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POINTS FOR LIBERAL CATHOLICS

ON FRIDAY, February 10th, at Caxton Hall I had the pleasure of participating in a memorable meeting on 'religion in the school'. Along with a very large attentive audience I listened with considerable interest to the speech by Mother Mary Norbert, Lecturer in Psychology at Cavendish Square College. She put a good case for Catholic schools and one point, her recurring theme one might say, stays uppermost in my mind as I write these lines the following day. This was, according to Mother Mary, the need of the Catholic minority to protect its divergent identity from the encroachments of the majority.

One of her colleagues who spoke from the floor took up this theme. He was clearly concerned about what he saw as the attempt of Secularists and Humanists to impose their ethic, philosophy and social system on society as a whole. He maintained that a number of Catholics were for closer integration, particularly that of Catholic children into the County system of education, but, seeing no prospect of concessions from the Secularist camp, were anxious lest children from indifferent Catholic homes should be totally deprived of the opportunity to experience Catholic faith and worship and indeed be overwhelmed by the increasing secularisation of life in general and the ever more widely spread Secularist propaganda against organised religion in particular.

Liberal Catholics would better understand the seemingly intransigent Secularist position were they to appreciate certain important points.

In my view, Secularism is not restricted to affairs and situations on the national front. It is international in outlook. Even if all the battles against religious obscurantism and obstructionism were won in *this* country the Secularist fight would have to continue on other fronts. World government must be achieved and achieved soon if a nuclear holocaust is to be averted and the equitable distribution and utilisation of the world's resources is to be realised. Religious divisiveness as exists at present and authoritarian attempts to impose an allegedly divine will on individuals, communities, local and national governments are among the major obstacles to international unification

culminating in world government. Thus the issues in this country must not be observed and treated in isolation. Their effect on communities beyond the United Kingdom must be considered.

Bearing this in mind, liberal Catholics in this country would be hoping for too much in expecting major concessions from the Secularist camp. As one Protestant speaker from the floor pointed out at the Caxton Hall meeting, Catholics call for religious freedom and State support of their Church schools in this country, which in fact they have, whilst their papist brothers and sisters in some other countries do little or nothing to accord the same degree of freedom and assistance to Protestants or to those of other religions. The speaker cited the case of Spain. Now, in fact, the Pope could improve the position of the Protestants there very quickly. The Pope is no mere titular figure. He has real power, not only ecclesiastical but also, and in no mean measure, political. He could obtain full religious and civil freedom for them on the grounds that if they were not accorded this freedom he would excommunicate Franco and put Spain under an interdict. You, my dear liberal Catholics, support the Pope by being communicating members of his Church and by acknowledging him as your Father on earth to whom allegiance is due. The Pope derives his political power from Catholics and without Catholics his ecclesiastical power would not exist. Thus you too have power, the power to influence the Pope by threatening to withdraw your allegiance from him. In omitting to use this power you, for all your liberalism, thereby support conservatism and oppression.

The cause of Secularism, international in its concern for the welfare of all men, women and children, is gathering impetus. Legal and social reform have long had Secularist sense and action behind their back to prompt and guide. Society is becoming more and more secularised. The major Christian Churches, including the Roman Catholic, are losing their influence and power. Soon they will want to do a deal. They will want us, as they have wanted in the past, to compromise our principles. But, my liberal Catholic friends, we will not abandon principles which mean abandoning those who live and suffer in countries where the Church is still a despot. You or your not so liberal co-religionists may try to draw our teeth but you will not entice us to the Ecumenical Dentist's chair where you would doubtless have our tongue out as well. We will talk with you. We will discuss with you. We will work with you towards liberalism. But I am of the opinion that there is ultimately one choice which many must still make, distasteful though the necessity of it may be to them. Rome or Rationalism.

If your Church's cry is for freedom then let your

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Church give this commodity of right to those whom it has so long denied. The Church is no abstraction. The Church is its members. You are its members. You thus share responsibility for your Church. Father Herbert McCabe, who has just been sacked from the editorship of *New Blackfriars* for committing the crime of being honest, says

that your Church is corrupt. This being the case, clean your house of ill-fame with a speed befitting the space age. And if you must have a throne to kneel before, make present authoritarianism abdicate and crown democracy in its place. Then when you sing your anthem of freedom you may well hear our voices join in chorus with you.

WHY I AM PREJUDICED AGAINST BILLY GRAHAM

H. P. Lamont

I WAS BROUGHT UP in South Wales and from the turn of the century until the first world war endured a fierce and sustained religious indoctrination.

We had to suffer two long and dreary services on Sundays, morning and evening, with a couple of hours of Sunday school in the afternoon. I rebelled at an early age and squirmed in agony while some illiterate bigot thundered in the pulpit. Normal services were bad enough, but at frequent intervals the zealots decided to stage a revival. For two or three months we learnt special hymns and held rehearsals. At length the great day dawned and the chosen revivalist opened his campaign. He was invariably very eloquent, a real barnstormer. He ranted and raved that hell would inevitably be our destination unless we got saved. If we accepted Christ all our sins would be washed white as snow in the blood of the Lamb. There would be great rejoicing in heaven where—our earthly pilgrimage over—we would enter (accompanied by a glorious fanfare of trumpets) to play harps and wear crowns of gold.

Even today—sixty years later—I still intone lugubriously:

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains."

The preacher yelled, moaned, groaned and indulged in a grotesque singsong called the *hywl*. He warned us we ought not to defer salvation. We might die in our beds that very night and tomorrow would be too late. Those who rejected Christ crucified him afresh and were (by implication) cads of the lowest type.

My parents believed all the bunkum and I shall never forget their sadness as they gazed at me, obdurate to the plea to walk up to the Mercy Seat. They could visualise me roasting, frying or boiling in hell while they stood at the balcony of heaven watching Lazarus refuse Dives a glass of water.

When the preacher's eloquence reached its paroxysm, devout worshippers shouted *Amen, Praise the Lord, Alleluja, Oh the joy of salvation!* and other expressions of beatitude. I tried desperately hard to have faith, but it eluded me. The preacher fulminated that those who did not accept Jesus had hardened their hearts and caused despair among the angels.

On one of the chapel walls hung a picture of Jesus with a lantern, knocking at a door. I used to gaze at it by the hour and wish ardently that I could believe the ideology of salvation, but the more they tried to brainwash me, the more I rebelled. I must be allergic to dogmatic religion.

Multi-salvation

Many of the penitents had been saved over and over again. They made a habit of it. One of my pals told me it was all eyewash, but his parents liked to see him declare publicly for Christ, so he went up every time. There were special services for backsliders. I regret to record that numerous converts slipped back into their old evil ways soon after the revival man had departed.

H. G. Wells threw the holy bag of tricks overboard at

the age of about 14. So did I, and felt a great relief when the burden of sin they tried to hang round my neck dissolved into thin air.

I do not know if Billy Graham is sincere or not. He may well be, but even if he were, his methods seem to me open to criticism. I'm sure many a sex-starved spinster falls in love with him and accepts Christ in order to be on good terms with a presentable male.

In the storms and stresses of life, with its anxieties and uncertainties, it is natural to long for celestial bliss. Joseph Conrad said we are like blind rats waiting to be clubbed. That is an extreme view, but for many life brings more kicks than ha'pence. So we turn to religion.

As an agnostic I do not know if there is a God. The idea of a deity who is a glorified man seems nonsensical to me. It has been asserted that if the oxen could imagine a god they could not conceive anything nobler than a glorified ox, and the triangles' god would certainly be three-sided.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau declared that man is an animal who has evolved to the stage where he can ask certain questions but can't answer them, so he torments himself and becomes miserable. The same writer affirmed that if he were confronted by an eternity of bliss he would want to commit suicide out of sheer boredom. The showmanship of Billy Graham's theatrical performance alienates me. Billy is the *primum mobile* and Christ an also-ran.

I have always admired the mendicant friars and all holy men who espouse poverty. They share the privations of the submerged tenth. But I have only contempt for those who preach the gospel of Christ (Blessed are the poor), while travelling first class, staying at the best hotels, and living on the fat of the land. Shakespeare had them in mind when he wrote:—

"Do not, as some ungracious parsons do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
Whiles, like a puffed and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede."

Prelates in palaces

Prelates who live luxuriously in palaces while urging the faithful to give their goods to the poor, take up Christ's cross and follow Him, seem to me either insincere or just plain humbugs.

St Augustine asserted there is no salvation outside the Church, and throughout the ages millions have been terrified into obedience to the priests by threats of hell-fire and eternal damnation. But agnosticism is spreading, despite clerical anathemas. Certain dogmas insult the intelligence and sensible people can no longer accept them.

The psychology of conversion is very interesting to the alienist, but has nothing to do with the validity or otherwise of the doctrine expounded.

When I was a hobo in America I attended mission flops where we were given food and drink in exchange for salvation; we knelt while a parson prayed, we sang hymns testifying to our conversion and a good time was had by all; but it was entirely bogus. No matter how I try I can't take hot-gospellers seriously.

DE-MYTHOLOGISING GOD

Michael Gray

SINCE MANY CHRISTIANS today are going in for a "de-mythologising" of religion in order to make it more palatable to the new not-so-ignorant masses, they cannot consider it unreasonable if we extend this process to God himself. The traditional qualities attributed to the Christian god are Omniscience, Omnipresence and Omnipotence—in plain terms he knows and sees all things everywhere, and he can do all things. To this remarkable array of talents we must add that he is also All-Loving and Merciful to his poor creatures. With the advance of science and the facilities for education now open to almost everybody it is becoming increasingly difficult for intelligent men to reconcile the traditional concept of god with the state of the world in which we live. The constant procession of wars, famines, diseases and other disasters ("natural" or otherwise) that are daily events on our miserable little planet make it very hard to effect such a reconciliation; to the rational mind, unencumbered by the fetters of religious superstition and indoctrination, it is impossible. Even Christians, however, are finding it difficult to understand why an All-Merciful Almighty does not intervene to prevent such catastrophes as that at Aberfan. Blaming this particular disaster on Man's incompetence and not God's is the usual excuse and, although this may be true it does not explain why a supposedly merciful, all-powerful deity allows innocent children to die so horribly and unnecessarily when he could easily prevent it; nor, if he existed, would it excuse him.

Inscrutability of God

In order to answer, or to evade answering, this valid argument against the existence of the Christian god, Christian apologists have concocted the explanation of the "inscrutability of God". We are taught that it is because we, as mere mortals, cannot understand the "ways of God" that we are confused—that it is not given to us to comprehend, only to accept and obey. All the things we see as unnecessary evils are really necessary for the fulfilment of some Divine Plan for our Ultimate Good—we are perplexed because we see only a very small part of the Great Plan. Pope summed it up with a callous optimism:

"All nature is but art unknown to thee,
All chance, direction which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony, not understood;
All partial evil, universal good."

The "inscrutability" argument is a last desperate attempt to explain something that cannot be explained. It is a perfectly logical and reasonable argument to many Christians simply because the average Christian is beyond all reason and logic in religious matters; he believes because he *wants* to believe. But to the man whose only gods are Reason and Truth it does not stand up to the slightest scrutiny. If all the evil in the world is a necessary part of God's plan then plainly he must accept responsibility for it; and it is no use blaming the poor old over-worked Devil, for if God is almighty he must have dominion over Satan and therefore could abolish all Satan's evils if he wished. Now if God is responsible his excuse is that our misery and suffering are a necessary part of his plan for our salvation. But, whatever he may accomplish by his Plan, he could, being almighty, accomplish anyway without the need for any suffering whatsoever. Yet instead of devising a painless plan for our salvation he deliberately chooses to subject us to unnecessary hardship and misery; hardly consistent with a god of mercy! It is no good Christians telling

us that we cannot comprehend the workings of the Divine Mind when the facts are so plain and simple—an All-Powerful god *could* save us without the need for suffering, and an All-Merciful god *would*.

Need to rethink further

If Christians still insist on hanging on to a god then it is time they did some re-thinking about their ideas of his nature. Since he cannot be both All-Powerful and All-Merciful he must be either (a) Almighty but, since he *will* not prevent suffering, *not* All-Merciful; or (b) All-Merciful but, since he *does* not prevent suffering, *not* Almighty. The first alternative must, far from being merciful, be an angry, jealous, sadistic god who refuses to help his own creatures. He is obviously more a god of Fear than of Love; he does, in fact bear a remarkable resemblance to the Yahweh of Hebrew mythology before he was transformed by the Christians into a more attractive form in the New Testament.

The second alternative, that of a merciful but sadly impotent god, is one with which we could have more sympathy. How infinitely sad he must be to be unable to help his own poor creatures in their misery. And how infinitely frustrated also at the constant prayers of his dull-witted subjects beseeching him to do things he quite obviously has not the power to do!

Incredible though these two concepts of a godhead are, they are still both much more logical and reasonable than the present Christian concept. The Christian "modernist" who demonstrates at least an apparent concern with reason in religion (blissfully unaware that this is a contradiction in terms) would do well to consider switching his allegiance to one of these alternative gods. It would at least prove that he was willing to make a little progress—if only from a superstitious belief in a god that is demonstrably impossible to one that is only highly improbable!

No matter how religion develops, however, how it is changed and adapted to make it more acceptable to the increasingly sceptical masses, it cannot eventually escape its death, which is a necessary part of the evolution and emancipation of Man. Science is the only Saviour that this world can ever know, and it is no coincidence that religion retreats as science advances, for science is simply another word for knowledge which, in its progress towards the truth, must inevitably displace the ignorance that is synonymous with religion. We now know the reasons for many of the natural events which happen around us and which primitive Man in his ignorance attributed to supernatural causes. We realise that although there are still happenings for which science has no explanation they are not to be credited to supernatural agencies but merely to the workings of natural laws of which we are as yet ignorant. Religion tries to drag us back into the ignorant past, but science constantly looks to the future; we are learning more all the time and one day, when the Universe stands revealed to us by knowledge and not superstition, religion will have died a natural death. That is if the Christian "modernists" in their haste to combat and suppress the "evils" of Atheism have not already destroyed it themselves. For the great danger involved in "de-mythologising" religion is that if you do succeed in abolishing all the myths and legends that are contained in it you will undoubtedly find that there is nothing left.

NEWS AND NOTES

THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY has allowed the addition of an emergency motion by the Archdeacon of Winchester, Ven. J. R. Beynon, to the spring agenda of the Church Assembly because it is "of sufficient urgency and importance".

The Archdeacon's motion deeply deplores the use by the BBC in a television programme of a painting of Christ "for the purpose of comedy" (*Guardian* report, Feb. 14th).

If this motion is followed up by representations to the BBC censuring it for allowing the use, or abuse as the Archdeacon would have it, of this particular painting, then I can only deplore the sheer cheek of the Archdeacon and wonder at the Archbishop's idea of "urgency and importance".

The Church of England holds an entrenched propaganda position in the communications' front line of the BBC. Every week, it is allocated time out of all proportion to the number of communicants it represents and even more out of proportion to the modicum of ascertainable truth it promotes. This time, considerable as it is on both BBC TV and Radio, is used to propagate a mixture of mystical truth and blatant falsehood.

Debate such a motion if you will, Archdeacon Beynon and Archbishop Ramsey, in your established Church Assembly. But please try to restrict your outrageous impudence to the dusty confines of that august body. If you are so concerned with the way in which the BBC handles religious and irreligious issues, then be so good as to insist, in the name of honesty, for more broadcasting time to Secularists and Humanists.

Immunising against pregnancy

DR MARGARET MEAD, the American anthropologist, told a San Francisco conference on "The Pill and the Puritan Ethic" that girls should be given the Birth Pill at 16 even though it might lead to greater sexual promiscuity among teenagers. She said that at present too many teenagers got married for the wrong reason—because they were pregnant.

Dr Jerold Lowenstein, a physician, supported the Pill proposal for young women saying: "We don't hesitate to immunise ourselves against smallpox and polio, yet these illnesses, in serious form, never reach the epidemic proportions of teenage pregnancies".

Considering your Church's belated concern with social issues, Archbishop Ramsey, how about adding to your agenda an emergency motion "of urgency and importance" calling for the acceptance of Dr Mead's proposal.

Breast censorship

MR JOHN AKAR intends resigning from all his government posts, reports *The Sunday Telegraph* (Feb. 12th).

Mr Akar founded the Sierra Leone dancing troupe which very nearly didn't dance in Trafalgar Square at the Commonwealth Arts Festival because the Ministry of Works told them they would have to cover their bosoms if they did.

When not touring abroad the dancers live as a community in the village of Hastings, about 15 miles from Freetown. The government pays, feeds, houses and clothes them.

Mr Akar told the *Sunday Telegraph's* man on the spot that every tribe is represented in the troupe and that membership of the company is an artistic status symbol.

"Of course, we dislike the ridiculous prohibitions which some countries try to impose, by forcing the company to conform to Western ideas of morality. It is absurd and unnatural to insist that African dancers should wear tops to their dresses, when their tradition and cultures say otherwise.

"In Italy, for example, the girls were obliged to wear pink rose petals on their breasts. When they began dancing, the stage was soon covered with pink rose petals. Can you imagine anything more idiotic?

"The Americans also tried to stipulate that the girls should wear tops to their dresses. 'Very well,' I replied, 'since we are your guests we will comply with your customs. But when your dancers visit our country we shall expect them to conform to our traditions.'

"The Americans," said Mr Akar, "took the point."

Ecclesiastical censorship

FATHER HERBERT McCABE has been sacked. He was until recently editor of *New Blackfriars*, semi-official organ of the English Province of the Dominican Order (see FREETHINKER, Feb. 17th).

Father McCabe has herewith had confirmatory evidence that the Big Boys in the Roman Catholic Church do not like honest trenchant criticism of their institution.

The biting terrier has been muzzled.

Moslem censorship

TWO YOUNG BRITONS were arrested in a Moroccan seaside resort while distributing a Nonconformist religious pamphlet called *The Christian Way of Life*.

Police decided the pamphlet was "anti-Moslem propaganda". The British propagators were charged with an offence that carries a maximum sentence of three years: "Trying to shake the faith of a Moslem or to convert him to another religion".

"It must be a comforting thought to ecumenically minded British Christians to know that they have something in common with Moroccan Moslems.

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THE ABORTION BILL AND ROMAN CATHOLIC OPPOSITION

F. H. Amphlett Micklewright

IT IS curious that the present agitation over the Abortion Bill should recall the late Dr G. G. Coulton, but a mental link is natural enough. During the first half of the present century, Dr Coulton, who ranked as one of the most learned mediaevalists of his day, was engaged in constant controversy exposing the dishonest nature of Roman Catholic propaganda. He commenced by attacking Roman Catholic historical methods and gradually passed over into a full-blooded attack upon the inaccuracies and inconsistencies of Cardinal Gasquet when writing upon his particular mediaeval period. Roman Catholic response led Dr Coulton to examine the general nature of Roman Catholic propaganda with the result that he was responsible for such volumes as *Romanism and Truth* or exposés of Roman Catholic propaganda activities in Malta during the régime of Lord Strickland and the Vatican attack upon him. Since Dr Coulton died in 1947, few have undertaken to fill the academic gap which he left. At the same time, the age-old methods of Rome's tactics have gone on apace and have welled up anew in whatever fresh sphere of argument may arise.

The debates over the present Abortion Bill recall these older controversies in the methods which have been involved. Mr Steel has introduced a bill which permits of a therapeutic abortion within certain medical and surgical safeguards and which places the wellbeing of the mother before that of the unborn foetus. The bill represents the desires and outlook of a very large number of the citizens of the country and has the support of some liberal Christians. It certainly sets forth the point of view to which public opinion at large has gradually been moving during recent years. At the same time, it is in opposition to Roman Catholic theology and represents the negation of the standpoint taken up by the Pope in the "mother and child" controversy of some years ago. Clearly one must expect Roman Catholics to oppose it and to forbid the members of their church to take advantage of its provisions should it become law. Opposition as such cannot be disallowed upon general democratic grounds and the opponent has a right to his standpoint. But it is not too much to say that the methods used by the Roman Catholic Church when opposing the bill leave a great deal open to question especially when it is recalled that it opposes the bill upon ethical grounds.

There can be no doubt that the Roman Catholic hierarchy have issued an inspired propaganda to their supporters throughout the country and have urged them to make the fullest use of the correspondence columns of local papers. Here again, it is the material provided which is questionable. The one is a quotation from the Declaration of Human Rights. This has appeared again and again up and down the country to such a degree that it is impossible to believe that it came about because the Declaration is the favourite reading of Roman Catholic laymen! The quotation asserts the basic rights of the individual and it is related by the writers to the Commission on Human Rights together with a recalling of the legal obligations towards the Commission which this country has undertaken. There is of course nothing to show the casual reader that the quotation is taken out of context from a document which bears no sort of relationship to a discussion of the unborn foetus and which could as well be applied to the

rights of the mother. One wonders whether the sources inspiring this piece of impudent propaganda have also suggested that nothing in the letter should reflect the religious views of the writer. A letter of this type appeared some weeks ago in the *West Norwood and Dulwich News* and its author lapsed into silence when I pointed out that he was a Roman Catholic layman and challenged his general knowledge of the United Nations as of the organisations attached to it. Indeed, it is curious that a writer so emphatic upon the Declaration and so concerned lest Mr Steel's bill should weaken the allegiance of this country to the document should be at the same time so vague about the parent body! In short, one had a mere piece of Roman Catholic propaganda against the Abortion Bill which was not candid enough to acknowledge its source, background or purpose.

Again, it is true that abortion is related to ethical issues. But the present debate is dealing with a parliamentary bill and hence with a piece of potential legislation. It is therefore a matter of law. Clearly, both the common law of England and the statute law are agreed that murder and causing a miscarriage are two totally different crimes carrying far different penalties. Even in the cases where the operation has brought about the death of the woman, the defendant is charged with causing death by miscarriage under modern procedure and is not indicted for murder or for manslaughter as was once the case. There is no crime known to the law which indicts for murdering the unborn foetus. Indeed, at common law—the continuing law since 1189—an abortion is only procured when the foetus has quickened after the third month, an interesting reflection of mediaeval methods for dealing with unwanted pregnancies. Even by the demands of Roman Catholic theology, no burial service is held over the remains of a miscarried foetus. Yet, the contemporary popular Roman Catholic propaganda chooses to ignore both law and history. It falls back upon certain assertions of Roman Catholic ethical theory whilst making the suggestion that the acceptance of these theories should be of universal import. Although it is true that Pope Boniface VIII claimed that all who did not explicitly accept the supremacy of the Roman see are in danger of eternal damnation, it scarcely seems realistic to claim that the *ad hoc* ethical opinions of a minority sect based upon mediaeval philosophical methods should guide the shaping of the law of the land. It therefore becomes necessary to hide up the fact that these opinions are explicitly Roman Catholic and to claim that they are the non-denominational opinions of any right-thinking men. One therefore rants at large about "murder" as did a recent writer in the *Croydon Advertiser*. Of course, this is a good example of the emotive use of a particular word whose proper meaning is to be sought in the textbook upon criminal law. When I called the writer's attention to this fact and dealt with the legalities of the situation, the Roman Catholic correspondent seemed to be nonplussed. Possibly, his priestly advisers had not thought of the possibilities of this answer. He grew angry and upbraided his humanist opponent for firing a broadside of legality into the question. The raising of legal issues showed, in his opinion, the narrowness of his opponent! In view of the legalism of Roman Catholic moral theology and the demands made by the so-called Canon Law both

upon churches and societies, this profession of Catholicism as anarchic anti-legalism was somewhat cool! Yet it is an incident representative of more than a little of the type of propaganda which is being poured out through correspondence columns up and down the country with the idea of getting members of Parliament to withdraw their support for the bill. Letters which appear to be casually written by some private readers are in fact concoctions of arguments put forward for this purpose on behalf of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. In many cases, it requires a fairly wide background of law and history to spot and expose the fallacies and sheer mis-statements involved.

It is not surprising that the Abortion Law Reform Association should find itself faced by a rival body, the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children. The methods based upon gynaecological argument used by this society suggested that it was yet another Roman Catholic inspired mouthpiece. It has been pointed out however that no member of the Council of the new body is a Roman Catholic and I hasten to accept the assurance. But the matter does not end at this point. Presumably, as such an assurance can be given, the society is aware of the religious beliefs of its actual supporters and it would be interesting to know how many of the members at large are themselves Roman Catholics. Presumably, the council or committee represents the membership in a democratic manner and it is therefore permissible to draw conclusions. Again, a glance at the names shows that the council includes two High Anglican diocesan bishops whose theology on this point would presumably come near to that held by the Roman Catholic Church. Although this set-up can scarcely be accused of being dishonest, it would be appreciated if it showed a little more detailed candour upon the point raised and did not hide behind a somewhat vague negative assertion.

It is interesting to notice the emergence of Dr Alick Bourne into the debate with his assertion that the present law covers the whole question. In 1938, Dr Bourne was indicted for having aborted a girl who had been brutally

raped and was pregnant. His defence was that her physical future and sanity were involved and that the operation was therefore necessary for the saving of life. Mr Justice McNaughton summed up in his favour, Dr Bourne was acquitted, and the case *Rex v Bourne* (1938), added a milestone to the long controversy. Dr Bourne is quite at liberty today to become the "Finality John" of the debate when measured by the 1938 decision although he might remember that much of the popular support which he received in 1938 came in fact from people who wished to go a great deal further, having been shocked by such works as the late Janet Chance's *Cost of English Morals*. When Dr Bourne is quoted by such bodies as the Society for the Protection of Children Unborn, it should be recalled that, in terms of the 1938 decision, he speaks entirely for himself.

So the controversy rages and it is to be hoped that Members of Parliament will be as unaffected by Roman Catholic claims of any kind, whether open or hidden, as have been their predecessors upon some notable occasions of national history. But it is natural that incidents such as those mentioned should recall previous controversies and should also look towards the future. The same methods of misrepresentation and half-truth characterise Rome's tactics with regard to the Abortion Bill just as they have in the past characterised discussion upon such subjects as the Middle Ages and the Reformation. They will no doubt be brought out of the cupboard and used again when some widely different issue becomes the bone of contention. Again and again, they illustrate the remark of Dr Martineau, the eminent Unitarian divine of a previous generation, that there is one grace which the Roman Catholic Church fails to reveal and it is the grace of veracity. The present issue recalls the widely differing controversies waged by Dr Coulton in the past as it also illustrates the vital need for humanists and secularists to continue the warfare into the present with a constant demand that Roman Catholic argumentation shall at least reflect such objective truth as may be available to throw light upon the discussion.

THE CHRISTIAN TRINITY (Part 2)

A. C. Thompson

LUKE tells us of the decree that went out from Caesar Augustus, the journey to Bethlehem, the full-up inn, and the birth in the stable of the last—or middle—Person of the Blessed Trinity. Look at the problem of the Evangelists from their point of view. They have to claim that Jesus is God, not just another man. But if he is born just as everyone else, he is nothing special. The problem is to get him, flesh and blood, into the world in a miraculous way. Now they can't very well contrive a way to get him here without a mother, but they can write a story of birth from a virgin impregnated by a God. Such stories were not at all uncommon in ancient myths. The Father God of the Greeks, Zeus, was a prolific impregnator of women: his copulation with Leda produced the twins Castor and Pollux, and his intercourse with Io produced Epaphus. Mars, the Roman war-god, performed the sex act with the vestal virgin Rhea Silvia who subsequently bore Romulus and Remus, the twin founders of Rome. The hero Achilles was born of the union of, in this case, a human father and an immortal sea goddess, Thetis. These offspring were demigods, half divine and half human, and it is a question why Jesus similarly is not called a demigod rather than a full-fledged god, having also a human mother. The Egyptian pharaohs and the Roman emperors were gods. The

God of the Hebrews also had fathered other children by human mothers: Isaac (Genesis 18, 10-11; 21, 1-3); Samson (Judges 13, 2-24); Samuel (1 Samuel, 9-20); and John the Baptist (Luke 1, 7-13). Hence, Jesus is not the "only-begotten son" of the Hebrew's God, and his divine paternity should not entitle him to be a God any more than the others sired by this same God.

One may well be considered foolish indeed to believe the story of a young woman, already pregnant at the time of her marriage, whose husband does not acknowledge the baby as his, explaining things by coming up with a story of impregnation by a being never before heard of in the history of the world, after keeping the story secret from her husband until after he discovered her condition for himself. But—she got away with it. Got away with it? She not only got her husband to accept it, but has been believed by millions of people for 2,000 years, has been canonized a saint because of it, indeed Saint No. 1 because of it, is commemorated in statues and pictures in churches before which people light candles, kneel and pray, is extolled in hymns as Blessed Mary ever virgin, ever pure, and so on. If this is not the summit of human gullibility.

Theologians have built upon this story the whole doctrine of the Trinity. God of the Old Testament is the

Father. This Jesus who also is to be God but who does not look like the OT God and was born human, is appropriately his Son, and the being who impregnated his mother must also be God. But if monotheism is to endure, if the polytheism of other ancient nations is to be avoided, all these three must form one God. God the Father is not really the Father of the Son—it is the Holy Ghost who actually is Father, but this exactness will get the Persons confused.

Of course, Matthew and Luke had no first-hand knowledge of the birth of Jesus. Their stories are not corroborated by other witnesses. There is no evidence that any relatives or friends of the family or the disciples or anyone else ever regarded Jesus as conceived by the Holy Ghost, or anything other than a natural child of human parents. When Jesus was casting out devils, some people said he did so by Beelzebub, the Prince of Devils, but his friends "went out to lay hold of him: for they said, he is beside himself" (Mark 3, 21), evidently not regarding him as God. Despite the publicity "made known abroad" by the shepherds (Luke 2, 17-20), and the official birth record registered at the court of King Herod by three wise men from the east (Matthew 2, 1-18), people did not know what to make of him (John 10, 19-21). Even his own parents, Mary and Joseph, do not appear to believe the Holy Ghost story themselves, for when Simeon and Anna raved over the baby in the temple, "Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him" (Luke 2, 33). Why, if they knew who he was? And when they found the child in the temple teaching the doctors, "They understood not the saying which he spake unto them" (Luke 2, 50). Why not? Had they not been living with him for twelve years? Here, they both seem to think Joseph to be his natural real father. And of course there are those who say that since Matthew and Luke were not witnesses of what they wrote, there is no reason to believe that any of it is true and that in fact the whole of it is fiction. But this is not the point.

The real point is this: that, whether true or untrue, this story is the only basis for belief in a Trinity. The only logical basis for our intimate knowledge of the essential composition of the Christian God, of the all-knowing and all-powerful Cause of the total matter and energy in the universe and of their myriad transformations throughout an infinity of time and space must rest ultimately upon the way one young woman explained why she was already pregnant before her marriage. There is no other evidence. Who can believe that the Cause of the universe would employ such means to reveal his nature? It is an affront to human reason and credulity.

What is the virtue in a woman remaining a virgin during her marriage? Christians laud "Blessed Mary ever virgin" and it may well be that this ideal of saintliness implanted in the minds of pious girls has given rise to much marital incompatibility, frustration, discord, strife and separation. Even though she was a married woman and the mother of a child of unknown paternity, theologians try to maintain Mary a virgin and deny at least that she had other children. The Bible itself reveals her intended and attempted intercourse with Joseph (Matthew 1, 18). She had no intention of remaining celibate, even while she was carrying Jesus, and she did attempt sex relations. The Bible, in other places, records her other children, brothers and sisters of Jesus: "And when he was come into his own country he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch as they were astonished and said . . . "Is this not the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and

Judas? and his sisters, are they not all with us?" (Matthew 13, 54-56); and again, "and many hearing him were astonished saying . . . "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" (Mark 6, 2-3). These people, apparently, had not heard of, or did not believe in, the divine impregnation of Mary. Is there something sinful in having later legitimate children? Should Mary not obey God's very first command to the human race: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1, 28)? Is there something wicked in the sex act between husband and wife? Is there something virtuous about Joseph's marital self-restraint?

It should thus not escape the notice of those interested in the "virginity" of Mary that there is an alternative hypothesis of the cause of Mary's pregnancy to the simple credulous one that Jesus "was conceived of the Holy Ghost".

(Concluded)

LETTERS

The British Humanist Association

I GREET with good wishes and congratulations your first editorial. I would, however, add my regret that it contains no direct reference to the long-sustained legal muddles of BHA which has led to the recent botch of a new Constitution foisted upon members during Christmas and New Year time when holidays, etc, and general business precludes sufficient scrutiny of the subject. Many other FREETHINKER readers may be members of NSS, RPA and BHA, and perhaps share my disgust with the vague and woolly PRIMARY OBJECTS of the new BHA Constitution taken over as a whole from EU by the stratagem of changing the name of EU to BHA "for speed and convenience"! I protested strongly to BHA Chairman in three letters, prior to the Extraordinary Special Meeting called for 14th January, that the proposed PRIMARY OBJECTS do not even mention Humanism, Rationalism or Secular Education, nor do they openly reject sacerdotalism and religious myths. They are no more distinctively Humanist than, say, some cry of the Salvation Army and certainly are much less so than those proposed when BHA was again foolishly seeking the humbug of Charitable Status, whereas of course the revised ones should have been still much stronger. The only truly democratic method of dealing with this basic matter should be by Referendum, giving plenty of time for consideration and discussion, because membership is widely dispersed in our Movement and for several reasons most of us cannot get to central meetings or conferences. A Referendum promotes general participation in thought and decisions, whereas Proxy Voting tends to Centralism and to authoritarianism which is wrong in principle and pernicious in practice.

Surely, ever since RPA withdrew from BHA to safeguard its own Charitable Status (a millstone round our necks in my view and also gagging us for a handful of gold) the work of forming a new Constitution should have received unremitting attention as a first priority and lesser things should have been dropped (including such eccentricities as dialogues with RCs!). Anyhow this new Constitution is shameful to any Rationalist and Secularist with fire in his belly; Billy Graham's Circus or LDOS might endorse such flabby "harmless" Primary Objects. ("PRIMARY", mark you!) I am ashamed and downcast at BHA's gross inept handling of this matter because Rational Humanists and especially the Secularists among us should with veracity and integrity, intellectual and moral, have got the Constitution right *at the start*.

Your editorial states, "If it will only commit itself to the pursuit of secular humanism long may it (BHA) live". I warmly agree, but in December *Humanist News* proclaimed "the essential sterility of Secularism"! Is this fundamental transplantation from EU a dogma of the new BHA attitude? Such a pronouncement comes ill from those who in the January *News* agreed that Humanist wings should not attack one another through meetings or publications. There is no danger I would agree of the wings consorting in a Mutual Admiration Society, nevertheless there should be room for open candour when any wing takes an incongruous course, especially when basic rationalism is left out! Members should clamour for reform of the Constitution and of procedure.

E. HUGHES-JONES.

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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, DUIGNAN, MILLS and WOOD.

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

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

INDOOR

Bristol Humanist Group (Kelmcott, 4 Portland Street, Clifton), Sunday, February 26th, 7.15 p.m.: D. SHERWOOD, "The Work of the Council of Social Service".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, February 26th, 6.30 p.m.: ALAN BATES, "Censorship".

Merseyside Humanist Group (Stork Hotel, Liverpool), Friday, February 24th, 7.30 p.m.: Dr CYRIL BIBBY, "Stand up and be Counted"; Thursday, March 2nd, 7.30 p.m.: MARGARET KNIGHT, "Humanism: An Alternative to Christianity".

Marx House, Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1, Saturday, February 25th, 11 a.m.—5 p.m.: Discussion Conference, "Marxism and Religion". Admission 2/6.

National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1, HOP 2717: 61st Annual Dinner. Speakers: BARONESS WOOTTON, MARGARET KNIGHT, LORD WILLIS. Horse Shoe Hotel, Tottenham Court Road, London, W1, Saturday, April 8th, 6 p.m. Dress optional; Vegetarians catered for. Tickets £1 1s each must be obtained and paid for in advance.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, February 26th, 11 a.m.: MAURICE CRANSTON, "Sartres' Sociology"; Tuesday, February 28th, 6.30 p.m.: HARRY KNIGHT, "Authoritarianism and Industry".

South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, London, WC1), Sunday, February 26th, 6.30 p.m.: Macgibbon String Quartet. Mozart, Dvorak, Schubert. Admission 3/-.

Worthing Humanist Group (Morelands Hotel, The Pier), Sunday, February 26th, 5.30 p.m.: Dr JOHN LEWIS, "Morality without Religion".

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

The Lord Willis v Legerton Debate

IN HIS LETTER Christopher Brunel expresses surprise "that in this scientific age there should be so many serious supporters of Sunday observance". I have no brief whatever for the LDOS but equally, and in company with many others, I regret that a rational and considered approach to the question of Sunday Observance is in danger of giving way to one as extreme as that of the LDOS, in the other direction.

Granted that a clearance of the statute-book is long overdue and that there should be a general liberalization, yet it ought not to be forgotten that many would prefer, on purely social grounds, a distinctive English Sunday.

Amongst my Continental and American friends I find plenty of intelligent people who see something attractive in the English situation. I fear lest we move from the impositions of Legerton to those of Lord Willis. Fanaticism breeds fanaticism and the use by Lord Willis of emotive words like "kill-joy", "Mrs Grundies" and all the rest is as irrational as the Legerton approach. To describe the Shops Act of 1950 as "half-way to the edge of sheer lunacy" is extravagant language. Must we sacrifice one of the most sensible and logical assets of living in England: a Sunday free from the worst aspects of the hectic week just because Lord Willis wants to buy his toothbrush on Sunday?

Sir James Crichton Browne wrote: "We doctors are now constantly compelled in the treatment of nervous disorders to prescribe periods of absolute rest and complete seclusion. Some periods are, I think, only Sundays in arrears". There is an important point here and it will never be made if we all get too concerned with imitating LDOS bigotry.

PETER WALES

PERHAPS it is not out of place to recall a remark in a letter of mine, dealing with the Willis—Legerton flop on November 4th last, at Caxton Hall (and concerning which I have been called to task, pretty severely, by what I can only call "pacifist" Secularists) that remark being, "How Harold Legerton of the Lord's Day Observance Society will crow!" In that organisation's sanctimonious house-magazine, *Joy and Light*, we read: "The tremendous ovation given Mr Legerton when he rose to speak, seemed to indicate that the supporters of the Lord's Day Cause were in the majority in the hall". Exactly, word for word what I wrote in my letter! But to continue. "This strikes us as significant, in view of the remark in the *Freethinker's* report of the meeting—'What fun this little band of misery-mongers must have!' . . . THIS IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT THE DISCUSSION WAS ORGANISED BY SECULARISTS and yet 'this little band' greatly out-numbered them! The event was a grand opportunity to testify for Our Lord and His Day, and we believe He granted the necessary enabling." End of quote. Again, how Legerton crowed!

I can only repeat—all Secularists who were able to attend that meeting, but did not, aren't worthy of the name! I am still very hot under the collar about all this.

JOHN SHEPHERD, *The Sunday Freedom League*.

[Hot or cold, correspondence on the November 4th meeting is now closed.]

Sunday seventy years ago

HOW very true is Mr Lamont's Sunday Sixty Years Ago! And not only of a Welsh village but a South London suburb where my Sundays of seventy years ago were identical with his. No music other than hymns permitted, all books except the Bible and Cruden's Concordance banished—with the possible exceptions of *Pilgrim's Progress* or Day's *Sandford and Merton*—those two most unbearable prigs ever invented.

Every spare moment between morning and afternoon Sunday Schools and morning and evening Chapel seemed to be utilised for family prayers or Bible reading. And this was the rule rather than the exception among average middle class families of the period. No wonder reaction set in as soon as we could throw off the trammells of this tyranny, and yet the LDOS would inflict it on us again could they do so!

H. J. BATTY.