

FREE THINKER

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DISTASTEFUL AND REPELLENT

HE NAILED HIS WIFE ON A CROSS JUST TO PROVE THEY ARE "MR AND MRS SUPERMAN". It would, I suppose, be possible to conceive a more distasteful, repellent stunt than this one which Patrick and Mariza Benichou have just perpetrated. But the mind boggles at the prospect.

This couple have, for reasons best known to themselves, staged a parody of the most poignant moment in history — the Crucifixion.

Quite deliberately and in front of many people. Mr Benichou first crucified his wife. And he then crucified himself. Mrs Benichou stayed on her cross for 22 hours. Mr Benichou, not to be outdone, endured his own self-imposed agony for 30 hours. (Michael Dale reporting in *The People*, August 27th).

HOW good of Michael Dale and *The People* to bring this modern crucifixion to the attention of so many. Unhappily it is unlikely to make the deluded see the light of common sense.

One of the most inane among many inane pieces of religious superstition concerns what Mr Dale refers to as 'the most poignant moment in history'—the Crucifixion. Religionists would have us believe that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ constitutes the greatest sacrifice the world has ever known. Here was a man, so the teaching goes, who was a real human being with human passions and human sensations, unique in that he was the one and only son of the one and only almighty God who had sent him into the world to act as propitiation for the sin originally conceived by the first earthlings, Adam and Eve. So along comes man Jesus, is duly crucified as the Scriptures foretold, dies, is resurrected, joins his father in Heaven.

We are told that this extraordinary man, Jesus Christ, suffered excruciating agony on the cross, all for us, all because he loved us. He could have avoided crucifixion but he endured it so that we might be saved. His cruel death was necessary for our redemption. Never was pain so intense. Never was sacrifice so great. Never was nonsense so considerable. On the Christians' hypothesis — although

they do not even admit it as a hypothesis but contend it is indisputable fact — God in the guise of man hangs as his own son on a cross for six hours and then gives up his holy ghost. He knows he is the son of God. He knows he will join his father who is himself in Heaven and there live happily ever after. He *knows* all this, claim the Christians.

Now if you or I were to *know* beyond any shadow of doubt, and after all if we were omnipotent we *would* know, that after six terrestrial hours' self-imposed suffering, we should leave the mortal sphere and live for ever in the best of all worlds which we in our omnipotence had created, would we be unduly concerned about suffering for such a puny period of time? Ah yes, the Christians retort, but that is the very point. Because Christ was himself God, he did not *need* to suffer. It was nothing but the highest love for his wayward creations which made him accept and bear such suffering. Well, if we accept that retort, then Christ was not only a magnificent sufferer but an egregious idiot. God creates the world, aeons later anticipates Jekyll and Hyde by some 1900 years, splits himself into his own (supernaturally of course) created son, spends thirty odd years on earth to save the beings he created from their incorrigible sinfulness, has himself appropriately nailed to two bits of wood, suffers in an authentically mortal manner, expires, rises again to the place from whence he so temporarily descended, and for nearly two thousand years sits on his paradisiac throne listening to millions of mortals praising him for his great self-sacrificing love.

The hard fact is that if we accept the less fantastic claims of less superstition-riddled people that there was a man called Jesus Christ who was crucified and suffered for others on a cross for some six hours or so, this suffering was no greater, was indeed less, than that of others who have also suffered for those they loved. So much for what Mr Dale calls 'the most poignant moment in history'. And if Mr Dale's mind boggles at the prospect of conceiving a stunt more distasteful and repellent than the one he has reported, how about the one which has been going on for years of manufacturing figures of this mythical man-god, with protruding bleeding heart, blood, blood, blood, and hanging these figures for little kids to gaze at all day in school and home. To me that is distasteful and repellent.

For all the modernism in the Christian Churches, there is much remaining which is steeped in the superstition of two thousand years and more. Christianity itself, with its obsession with suffering and death, remains one of the most distasteful and repellent as well as one of the longest stunts ever perpetrated. Read your history Mr Dale, and then look around you to see what still persists today in the way of distasteful and repellent religious perversions.

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Harry Lamont

Speaking Personally

FOR LONG the priest and parson enjoyed great prestige. With a smattering of Latin a clodhopper was ordained and wielded considerable power in the parish. If he were eloquent and ambitious he could aspire to the highest ecclesiastical office. Several Popes were of very humble origins.

For the poor parish priest or parson who leads a life of self-abnegation and service to the community I have the greatest admiration, but the pompous affluent sky pilot who chucks his weight about and is imbued with a sense of his importance seems to me a fraud and a sham.

Many people regard priests and parsons with a kind of superstitious reverence. The keys of heaven have been entrusted by Saint Peter to his representatives, and you incur their displeasure at your peril.

I'm sure that vanity prompts many young men to enter the ministry. They fancy themselves in a dog-collar. When I was a student, I thought seriously of taking holy orders. In my imagination I saw on a board outside the church: VICAR: THE REV. H. P. LAMONT, M.A., and I felt a thrill. But I could not do it. The prospect of dreary meetings attended by sex-starved spinsters filled me with horror.

In the French Army priests are conscripted and have to serve in a combatant capacity. In the British Army a holy man is commissioned as a chaplain, and in the officers' mess many of them live on the fat of the land. I don't think a parson should be an officer. Class distinctions seem to me out of place in religion.

Some of my readers will remember *Elmer Gantry*, that magnificent novel by Sinclair Lewis, in which the 'hero' is an absolute scoundrel who becomes a hot gossamer and has terrific success until retribution overtakes him.

In South Africa a woman asked me if she could borrow *Elmer Gantry*. I produced it, but she looked at it and said she had changed her mind. She was shocked by a picture on the cover which depicted a placard outside a marquee with the caption: WOULD JESUS PLAY POKER?

Many years ago I read *The Way of all Flesh*, by Samuel Butler, a superb story of a clergyman who was a nasty sadist to his family and gave them all hell, while pretending to be deeply religious.

I should think the average parson's besetting sin is hypocrisy. I know some of them who enjoy choice wines and expensive tobacco, while millions die of starvation in under-developed countries.

CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE, LONDON, WC1
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11th, 7.30 p.m.

PUBLIC FORUM HUMANISM, CHRISTIANITY AND SEX

Speakers include

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Canon EDWARD CARPENTER
Father T. CORBISHLEY, SJ
BRIGID BROPHY
DAVID TRIBE

Organised by the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1
Telephone: 01-407 2717

THOUGHTS ON PARSONS

From time to time we hear complaints that parsons should be paid a living wage, but I think they ought to be poor to prove their sincerity. That is why I admire the mendicant friars and other Roman Catholic religious orders who take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Few are consistent, of course. The majority live well and apparently aim at enjoying the best of both worlds.

I'm all in favour of celibacy too. When a parson has a wife and children they distract his attention, and he is liable to spend on family matters time that should be devoted to the Lord's service.

The question is often asked as to whether a parson should take an active part in politics. I don't think he should belong to a party, but he should denounce social abuses, such as sweated labour, bad housing or profiteering. It is his duty to denounce such evils.

For too long in England the parson hobnobbed with the squire and treated the poor with contempt. He lived in a big house, sent his children to public schools and regarded himself as part of the Establishment. Some of them were dreadful rogues. Children in primary schools had to repeat:

"The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them high and lowly,
He ordered their estate."

I have always disliked parsonic teachers. The cobbler should stick to his last.

Priestly tyranny has declined in many countries, but is still very powerful in backward nations. In Italy, recently, a bill to allow divorce in special cases was killed stone dead because the Vatican didn't like it.

Some people think that organised religion will soon be a thing of the past, but in my view they are wrong. Human credulity will persist for a long time yet. Of course humanism will spread gradually, but the stupid herd will need religious consolation for the foreseeable future.

Whenever I meet a priest or parson who claims to believe that every word in the Bible, the prayer book and the Litany is divinely inspired and absolutely true, I think he is either a liar or mentally deficient. So many dogmas are now seen to be nonsense.

I asked a bishop what would happen to the millions of people who lived and died before Christ? Would they be damned? He replied that they would be judged as to whether they would have believed if they had known. I laughed in his face, but he was quite serious.

I read today about a priest who refused to officiate at a service for a woman about to be cremated. Some blamed him, but he was quite consistent. The body can't be resurrected after the ashes have been scattered.

It is rather pathetic the way certain parsons devise stunts to attract people to church. Usually such activities don't do much harm, provided they are properly supervised. For many the church is a social club.

I feel sorry for the parson who preaches in a church that is practically empty. I entered one recently on a Sunday morning and found a congregation that numbered three. I know many parsons who struggle desperately to prove they are good fellows, but I'm afraid they face a bleak future.

In France worker priests were instituted, so that priests could mix with factory workers, but the experiment was not very successful.

ATHEIST OR AGNOSTIC?

F. H. Snow

THE RESPECTIVE MERITS of atheism and agnosticism, as the true secularist attitude, have been greatly argued, and there would seem to be little more to be said upon the subject. I propose, however, in this article, to view this well-worn theme through the lens of simple logic, and show which of these attitudes is the right one.

To decide between outright denial of a celestial deity's existence, and uncertainty about it, has undoubtedly been hard for many sceptics, though I dare allege that no self-styled agnostic would refuse the designation of unbeliever. Yet if one is not prepared to deny that God exists, that designation is unapt. By what process of reasoning do agnostics disbelieve in the biblical account of the supernatural, but decline to commit themselves to denial of the existence of the deity around which that account was written? They profess disbelief in heaven, hell, angels and devils, but say that one cannot know there is no God, because there is no evidence to that effect. Is there any more evidence that heaven, hell, angels or devils do not exist? Would any agnostic claim that he does not know they are mythical? Why does he not apply the same dictum to the deity without which they would not have been posited?

If the agnostic position is that one cannot rule out the possibility of some sort of god inhabiting space, my reply is that had not the Jewish and Christian God been postulated, there would have been no excuse for postulating an alternative 'some sort of god'. To believe or disbelieve in Jehovah is a practical proposition. Why conjure up a god of some imaginable or unimaginable kind, and tell ourselves we can't know it doesn't exist? It is understandable that thinking persons should find themselves unable to believe in a deity of whom there is no evidence. What is incomprehensible is that professed sceptics such as agnostics should be unable to regard that concept as palpable myth, merely because there is no evidence to that effect.

These sticklers for proof of the unreality of the Christian God or the nameless one it is fashionable to ideate ought to be logically consistent. They should, for example, be unable to discredit the reality of Amitabha, worshipped for many centuries by the Japanese; of Izanagi and Izanami, their male and female gods; of Amaterasa, their sun goddess, and Susanoo, her divine brother, none of whom can be proved not to exist. But what agnostic is prepared to defend them against the charge of being mythical? The Indian deities, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva—no agnostic is worried about dismissing them as fictional. Nor does Mithra, the Persian god, provide any problem for persons of that designation. As for the ancient Hellenic immortals, who can be positive, without evidence of their non-existence, that Saturn and Jupiter are not still sitting on the top of Mount Olympus? Certainly not agnostics, according to their criterion of judgment. Even Baal, Jehovah's scriptural rival for the worship of the Hebrews, should be given the benefit of the premise that keeps the God of Abraham or his modern substitute, hovering in the hazy background of agnostic incertitude.

Unfortunately, time is against Baal and the Olympians. Nobody has given them credence for so long that nobody

regards them as anything. The time factor will operate as disastrously for the celestial postulants of our day and age, even should they survive for centuries more. Secularism has got to see that they don't, and that the stupid worship that holds in thrall many millions of Roman Catholics, Jews, Moslems and others, becomes defunct more speedily than did that of the antiquated deities.

But belief in a god of some description or of none, will die extremely slowly, even amongst the self-styled civilised peoples, if professed sceptics fight shy of applying to that god the commonsense with which they judge other superstitious divinities. If it cannot be known that the Christian God or his unspecified alternative does not exist, then every god, Indian, Japanese, Persian or Syro-Phoenician, is as potentially extant, and to deny them reality is to invalidate the premise upon which agnosticism rests its case.

Most dictionaries describe the agnostic as one who holds that man has no knowledge except of material phenomena. Therefore, and, of course, avowedly, he doubts God's existence. And yet, those who adopt the designation of agnostic are inhibited, by that very fact, from such doubt, for Professor T. H. Huxley, who invented the name, demanded it for those who disclaimed atheism, and believed, with him, in an 'unknown and unknowable God'. I fail to see how *soi-disant* sceptics who are conversant with Huxley's definition, can justify their adoption of the title.

Atheism is a forthright philosophy. It takes the line that a god who is unidentifiable by any sign, either as a being or a power, benevolent or malevolent, is nothing, because any god worthy of consideration as an entity, would be evident as something. It would be neither unknown nor unknowable. Atheism is accused of being dogmatic. It is dogmatic only in consistent denial of the actuality of a deity that is consistently inevident. It is ever willing—indeed, eager—to examine any religious apologetic, and afford opponents full facility for refuting its claims. Agnosticism, on the other hand, is inconsistent in its attitude towards the allegedly supernatural, as I have illustrated—demanding proof of the non-existence of the Christian God, but not for that of gods as absurdly, though no more palpably, fallacious—knowing them to be sheer myth, but claiming that such can't be known of the winged one of semitic fancy or his undefinable proxy.

Agnostics cannot fall back upon a mindless Cause, in support of their view, since the atheism they cannot endorse is, as the name implies, concerned only with the conscious supernatural. A god, with or without the capital 'g', is a personal one. The agnostic's ground for eschewing atheism disappears if an impersonal force is in question.

Disbelief in a deity is irreconcilable with uncertainty of that deity's non-existence, and the agnostic position is logically and intellectually untenable. If secularism is to be a real power, it must speak with one voice against the superstition that still disgraces the so-called enlightened nations. Otherwise, religious belief may be indefinitely prolonged, and the time factor alone will place the Unknowable with the dead gods of antiquity.

NEWS AND NOTES

IN the current issue of his *Diocesan News* the Bishop of Carlisle (the Right Rev. Cyril Bulley) sounds the alarm on the prospects of the privileged position of Christianity in Britain's schools. He sees the campaign on RI as a declaration of war on the Church.

The bishop points out that there is a distinction between Christian humanism and secular humanism. He warns his flock, "It is this secular humanism which has declared war on 'religious privilege'. Speaking as it so often does in Christian accents, and moved as it is by ideals which we recognise as Christian, it is very tempting to shrug our shoulders and say 'Not to worry, they want the same things as we do'."

There is some confusion in the bishop's mind. True, some Humanists create such an impression that one cannot blame Christians for yielding to the temptation which worries him. Secular Humanists prefer straight talk to devious waffle. This preference is shared by many Christians, but unfortunately not by all Humanists.

Battle at Redbridge

HUMANISTS in the London Borough of Redbridge have been trying for some time to get the *Humanist* displayed in the public libraries. At a recent meeting of the Council the refusal of the Libraries Committee was strongly criticised. The leader of the Labour Group (Councillor John Ryder) moved a resolution that the decisions of the committee should be subject to Council approval. He also called upon the committee to submit a list of periodicals at present available in the local libraries. He declared, "It is a question of whether a small, narrow-minded group in the Libraries Committee are entitled to make themselves self-appointed censors".

During the debate Councillor Nicholas Hurst, Chairman of the Libraries Committee, repeated the argument that the Humanist point of view was covered by the *Hibbert Journal*. He added, "In a discussion with the Headquarters of the Humanist Association they did not deny this. They just said it would be more helpful if the *Humanist* were taken as well".

It is difficult to see how the *Hibbert Journal* can even be expected to cover the Humanist point of view. It is published quarterly for the Hibbert Trust (secretary: the Rev. Roger Thomas) and edited by the Rev. H. L. Short.

CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE, LONDON, WC1
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19th, 8 p.m.

PUBLIC MEETING

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Speaker: EMMETT McLOUGHLIN

Famous American ex-Priest and Author

Chairman: DAVID TRIBE

President, National Secular Society

Organised by the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

Telephone: 01-407 2717

On the front cover it is described as "international, inter-religious".

London tour

THE tour of *London for Heretics*—organised by the National Secular Society and conducted by David Tribe—was greatly enjoyed by the fifty people who took part. Much research had obviously been undertaken beforehand and David Tribe's commentary, together with visits to various buildings and exhibitions, made the tour a most interesting event.

The tourists departed from Trafalgar Square—itsself the scene of many heretical happenings—and after seeing houses in Soho where William Hazlitt and Karl Marx lived, proceeded to Essex Hall, the headquarters of Unitarianism in Britain. After Mr S. Knight had welcomed the visitors, he gave a short talk on the history of the building and its predecessors, and its association with various radical causes.

Before going to the headquarters of the Rationalist Press Association in Islington High Street, several buildings in the Fleet Street area were visited. These included 17 Johnson's Court, former headquarters of the RPA and NSS, and almost opposite Johnson's Court there was Richard Carlile's shop. Mr Hector Hawton, Managing Director of the RPA, showed the visitors over the Association's new building and outlined future development plans.

The next stop was 103 Borough High Street, Southwark, headquarters of the NSS. Here was displayed a collection of documents, pictures and rare books, together with the magnificent gifts which were presented to Charles Bradlaugh by the people of India. These are now in the possession of Bradlaugh's descendants, and were kindly lent by Mr Basil Bonner. There were other Bradlaugh items to be seen at Shoreditch Central Library which is situated only a few hundred yards from the street where Bradlaugh was born.

The Rev. Albert Jones welcomed the tourists to St Peter's Church, Hackney. It was while he was a Sunday School teacher at St. Peter's that Charles Bradlaugh asked the Rev. J. L. Packer a number of questions which precipitated the crisis resulting in his decision to leave home. The hall in which Bradlaugh spoke on temperance and other subjects is still standing almost opposite the church, and the Rev. Packer's grave is in the churchyard.

The tour ended at Conway Hall, headquarters of South Place Ethical Society, where Miss Edwina Palmer had arranged an interesting display of books and other items. She spoke on the history of SPES since the 18th century and its role in the Humanist movement at the present time. After tea, the heretics dispersed to various parts of London and to Nottingham, Cambridge and Cheshire.

E.A.

Flashback

AT a dinner given by Charles James, of London, to some of his clergy, the conversation turned upon the new Army and Navy Club, the ground for which cost the sum of thirty thousand pounds. A heavy sigh escaped from the over-burdened bosom of the prelate (he had dined) as he exclaimed, "that money would have built two churches!" It is a fearful thought. Thirty thousand good honest pounds which might have been so much better employed! Carlyle has told us how churches multiply as religion decays; but considering that the bishop cannot keep his existing churches in order, what rage for ecclesiastical architecture is it which makes him sigh because more are not built? And if the demand is for churches not religion, why does he not justify his taste by building them on his own ample grounds at Fulham? There is room for a dozen churches there, all in a bunch!

(*The Leader*—March 1st, 1851.)

FUNCTIONS OF THE CHURCH: III

A. C. Thompson

Religion and Morality

RELIGION is useful, and has been useful through the ages. It offers explanations that satisfy wonder which is not too critical, and moral precepts for those who see no other reason for morality.

Still today the foundation argument for religion, that for the existence of God, is the unexplained universe. How can the agnostic explain the origin of the universe with its remarkable intricacy, order, regularity, variety, vastness, minuteness? Creation by a God is a hypothesis accepted simply because there exists no rival hypothesis, no reasonable alternative explanation. In logic, it is questioned whether a proposition is validly proved by the mere absence of a rival one, or even by the disproof of a rival, unless it can be shown that the proposition and its rival exhaust the possibilities. It is declared that an alternative hypothesis is inconceivable—there never can be and never will be another explanation. Here one ventures on dangerous ground for no one can predict what the science of the future will produce.

Speculation about the origin of the universe is essentially philosophic or scientific rather than religious. Religion gives to the supposed First Cause the rôle of a Great Lawgiver who dictates rules for free human conduct and who rewards observance and punishes infractions of his rules. Religion has thus, through the ages, been a powerful force for regulating human behaviour. It has also been a cohesive force in society, uniting its adherents into a great family as it were, with common beliefs, aspirations and loyalties. At a religious service, even the unbeliever who attends out of mere curiosity finds himself drawn into the ritual, standing when others stand, holding a hymn-book when they do, and his presence there is another testimony to the congregation in support of the faith. Adherents of religion reinforce one another's adherence. The result is a social unity.

Religious people are advocates of morality and want to do what is right. Churchgoers renew their aspirations to goodness and encourage one another in the pursuit of virtue. The clergy devote their entire lives to what they conceive to be the moral perfection of humanity. It is true, of course, that the ultimate motive of religious moralists is a covert Egoistic Hedonism: to win a God's favour, to find happiness and contentment in life and a blissful eternity after death, rather than a true altruistic concern for others. But it remains true that religious people are trying to be good. Religion has, in the past, provided the moral standards for all but a minority of society, and it is still feared by many that the steadfastness of religious people would be imperilled by offering them any substitute principle. The great objection to a natural morality has been the lack of a personal motive and provision only of a social one. A social motive may not be a strong one, for a malefactor may think, "If I steal this, society will not fall apart—of course if everyone steals, society will fall apart, but I do not want everyone to steal—I just want to do it myself". This is the attitude of a small child which some people never outgrow. Religion on the other hand enforces morality with reputedly certain rewards and punishments, omniscient detection, final exposure and inevitable retribution. In the older religions, these rewards and punishments

came during life; in the Christian Era, they are promised for an eternity after death, for it is obvious even to the casual observer that the wicked often prosper during life while the virtuous suffer. On the other hand, the chief objection which supporters of a natural morality urge against the religion-based type is that it is false. As more people realise that right and wrong do not depend on supernatural sanctions, they are left with no reason for morality. If the survival of society is the true ultimate principle, it is clear that religion is but a sham.

Primitive people turned religion to practical use as a tool for the enforcement of morality. Among ancient peoples, religion was declared to be the source of law, especially of the criminal law. It was ancient Roman law which ended, for all later civilised nations and peoples, the subordination of human law to supernaturalism; everywhere today people universally reject the claims of ancient rulers that they received their laws directly from God. Civil states today rely on enactments and enforcement of law to secure the morality necessary for the survival of society. But law is inferior to religion, in at least three ways.

The first respect in which law is inferior to religion is that law is minimal rather than maximal. Law prescribes what is barely necessary to the survival of society; it does not uphold ideals. One who holds only to the letter of the law and no more is not worth much; for he continually seeks loopholes in the law, ways around the law, devices for observing the letter of the law while violating its intent. Religion, on the other hand, urges men to aspire to perfection. Law cannot enact cultivation of virtue, while religion can uphold saintliness. The strongest justification for the survival of the church in the modern world is the vast amount of charitable and humanitarian work in which it engages. Some wrongs, such for example as telling lies, may not be deemed sufficiently grievous to be made the subject of legislation, and yet they can, with widespread practice, be very detrimental to other individuals and to society. Further, it is difficult to frame a law which foresees every possible future case, and here religion impels people to do what they see to be right even if there is no law about it.

Second, law is negative while religion is positive. Law prohibits evil; it does not often command good. Law forbids one to injure another; it cannot command kindness to another. Law restrains violations of the highway code; it does not extend to courtesy on the road. To produce positive behaviour, it is necessary to reach further than bodily actions into the mind and what is erroneously called the heart. Actually, restraint on conduct often generates rebellion against authority, so often seen in school children. Law cannot make people good—it can only punish them for being bad.

A third deficiency of law is that it can enact only what is enforceable. It cannot command husbands to love their wives, parents their children, nor anyone his neighbour, for such laws would be unenforceable. At most, law can command husbands to support their wives, parents to care for their children, and anyone to refrain from transgressing his neighbour's legal rights. Law rests on coercion. Law cannot forbid illegitimacy because it cannot punish it. Punishment would defeat the end or aim of the law, which is the welfare of the child; to punish the illegitimate parents would be to punish the child. Hence, illegitimate parent-

hood is a matter for social disapproval and shame rather than for law-courts. Religion has a personal influence which law cannot exert.

Beyond these three practical shortcomings of law lies the far deeper theoretical one of principle. A law can be an unjust law. Law, for example, might require high taxes when public money is spent for evil, as for aggressive war, or high customs duties may be exacted for restricting imports. There have been laws which authorised slavery and piracy, which suppressed freedom of thought and speech, which destroyed political opposition, which maintained a wealthy privileged class at the people's expense. There is required reason and principle above law, in the minds of the governed, principle to form the basis for law and to justify it. This principle cannot be enacted; it must be the product of the rational mind, not of the will. As reason shirks this duty, religion assumes it.

These advantages of religion over law explain the existence not only of religion but of specific religions. Christianity grew when, in the Roman world, there were no sanctions for goodness beyond law. The law could forbid murder and punish the murderer. But if a man were starving, the law could not require any particular individual to feed him. If you said to the Roman nobleman, "What you waste is enough to feed a dozen men; you ought to give to the poor", he could reply, "Why should I?" and what answer could you give? Inevitably people see a need for morality beyond law. When the Christians say, "Practice such morality and obtain a reward in Heaven. Jesus the Anointed says so, and that he is God is proved by his virgin birth, miracles and resurrection", people are converted. True, there could instead have been a Reformation of the pagan religion, but this did not happen. Some Roman theologian, if there were any such, could have decided that Jupiter, or Minerva, or some god, liked Jovian charity and would reward it; he might also have revived the ancient Egyptian idea of life after death. Christianity would have been unnecessary, and today's churches might still worship the Roman gods just as we use the Roman calendar, or might practice some cult such as Orphism, Eleusianism, or Mithraism. Neoplatonism, the Secularism of the early Christian Era, failed to meet the need. It is commonly said to have declined with the murder of its leader, the reputedly beautiful Hypatia, instigated by Bishop Cyril of Alexandria (later canonised St. Cyril), who incited a Christian mob to drag her through the streets from her Academy, strip her naked, club her to death, tear and scrape all the flesh from her bones with oyster shells, and then to burn the lot. But an intellectual movement can hardly be extinguished by the death of one woman; the fact was that Christianity was more practical than Neoplatonism. The latter was for the intellectual and erudite, while the former appealed to the masses, even to the meanest slave; the former exerted sanctions while the latter upheld ideals. The reason why the death of Jesus has been more complained of through the centuries than the death of Hypatia is that Jesus symbolises a practical and needed morality. Inevitably, some Roman emperor, such as Constantine, must see the practical value of Christianity, with its all-knowing and all-powerful God's rewards and punishments in a life after death, as a tool for enforcement of public morals, and make it the state religion. Of all ethical philosophies, Stoicism had been most acceptable to the Roman mind, and the Christian principle of a natural moral law carried on where Stoicism left off. Despite the early persecutions inflicted for its pacifism, anti-nationalism and apparent lack of patriotism, the Christian Church

eventually triumphed because its ideals of patience, obedience, forgiveness, charity—contemptuously called the "slave virtues"—and its high sexual standards were necessary for the common human interaction which is the essence of society.

The Christian Church dominated morality in European countries throughout the Middle Ages. But it is not correct to believe, as some moralists have asserted, that present-day morality is largely determined by the moral traditions of Jews and Christians which were taught by the Christian Church of the Middle Ages, for much the same morality existed among the Chinese, Hindus, and even among savages. Morality is not dependent upon any particular religion. Religion did not bring into being the common human moral practices—it did not invent them—but merely acts as an adjunct for their enforcement. Religion is not the source of morality, for men practiced morality before any of the world's present religions started. The law said to have been given to Moses by the god of the Hebrews in 1490 BC is not essentially different from that given by Hammurabi, without divine assistance, in 2350 BC, 860 years earlier, and men surely practiced morality before the birth of Moses, or of Christ, or of Gautama Buddha, or of Mohammed, or of Joseph Smith, or of any other of the religious innovators.

People impute to their religion what it really does not contain. Christians talk of "Christian" attitudes to contraception, abortion, euthanasia, etc. although Jesus said nothing and knew nothing about these matters. When hare-coursing was debated much was heard about "Christian" kindness to animals, but Jesus said not a single word about kindness to animals. We even hear that road courtesy is "Christian" though Jesus never told how to drive a car. It is declared that Jesus "came to earth" to end racial discrimination, to unite all men in a common brotherhood, etc. A man who spends his life caring for lepers, or doing other humanitarian work, declares he does it "to serve God", that he would not do it otherwise. It is part of God's Divine plan for him that he devote his life thus. It may be asked, did the Divine plan produce the lepers? Does God make people leprous to be subjects on which others can exhibit their charity, or does he make lepers to "test" others, to find out what he does not know about them? Is it a sort of game? What sense is there in it? If some scientist found a way to prevent or cure leprosy, would he frustrate God's Divine plan by preventing God from making lepers for his test-creatures to care for? God makes lepers, and this man tries to unmake them; does it not seem that he is actually contravening God's Divine plan? How can anyone know whether he is acting in accordance with God's will? Did God create the leprosy bacterium, and if so, is he not the ultimate cause of leprosy? It is obvious that religious people are not so much following a religion as they are shaping a religion they think people ought to follow. The assertion that religion inspires virtue does not really stand up to examination. Morality is not founded on religion; religion is founded on morality.

Religion has a strong hold on society not only because it offers a hypothesis to explain the universe and sanctions for morality, but also because of the intricacy of its establishment, because of its pervasiveness through so much of ordinary living. It is enshrined in folklore, song and ceremony. It is housed in the most splendid edifices, fostered by men wearing impressive costumes, in the light from stained glass windows and flickering candles, amid the peal

(Continued on next page)

SOME DRUGS ARE AS BAD AS RELIGION

Isobel Grahame

FROM 1924 until early in the last war, my life was dominated at home, at school and at work by chronic menstrual disorder. Out of every 21 days I had to spend at least two in bed or lying down in a state of fever, acute internal pain, gastric malfunction and such muscular cramp that walking was impossible and it was difficult even to stand up.

The migraine type of headache which accompanied this condition was relieved only by knocking my forehead against a wall until it was anaesthetised. All the then known remedies failed or made matters worse, and as each proved more futile than the last, I spent my teens to thirties in despairing dread of the next attack's inescapable inevitability (Only last week I learned to my surprise from a young neighbour that this condition is apparently as incurable today as ever it was.)

During the last war, when I was due to take part in a Civil Defence demonstration at the Surrey County Rescue School at Ashted, the pain and fever came on and I could find no trained substitute to take my place. I phoned an ex-Army doctor who was also taking part and he asked if I was game to try just one more new thing called Benzedrine. He said it wouldn't do anything about the pain, but might temporarily relieve the muscular cramp and weakness so that I could get through the performance. It would have several bad side effects and I was to expect sweating shaky hands and a sleepless night to follow.

Ten minutes after taking 2½ tablets the pain stopped just as though a switch had been turned off and I felt really well and strong for the first time since childhood. My hands remained dry and steady which was fortunate as I had to work on a 30 ft. wall of a bombed Convent School. Next day I felt terribly tired, but by that time the pain had gone so it didn't matter.

It soon became clear to me, however, that the effects of Benzedrine were so stimulating that it not only overcame pain and debility (which after all are danger signals), but speeded me up so that I could do a prodigious amount of heavy work which had to be paid for next day. It also gave a spurious feeling of confidence putting out of gear to a dangerous degree my normally active faculties of caution and self-criticism. So I made a habit of never doing anything which called for important decisions until the effects had worn off—about 24 hours.

Soon after the war I was horrified to discover that Benzedrine was easily obtainable, and that a neighbour who was a rising left-wing politician habitually took much more than my prescribed dose before addressing meetings, often on several successive days. Suddenly I understood how and why some of the immediate post-war political pronouncements came to be made, speakers were getting high as kites on the stuff and acting like revivalist preachers.

So alarmed was I to recognise the symptoms of lack of judgment and caution in reported speeches, that I wrote to the *Evening Standard* after Benzedrine was mentioned in the 'Londoner's Diary'. My letter was not published, but the Editor replied that there was no medical evidence that Benzedrine was anything but a beneficial pep-pil!

Years later the medical world woke up and in its panic partially succeeded in preventing some politicians talking tripe, and wholly deprived me of the only drug which made life tolerable.

Any medication which is either unnecessary or administered in too great concentration for too long is liable to upset bodily functions. The pressures on our Health Service and the system of prescribing ready-made tablets means doses all too often not calculated minutely enough for the idiosyncrasies of individuals. I predict that in the not so distant future doctors will be horrified at the quantities and concentrations of drug substances administered today, often without any preliminary test for allergic reaction.

Drugs taken for non-medical reasons and which cause forms of irrational or mystical experience, or the 'oceanic' magnification of consciousness are as evil in their effect as religious belief, for they create dependence from which the sufferer cannot easily get free, thus depriving him of liberty and self-determination. Those which create a false sense of well-being, of superior competence and of eventual all rightness are also as bad as religion, for they pervert perception of the real all wrongnesses which ought to spur us on to make this world a better place, because we don't believe in Heaven or another existence of some kind of higher sensitivity.

FUNCTIONS OF THE CHURCH

(Continued from previous page)

of sonorous pipe organs which rise ceilingwards among tall limestone and granite columns. The vicar interests himself in the affairs of all the people round, constantly proselyting, able to speak a special Scriptural language with such words as "thou" and "unto". The Church unites a man and woman in marriage, names their children and presides over the burial of people who depart from life. Religion maintains its calendar of holidays, is instrumental in having children showered with presents at Christmas and sweets at Easter. The Church reaches out especially to children, attempting to influence if not to control their education, and providing Sunday School with little hymns and Scripture lessons.

Religious people are good people, or at least they want and are trying to be good. The truth of what they believe matters little to them, for their religion is the symbol of their society which they know they are necessarily bound to preserve, even if they are not able to say so. Religious people enact "blasphemy laws" to stifle any utterance contrary to their society; why do blasphemy laws not operate against one who attacks the atheist or agnostic in an offensive or insulting manner likely to provoke a breach of the peace? Many have been willing to die for their religion: the Hindus in India declare themselves willing to die for the cows. Religion appeals to the most selfish in man to act unselfishly. Religion, even if false, provides a way of living. Morality is not regarded as a field for knowledge: how many people are there in this world who know the ethical theory of Immanuel Kant, how many know or practice the ethics of Spinoza?

Intellectually honest clergy and laity must see the need in the modern world of a new Reformation based upon a rational system of ethics.

(To be continued)

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Telephone HOP 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) 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

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, September 24th, 3 p.m. Annual Reunion. Guest of Honour: Professor Hyman Levy who will speak on "The Technological Explosion and its Social Cost. Folk songs by Unity Singers, speeches by representatives of other societies, tea. Admission free.
The 59 Society (Kensington Public Library, off Kensington High Street, London, W8), Thursday, September 21st, 8 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE, "The Right to Die—the Challenge of Euthanasia".
West Ham Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead, London, E11). Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.

LETTERS

Human Sacrifice . . . A. C. Thompson, pp. 269/70

THE FREETHINKER is not normally the paper one turns to in order to find arguments quoting the scriptures for support: this is what your contributor A. C. Thompson does in his article on Human Sacrifice, 25th August, 1967.

No doubt Mr Thompson does not believe in the virgin birth and the subsequently related supernatural happenings of the gospel stories; he appears, however, to accept the story of the crucifixion of Jesus as gospel truth. ". . . witness", he writes, "that the Jewish authorities could not execute Jesus without first obtaining the permission of the Roman Governor." His authority? Why that great secularist document the New Testament. Readers of Christian apologetics will be familiar with A. C. Thompson's type of selective quoting.

He alleges that not only does Mosaic Law command human sacrifice but, "it is nowhere recorded in Holy Scripture" that the law has ever been repealed. Obviously Mr Thompson is a fundamentalist as well as being in the tradition of Christian wilful ignorance of Judaism. Firstly, Mosaic Law has been subject to amendment by commentary before it was ever written down. The *lex talionis*, for example, cannot be shown to be repealed in the Holy Scriptures yet it had been abolished in favour of recompense centuries before the time of Jesus. Literal interpretation of the Mosaic Law was confined to the Samaritans. Secondly, for millenia the Isaac incident has been taught to the young as evidence that god does not require human sacrifice—in contrast to the teaching of Christianity. Finally, I challenge Mr Thompson and any other anti-Jewish propagandist to produce one historically attested case of Mosaic human sacrifice or one single Jew who believes in human sacrifice.

Mr Thompson puts himself in the company of a long line of Christian detractors of Judaism. A Freethinker? I have met men and women in the orders of the Catholic Church who are better informed and who think more freely than the traditionalist Mr Thompson does on this matter.

GERALD SAMUEL.

Round-Robin on Krishnamurti

I HAVE been receiving the FREETHINKER for almost a year and for the most part have enjoyed it tremendously. It is not only enjoyable but educational as well.

In the July 14th issue of FREETHINKER there was a letter by V. T. Bowen on which I would like to comment briefly. He says, "surely all children should be 'wanted' inside and outside of marriage". Should be, yes, but let's be realistic, Mr Bowen. All children are *not* wanted and this is a *fact*. Wanting or expecting people to see a responsibility through to the end is *idealistic* and it is no good thinking idealistically; one must deal with *facts*.

Mr Bowen also states that "making abortion legal is only playing into the hands of the wrong people". It seems to me that that is what is happening now, *without* legalised abortion. I wish you had been more specific, Mr Bowen. What about the situation as it stands now? The quacks who are not medically qualified to perform abortions are responsible for many deaths. I think legalised abortion is what we *do* need, UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. Until we have a more responsible society, legalised abortion is the lesser of two evils.

If I may, I would like to take this means to introduce your readers to the philosophy of J. Krishnamurti. Many of you may think of this author and lecturer as a spiritual or religious teacher, but this is not the case. He has profound interest in, and has committed himself to, education of the young. He believes that if a person is to find real happiness, he must see life, and himself, as they are, not as he would like them to be. He explores and discusses with his audience the psychological problems each of us faces from day to day. In his book *The First and Last Freedom* he writes on such topics as: Can Thinking Solve our Problems? The Function of the Mind, Action and Idea, Individual and Society, On Awareness, Surrender to 'What is', On Sex, On Love, etc., etc. His approach to psychological problems is unique.

I would like very much to begin a 'Round-Robin' on the philosophy of Krishnamurti. Anyone who would like to join the 'robin' can do so by writing a statement, either for or against his convictions, and mailing it to me. I shall put your name on the list as your letter arrives, and on October 15th will start the Robin on his way.

Perhaps after the Robin has made two or three 'rounds' the letters could then appear in the FREETHINKER.

I liked *A Matter of Freedom* very much. BETTY STROUP,
PO Box 712, Buttonwillow, California, USA.