abortion law reform is more recent than his support of law reform regarding homosexuals and the death penalty, it is now wholehearted and imaginative.

ALRA, as always, are to be congratulated on such a lively and well-organised meeting, and the Kensington Library is an ideal lecture room for such purposes. May the busy weeks and months to come bring them the success they deserve.

KM.

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Monday, November 14th, 8 p.m.: Professor G. MAHOOD,
"Personal Discourse: The Role of Humanists in a Rationalist
Society".**Glasgow Secular Society (Grand Hotel, Charing Cross), Sunday,
November 13th, 2.45 p.m.: HUGH MCDIARMID, "The Fight
Against Religion—a Progress Report".**Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate),
Sunday, November 13th, 6.30 p.m.: Professor J. KEMP,
"Religion and Morality".**The Medway Humanists (Riverside Rooms, Chatham), Friday,
November 11th, 7.30 p.m.: WILLIAM McILLROY, "Centenary of
the National Secular Society".**South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London, WC1), Sunday, November 13th, 11 a.m.: RONALD
MASON, "Shakespeare and the Moral Order"; Tuesday, Novem-
ber 15th, 6.30 p.m.: RICHARD CLEMENTS, "Racialism in the Far
East".**South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London, WC1), Sunday, November 13th, 6.30 p.m.: Amici
String Quartet. Dvorak, Rubbra, Schubert. Admission 3s.**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.***HOUSE OF COMMONS MEETING**

AT a meeting in the House of Commons last week the lobby of the National Secular Society and Humanist Teachers' Association expressed its grave concern at the proposals to extend subsidies to denominational schools contained in the Education Bill, 1966, which was given its second reading on Friday. In advocating secular education, the members emphasised that they were not wanting atheist education or opposition to the principle of private education so long as it was financially supported by those who benefited from it.

They contended that, in days of oecumenism among the churches and an emphasis on the desirability of racial and colour integration in the community at large, it should be contrary to public policy to subsidise segregation on credal lines. The present Government has, admittedly, inherited a problem from the 1944 Act and the meeting did not demand that subsidies from existing church schools should be immediately withdrawn. But it felt that at a time of comprehensive reorganisation there should be no extension of the principle of credal division and that existing subsidised schools should be allowed to run down. Many people are strongly opposed to the subsidy of ideologies which they believe to be both dangerous and antisocial. The prime example is the Catholic attitude to population problems.

The argument given in favour of separate schools is parental choice, which ignores the absurdity of having individual schools at public expense for every ideological faction in the community, e.g. Exclusive Brethren, Spiritualists, Jehovah's Witnesses. But on this principle it is particularly unfortunate that it is proposed to extend support of church schools in single-school areas even where a majority of citizens may prefer a county school. The so-called conscience clause does not work in practice because parents fear removed children will be embarrassed or victimised and at least one chairman of a church school (Wheatthamstead, Herts.) asserted that "every activity of the school shall be informed with the Christian spirit. It applies to everything from learning numbers to playing football". The clauses in the Bill applying to church schools in single-school areas are the ones most in need of deletion.

NEWS AND NOTES (Continued from page 356)**Another try which must succeed**

MR LEO ABSE (Lab., Pontypool) has been given leave to introduce his private member's bill to amend the divorce law. The bill received an unopposed first reading. Last time it was the Bishops who obstructed the reform which is so urgently needed. The intention now is that courts should be able to grant a divorce where partners of a marriage which has irrevocably broken down have been apart for five years. Such conditions for divorce already exist in Australia, New Zealand and Belgium.

Miscellany

Mr M. A. BARY from Dacca, Pakistan, reports that, while we in this country try to abolish RI in schools, for the first time in his country RI is to be made compulsory for boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 15. The *Spiegel* (Oct. 10) reports that the town council at Gaildorf, North Württemberg, has refused to pay for repairs to a church clock tower, as it no longer serves a useful service to a public equipped with watches and radios. In McAllen, Texas, the Rev Henry Collins is to give 120 trading stamps to every member of his congregation in an attempt to boost attendances (*Express*, Oct. 22).

BOOK REVIEW

Elizabeth Collins

Of Inhuman Bondage

HOW THIN is the crust of civilisation! This is often apparent in countries where one least expects it, and it has been said that prison shows up every government and system as it really is. *117 Days* by Ruth First, a Penguin Special, 3s 6d, gives a precisely recorded and detailed account of police methods by which the Verwoerd régime seeks to impose its "Apartheid" policy on those who disagree with it. The author writes of her own experiences as a detainee in two prisons under the "90 Day Law". This presents a vivid and often poignant picture of restrictions and repressive measures taken against citizens, both white and black, who have become involved in this racial conflict.

Born in Johannesburg, and graduating in Social Science from Witwatersrand University, Ruth First is married to Joe Slovo, a practising barrister, and they have three daughters. She specialised in political journalism, becoming editor of three papers—*Clarion*, *New Age* and *Guardian*—which were mainly concerned with the effects of Apartheid on the lives and work of Africans. Each paper was in turn banned by the National Government, and because she was a member of the white opposition, constant restrictions were placed on her writing activities, even going so far as to forbid her entrance to newspaper and publishing offices. She was also among the accused in the 1956 Treason Trial. With all avenues of journalistic employment closed to her, Ruth First embarked upon a Librarianship course, and it was whilst studying at the University library that she was arrested, her house searched and one copy of a banned journal found. Thereupon, without warrant or charge, solely under the arbitrary "90 Day Law", she was taken to prison and placed in solitary confinement.

Catacomb Atmosphere

Here she was to experience prolonged and intense loneliness and idleness, in a small squalid concrete-walled cell with tiny barred window, one small electric bulb burning day and night, "a catacomb atmosphere". The sound of clanging doors, indignity of wardresses standing by while she washed, and of having to shout and bang on the door if she needed the lavatory. Added to that were the endless inspections and police interrogations, and anxiety as to what was happening to her family and friends outside. It became a matter of waiting for time to pass—and just enduring. Certain improvements had taken place in penal reform—mainly for white people—but basically emphasis is on harsh punishment, longer sentences and less freedom. Enquiries about blood-curdling screams from the punishment block only elicited the reply, "This is a prison you know." Wardresses were usually recruited from police families; some were teen-agers, as in South Africa youths and girls can enter the police service at sixteen. Those Ruth First mainly came into contact with were police widows, and her description of them is amusing. Some she identified by their approach along the corridors to the cells, and by their voices, giving them names such as Shriill, Raucus, Pained, etc. She also got to know many details of their former lives.

The System

The Security Branch have perfected a system designed to plague the victim with anxiety, uncertainty and apprehension, counting on increasing strain of isolation as well as prolonged sessions of interrogation to so weaken resistance that holding out would become impossible. The police thus gain all the incriminating information they need. Arrests can be ordered by police Chiefs without notifying relatives or disclosing where the arrested person is detained. These become "the unnumbered, the nameless, and the lost". Interrogation is undertaken by a group of detectives who are expert in knowing the exact moment at which to apply pressure. People vary as to cracking-point. At first the Security men relied upon the erosion of solitary confinement to get results, torture consisting of beatings, electric shocks, etc., being reserved solely for Africans; but after 14 months the most sacred law of Apartheid (that whites are different) was broken, and anything is now permitted. Since the failure of the Treason Trial they have become "sadistic mind-breakers". At one questioning Ruth First demanded the reason for her continued detention, and the officer replied by reading Clause 17 of the Suppression of Communism Act, which required that a person be detained for 90 days unless questions were satisfactorily answered.

Cat and Mouse

After two months Ruth First was transferred to Pretoria gaol to undergo a stricter régime hoping that would make her more co-operative with the police. No visitors—no books except a Bible—no conversation with wardresses. For the twenty-eight days they kept her there she felt as though abandoned. She tried to

organise activities, bed-making several times daily, unpicking the hem of her dressing-gown and with a smuggled needle and cotton sewing it up again, stitching a calendar behind the lapel of the dressing-gown to keep count of the 90 days. Towards the end of the time, having failed to get her to talk, they took her back to the detention cell in Johannesburg. Here, the day before she was due to be released, her mother and children were allowed to visit her. She thought that a bad sign, especially as her mother managed to convey the information that something had gone wrong, "B was talking". A feeling of panic seized her, as "B" was a key person. However, while she was in the exercise yard a detective came to release her, she was given her belongings, taken to the charge office and handed the liberation order. Refusing the use of the office phone to ring for a car, they indicated a telephone box outside in the street. Hurrying across to it, two Security Branch men promptly arrested her for another 90 days detention! Ruth First was numbed into silence as the cell door once more clanged behind her. The trick had worked!

What happened to Looksmart?

Interspersed throughout the book are extracts from trials, letters and diaries of 90-Day detainees and prisoners, pathetic accounts of their sufferings and of those escapees who were re-captured and condemned to have both ankles joined by a long clanging chain. John Ferus was taken to a police station forty miles from his home to be released and told to make his way home as best he could. As he ran into the street they chased and re-arrested him. What happened to Looksmart Ngudle nobody will probably ever really know. He was one of the live-wires of the Capetown African National Congress, was arrested and about a fortnight later found dead in his cell. Ten days afterwards his mother was notified and given a pass to attend his funeral in Pretoria. Arriving there, she found he had already been buried, and could neither discover why he had been arrested nor the cause of his death. Evidence produced at the subsequent inquest gave many instances of gross brutality employed to extract information from detainees, and those who had contact with Looksmart after he had undergone beatings and electric shocks said he had been threatened with death if he wouldn't talk, "they say they will kill me tomorrow". In spite of dubious police evidence the magistrate returned a verdict of suicide which nobody really credited. Finally after 117 days Ruth First was released. She was not prosecuted for possessing the illegal paper. "I don't know why I was released—perhaps they made up their minds that I would not talk after all." If among those locked away there were those who "cracked", they were used for information by the Security Branch. The unbreakable were given long terms of imprisonment, 12, 20 years or life.

This book should be of immense interest to all those concerned with the problem of racial conflict. It makes nonsense of that frequently used expression, "the Free World". Well might Madame Roland exclaim on the steps of the guillotine in 1793—"O Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name".

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