

# FREETHINKER

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## TEACH THEM TO KNOW AND LOVE GOD

**Brat:** Have you read the Plowden report, Sir?

**Teacher:** No, I haven't.

**B:** My Dad has. He's very interested in education, so he bought a copy. He asked me to read the bit on RI and see what I thought about it.

**T:** You're far too young to understand such matters.

**B:** Why do you say that Sir? After all the Plowden report is at least written in modern English and if I'm old enough to understand the old fashioned language in the Bible I ought to be old enough to understand the Plowden report.

**T:** Jones, you are being cheeky again, as usual.

**B:** Sorry, Sir, I didn't mean to be cheeky. I just wanted to ask a few questions and get a few answers. After all, isn't that what I come to school for?

**T:** Yes, yes. Of course. Now let us get on with Sodom and Gomorrah.

**B:** Sir, do you *really* believe she was turned into a pillar of salt?

**T:** Who?

**B:** Lot's wife, Sir.

**T:** That's what the Bible says, doesn't it?

**B:** I know that, Sir, but I'd like to know if you *believe* it.

**T:** Really, Jones, why do you ask such questions? The other children want to get on with the story.

**B:** But, Sir, the Plowden report says that if we ask if stories are true we should be given an honest answer.

**Do you believe it's true, Sir?**

**T:** Well...um...ah...you see...

**B:** It's all right, Sir, we won't split. I mean if you don't believe the same as Mr Smith, that's all right. If I may quote, Sir, the Plowden report says that "neither the believing nor the non-believing teacher should try to conceal from his pupils the fact that others take a different view". Do you take a different view, Sir?

**T:** Jones, if you learned to recite the creed as well as you can recite the Plowden report, you would do better. Now then, the time is getting on.

**B:** Well, Sir, I only want to know if you believe this story of Lot's wife becoming salt.

**T:** Oh well, if you really must know, I don't.

**B:** Do you believe that bit we read on Tuesday about Jonah living in a whale for three days and then being coughed up by it? Do you, Sir?

**T:** Jones, we are supposed to be doing Sodom and Gomorrah today, not Jonah and the whale.

**B:** But *do* you believe it, Sir?

**T:** Well, no, not really.

**B:** And that bit about a talking serpent, you know, in the Garden of Eden?

**T:** Well, not actually a talking one.

**B:** And do you really believe that Mary was still a virgin when Jesus was born?

**T:** Well, seeing as you ask me, I can't say I do, but we don't want to get involved in that sort of thing during RI.

**B:** Sir, do you believe in God?

**T:** Jones, I really think we have spent more than enough time answering your questions.

**B:** Well, it's not my fault, Sir, if the others don't ask them. Perhaps they're not as interested as I am.

**T:** Perhaps, Jones, it is simply that their interest is not as sadly misplaced as yours.

**B:** Oh come on, Sir, please, Sir. You know what the Plowden report says about it. The teacher should give an honest answer and not conceal his views. Now, Sir, do you believe in God?

**T:** No, I don't, I don't. Now I've said it, haven't I?

**B:** You don't believe there is a God?

**T:** No, I don't. Now we really *must* get on with Sodom and Gomorrah.

**B:** But, Sir. The Plowden report says that we should be taught to know and love God. How can you teach us to know and love God when you don't even believe he exists?

**T:** Jones, I have simply given you my personal opinion, seeing as your premature interest in the subject insists on it. It is only my personal opinion. I have no doubt that most of the other teachers *do* believe in God.

**B:** They do, Sir, they do, or at least they say they do, because I've asked them Sir. But Sir, the fact is you're making us doubt whether God even *exists* because if you don't believe he does, maybe he doesn't.

**T:** Jones, I told you it's only my personal opinion.

**B:** Well, Sir, I know that Sir, but the Plowden report says that we shouldn't be confused by being taught to doubt before faith is established and now you *are* teaching us to doubt. I must say I don't know *which* is more confusing. The Plowden report or the Bible. Which do you think, Sir?

**T:** Jones, you have clearly become so engrossed in this subject that you were unable to hear the blessed bell which has just rung with exceptional clarity to notify us, I am glad to say, that this lesson is now over.

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## HONEST TO GODNESS

F. H. Snow

CHRIST, we have it on scriptural testimony, denounced the Pharisees as hypocrites. He was very severe upon them. How hard, we wonder, would he be on those today who, unlike the Pharisees, profess to reverence and serve him, were he able to come back on earth? And, surely, he would have been back long ago if he could. The world has been his to roam for nigh on twenty centuries since he went up out of sight of his marvelling disciples, according to that impeccable witness, Mark. Indulging the Christian fancy that he could have come back, he must have forgotten that he promised some of his listeners that he would do so before they died. But that's very "old hat". Christians don't let things like that worry them now. Indeed, they have become so habituated to swallowing, without strain to the mental epiglottis, the most palpable infeasibilities in respect of their creed, that the most devout of them are self-deceivers, or, bluntly, hypocrites.

One does not like to say that of the nice people who form the core of religious bodies—the genial, good-living, well-wishing, earnest labourers for the Lord—the kindly ladies and gentlemen who wouldn't hurt a thing, and are the essence of piety. Yet it is brutally true. The writer's father was a staunch and benevolent Christian, unwavering in "good works", but quite dishonest about credal vulnerabilities. He would not face them, and was, for all his devotional warmth, a hypocrite.

It is, of course, impossible for any but the most ignorant to honestly embrace the Christian faith. The majority of modern believers are, however, more dishonest than were those of old. With the churches hedging on numerous doctrinal points, double thinking has become almost a cult. Many biblical statements, formerly accepted as inviolable, are now interpreted to suit personal predilections. The churches, though not endorsing this latitude, tacitly condone it, whilst preaching the chief fundamentals of Christian belief. They realise that modern thought is steadily eroding the supposititious rock on which their faith is based, and that retreat to less orthodox defences must be screened by an ostensibly unbroken front. Consciences can be permitted individual adjustment, but the same old story of the God above the clouds, the Bethlehem Babe born to be crucified for sinning mankind, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost trinity, heaven, angels and devils, is preached and publicised as utter truth. Churchfolk may squirm round the many scriptural inconsistencies, impute figurative meanings to inconveniently literal injunctions, interpret this and that in the interests of comfort and affluence, so long as they hold the basic doctrines. These the most consummate religious shufflers are required to profess, as essential to salvation and the obstruction of secular opinion.

The Bishop of Woolwich's outspoken objections to the most fundamental of Christian tenets—the personal reality of God—have come as a blow to the churches' hopes of keeping their archaic and scientifically discredited doctrines clamped on their people's minds, despite yielding so much ground otherwise. Dr Robinson's assertion that the deity worshipped by the many millions of Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Moslems is nothing but a shapeless force, is sheer religious treason. It strikes at the very root of Christian faith, challenging not only God's actuality but the divinity of Jesus and the doctrine of salvation. For, if Christ's Father is not a being, whatever he or it imagin-

ably is would need no material residence (with or without golden streets), and his Son could have had nothing to take his very material body up to, much less sit on the right hand of.

Now the Bishop has come out with the statement that "in one sense the definition of heaven and hell is the same; being without God—for ever". Just what he means he alone knows, but the only sense I conceive that he has conjured, is that heaven is the heavenly feeling ecstatic believers experience, continued eternally, and pre-supposing *post mortem* capacity to forever "find" his shadow God. How hell comes into the picture defeats me. This, however, is clear: the Bishop's retention of his so-called holy office, whilst making the creed he was ordained to profess and preach the subject of doubt and ridicule, is morally indefensible. He has demolished God as a being, and, by that fact, the literality of heaven and its scripturally attested inmates; he has made a mock of the Gospel story, and forfeited all right to the vocation of Christian priest.

What an example of mental prestidigitation he sets his religious brethren! What does he think the Christ whose divinity he affirmed at ordination would say of him, could he reappear? Undoubtedly he thinks he can't, but the great lip-serving preponderance of orthodox churchfolk don't doubt that he could, though they don't believe he will before the Last Day. How do they reconcile their belief in the bleeding Christ, the resurrected Jesus, the embodiment of truth and mouthpiece of God, with their watering down of his precepts to almost entire illiteralities; their contention that the Bible is divinely inspired, with their complacent disregard of its Six Day Creation story's clash with science's multi-million year evolution, no longer disputed by their churches; how do they reconcile their behavioural conformity to modern thought, with their diametrically-opposing religious beliefs?

The answer is: they don't. Bland acceptance of an illogical alliance of wordliness and other-worldliness—of a burlesqued Christianity—of double thought as the solvent of religious difficulties, is the order of the day. Confined within the orbit of indoctrinated beliefs, the sceptical faculties of such people stay dormant. Inured to hypocritical thinking, what hope is there of their liberation, or that of succeeding generations of their like, from the intellectual dishonesty bred by religion's demands on their credulity?

More than ever, there is need of high-powered denunciation of the self-cheating vogue that threatens to indefinitely prolong religion. More than ever, there is need of loyalty to Freethought ideals, and an end of compromise with obscurantism. More than ever, there is need of a strong, aggressive secularism, hungry to command the immense facilities essential to the effective propagation of atheism, and the people's comprehension that God is myth, Christ dead for ever, and that salvation lies in love of truth, hatred of hypocrisy and in reverence of all that makes for good in this, the only life of which we know.

### ADVERTISEMENT

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## HELP! I NEED SOMEBODY

Margaret Green

"OH THEY'RE GREAT 'do gooders', they are," someone said in a not very complimentary voice. But what *are* "do gooders" and what motivates them? The church would have it that they are motivated by the "love of God". But "love" in itself is a very complex word, with many facets.

People do good because *they* want to, because *they* get personal satisfaction, because *they* feel a sense of purpose, because *they* find a usefulness in life, because *they* realise we all need each other.

We seldom deliberately say, "I will help so-and-so because it will help me", but we do weigh up the pros and cons in our minds. We also help people because we know what it is like to be in a similar position. We understand their need for help because we have experienced it too, so by helping that person we are transporting ourselves into the needy person's place. This is not a self-sacrifice but an act of understanding that "there but for fortune go you or I", and we thus identify ourselves with that person.

It is often the people who do not work for a "cause" or help with "this or that", who use the phrase "do gooder", even though they too give their help in everyday acts (which are not considered in the same light).

The term "do gooder" stems from the original conception of Social Workers, who were "ladies of social status", with time on their hands to devote to charity. Although they realised the need and did much good work, they were regarded sceptically because of their social position. Gradually this attitude has changed and the need for organised social work is being appreciated. There are still those however who regard social work as a pastime for the wealthy (and often an invasion of privacy) without realising that it is undertaken by a variety of people, quite often in an odd free hour during the day or evening, and that it is carried out because of the *need* to improve and help the lives of many individuals and thus benefit society as a whole.

I have a friend who this year was awarded the BEM for "charitable services". But for two days he thought it was a joke, because he could not understand why he should be receiving it. True he had done a great deal for charity all his life. He entertains at many Old Folks' and children's parties and travels many miles to organise and entertain for other people, but this is his *life* and he enjoys it. The fact that it is charitable makes no difference to him, because this is an interest beyond his working day. So when he was awarded a medal for his "services", he was greatly surprised. He, like many other people, had the opportunity to use a special talent, so he used it and *enjoyed* doing so.

Social Workers use their special talents and training to notice the needs of other people and through their jobs have the opportunity to help satisfy those needs. Similarly with voluntary workers, they have the opportunity to use their *spare* time for the benefit of other people which, at the same time, gives them an interest and usefulness outside their routine life.

There are so many people who, through lack of opportunity, lack of education, lack of understanding or sheer bad luck, find themselves in need of help of some sort.

Those who have the opportunity, the education or the understanding are in a position to do something about it. But the way in which they do it will depend on what they have to offer, and how their helping someone else will fit in with their own lives. If they give themselves to the exclusion of themselves, they will soon find they are not able to give the help they set out to give.

This is not a simple case of the "haves" and the "have nots", because at some point we all need help from someone. One day we may be in a position to give this help, another day we may be accepting it. So because of this need for each other, "charity" as such becomes a necessary part of all our lives.

I was talking to a clergyman's wife recently, and she told me of someone who had for many years helped an aged disabled invalid. She worked hard behind the scenes, no one knew about her devoted work, and it was only by accident that the clergyman's wife had come across her, and seen all she was doing. Obviously the helper had not done it for public recognition, and she had no reward in her "selfless task" of menial, often unpleasant jobs. She worked, I was told, without thanks or appreciation from the aged disabled invalid, who was often rude and abusive. But still she carried on, obviously inspired by "the love of God", for who could otherwise continue in such devoted service, without recognition from any source, and without apparently being wanted by the unfortunate invalid.

"But was she in fact being of use?" I asked.

"Oh yes, she was making progress, although it was very slow," said the clergyman's wife, "and without her help the invalid would be lost"

"Well there is her reward," I said. "The helper *needed* to be *needed*." And she was.

Of course she was doing good. Of course she had a thankless job, but deep down she knew she was wanted, and here was her motivating force. The clergyman's wife was rather amazed at my seemingly hard attitude. But we all do good in one way or another, possibly not in such a concentrated form as the person just mentioned, but we do so because *we* want to and realise its need. Providing this "self" motivating force can at the same time be directed towards helping other people, it is excellent and necessary. So let's get rid of this aura of self-sacrifice, because we are all "do gooders" and we all need somebody.

### FREETHINKER FIGHTING FUND

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## NEWS AND NOTES

### In the best McCabe tradition

71 YEARS AGO, in February 1896, the Very Rev. Father Antony, OSF, left the Church of Rome. For the next sixty years to come he was, as Joseph Martin McCabe, to prove a living scourge of the corrupt organism he had left. At the time of his secession malicious stories were circulated in an attempt to discredit him, but the force of his arguments and the indisputability of many facts he marshalled against obscurantism in a distinguished lifetime of study could not be discredited. The name of McCabe will go down in the annals of Freethought as one of its staunchest, indomitable fighters.

Joseph McCabe is dead. Perhaps I should say his body ceased to function just twelve years ago. For his literary works live on and his influence is still vital, as much within the Catholic Church I suspect as without.

His namesake, Father Herbert McCabe, editor of *New Blackfriars*, the organ of the Dominican order in Britain, has now attacked the Roman Catholic Church in a recent article as "quite plainly corrupt".

Referring to the charges made against the Church by Mr Charles Davis, a leading Roman Catholic theologian, when he left the priesthood and church recently, Father McCabe wrote: —

"These charges seem to me to be very well-founded, and their truth would, on the whole, be taken for granted by English Catholics. The church is quite plainly corrupt. A cardinal selects Christmas as the occasion for supporting the murder of Vietnamese civilians. The Pope alleges that the Church's teaching is not in doubt about birth control. Nearer home, and more comically, a bishop has expressed the fear that Catholics who sing carols in Anglican churches are endangering their faith and morals."

Fr McCabe would, however, have done better to write that the charges and their truth are taken for granted by *some* English Catholics. The magazine he edits is directed towards a small, critical and educated readership. It is extremely doubtful whether the charges and their truth are taken for granted by a large, uncritical and poorly educated section of the Catholic population.

### Killing for fun

A BILL just introduced into the House of Commons proposes to ban greyhound coursing with live hares as the catch.

Jeremy Bugler of *The Sunday Times* has given a harrowing description of his visit to a coursing meet (5.2.67).

"One hare was bowled over by a greyhound some 10 yards from where I was standing. Both dogs tore at the creature which kept up a steady squealing. It was still squealing when the despatcher, perhaps 15 seconds later, ran up. It squealed in his hands (one of its legs stuck out at right angles from its body, clearly broken) and squealed until he stretched it. On another occasion squealing was audible for at least 15 seconds while the hare was being attacked by the hounds. On both occasions the hares died painfully and slowly."

As Mr Bugler points out, "the sport makes no pretensions of being run purely to catch hares or to control them as pests. The sport exists to test the merits of greyhounds who chase the hare".

It is a sad comment on human nature that it should be necessary to legislate against such activities. I saw recently a beautifully polished set of ladies and gentlemen defend-

ing this sport on television. I wonder how they would respond to actively participating themselves in a "see if you can be caught" game. How about giving them a 200-yard start in open country and then setting a pair of vicious alsatians on them and seeing if they are able to elude them and emerge from the sport unharmed. Those cultivated ladies and gentlemen would doubtless be among the first to call for a halt to such bloodthirsty activity.

### Religious beliefs of hospital staff

IN THE HOUSE of Commons on January 31st Mr Archer (Rowley Regis and Tipton, Lab.) asked the Minister of Health what steps he had taken to ensure that candidates for posts in National Health Service hospitals were not required to answer questions about their religion.

Mr Robinson, in a written reply, stated: I have arranged for hospital authorities to be informed of my views, and that I wish them to be observed. These views are: —

(a) there should be no discrimination or prejudice (or appearance of discrimination or prejudice) on grounds of religious belief or unbelief, in the appointment of nursing or other staff (or their promotion);

(b) an individual's religious belief or unbelief is in any event a personal matter for him and not for his or her employer;

(c) application forms should therefore not include a question on this subject;

(d) if a question is asked at interview about a candidate's religion (as about other matters), it should be framed in such a way that the candidate knows it need not be answered, should he or she prefer not to do so;

(e) there are occasions when it may be desirable for the running of the hospital to know a nurse's religion, particularly when there are religious objections to certain procedures. But nurses could be told collectively that in such a case they should inform the matron; or the matron could explain at the interview that for the running of the hospital it will be necessary for her to know in due course whether the candidate has any religious beliefs which would prevent her from undertaking particular duties;

(f) if it is desired to put student nurses in touch with clergy or other representatives of their particular denominations, an offer to do so could be conveyed in general terms to all.

I accept that special considerations apply at denominational hospitals and this guidance is not intended for these

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## THE CHRISTIAN TRINITY (Part 1)

A. C. Thompson

WHAT IS KNOWN about the essence of God? Is He equivalent, as Spinoza theorised, to the whole universe? Is He merely a store of matter and energy which initiated cosmogony and evolution, as deists assert? Is He the "mighty man-of-war" portrayed in the Bible? Is He an unextended point as one might conceive from Descartes' philosophy? Is He an invisible man, as savage witch-doctors depict and as primitive peoples everywhere blame for their misfortunes?

Christian theologians tell us that God consists of three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Ghost. This doctrine of the "Trinity" is peculiar to Christianity; it is not found in other religions such as Judaism or Hinduism. Where did the doctrine come from? How can it be known? Why is it believed? Is it true?

If we search the Scriptures for the origin of this belief, we find no mention of such a Trinity anywhere throughout the Old Testament, from beginning to end. The ancient Hebrews never had such an idea. We find the very first allusion to it in the first book of the New Testament, in the Gospel according to St Matthew (1, 18), where, narrating the birth of Jesus Christ, he avers that, "When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost". Matthew does not reveal how Mary's child was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and we must turn for these details to the only other biographer of the infancy of Jesus, Luke (1, 5 to 2, 8) who begins by narrating how the angel, Gabriel, predicted to Zachariah the pregnancy of his wife, Elizabeth. Then (1, 26) Luke tells us that in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, this angel Gabriel went to a virgin, Mary, who was espoused to a man named Joseph, told her that she would bear a son, whom she should call Jesus. When, Mary asked, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (1, 34), Gabriel replied that "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and . . . overshadow thee" (1, 35).

From this story it should be evident that Mary was not yet married, but merely engaged, for she knew not a man, not even Joseph. What "overshadow" means, or what it meant in the original from which it was translated into English, may contain the idea of a physical body on top of Mary which could shut off light from her. Mary consented (1, 38), and "in those days" (1, 39) went off to tell Elizabeth, whom Gabriel had referred to as her cousin (1, 36).

Now the visit by the angel, and the subsequent visit and impregnation by the Holy Ghost, whatever it was that Luke would have us imagine the latter did to impregnate her, were private events which could be testified by Mary only; Luke, who reports them, could not actually have witnessed them. It is to be noted carefully that the world's first public proclamation of the existence of a Holy Ghost was this announcement by Mary, and that she did it in order to explain her pregnancy.

Mary then recited the Magnificat, exclaiming how wonderful God was to do such a great thing to such an insignificant being as she (1, 46-55). In her exultation, she speaks of the divine fecundation as already accomplished, for she says that he that is mighty "hath done to me great things" (1, 49), not that he will do them. Then she stayed with Elizabeth three months and returned to her own house (1, 56). Mary's pregnancy must have been pretty far

advanced by this time, certainly more than three months, but not yet far enough to show too much, for Joseph did not know or suspect it until he commenced a sex act with her (Matthew 1, 18-19). Mary must have left for home just before the time of Elizabeth's delivery, for Elizabeth was six months pregnant at the time Gabriel came to Mary and Mary stayed there as a guest for three months, making a total of nine months, not allowing for the time of Mary's travel. Now why should Mary leave her cousin when she was just at the point of childbirth (Luke 1, 57), instead of waiting to help and comfort her or at least to see and welcome the new baby? Did she realise that her own condition would begin to show? Did she want to get home, find Joseph and get married to him before he could tell she was already pregnant?

Obviously she did not tell Joseph the truth about her condition, but married him first and then let him find out for himself, for Matthew testifies that "before they came together she was found with child . . . Then Joseph her husband . . ." (1, 18-19). Apparently Joseph was already her husband when he discovered her pregnancy and he did so before actually having intercourse with her himself, presumably on their wedding night. Hence, Mary had left Elizabeth at a critical moment and married Joseph before her pregnancy began to show through her clothing. And she did not tell Joseph of her pregnancy. She had told her cousin Elizabeth about it, in fact had even sung a Magnificat about it; but—she did not tell her husband. Why not?

Could it have been that Mary bound herself up tightly to hide as best she could an enlargement of perhaps four or probably more months, married Joseph as quickly as possible and attempted sexual intercourse with him, planning to make him think later that the baby was his, but that her pregnancy was so far advanced that she could not succeed? Of course, this is a supposition; but it is borne out by Mary's conduct as described in the Bible. What other explanation for Mary's behaviour is possible?

That Joseph was ignorant of Mary's condition at the time of their marriage is confirmed by his reaction to his discovery. For he, "being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was inclined to put her away privily" (Matthew 1, 19). Evidently he regretted his marriage, regarding himself as having been duped.

Even then, Mary did not give Joseph the Holy Ghost story; or if she did, Matthew does not know about it; or if he knows about it, he does not tell us about it; or if she did tell him, Joseph did not believe her; for, "while he thought on these things" presumably for some period of time which extended past the wedding night, "the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream" (Matthew 1, 20). Now why, when Joseph found her pregnant, did she not give him the explanation? Would he, or any normal new husband, not ask? Can it be that she did not have a Holy Ghost story made up yet, but invented it in desperation and later got Elizabeth to corroborate that the two of them knew of it during her three-month visit? The only possible alternative explanation could be that Joseph demanded, "Who is the father of your baby?" and that quickly, even before Mary had time to answer "The Holy Ghost", Joseph thought on these things, including divorce, for a tiny fraction of a second, then fell right asleep and dreamed.



It is quite remarkable that Joseph should have believed such a dream, for he had never before in his life ever heard of any Holy Ghost, there being no such character in the Hebrew religion in which he was brought up. Every night, you and I and everybody else have the most fantastic dreams; if we believed our dreams, we should have strange beliefs indeed. In our minds a chief characteristic of a dream is that it is unreal, not to be believed—"only a dream". The only supposition which is plausible may be that he was softened by Mary's pleading, perhaps by her protestations of love, and was persuaded to accept her alibi of the Holy Ghost. Also, in Judea in Biblical times, illegitimacy was not thought so wicked as now. Jesus' own

ancestors listed by Matthew (1, 1-17), included four women: Tamar, who tricked her own father-in-law, Judah, into incest with her by pretending to be a prostitute (Genesis 38, 6-26); Rahab, the harlot (Joshua 2, 1); Ruth, who crept at night into Boaz's bed and slept with him to induce him to marry her (Ruth 3, 7-13); and Bathsheba, who conspired with David to murder her husband, Uriah, so that she could become another of David's concubines (1 Samuel 11, 2-27). Solomon, another of the listed ancestors, was their illegitimate child. So Joseph gallantly undertook to bring up Mary's baby, of whom Christian theologians insist he was not the father.

*(To be continued)*

## THE SECOND HUNDRED YEARS

AS the National Secular Society enters its second hundred School, Bihar Community Project and other work of years, it looks forward to a real breakthrough in the thought and social climate in Britain. While it insists on the freedom of the individual to choose his or her own philosophy of life, however extraordinary, it hopes for a new dawn of rationalism and responsible behaviour. With sympathy and help, people will increasingly look to this world to solve their problems and provide their needs for love and companionship. We should like to see sport and the arts replace ritual; knowledge, faith; understanding, prejudice; psychiatrists and social workers, priests. Meanwhile we assert that those who continue to prefer traditional phantasy-answers to their questions about life and its meaning should recognise democratic principles and cease to demand for themselves privileges in education, broadcasting, rating, establishment and the like, which no other groups in the community enjoy.

Personally I like to look on the nineteenth century as the period of ideological revolution, and the twentieth as that of the sociological revolution. Yet the editors of serious newspapers say that their biggest correspondence comes from articles on basic belief. In schools and colleges I am still asked to lecture on atheism and debate the Bible. So it is simply not true, as some say, that the NSS as a humanist organisation can regard its theological battles as over and interest in religion as non-existent. Nor is it true that organisations like the churches with millions in annual income, active political lobbies and strong anti-humanist views on social and educational issues, can be written off as has-beens or embraced as partners in reform. The MRA campaign against abortion law reform today is a warning to the over-optimistic.

Yet it is true that the rôle of the NSS is becoming increasingly sociological. The world's problems will not vanish overnight with the decline of religion. War and want and selfishness and violence stand over us, and the Society is happy to work with anyone who will co-operate in their eradication. Increasing leisure is coming at a time when creative hobbies are being submerged by spectator pursuits in stadium or betting shop or television lounge. The churches have lost their attraction, but too few communities are building civic centres of comparable architectural merit. Life is not as rich or as colourful as national resources justify, and loneliness increases as our cities grow larger.

In the coming hundred years the Society's work will expand, in the fields of ideas, law reform, education, morality, civil liberties and culture. For the last century we have been the only organisation consistently advocating secular education. This work will continue with, we be-

David Tribe *President, National Secular Society*

lieve, mounting support from others. In the past the NSS worked out its ethical ideas in its own secular Sunday schools. Its members have already begun to devise syllabuses in social morality and citizenship to offer to county schools when they have freed themselves from the indoctrination of religious instruction and worship. We propose to set up a Secular Schools Trust to help those countries at present dependent on sectarian mission schools.

The NSS has made its main contribution to developing countries in showing how religious beliefs stifle scientific development and population control, and in urging reduction of arms bills and the responsibility of rich countries for the poor. In practical terms it will continue to support the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, Swaneng Hill social welfare. At home it will continue to assist in the management of the Agnostics Adoption Society and in urging local authorities to secularise their procedures.

The family planning movement grew directly out of the NSS. The Society's support for this as an essential part of the NHS and for other law reforms will strengthen: abortion, homosexual toleration, Sunday freedom, voluntary euthanasia, divorce rationalisation, penal reform, abolition of cruel sports, cultural emancipation. We propose a blitz on the mischievous old myth that public crime should be the same as private sin, and further assert that much of what the churches regard as sinful is morally permissible.

Inside religious bodies there are ceremonies, music recitations and social events. The NSS has had a notable reputation down the years for public meetings, conferences, debates, lectures and dinners, at which distinguished members and supporters have delighted thousands; but since secularist "services" were discontinued the Society has not, till recently, had enough cultural and social events. Building on centenary celebrations, concerts and lecture-recitals, we propose to establish a Humanist Film Society and a Profane Arts Group, and to further historical research in the great traditions of freethought and radicalism in this country.

But people of any or no ideology cannot lead a full life in freedom without basic civil liberties. No organisation has done more than the NSS to defend the rights of minorities—racial, religious, humanist, social. It has been a foremost supporter of the National Council for Civil Liberties and is its special adviser in the field of religion and the law. The National Secular Society intends to fight even harder in the next hundred years for a national secular society, which will stress our common humanity and have no established churches, no official religious ceremonies nationally or locally, and no formal oath. In this open society of the future, personal beliefs will vary, but the community will foster communal wellbeing.



## BOOK REVIEWS

David Tribe

PERHAPS I am not the right person to review a book on Simone Weil (Richard Rees, Oxford University Press, 30s). I have little sympathy with Catholic converts, hypochondriacs, mystics, martyrs and French intellectuals, particularly those who glow for T. S. Eliot "with a kind of genius akin to that of the saints".

Simone Weil was born to freethinking Jewish parents in Paris in 1909. She was an early victim of *Weltschmerz* and ambition, claimed afterwards that she travelled more on behalf of Germany than France in 1918, by dint of overwork had a brilliant academic career in mathematics and philosophy, taught at several lycées, went to Berlin to see the political situation in 1932, worked for nine months in a factory (1934-34) to see how the other half lived, spent two months as a pacifist at the Spanish Civil War in 1936 till she burnt herself with some cooking oil, found God while holidaying in Italy in 1937, recommenced teaching, stopped after four months because "pain around the central point of the nervous system . . . persists during sleep and has never stopped a second", to the accompaniment of Gregorian music at Easter 1938 "Christ himself came down and took possession" of her, in 1939 renounced pacifism, offered to form a women's suicide corps on the French front, worked on a grape harvest in France in 1941, left for America in May 1942, spent most of her time in Harlem till she left for Liverpool in November 1942, worked four months in London while offering to join the French Resistance, died in a fashionable sanatorium at Ashford, Kent, of tuberculosis and a hunger strike in 1943. Throughout this period she managed to deliver a number of lectures, write some short books and articles and leave many notebooks on philosophy, mathematics, politics and theology.

Throughout the book Mr Rees constantly assures us of her heroism and her genius, so that at the end of it all one feels a positive cad to remain unimpressed. Oh, she has some interesting things to say on the shortcomings of Yahweh, the Roman Empire and modern nation-states, the evil of deracination, the illusion that "freedom" for workers is simply more leisure, the dangers of specialisation and mob psychology. The author tells us that this is all highly original, not necessarily the "thoughts", but the "way of thinking". Certainly her insights are mixed up with the curious essays in metaphysics and paradox that would have delighted Père Teilhard de Chardin. But it is clear that the appeal for Mr Rees is her abiding anti-humanism, her strictures on "humanistic progressivism, the worship of a loveless and godless science, and the loss of the sense of the supernatural, the impersonal, the other reality". Needless to say she has discovered that "perfect beauty, perfect truth, perfect justice" belong to a world outside ours and have something to do with Catholicism, that there is no conflict between true religion and true science and there is nobility in affliction. But the book is worth reading for a portrait of the disintegration of our time and the strange effects it can have on *déraciné* intellectuals.

Elizabeth Collins

**A House on Clerkenwell Green** by Andrew Rothstein (Lawrence and Wishart. 7s 6d).

"A NEIGHBOURHOOD well known to the democracy of London", was the description of Clerkenwell Green as reported in June 1872 in Charles Bradlaugh's paper the *National Reformer*. An historic quarter, indeed, showing more than 200 years of continuous association with various workers' movements in this country. This is an exciting book, in which the author gives a comprehensive and well-documented account of the house 37A Clerkenwell Green, tracing its history of changing fortunes from its beginning as a Welsh Charity School in 1738 to 1933 when it became the MARX MEMORIAL LIBRARY. Clerkenwell appears to have been the recognised sounding-board for both popular and unpopular causes, and the Green a much favoured ground for protest meetings. Illustrations in the book include an engraving of the original house, as well as portraits of John Stuart Mill, William Morris, R. Page Arnot and other notable people connected with liberal and reformist movements of their day.

In 1869 the Patriotic Society was formed for Sunday evening meetings and discussions. An appeal for subscriptions to provide suitable premises received generous support from, among others, J. S. Mill, who sent £20 from Avignon, Samuel Morley (Liberal MP), G. M. Reynolds (*Reynolds News*), Passmore Edwards and Moncure Conway, after whom Conway Hall was named. In June the same year it was announced that 37A Clerkenwell Green had been secured as the headquarters, where it became the London Patriotic Club. There was of course no Socialist movement in the

country at that time, and it was to the Radical Clubs that the more advanced workers looked for inspiration and direction. The LP Club actively participated in the economic and political battles of the day, organising meetings on the Green at which many famous speakers could be heard—Richard Carlile, Robert Taylor, William Morris, Eleanor Marx Aveling among others. It was one of the twenty-eight Radical Clubs taking part in the first London May Day demonstration in 1890.

When in 1892 the Club vacated 37A, the house was taken over by Twentieth Century Press, and William Morris (writing from Kelmescott House) offered to be responsible for the first year's rent. The years following TCP establishment in Clerkenwell saw the formation of the ILP, the first Labour municipal majority in West Ham, and the issue of many important publications. Several foreign Socialists visited the premises, and Theodore Rothstein, a member of the executive committee, helped in negotiations whereby the Press permitted the printing of 17 issues of the Russian Social-Democratic paper *Iskra* on their presses. Lenin used to go to the Editor's office to correct proofs. When expanding business necessitated the TCP moving to larger premises in 1922, the house on Clerkenwell Green reverted to small commercial tenancies.

In 1933 as the 50th anniversary of Karl Marx's death approached (March 14th, 1883) the question was raised of providing a suitable memorial to him "in the city where he lived and worked for the greater part of his life". On the initiative of the Labour Research Dept., and with the support of Martin Lawrence (publishers of Marxist literature), a commemoration committee was set up comprising many well known trade unionists, veteran socialists such as Tom Mann, Emile Burns, R. Page Arnot and others. They met in conference at Conway Hall and unanimously decided that the best memorial would be a library, workers' schools and an educational centre. Within a few months substantial funds were collected, and on November 5th, 1933, Tom Mann gave the inaugural lecture, "The Life of Marx". Starting with 5,000, the library has now reached 14,000 volumes, a great number of which are available on loan. After the war the rôle of the library was providing opportunities for study of the social sciences on a broad basis, and was open to students of all sections of working-class movements. Exhibitions are organised periodically on subjects such as the work of Robert Owen and Thomas Paine. An increasing number of students from universities in Britain and overseas use the library resources, and on the date of Marx's death each year, a memorial lecture is given on some general topic of current interest.

It is evident, from the enormous amount of historic material collected in this book, that 37A Clerkenwell Green should rightly occupy a very special place as a landmark in our social history of democratic aspirations, the goal of which is the freedom, happiness, and well-being of all citizens. A book which everyone should read, though not all may agree with some of the views expressed therein.

David Reynolds

**Roads to Freedom** by Bertrand Russell (Unwin Books 6/-).

I AM GLAD I had no outstanding political ties before reading this book, for this enables me to praise it, without any bias superimposed by previous convictions.

If one knows little of the lives of Marx and Bakunin, and the movements they inspired, namely Socialism, Anarchism and Syndicalism, which is broadly a compromise between the two, this book is very useful, since it gives details of the history of these men and movements very compactly, with quotations from Marx, Kropotkin and others. Even if one already knows all this inside out, one is treated to a revealing assessment of these movements by a philosophical giant and given an insight into his own ideas. For in this book, which concludes with a chapter on Russell's "Utopia", he gives his own political views, which constitute a form of guild socialism.

Though this book was first published in 1918, almost fifty years ago, and though many people assert, rightly or wrongly, that Guild Socialism has been proven unworkable, much said in this book is still very applicable today. "If the world is ever to become secure . . . there will have to be a development of the League of Nations". The present state of the United Nations shows this need still to be pressing, particularly if the Humanist ideal of a World Government to secure international relations is to be realised.

Whatever the fate of guild socialism, no one can argue with the more idealistic points Russell makes. "It is by its effects outside economics and politics, at least as much as by its effects inside them, that a social system should be judged", is just one of a number of similar maxims which need more attention nowadays.

Thus this book is both an education and what is needed to make people realise there is a lot to the left of Harold Wilson, which is well worth investigating.



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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 Holidays. Hastings: Thursday, March 23rd to April 1st.  
Burton-in-the-Wirral, Cheshire: Painting Holiday, July 29th to  
August 12th. Details from Mrs M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road,  
Sutton, Surrey. Telephone, Vigilant 8796.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal  
Book Service. For information or catalogue send 6d stamp 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, Car Park, Victoria Street,  
Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.: Messrs COLLINS, DUGNAN, MILLS and  
WOOD.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays,  
1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

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

### INDOOR

Coventry and Mid-Warwickshire Humanist Group (Secretary:  
Mrs Patricia Knight, 9 Thirlmere Close, Hawthorn Lane,  
Coventry. Telephone 64320), Public Meeting, Coventry Council  
of Social Service, Tudor House, Spon Street, Coventry, Tuesday,  
February 21st, 8 p.m.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate),  
Sunday, February 19th, 6.30 p.m.: RICHARD CLEMENTS, "Dissent  
in the USA".

Merseyside Humanist Group (Stork Hotel, Liverpool), Friday,  
February 24th, 7.30 p.m.: Dr CYRIL BIBBY, "Stand up and be  
Counted".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red  
Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, February 19th, 11 a.m.:  
LORD SORENSON, "What Humanism?"; Tuesday, February 21st,  
6.30 p.m.: Synthesis on Education.

South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, London), Sunday,  
February 19th, 6.30 p.m.: Martin String Quartet. Mozart,  
Dvorak, Schubert. Admission 3/-.

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

# LETTERS

I WAS so enraged by the stories related to me by different  
people of the intimidation of hospital patients by Catholic  
priests that I complained to the Minister of Health. The  
priest usually starts by asking the patient which church they  
married in, and as in the case of many mixed marriages the  
answer doesn't suit the priest, then a very rough time is given  
them. They tell the patient point blank that they are not married  
when in fact they are.

I received a nice reply from the Minister's private secretary  
who said the minister was concerned and would I supply details  
of names and dates, etc, so that an investigation could be made.  
Well as you can guess, it is one thing to get a Catholic to have  
a little grumble and quite another to want the priest to know  
this. It would be a pity now that the Minister's interest is aroused  
to let the matter drop, so I wondered if through your paper you  
could perhaps get some of your readers to quote similar stories  
they may know of. And may I suggest that you or someone more  
qualified than myself would bring these stories to the notice of  
the Minister of Health.

Mrs H. JONES.

[Any offers? Only incidents to which a witness is prepared to  
testify are worth relating.—Ed.]

P. P. CROMMELIN queries the logical necessity of my statement  
in the article "The Right to Die" that death is always a tragedy.  
I quite agree with him that "the total extinction of a human being  
... if it comes at the end of a long and useful and completely  
enjoyed life" is not a tragedy, and I would not regard my own  
death as such if I could look back on such a life. But although  
death is not necessarily tragic for the person dying, it must always  
be so to the friends and loved ones who are left behind, whose  
grief, though perhaps selfish, is nevertheless very real at the loss.

I find Nicholas J. Teape's criticisms not so acceptable. He  
criticises F. H. Snow for stating in his excellent article that "No  
Christian . . . would deny the almightiness of God". Mr Teape  
may know a few hypocritical pseudo-intellectuals who enjoy  
mimicking the theological contortions of such "Christians" as the  
Bishop of Woolwich, but they are not representative of the  
traditional Christian. Any honest man who professes the Christian  
faith must accept the Omnipotence of God or else he is not a  
true Christian; F. H. Snow is obviously quite correct.

Mr Teape also considers my free love article as inaccurate  
because (he says) there are plenty of Christians who do not  
consider sex outside marriage as sinful. He quotes as evidence the  
Christian report on "Sex and Morality" and asks why I do not  
know of this. I can assure Mr Teape that I am aware of the  
report produced by a working party of the British Council of  
Churches—I am also aware that this report was completely  
rejected by the Council who have now re-affirmed the traditional  
Christian stupidity that sexual relations outside marriage are  
always sinful and immoral—does Mr Teape know this? He  
claims to be a freethinker and not a Christian but Mr Teape is  
obviously taken in by the panic moves to modernise Christianity  
by a minority. It is he not us whose thinking is based on phantasy  
if he imagines that religion can never be anything but a barrier  
to the physical, cultural and intellectual happiness of mankind.

I would like to add a word of thanks and appreciation to R. J.  
Bird, the lone supporter of my article on freelove. Needless to  
say I found his remarks enlightened and perceptive, in marked  
contrast to the previous correspondents' reactionary sentiments.

MICHAEL GRAY

### The anti-religious Professor Ayer

POSSIBLY the editor of the *Church Times* is thinking of Pro-  
fessor Ayer's contribution to the book "What I Believe".

In his credo A. J. Ayer says: "This means that I do not believe  
in God. It seems to me that theists of all kinds have very largely  
failed to make their concept of a deity intelligible". He goes on,  
as regards the Universe: "I think there is no end towards which  
it is directed, and *a fortiori* no end for which it has been designed.  
I do not believe that it was created or is governed by a super-  
natural intelligence, neither do I believe that there is any divinity  
to which human beings are answerable for their conduct".

Now, if I were a member of the Christian Church, or any  
church—which I am not, I should hardly consider Professor Ayer  
to be on my side. This would not make him necessarily an oppon-  
ent to a rationalist, but, to a Bible-puncher, "he that is not with  
me is against me". This phrase completes the logical chain and  
on the evidence, Professor Ayer is "anti-religious" to such a  
religious person.

K. UNSWORTH.