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A MATTER OF WORDS

MR David Pollock, Chairman of the BHA Political Committee, who used the phrase 'the essential sterility of Secularism' in the December issue of the official BHA publication, *Humanist News*, explains in this issue of the *FREE THINKER* what he meant by the phrase and supplements his explanation by proclaiming 'the essential secularity of Humanism'. In our *Letters* column are to be found indications as to why Mr Pollock should have been misled into thinking that Secularism was essentially sterile. However, one should distinguish between Secularism as a philosophy and a movement and the attitudes of a few individual Secularists who get left, or perhaps leave themselves, by the wayside. Secularism is not essentially sterile, although some Secularists may well be so.

Mr Pollock misunderstands the Secularist position. He says that the content of Secularism is largely, if not wholly, negative. Let us look at the record and see if this is so. For this purpose I shall quote three eminent Secularists or, as some BHA officials would doubtless call them if they were still living, Humanists. The first is G. J. Holyoake, coiner of the word 'Secularism', editor of *The Reasoner*, and first Chairman of the Rationalist Press Association. In *The Origin and Nature of Secularism* (Watts & Co., 1896) he explains how Secularism arose. He refers to the early 1840s and writes:

'Then, as now, there were numerous persons everywhere to be met with who explained everything on supernatural principles, with all the confidence of infinite knowledge. Not having this advantage, I profited as well as I could by such observation as was in my power to make. I could see that material laws counted for something in the world. This led me to the conclusion that the duty of watching the ways of nature was incumbent on all who would find true conditions of human betterment, or new reasons for morality—both very much needed. To this end the name of Secularism was given to certain principles which had for their object human improvement by material means, regarding Science as the Providence of man, and justifying morality by considerations which pertain to this life alone.'

That strikes me as being rather positive and I doubt if the BHA would repudiate it as Humanism.

The second is G. W. Foote, first editor of the *FREE THINKER*, who, 81 years ago, said in a debate:

'Secularism is the philosophy of this life, without reference to another; it recognises no providence but science, and no saviour but human effort; and it regards the public welfare as the criterion of right and wrong.'

Again, pretty positive stuff.

The third is Joseph McCabe who, I think I am right in saying, was a lecturer at South Place Ethical Society for longer than anyone else. He had this to say about Secularism in a debate in 1911 when he represented the RPA:

'Secularism is the cultivation of human character and human interests on a purely human ground; it is the running of this planet by men, for men, without any reference whatever to religious beliefs, either for or against them. Secularism says that men, when they take into their own hands their own affairs, may set on one side—it does not matter whether they doubt, deny, or accept, but they may set aside—their religious ideas; we can run the affairs of humanity on purely human grounds. That is Secularism.'

Mr Pollock mistakenly equates 'secular' with 'secularist', an error which bedevilled the movement for secular instruction. I leave it to G. J. Holyoake to rectify the misconception.

'If the reader does not distrust it as a paradox, he will assent that the secular is distinct from Secularism, as distinct as an act is distinct from its motive. Secular teaching comprises a set of rules of instruction in trade, business, and professional knowledge. Secularism furnishes a set of principles for the ethical conduct of life. Secular instruction is far more limited in its range than Secularism, which defends secular pursuits against theology, where theology attacks them or obstructs them. But pure secular knowledge is confined to its own pursuit, and does not come in contact with theology, any more than architecture comes in contact with preaching.'

Mr Pollock contends that 'Secularists have done us all a disservice by their out-of-date, narrow-minded conception of the primary rôle of our Humanist/Secularist movement as being attack on the churches and all their works'. It must be pointed out that if Secularists, particularly those of the 19th century, had not attacked the churches and theology as vigorously and as successfully as they did, it is unlikely that the present climate of opinion would be as favourable to Humanism as it now is.

Mr Pollock maintains that 'Humanism goes beyond secularism in adding reason and (to use the vogue word) "concern"'. This statement makes no sense unless the implication is accepted that secularism does not use reason and has no concern. I doubt if this implication could be substantiated.

Mr Pollock says that he would rather lose a million debating points than one life from the survival of a stupid law that fosters back-street abortionists. Mr Pollock's sentiments are laudable, and he is doing valuable work for the

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ABOUT MISSIONARIES**Speaking Personally**

IN the course of long residence in distant lands I met many missionaries. For some I had great admiration, for others profound contempt. I admired the medical missionary who could have lived on the fat of the land at home, but who preferred to alleviate suffering among the under-privileged, often under appalling conditions.

It was a byword among settlers in various parts that one should never employ a mission boy. They were often liars, cheats and thieves who had been taught that Jesus would forgive them if they repented.

The sensible missionary taught his converts useful accomplishments such as carpentry, brick-laying, horticulture, hygiene, child-care, household management and laundry work, but foolish holy men concentrated on holding services, with endless prayers, hymns and sermons.

A lot of missionaries were merely agents for the colonial power. They wanted to convert the blacks to Christianity, but such proselytes must never consider themselves equal to the white man. They were trained to be efficient servants, hewers of wood and drawers of water. The Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa still discriminate in this way and the Rhodesia Front wants to perpetuate a similar state of affairs in that country, hence the impasse with the British Government.

Some missionaries are saints, but I also came across dreadful humbugs. In Jamaica I knew one who owned a school in an ideal climate up in the hills. He had an attractive wife, numerous vivacious children and a very soft job. The donkey work was done by under-paid assistant masters. One day he invited me to tea. I found him in a hammock suspended between two shady trees, stuffing his fat guts with cream buns handed to him by his family and retainers.

I happened to say that if there is a God concerned with our welfare he is more likely to give us what he deems judicious than what we ask for. My host stared at me in amazement, threw out his podgy hands and shouted: "Where would I be if I only got what I deserve?" and fell out on to his fat posterior.

Subsequently he reported me to my boss as an atheist because I had doubted some of his *obiter dicta*. Sacerdotal influence was very powerful in the island.

Every three years that holy humbug travelled to England and toured the country, preaching in churches and collecting money for mission work. He pretended he slogged his guts out in intolerable heat. Actually he lived sumptuously under ideal conditions. In ringing tones he sang in the pulpit:

"There's a call comes ringing o'er the restless wave,
Send the light! Send the light!
There are souls to rescue, there are souls to save,
Send the light! Send the light!
Send the light . . . the blessed gospel light,
Let it shine . . . from shore to shore!
Send the light . . . and let its radiant beams
Light the world . . . for evermore."

In his autobiography Nkrumah denigrates missionaries, but we must not forget that the leaders of the emergent African countries owe their early education to mission schools. The South African Government—alarmed at the prospect of too many educated Africans—took over mission schools, to ensure that the Bantu receives an inferior type of education, as befits helots. From time to time I read

protests by the South African Government that they spend vast sums on education for non-Europeans, but they protest too much with tongue in cheek. *Apartheid* is merely an excuse for cheap native labour.

The Moslem religion seems to appeal to Africans more than Christianity. An educated negro said to me: "When the first missionaries came we had the land and you had the Bible. Now we have the Bible and you have the land".

The intelligent African sees we don't practise what we preach, that we are consummate hypocrites.

It is a tricky business to interfere with old customs like polygamy and female circumcision. The object of the latter is supposed to be that the woman derives no pleasure from sexual intercourse and is therefore more likely to be faithful to her husband. A Scottish woman missionary was murdered by some enraged Kikuyu because she tried to shelter girls who refused to be circumcised.

I once shared a room with a young American missionary in Jinja (Uganda). He was a very congenial companion for whom I had a high regard, but I found his concern for my spiritual welfare irksome. He persuaded me to kneel at my bedside with him, while he prayed to God to save me from the flames of hell. When the *opera bouffe* ended he asked me if I felt I had achieved salvation.

"No, I don't, I feel just the same as before," I replied.

"You have hardened your heart," he cried, then sang with great fervour:

"Come to the Saviour, make no delay,
Here in his word He has shown us the way;
Here in our midst He's standing today,
Tenderly saying: 'Come'."

I felt very tired and sleepy, but Earl Bazooka was determined to win my soul for the Lord. It was a serious matter for him. If I died unshriven and went to hell he would be responsible, which explained the glint in his eye and his refusal to accept defeat. Finally I fell asleep while he was still ranting.

In the Belgian Congo I met some French missionaries called White Fathers who impressed me by their zeal and dedication to the task of spreading the Gospel. One of them told me he'd had no leave for 30 years. When the troubles started most of them were murdered. But I have always maintained that if the Belgians had trained the Congolese for self-government instead of exploiting them, it is unlikely there would have been wholesale murder, rape and rapine when the ruling power withdrew and left the blacks unprepared for freedom. During the Belgian occupation I knew of no Congolese above the ranks of chief clerk, foreman or sergeant-major. All the best jobs were reserved for Belgians.

It is wrong to assume that all white settlers are harsh to the black servants. I knew European farmers who treated their labourers very well indeed. After all, if you have a good horse you don't maltreat him.

But the fact remains that taking them by and large the missionaries were not popular. It was alleged by many whites that the sky pilots put ideas into their heads and spoil the simple unsophisticated native. I quarrelled with a European farmer friend who complained that his labourers were not co-operative because the mission spoiled them.

"Have they any inducement to show zeal?" I asked.

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"Well, you admitted you had a good year and cleared a handsome profit. Did you give your labourers a bonus?"

"Certainly not."

"Then why should they sweat for you? In America and Great Britain it is recognised by captains of industry that prosperity should be shared."

He called me a Communist, left my house in a rage and never spoke to me again.

Some missionaries attach great importance to covering the body. I knew many who told their converts it was a mortal sin to walk about naked. Labourers in the shamba* had to wear a blanket knotted at the neck. I had to laugh when they threw back their covering to secure freedom of action and caused prudish beholders much embarrassment.

But I never joined in the chorus of denigration of mis-

sionaries to which many white settlers were prone. I used to say that those who brought hygiene and education where filth and brutality had reigned, deserve our respect.

As a heathen I attach no importance to religious teaching, but I do admire the spread of hygiene, sanitation and security. Not long ago the African's life was, in the words of Thomas Hobbes, continual fear and danger of violent death, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. The best type of missionary insists on cleanliness. He is guide, companion and friend to those harassed by vexatious legislation in Southern Africa where the whites, under the pretext of separate development, intend to keep the Africans down for ever if they can.

Like Karl Marx I believe that religion is the opium of the people, but I'm all for the men and women who, while spreading it, improve the living conditions of their converts.

* Field, garden.

THE ESSENTIAL SECULARITY OF HUMANISM

David Pollock*

"Humanism . . . cannot afford to be qualified: it is secular" (H. J. Blackham, Director of the BHA—*Humanist*, April 1967).

"The BHA will take the theory of Humanism beyond the essential sterility of Secularism so that it provides a comprehensive, warm and rational outlook on all these social questions" (*Humanist News*, December 1966).

THE FREETHINKER in an editorial recently challenged the BHA to state its attitude to secularism and to reply to the charge of semantic confusion between "religious Humanism and secular Humanism". As the author of the phrase "the essential sterility of secularism" (and I should have preferred a small 's' to the capital as printed), I am glad to try to do so.

There are some Secularists, perhaps, to whom Secularism means the same as Humanism does to me (and rather than take up space here to explain that, I would refer you to the new BHA handout, *Humanism and the British Humanist Association*). With such people I can have no quarrel. But to me secularism is 'essentially sterile' for the same reason as is atheism: its content is largely, if not wholly, negative. It is possible for, say, a state to be quite secular without being at all admirable—certainly without being Humanist. Secularists (in this sense) have done us all a disservice by their out-of-date, narrow-minded conception of the primary rôle of our Humanist/Secularist movement as being attack on the churches and all their works—an attack which in the event has been too often little more than a schoolboy sneer.

If you are truly free of religious habits of mind, you don't devote a major effort to attacking Christians for being Christians. You try, if you care, to build a society in which both Christians and non-Christians have the maximum chance of living happy and fulfilled lives, neither imposed upon by the other. Often you have to attack the churches as a result, and sometimes they thoroughly deserve it, but you have a positive, specific reason for your attack. Not to have this reason is to be sterile, to be a windbag.

Humanism goes 'beyond secularism' in adding reason (and to use the vogue word) 'concern'. The FREETHINKER editorial is mistaken, therefore, in saying that the BHA "repudiates" secularism: rather, it embraces it:

secularism provides one of the three main planks of Humanism.

It becomes plain why the BHA is against using the term 'Secular Humanism': it would give undue prominence to just one element of Humanism. You might as well say we should call it 'Rational Humanism' or 'Humane Humanism'—or even 'Secular Rational Humane Humanism'.

But there is no need. Maybe a few clergy *are* scared of the advances Humanism is making, maybe they are worried by this movement that has all the moral appeal of Christianity without the theological impedimenta, and maybe they are therefore trying to jump on the bandwagon and call Christianity 'humanist' (a name they have never bothered with before). But it is 'humanist' with a small 'h'; and their clothes-stealing is merely a measure of our success, and one which confuses no-one (except perhaps the odd Secularist?). To the public at large, Humanism is as unrepentantly secular as ever, and there is no need to wave the white flag and change our name. Besides, as I wrote in a letter to the *Humanist* (April 1967), how long before John Robinson calls himself a 'Secular Humanist'? And where should we retreat to then?

Of course sometimes, to get anything achieved at all, our broader aim means that we must work with Christians. But in so doing we do not lose our identity: in such bodies as the Social Morality Council the Humanists are recognised for what they are and utterly distinct from the Christians. To those who object, I say that men of two kinds of goodwill should be able to co-operate for a common purpose (or what hope is there for any of us?) and that I had rather lose a million debating points than one life from the survival of a stupid law that fosters backstreet abortionists. To believe this is not to abdicate one jot of Humanist principle.

I hope that this note serves to clear up the confusion that evidently exists. It seems to be one of misunderstanding and terminology in the main. I hope, too, that members of the NSS who agree with me will forgive me for being unable to understand why they do not just call themselves 'Humanists'. But I expect they wonder just the opposite about me . . .

* Chairman, BHA Political Committee.

NEWS AND NOTES

BILLY GRAHAM'S visit to London last week was a rather flat affair compared with the 1966 Crusade. The coaches of hymn-singing devotees rolled up as usual, there were the newspaper and television interviews, but what is there to show now that the circus has moved on? The first night did not produce a great deal in the news columns, and the remainder of the week passed off so quietly that one would have hardly realised the hot-gospeller was in town, except for the thousands of posters and leaflets announcing "Billy's Back".

Members of the University Humanist Federation distributed leaflets to the audience on the opening night. The final paragraph sums it up very well: "Billy's oversimplified view of things just won't work in a complex modern world. It only puts people in their own little fool's paradise. If your aim is to right the great evils of our time—hunger, war, racial hatred—you ought not to be wasting your time at circuses like this. If you really care about human happiness, you know what makes Billy's back the only part of him we want to see".

David Tribe's challenge to a public debate was not accepted as Billy Graham—understandably—does not participate in such activities.

Parents' protest

PARENTS of children in the primary section of Calder Street School, Govanhill, Glasgow, have been energetically protesting against the proposed amalgamation with Victoria Primary School. An official of the parents' association said representations had been made to the Secretary of State for Scotland, local councillors and MPs to prevent amalgamation. But Glasgow Corporation insists that 155 primary pupils will be transferred after the holidays.

Calder Street School is scheduled to take an overspill of pupils from Holy Cross Roman Catholic School. Parents would prefer an integration of pupils, which, they say, would help "to stop the bigotry between Roman Catholics and Protestants in the city".

A Christian outpost

THE recent television programme about Northern Ireland must have bewildered many viewers, for only those who

Flashback

WHY DOES THE CHURCH OPPOSE EDUCATION? We remember being told in our youthful days, that dog-fanciers succeeded in producing the race of tiny lapdogs by administering gin to them while puppies, and thus preventing their further growth. We shall not need to insist upon the correctness of our information. True or false it will serve to illustrate our present subject. The main end of the system of education worked by the clergy seems to be, to hinder the free development of the youthful mind, and to produce a race of intellectual dwarfs. With the miserable pittance of instruction, the coarsest rudiments of knowledge imparted in their schools they mingle slavish maxims *usque ad nauseam*. Habits of enquiry constitute just the one thing which they labour to prevent—*independence* of mind the cardinal sin which the youngsters are taught to shun. To do what they are bid, to think as they are taught, to believe what they are told by clerical authority, to go to church without knowing why, to submit to government as it is without asking wherefore, to be reading and writing machines to subserve the powerful and the rich—mere living copies of a primer and a prayer-book—this is what our rising generation are to gain by the generous aid of the Establishment.—*Miall's Nonconformist Sketch-Book*.

(*The Leader*—March 29th, 1851)

have lived in that citadel of Christian love and charity can fully realise the extent to which Catholic-Protestant animosity pervades all aspects of life. The fulminations of a bigoted hate-merchant like the Rev. Ian Paisley may nauseate, irritate or simply amuse, but he commands far more support than the Ulster politicians or newspapers care to admit.

For generations the Unionist Party has been dominated by the Orange Order, and however enlightened the present Prime Minister of Ulster may be, he must face the unpleasant fact that his party is still controlled by ultra-Protestant bigots.

The faithful Witness

JOHN GIBSON, a 23-year-old miner was critically ill following an accident at Ashington Colliery, Northumberland. While his parents sat by his bedside, surgeons pleaded with them to agree to a blood transfusion. They refused—so did their son during periods of consciousness. All three were Jehovah's Witnesses. In the words of the circuit minister for Northumberland: "John proved himself to be a faithful Witness".

John Gibson is dead.

Anything goes

LAST week *The Sun* published two pages of letters from readers on the existence of God. Here are some of the reasons given for belief in God:

I believe in God because I am in love with a beautiful girl (*Brighton reader*).

I have never seen an unbeliever who looked happy (*Surbiton reader*).

Many other impressive arguments were put forward by believers, but it was all well wrapped up by a Methodist from Cleveleys, Lancashire: "I believe God exists mainly because I *want* to believe that he does."

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A MATTER OF WORDS

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Humanist movement on the political front, but one must add reason to sentiment. He, of all people, should know that lives *are* lost because the debating points are lost, just as lives are saved, misery mitigated and happiness increased because debating points are won. We still need to use polemics in the forging of a New Society. Polemics are used by those who would obstruct progress. We can beat such polemicists at their own game, simply because we do have the better debating points to make. Properly made to an attentive public the debating points will cause the reactionaries to lose support. It has been done in the past. Bradlaugh was a master of this art. It can be done again in the future.

One cannot expect all of those new to the Humanist movement to have the facilities, time or inclination to study the history of Secularism. Such people tend to form their impressions of Secularism from their observations of present-day Secularists. And some Secularists possess a remarkable flair for creating a bad impression by their unfortunate attitudes which, if they ever might have been relevant and appropriate to some bygone situation, are irrelevant and inappropriate today. The principles of Secularism remain the same today as they were 100 years ago. It is the problems and situations which are different.

THE LAW OF GOD: I

A. C. Thompson

"FROM the most primitive times to the present day, morality has been said to be the will of unseen god or gods rather than the need of human beings for mutual survival. When humanity failed to recognise this true basis of morality and declared that it came from God, stories were promulgated and accepted of a god revealing law, giving ten commandments to a chieftain atop a mountain; there is now positive evidence that the Biblical story of ten commandments is pure fiction. Since it rests on a spurious base, supernatural morality is not likely to endure, and in fact is even now visibly disintegrating."

These statements, which I made in an earlier article, have been challenged by many readers, who have been indoctrinated into believing that morality depends on religion; and I hasten to defend my words with this series of four articles.

What we know from anthropology and archaeology, from the customs of recent savages and of early peoples, agrees in showing that the savage's fear of the gods is exploited to inspire reverence for the chieftain and his commands. The tribal religion as expounded by the priests and medicine-men engender the belief that the person of the ruler is sacred, that he is of different material than his subjects. This belief is strengthened by solemn religious ceremonies at which the ruler officiates, by the use of incantations and rituals, by adorning the chief with elaborate trappings such as gaudy beads, metal-work and costumes, by associating with him symbols, totems, emblazonments and coats-of-arms. In all early societies, law was promulgated as the will of the gods, ascertained by various divinations. Taboos were used to secure the unity of the group under the leadership of the ruler. Arousing of religious awe and reverence to secure order and obedience from an unruly people was very useful to a man who must rule in person, without the complex administrative organisation of modern government. The religion of the ancient Egyptians proclaimed that the Pharaoh was himself a god; to disobey him was unthinkable. The Hebrews had a covenant with God which was the basis of their government. Under such conditions, free speculation on social policy or social reform was out of the question; it was the duty of the citizen to obey, and to obey unquestioningly.

Free speculation on ethics and government began with the Greeks. They were the first people to seek reasons for the existence of morality and law, and to base theories of state on conceptions of right and justice and the welfare of mankind. The Romans separated their law from supernaturalism; Roman law was human law. Since their time, the laws of all civilised countries are frankly enacted, enforced and altered by men rather than by any unseen spirit. But ethics, private morality distinct from observance of law, is still for many people dominated by the supposed will of a supernatural being.

For the will of this supernatural being, this God, to be known to man, there is thought necessary to be a 'revelation' usually in the form of a book, such as the Bible, the Koran, Book of Mormon, Science and Health, etc. In the space of these four short articles, it will not be possible to examine all of these pretended revelations. By far the most credited, among us at least, is the Bible, which tells a story of the God of the ancient Hebrews giving 'Ten Commandments' to one man, Moses, who was then leading the whole people from past slavery in Egypt to a 'promised land'.

Did this actually happen, or is it a story simply concocted to give better authority to rules made by men?

If you please, get a Bible, and look at 2 Kings 22, 23 and 2 Chronicles 34, 35. Both accounts relate that King Josiah ordered repairs to Solomon's temple, that Hilkiah the high-priest told Shaphan the scribe that "he found the book of the law" in the temple, and that Shaphan showed the book to the king and read it to him. Then Josiah rent his clothes and ordered them to inquire of the Lord, 'for great is the wrath of the Lord because our fathers have not hearkened to the words of this book'. They consulted Huldah the prophetess, who reported, thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I will bring evil against this place, my wrath shall be kindled against this place, but will spare the king. Then the king set about instituting reforms according to the book. That these reforms correspond with the 'Mosaic Law', or Law of Moses, given chiefly in the Books of Exodus and Leviticus, and summarised in the Book of Deuteronomy, which is mostly occupied with the last speech of Moses before his death, may be verified by comparing Josiah's reforms with the law in Deuteronomy, thus: 2 Kings 23, 7 with Deut. 23, 17 ff; 2 Kings 23, 8, 9 with Deut. 12, 2; 2 Kings 23, 10 with Deut. 18, 10; 2 Kings 23, 11 with Deut. 17, 3; 2 Kings 23, 14 with Deut. 16, 21; 2 Kings 23, 21 with Deut. 16, 5, 6; 2 Kings 23, 24 with Deut. 18, 18. These cross-references are found marked in the margins of some Bibles. It is therefore evident that what was alleged to be found was the law of Moses.

That this story of the finding of a book is a base lie is betrayed by the fact that, throughout the whole past history of the Jews, such law had been utterly unknown, to the people, to the kings, to the priests, to the prophets, and even to God himself. Nobody had ever actually heard of such a thing since the beginning of the world. Josiah himself admits that the law was previously unknown (2 Kings 22, 13; 2 Chron. 34, 21). Even the passover was unknown (2 Kings 23, 21, 22). Throughout all the previous Books of the Bible can be found instances in which the Mosaic Law is violated, and nobody knows the difference. Such cases are too numerous to relate them all; let us look at just one case, the story of David and Bathsheba.

The story (2 Samuel 11, 12) is briefly that King David lusted for a woman he saw washing herself, and although both he and she were married, sent for her, and lay with her. When she later sent him word that she was pregnant, David contrived to have her husband, Uriah, set in the forefront of the hottest battle so that he was smitten and killed, after which he took Bathsheba as another of his concubines. The Lord sent the prophet Nathan to David (2 Samuel 12, 1 ff), who told David a story of a rich man, with many flocks and herds, who took the one ewe lamb belonging to a poor neighbour to serve his guest. Now, according to what we are asked to believe the God of the Hebrews (whose name in Hebrew was spelled Yhwh and which no one knows how to pronounce) had given to Moses on Mount Sinai a law, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20, 14; Deut. 5, 18). Nathan, and also the God who sent him, are both apparently completely ignorant of the existence of this law; for instead of citing the law to David and pointing out to him that he violated a divine command revealed to the human race in the person of Moses, they cook up a parable about a man stealing a sheep in order to clarify the nature of his injustice. Far from knowing adultery to be forbidden by any divine law,

God and Nathan do not appear here to have any clear conception even of what adultery is; for Nathan's story shows David guilty, not of adultery, but of selfishness, of taking all for himself and allowing another to have nothing. Today, in all the armed forces of the world, a distinction would be drawn between death met in performance of duty and a contrived murder. Today, if a military officer were to contrive a soldier's death in order to secure some personal end, such as to get rid of the soldier so as to be able to take his wife, he could be court-martialled and shot. God and Nathan are neither of them astute enough to be able to invent a parable which displays this difference between a battle casualty and deliberate murder. Their ignorance of the nature of adultery and of its prohibition by the Mosaic Law is further shown in the proposed penalty: "Thus saith the Lord, . . . I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun" (2 Sam. 12, 11). But Yhwh did not keep his word; instead, he killed the baby (12, 18).

It is the same with any wrong that anyone in Israel does; nobody knows that any law is violated, and there is no mention of Moses and his law, outside the Hexateuch. An entire article this length could simply list violations of the first commandment recorded in the Bible in which there is no reference to Moses or a revealed law. Objectors will insist that, however improbable, a law can be forgotten, even by king, priest and prophet; but when their argument requires that God himself be unaware of the existence of his own law, this is too much.

It was not possible for the law to be lost. It was not possible that a book, whose author is ultimately God himself, could be entrusted to the jealous, constant care and custody of priests and, whenever it had disappeared, no one missed it, no one ever looked for it, and all through the 800 years from Moses to Josiah, there was not even a tradition of such a law or such a book. Not one of the holy Prophets ever said that there was a book in the temple that could be found for the looking. God himself never 'revealed' the existence or location of that book. Where is it today? There is no later record of whatever happened to it since. But museums today do hold Egyptian papyri of greater antiquity.

Moses ordained (Deut. 17, 14-20) that when Israel should later have a king (there had never been any king at that time—the first king was Saul), he should write himself a copy of this law in a book, and keep it with him, and read therein all the days of his life that he may learn to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them. How then could the book be lost? The king is here forbidden to multiply wives to himself, or greatly multiply to himself silver and gold (17, 17). But every king of Israel did have many wives and did try to amass silver and gold, without feeling the least guilt, and hence none of them could ever have seen or read such a book. Moses also commanded that every seven years, at the feast of tabernacles, all Israel should be assembled and the book of law should be read publicly to all of them, and that they should teach the law to their children (Deut. 31, 10-13). How then could the law be lost? Was there nobody in the land who would ask for the reading in the seventh year?

Conceive, if you will, that a charlady, tidying up Westminster Abbey, should find the Constitution of Britain which was given by God to William the Conqueror to be the basis for all British law forever; and that, when read, it is found to provide quite otherwise than our law has done; that there never should exist a monarchy, that industries should be nationalised, that grammar schools

should be turned into comprehensives, and also that Prime Ministers, when they later will exist, must read the document constantly, that the entire text must be printed in newspapers every seven years on Guy Fawkes' Day, and that a copy shall be kept on continual display in Piccadilly Circus for all to read. Suppose further that Mr Harold Wilson should tear his clothes, or his hair, that he should commission some nun to ask God what his feelings are, that the nun should report back that God has become suddenly angry because the Constitution has not been observed for the past 900 years, and that Mr Wilson should then set about reforms in keeping with this new, or rather ancient document. The reason why a British prime minister could not get away with such a thing and an ancient Hebrew king could is the difference between freethought and indoctrination: we have an Opposition, and some freedom of speech, whereas despots use their soldiers and a death penalty to silence dissenters forever.

The 'Law of Moses' and the Ten Commandments are therefore a fraud composed not by God, not by Moses, but by Josiah or his priests, and mendaciously proclaimed as ancient ordinances.

If it is the command of God that makes human acts right or wrong, what was moral before his revelation was made? And what is moral to other people than those who received the revelation? The year 1000 BC is just about at the half-way point in human history from a creation in 4000 BC to the present day. Has morality existed for only half the duration of human life? Do primitive people require no morality? The Hebrews, according to the Bible, had then a population of about 2 or 3 millions. How much was the total population of the earth? Is everybody else bound by a revelation made to a tribe of barbarian nomads on their way across a desert?

(To be continued)

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MIRACLES

S. A. Josephs

ONE of the most popular arguments for the existence of God has always been the alleged occurrence of miracles. The fact that miracles have occurred, it is argued, proves that God exists since a miracle is an observable instance of God intervening in the natural course of events.*

The most usual way of attacking this argument has been to try to show that none of these happenings ever took place, and it is this empirical approach that David Hume adopts in his essay "On Miracles" in his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* although, as Mr Cregan points out, Hume does make the mistake of trying to deduce the *logical* conclusion that 'Miracles could not have occurred' from the *empirical* premiss that 'Miracles have not occurred'.

Mr Cregan makes an excellent case against Hume's faulty reasoning and I certainly don't disagree with anything that he says in that context (although, to be fair to Hume, I think we must acknowledge that there is far less empirical evidence for the stories reported in the Bible than Mr Cregan is prepared to admit). I accept his conclusion that whether or not X walked on water, etc, is a matter to be established empirically, and we cannot say *a priori* that he did or he didn't (but as all our knowledge and experience points to the fact that he didn't we are quite right to be sceptical of any claim that he did).

Where I do disagree with Mr Cregan (and Hume) is his implicit acceptance of the original argument that *if* miracles occurred *then* the existence of God would be proved. For as I will now show, this argument is philosophically invalid. Even if it could be conclusively established that all the 'miracles' in the Bible were true this would no more prove the existence of God than the fact that most people can't walk on water proves that God doesn't exist.

First, we must decide what is meant by a 'miracle'. Clearly a miracle must be an unusual or unique event since something that happened all the time would obviously not qualify. But this is not enough. Many unusual and unique events occur that we do not wish to label 'miraculous' because we can quite clearly demonstrate that they are explainable by known physical laws. It would seem, then, that to qualify as a miracle it must be shown that the event in question is *not nor could be* explainable in scientific terms. But how could this ever be done? The whole point of science is to explain more and more phenomena by showing how it fits into the hierarchy of natural laws. The fact that science cannot explain a phenomenon at time t^1 is certainly no guarantee that it will not be able to explain it at a later point t^2 . So the fact that an event cannot be explained now does not, and cannot, prove that it will not be explained in the future.

But even if we could prove the impossible and establish that some events not only lack a causal explanation but could not, even in theory, have one since they are not part of the causal pattern, this would establish nothing about God but would simply prove that the universe exhibited indeterminacy as well as determinacy. Such uncaused events couldn't possibly establish the existence of God since the claim that they are uncaused is in direct contradiction to the assertion that they are examples of God intervening in the natural order of things; if such events occur, and do not have a cause, then it cannot be argued that they are caused by God. They are not caused by anything.

To try to argue that miracles are not part of the normal causal pattern but that they are caused by God cannot

possibly work as an argument for the existence of God based upon the evidence of the occurrence of miracles. For if that *were* the case, we would still be in the position described above: either we would empirically establish that there were causal explanations for these strange happenings, in which case they would be subsumed as part of the normal causal order; or we would fail to find causal explanations in which case we could argue that either they did have causal explanations but we hadn't yet found them, or they didn't have causal explanations in which case the universe was, to that extent, indeterminate. The only way in which we could make sense of the claim that miracles are not part of the natural causal order but are caused by God would be if we were to establish the existence of God independently of the existence of miracles. But if that could be done there would be no need for the argument from miracles!

I have shown, then, that it is impossible for any event to occur, whether it has a causal explanation or not, that could prove the existence of God. It therefore doesn't matter at all whether the stories reported in the Bible are true or false. Even if they are true, this in no way affects the validity of atheism; it simply shows that the universe is a rather odder place than we had previously supposed. So although Mr Cregan's attack on Hume is both interesting and justified it is also rather a waste of time; for Mr Cregan, like Hume, has missed the whole point about miracles which is that whether or not they occur is completely irrelevant to the question of whether or not there is a God.

* It is amusing to note the different grounds that are given for a belief in God. In the usual version of the teleological argument it is the orderliness of events that is held to be proof of a god, whereas in this argument it is the alleged non-orderliness that is offered for the same belief!

BHA CAMPAIGN YEAR SO FAR

Tom Vernon*

THE BHA's first Campaign Year has for its theme: "This life is all we have—make it good to be alive!" Though the climax of activity will be in October, the year is seeing plenty of action before then.

In January an important decision was taken to forgo charitable status and the attendant tax benefits for the sake of freedom to carry humanist principles into politics. As a result, Humanist Lobby is now organised as a division of the BHA, putting before MPs the humanist point of view on such topics as abortion and religion in schools. The setting up of a regional structure for local humanist groups has begun, and important administrative reforms (eg, election of the Executive by postal ballot) are on their way. A wide-range 34-point General Statement of Policy has been prepared for consideration at the BHA's first big policy conference this month.

Other conferences have been held in Leicester in January (a national student meeting on the subject of the mass-media, entitled 'Manipulators?'), and in Scotland (an April regional event with the theme 'Towards a Humanist Society'). Educational courses and holiday centres have been arranged in different parts of the country, with a summer school on 'The Ecology of Man' in Cotiston in August, and a study school 'Whither Democracy?' at Swanwick, Derbyshire in September.

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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, Art Holiday, Burton Galleries, Wirral
Cheshire, 29th July to 12th August. Small Youth Camp near
Yeovil, Somerset. Details of both from Mrs M. Mephram,
29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey.

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, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.;
Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

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

Humanist Teachers' Association (13 Prince of Wales Terrace,
London, W8), Sunday, July 9th, 3 p.m.: Speaker, MICHAEL
DUANE (former Headmaster of Rivinghill School). Non-members
welcome.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red
Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, July 9th, 11 a.m.: Joseph
McCabe Centenary Lecture by RICHARD CLEMENTS.

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

Evidence calling for disestablishment of the Church of
England has been submitted to the Archbishops' Commis-
sion. The first working party of the reconstituted Social
Morality Council has been convened by the BHA on the
subject of 'Democracy in the Plural Society' and, jointly
with the SMC, the first women-only public meeting on
abortion law reform has been organised.

Crescent House, a home for boys without a stable family
background, has been opened in Edinburgh, the culmina-
tion of three years' work by the local BHA group. Building
of the Humanist Housing Association's £98,000 home for
the elderly continues in Hampstead.

A special double-size issue of the BHA's house maga-
zine, *Humanist News*, has been prepared and distributed
widely, and a new enquirers' leaflet, *Humanism and the
BHA*, has been designed.

* Tom Vernon is BHA Press and Publications Officer.

LETTERS

Smut

WHY are glamour-slides sleazy? If Rodin had painted exactly as
slides portray, would his work be forgotten? To declare body-
photos smutty is very rude to people who have the same desire to
appreciate, but insufficient knowledge of hackneyed French to
know what "Le Baiser" means, or have an environment which
pontificates against visting art galleries.

Beethoven's Ninth can be enjoyed with windows closed, leaving
peace-smashing to mindless transistor maniacs. It would be grossly
impertinent to call pop-songs sleazy, as well as harmful to
Beethoven's public image. ERIC S. BARKER.

Censorship

LIKE Miss Hawtin, I (and no doubt most FREETHINKER
readers) prefer nude studies of genuine artistic worth to mere
"glamour slides", but none of us has the right to dictate to those
whose tastes happen to differ from our own, so long as they are
not harming us or anyone else. Anyway, the obscenity of one
decade may well acquire artistic worth in the next. Much better
to allow everything to find its own level than to ban whatever
happens to shock the official censors, who are inevitably going to
be affected by their personal conditioning. BARBARA SMOKER.

A better textbook needed

FUNDAMENTALISM emphasises belief in the inerrancy of the
Bible, the great textbook of Christianity. The Creation story;
Heaven and Hell as literal places; miracles like the Virgin Birth;
the physical resurrection, and the second coming of Jesus, are all
taught as facts. But Fundamentalists seem to overlook most of
the absurdities, atrocities, crimes, duplicities, immoralities, and
indecencies that are taught in the Scriptures.

Or they teach apologetics, dogmatics, exegesis, and polemics.
These subjects teach that many Bible passages don't really mean
what they say; that they mean or refer to something else less
damaging to faith or belief. This twisting and torturing of the
Scriptures may be described as "professional mental gymnastics".
If Bible sentences don't mean what they say, then their words
have lost all meaning.

Too many Christians narrow their outlook and lose much in life
by being glued to the Bible. Which really makes the most sense,
to read one book 100 times, or to read 100 good books once?
Devotion to Bible mythology, legends, and folklore can be an
expensive waste of time. Such continued concentration of ours
may help the Russians to get ahead of us yet.

They, like the Greeks of old, have stopped worshipping imag-
inary Gods and have devoted their time to a tremendous increase
of knowledge in many scientific fields. Reading books like Paine's
The Age of Reason, Kersey Graves' *World's Sixteen Crucified
Saviours*, and Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, should
make us think. This is something that few Christians seem to do,
beyond their daily routines. WILLARD E. EDWARDS (USA).