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Friday,
April 12, 1968**A PLEA FOR UNITY**

F. H. Snow

THE axiom, "Union is Strength", was never more apposite than now, when business combinations are the order of the day, and mergers of many kinds are frequent. Not the least important of prospective mergers is that visualised by the Church of Rome, under the guise of ecumenism. The major Christian bodies have realised the wisdom of presenting a united front to the menace of scepticism. Apparently unapprehensive that its almost certain fate of eventual submergence by Catholicism will be hastened by strategical alliance with Rome, Protestantism believes in the advantage to Christendom of that alliance.

In contrast to this unity-seeking attitude, Secularism appears conscious of no need for a closing of its variously-labelled ranks. Is it, then, so potent and cohesive a force?

As I see it, the reverse is the case. To use a business metaphor, its window display badly needs dressing. At present, it is a confused picture. So far, the general public has had little view of that picture, owing to the inhibitions of the press and broadcasting services, and the propagating inadequacy of secularist journals. When, as we fervently hope, the people's vision is freed from its impediments, what kind of secularist picture will it behold? One of divergent views, disunity of aims and numerous degrees of scepticism?

The privilege of free-thinking, is rightly prized by us. It was gained through suffering and sacrifice, in the teeth of clerical opposition and oppression, and is the mainspring of our movement. But the right to think and express ourselves freely, if irresponsibly exercised, could be of great disservice to the cause we espouse. It could create an image of weakness in the eyes of the religious. Our image should be that of unity of disbelief in, and opposition to, their fantastic and totally incredible creeds. To our hardly great number of interested onlookers, the various banners under which we march can scarcely present that image.

We are not, of course, so divided as the titles Atheist, Humanist, Agnostic, Rationalist, Freethinker, Secularist, Agnostic-atheist and Secular-humanist may suggest to the uncommitted. Many sceptics, indeed, consider that their views synchronise with the entirety of these terms. Probably, all who think so, and those who do not, are allied in repudiation of the literality of a supernatural entity. Surely that common view should be reflected in a common title, to the great advantage of our cause? Accepting that atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers, rationalists are as one in disbelief of the sky-dwelling deity's authenticity, they are connected by a bond that should over-rule terminological differences. Would not their humanitarian projects be best served if they stood forth in undisguised unanimity of ideal and purpose, under one appellation?

In my view, the focus of rational thought upon secularist disharmonies could render them innocuous. Atheists—I mean those who openly declare themselves such—are

denigrated by certain of their brother-sceptics as being concerned far more with the destruction of religion than pursuit of humanitarian objectives. Exercise of the tolerance and reason that is secularism's pride would discountenance an assertion unjust to the great bulk of atheists—even the militant type—the basic motivation of whom is the righting of the wrongs perpetrated under religious governance. They consider that the shortest route to the uplift of the down-trodden lies through the elimination of the superstitious beliefs that keep them subservient to supposedly divinely-instituted systems which condone privilege, oppression and poverty. Most atheists of my acquaintance have been zestful for the welfare of their fellow men, and indeed, any thing but arid dogmatists.

The view that atheism's forthright philosophy is unscientific in its approach to metaphysical problems, alike merits no sympathy. Scientific thinking is the essence of atheism, with its eagerness to explore every speculative avenue—to examine any premise by religious or secularist opponents—to probe always for flaws in its own conclusions. Atheism is dogmatic only in its insistence that the utter lack of evidence for God or for the power ascribed to him, is evidence that he is nothing but a postulation, and *ipso facto*, that he or it can never be manifested.

This, however, is as unimportant to the main objective of those who comprise the secularist movement, as the reservation which coined the agnostic title. In the interests of the great cause bequeathed us by Foote, Bradlaugh, McCabe and Wells, is it not possible to discover these and other distinctions that divide and weaken humanism? Should it not be all-sufficient that freethinkers, humanists, secularists, agnostics and atheists have a basic philosophy? All profess disbelief in the Christian and any god—all are zealous for the triumph of humanitarian principles. May they not work in unison for this by sinking the buoys that mark discordant irrelevancies, and abandoning a plurality of titles?

Obviously, the aptest common designation would be that which gives a clear anti-theistic yet humanitarian image. I shall be guilty of a heresy if I suggest that the current general title, Humanism, with its 'Secular', 'Agnostic', 'Rationalist', 'Atheist', 'Christian' and 'Mystical' variants, should be discarded as presenting a confused picture to the great uninitiated. I shall be deemed backward-thinking if I propose the lucid and time-honoured term 'Rationalism' as its alternative. I shall, in all probability, be considered as entertaining a 'pipe dream' in thinking unity possible along the lines I envisage.

I can only hope that the need of an identical policy and a united front will inspire secularists to disregard ideological distinctions, and enable them to approach with mutual zeal the twin tasks of freeing the people from their religious delusions, and speeding the progress of humanist ideas.

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EASTER CRUCIFIXION OR CRUCIFIXION?

Dr Willard E. Edwards

"EASTER" is from the Anglo-Saxon word "eastre", meaning Spring. It was originally the name of a pagan Vernal Equinox festival for Eastre, the Dawn Goddess, or Goddess of Spring and fertility. The rising sun of dawn is always in the East; and the Vernal Equinox marks the time of year when day equals night. But day is then beginning to lengthen by an earlier dawn and later sunset.

With this increasing light and warmth of Spring, sap begins to flow, and soon new vegetable life begins to appear. It was only natural that pagans considered this as a festive time for rejoicing. Spring also affects animals, and thus the connection with fertility. Surviving traditions are coloured Easter eggs, painted to represent the gay colours of Spring and sunrise; and the Easter bunny, symbol of the fertile rabbit.

The resurrection of life in the Spring was explained by legends and myths and was observed by festivals in many ancient religions. The Jewish Passover is one of them. This universal practice has led many scholars to interpret the supposed resurrection of Jesus as simply a mystical (symbolic) glorified variant of fertility myths. Easter early became known as "the Christian Passover".

An attempt was made in 325 A.D. at the Council of Nicaea to separate it from the Jewish Passover. A complicated formula was finally agreed upon after much bitterness between rival factions. It involved a day of the week (Sunday), a day of the month (full moon), and a day of the year (Vernal Equinox): "Easter shall be the first Sunday after the full moon which happens upon or next after the 21st of March; and, if the full moon happens on a Sunday, Easter is the Sunday thereafter".

Even so, Easter and Passover often occur at about the same time, as in 1968. The result of the Easter formula is that the date shifts from March 22 to April 25, inclusive, a period of 35 days. This movable feast governs the other feast days from Septuagesima Sunday to the first Sunday of Advent. It does not affect the "Feast of the Circumcision" (January 1); but it does affect educational, travel, social and secular business affairs tremendously.

A fixed Easter has long been urged. The British Parliament voted in 1928 for the first Sunday after the second Saturday in April. But the commemoration dates of the "Good Friday" crucifixion and the Easter Day resurrection still move, and this is a problem in both sectarian and secular life. One sometimes wonders, in a scientific "Space Age", or "Post-Christian Age", if the whole affair shouldn't be honestly recognised as a fertility myth and quietly abandoned.

But since "the Resurrection" is the foundation of the Christian religion, to abandon this myth would weaken the whole structure based upon it. Therefore Christianity seems to be stuck with its propagation. There is no historical evidence of any such single person as the Bible Jesus, or of his supposed crucifixion and resurrection. The least that Rationalists and Freethinkers can do is to refer to the former as the "Crucifixion", and to the whole Easter story as a myth.

FREUD AND THE ORIGIN OF BELIEF

Michael Cregan

I AM not here concerned with variations on Freud's account of the origins of religious belief, or indeed with considering the validity of the fundamental concepts of psycho-analysis. Eysenk's objection that "Psycho-analysis is unscientific" might be justified. But it has become so common to assume that Freud has shown up religion as a confidence trick of the mind, that it is as well to consider Freud's theories in themselves.

It must first be noted that Freud does not attack the 'intellectual' defences of religion such as the First Cause argument. Indeed, he even wrote: "It does not lie within the scope of this enquiry to estimate the value of religious doctrines as truth".¹ But from his contemptuous dismissal of rational theology, and his general hostility towards religion, it is clear that he estimates the value of religious doctrines as nil. Suffice to say that "In Freud's view, religion excluded any cognitive function; it was as purely associated with feeling as science was with reason".² All that remained was to deliver the death blow by explaining that feeling, and this Freud thought that he had done.

Briefly, Freud levels three main charges: (1) Religion is an illusion, and to live under an illusion is always in the long run harmful; (2) the religious mind is an essentially feminine mind; (3) religion is the reactivation of the child in man. Of these, the third is the real sting in the attack; it is Freud's fundamental objection to religion.

(1) Religion, Freud asserts, hinders progress to a more mature, more realistic position, in which man is better equipped to meet the world, by offering him a shelter from reality. And even the immediate benefits of religion as a refuge are outweighed by the fact that it brings about and perpetuates exactly those fears against which it offers sanctuary. "That religion may still give men confidence, comfort and a sense of security may seem enough justification for it; it is not enough for Freud. In his view, religion bestows the very fears and anxieties it then appeases"² and "the evolutionist moral of Freud's description is that we must grow up, develop beyond religion".² There is, no doubt, the use of religion is as an aspirin to soothe the pain of a painful world, and to obviate the necessity to remedy it. However, surrounded by a world increasingly concerned with the present, Christians are remembering the 'this-worldly' aspects of their religion.

(2) "To be religious, as Freud see it, is to be passive, compliant, dependent—essentially feminine traits".² Here Freud would seem to be borne out by historical and sociological fact. A great deal of the impetus of early Christianity was provided by women, and today women believers probably outnumber their male counterparts. However this is amenable to a sociological explanation, and does not necessitate an explanation in terms of Christianity's appeal to a feminine psychology, which is, to Freud, a slur.

(3) Freud was assisted by claims of anthropology to have discovered a universal "emotional complex" behind all varieties of religion. (It is a point of contention whether the religious instinct is an instinct as the sexual instinct is; but for Freud it was essential that, to quote a modern psycho-analytically orientated Christianity, "Religious behaviour has an instinctive basis, but is not itself a primary instinct".³) To Freud, the basic psychological fact which is disguised as religious feeling is the anxiety aroused by the external world, and a consequent regression to the infantile state of dependence upon the father for protection. In the absence of a father, man invents one—his gods.

"There is no question that religion derives from the need for help and the anxiety of the child and mankind in its early infancy."¹ As Rieff puts it: "Through religion the needs of the past revive. Adults feel their helplessness in the world at large, as if still children. In 'the child's defensive reaction to his helplessness' Freud found what he thought a perfectly adequate model for the adult religious experience of unknown and mighty powers".²

To this scheme, several objections may be made.

(1) If his explanation of religious belief is correct, one would expect such beliefs to be *universal*. But it is here that there is disagreement among anthropologists. And it is in precisely primitive communities that it is claimed that lack of religious belief is found; communities where, if anywhere, we find mankind "in its early infancy". The controversy is not settled, but if it turns out that certain communities *are* devoid of religious beliefs, this must count against Freud.

(2) As Rieff points out, Freud's reasoning is tautological; he "will admit, as religious, only feelings of submission and dependence".² He ignores the feelings of liberation and strengthening of the spirit which are often as characteristic of religion as the feeling Freud considers.

(3) Freud's reasoning is tautological in a more damaging sense. If the Freudian is to prove his thesis that the origin of religious feeling lies in anxiety and regression, and is confronted with the many Christians who are manifestly *not* intimidated by the world around them, it would seem that his sole defence would be to retort that the proof of their anxiety is seen in the fact that they are religious. If one propounds a theory that all A's are B's, one must delineate A and B sufficiently to discriminate between them, and they must be defined in independent terms. And this Freud failed to do; he failed to give an adequate definition of the adults who "feel their helplessness in the world at large", so that we could then analyse those who experience religious feeling and see whether they conform to this definition. In this, Freud's failure was a *scientific* failure.

(4) Freud overlooked the distinction between *analogous* and *causally* related. For example, if we were to observe the behaviour of a child and the behaviour of a member of a debating society, we would find many points of agreement. Both would become silent when told by a certain individual (parent, chairman), both would show respect to this authority figure, but less to others around him (siblings, fellow members), etc. But it would be a mistake to assume that the debator was regressing to the attitudes of the child to its family. Their behaviour would be *analogous*, but not governed by the same motives. And it is the same with feelings. Because the adult religious person's feelings of dependence and submission are analogous to the child's feelings towards its parents, it does not follow that both proceed from the same causes, still less that the former is regressing to the attitudes of the latter. In this, Freud's failure was a conceptual failure.

Hence, in spite of the easy acceptance that Freud has demolished religious feeling, there are many questions the convinced Freudian must answer before we can accept his dismissal of religion.

References

- 1 S. Freud: *The Future of an Illusion*.
- 2 P. Rieff: *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist*.
- 3 R. S. Lee: *Freud and Christianity*.

THE BEST THAT GOD COULD DO

A. J. Lowry

'GOD', as any Christian will tell you, 'so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son' (John 3 : 16). God didn't so love the world that he gave it the printing press, or the steam engine, or anaesthetics, or anything else which would have been of the slightest use to it: he gave it his son. In case we were wondering, the second half of the aforementioned verse explains the unique utility of such a gift, 'that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life'.

Now this is a queer business. God, we are told, is love, and does not wish anyone to perish. God, we know, must be omnipotent, and hence able to effect his desires. Why then, we may well ask, did he have to send his son to his death to secure the salvation of humanity, and how is it that so many years after the filial Godhead has died the majority of mankind is still cheerfully treading the broad way that leadeth to destruction?

The Christian's answer to enquiries such as these does very little to restore our faith in their rationality. We are told that we must believe in Jesus to be saved, and that anyone blasphemous enough not even to believe in his existence would be immediately ear-marked for damnation. Now, as any Christian will willingly agree, I am by no means as good as God or Jesus. Yet if someone printed an article proving that I didn't exist, I should view the whole proceedings with nothing worse than intense amusement. Their divinities, like Queen Victoria however, appear not to be amused when doubts are entertained concerning *their* existence, and, good and holy and just as we are assured they are, nevertheless feel that their wrath and damnation is the only suitable reply to sceptics such as these.

Such enigmas, of course, find their source in an even greater philosophical confusion—the Christian belief in the transferability of sin. Because of an unlikely event performed by Adam in the fifth millenium B.C., the hereditary charactersitic 'sin' was introduced into human nature, making individuals rebel against the will of God. (The fact that this must already have been the case for Adam to defy God in the first place appears to have escaped the majority of believers.) God, being omnipotent, could easily have removed this characteristic from man, but being all-loving he chose not to, so that being all-just he could ensure his damnation for having it. This, we are told, was perfectly legitimate, and the fact that it appears to be exactly the reverse is merely additional proof of the wickedness and depravity of human values.

But universal damnation was a little too much for even God's aesthetic taste, and so, we are told, he invented a curious system of punishment-by-proxy. In the Old Testament, the priest would every year place his hands on a goat's head, and transfer all the sins of Israel on to the unfortunate quadruped at his disposal. God then pretended that the goat had performed all the Hebrew's sins, and acted accordingly: a ritual which worked to the advantage of everyone except the goat.

This belief, magical as it was, reached its climax in the Messiah, who was to take upon himself not only the annual transgressions of the Israelites, but the iniquities of

everybody who had ever lived. God, apparently, was very keen that someone should pay for all these sins, but not at all particular as to who it should be, and hence by suffering crucifixion, Jesus assuaged his father's desire for retribution, and acted as the universal scapegoat. For some unknown reason, however, the process will only work for those who believe in it, and all sceptics, heretics and blasphemers (who, apparently, constitute the bulk of humanity) remain bound in their sin and unerringly destined for hell's sulphurous dominion.

It is easy to laugh at the idea that a process as illogical and inefficient as this represents the best attempt of an omniscient God. When it is remembered that the anniversary of this atonement is solemnly celebrated on dates varying from each other by up to five weeks, mirth becomes even harder to suppress. The festival of Easter was, of course, originally a pagan celebration of the resurrection of vegetation, taken over by the Christians in remembrance of their God who was the 'first fruits of them that slept'. The pagans, though often wrong, were nevertheless closer to the mark than the guilt-neurosis of Christianity, and their festival to mark the return of spring remains the only rational and legitimate excuse for continuing a celebration of this nature.

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A FORMULA FOR JUSTICE:

J. J. Thompson

Part 1—Why Justice?

IT would indeed be futile to commence by dilating upon the importance of justice. Let us instead proceed immediately to the nature of justice.

The Roman definition of justice as "*suum cuique tribuere*"—"to give to each his own"—which is found thus expressed in the Code of Justinian but which has been variously credited to a number of sources, meets difficulty over the word "*suum*"—"his own". What is it actually that is each one's own or each one's due, and how can we know that it is his own or his due? What exactly is it that we are to accord to each? If "*suum*" means what the law provides for each, cannot the questions be asked whether the law is just, what elements compose any just law, what ultimately constitutes justice beyond the law?

The Mediaeval Scholastics accepted the Roman conception and added to it the idea of "equal treatment for all people insofar as they are equal". This does not mean that all should be treated alike, but only if they are equal in relevant ways. The grave defects of this definition are of course that it says nothing about treatment of people insofar as they are not equal who, in most societies, are likely to be the most frequent and most disputable cases; and that, like the Roman one, it fails to identify the sort of treatment which justice requires in dealing with equal people. All Jews being exterminated in gas chambers are being treated equally, but very few people believe this treatment is just.

To give each one his due must mean, basically, to give each one his rights, and deprivation of rights without compelling reason is commonly regarded as unjust, whether the rights be natural, contractual, or of any other sort. Justice thus requires that persons be granted more than their natural rights insofar as they have earned or merited rights of other sorts. Justice also requires that a person be given no more than his rights. Generosity is for small societies such as the family and friendly circle; justice is for the society as a whole. Justice does imply unequal treatment for unequal people if and only if the personal inequality is the source or reasonable justification of the right or duty, privilege or penalty, in respect to which a person is treated unequally from others.

Why should there be justice? Is this a principle that one must recognise intuitively, or is there a reason for it? I must confess that I know of the existence of no ethical theory, legal principle, religious doctrine, nor any formulation of either reason or experience which can explain why, if it be accepted that such things as, say, a caste system in India or apartheid in South Africa or slavery that has existed in America and elsewhere are in fact unjust, they should therefore not exist. It cannot be asserted that this is obvious or intuitive, for it surely is not so to the people who practice caste or apartheid or slavery. No religious doctrine has justified human justice; rather, religion justifies injustice, for God will mete out his own justice and balance the scales in a future life. Utilitarianism does not explain a need for justice; in fact it cannot even define what justice is.

Since justice involves rights, the need for it may be best explained by the Social-Survival ethics (Securitarianism) the only natural theory which explains the nature and origin of human rights.¹ But it cannot be maintained that injustice imperils the survival of society, for societies with caste or

apartheid or slavery obviously can endure for centuries, while the democracy of ancient Athens, which according at least to the funeral oration of Pericles many would call just, perished. Moreover, many would declare that justice should prevail quite regardless of the survival of society—that whether or not unjust societies survive and just ones perish, humanity must still seek justice. Justice is thus an ideal. It is the state of perfection in which the rights of all are universally respected. The word equity is attached, in the popular mind, to the concept of ideal justice which is independent of the law and may be even contrary to the law.

A reason for justice may be that injustice is illogical. Let us assume an unjust society, in which there live a pair of twin brothers, as alike as it is possible to be. Suppose that society, for no reason at all, gives one of them a palace and puts the other in prison. Certainly one of the brothers will feel unjustly treated and many would say that in all fairness they both will, or should. Even the brother who profits would be callous indeed if he were to enjoy his fortune by ignoring the other's misery. But this feeling of injustice, by the brothers themselves, or even by the whole world, does not prove that such an act, manifestly unjust, should not be perpetrated. One may maintain that such act should not be done simply because there is no reason why it should, no justification for it, and to act without reason is to act unreasonably. But this is a negative reason. Such act is contrary to the principle of human rights, for both brothers have a right to liberty, and neither to special privilege.

This is the best explanation I can offer of why we need justice, if we do. I lay it open to one of our readers to do better. Surely everyone says we need justice, but nobody can say why. My own position, very frankly, is that I believe I can tell you what justice is; but I cannot give you a good reason why you should want it; nor do I believe that anyone else can either; though if you do want it, I believe I can tell you in the next two articles how to get it.

Human interaction and its continuity require that an individual in society has certain rights. An individual (singular) in society could mean the monarch and himself only. Justice pleads for the extension of rights to all of the individuals in society even when their denial does not imperil the continuity of society. Now, why?

¹ A. C. Thompson. *Rights and Duties*. The FREETHINKER, Vol. 87, Nos. 39—42, September 20 to October 20, 1967.

CENSORSHIP—clarification

A HASTY correction to my note on the Theatres Bill (Censorship, March 29). It is not, of course, intended to abolish the Lord Chamberlain *in toto*—it is intended only to abolish his theatre censorship functions and also his functions relating to the licensing of theatre premises in certain areas.

The House of Commons Committee who will debate the Bill will consist of all the Commons Members of the Select Committee, together with a few others. The Bill is supported by Sir David Renton, Norman St John-Stevas, Emlyn Hooson, William Wilson, Andrew Faulds, Michael Foot and Hugh Jenkins.

Apart from one or two who may want to retain the Lord Chamberlain, it is anticipated that most of the members will support the principles of the Bill, i.e., to substitute the Obscene Publications for the Lord Chamberlain's censorship powers. This doesn't mean that there may not be some detailed amendments in the application of these Acts to the theatre. JEAN STRAKER.

TIME CHANGE AND CONSCIENCE

Peter Crommelin

TIME has compelled me to discard nearly everything that I was taught as a child. Yet the world has changed far more than I have changed during the past sixty years. And the human mind and conscience have changed even more than the world itself. Humanism, secularism, atheism, and in many parts of the world communism, have induced radical alterations in the human attitude to knowledge, science, and to life itself.

In my own life, time and change have exerted a stronger pressure on my conduct than the "conscience" provided for me in my early youth by the Authority of the Roman Catholic Church. I realise now, very clearly, that the "conscience" provided by the Church was not really my own conscience, but was in fact in opposition to my own conscience, that was for ever striving for an honesty and integrity that would never be tolerated by the Church. As my own true conscience gradually emerged from the false conscience created by subjection to the dogmas and discipline of the Roman Catholic Church, I went through a painful period of confusion and doubt. I was really like a person in a state of hypnotic trance. It became quite impossible to make a sincere confession of "sins" that I no longer regarded as sinful. My real duty which was to excommunicate myself from the body of the Church, would certainly be condemned by that body as "mortal sin". In the end, stimulated by the incentive of passionate love and desire for union with the beloved, I carried out my "sinful duty" and ceased to be a Roman Catholic. I have no doubt that I am still classified in ecclesiastical records as a "lapsed" member of the Church, and thereby contribute quite unwillingly to those fraudulent records of their numerical strength that are from time to time published by the ecclesiastical authorities.

Whether in ceasing to be a Roman Catholic Priest I became an atheist, must be a matter of opinion. I have

certainly taken no further part in any form of public worship. Any influence I may have had, since I discarded my priestly vestments, has been directed towards complete freedom in the matter of religious opinion. I have certainly no intention of stating dogmatically that atheists are mistaken in their assertion that there is no god. They are possibly right, and even probably right.

My own opinion, which may well be a survival from my early religious upbringing, is that the universe probably has a Creator, and that the Creator of the universe must be almighty and eternal, though not perhaps what we humans would call "good". The creation of the world does not seem to have been dictated or directed by any kind of "conscience", and a god without a conscience would scarcely be worthy of the name or title.

But while there is no sign of "Justice" winning any kind of final victory, there are indications of "Mercy" in the scheme of things. The capacity of the wicked to inflict pain and torture on their victims—animal or human—is restricted by the fact that their victims are mortal. And this is a mercy, for a mortal creature cannot suffer for ever.

I conclude by repeating that my own conscience has completely changed in the course of time. Human acts that in my youth I regarded as mortal sin, I have come to regard as physically healthy and morally harmless. It is a long time since conscience dictated obedience to "ecclesiastical authority". Religious ritualism that in all the early years of my life, I regarded as containing a supernatural virtue of its own, I have come to condemn as a complete waste of time, and a mis-direction of human energy. Human meanness and selfishness now strikes me as contemptible rather than sinful. But what does still shock me is cruelty to animals, including the human animal to which we are bound by a special relationship.

INDOCTRINATION OF THE YOUNG

Alec English

Some observations by a Sixth Form student at Ealing Grammar School.

I WAS brought up as a member of the Church of England, and was a devout Christian until I was fourteen, and an acolyte for two years. I was educated at a Church of England primary school and was a member of the Church Boy Scout Troop until I was fifteen.

Indoctrination falls into three main categories; practices within the Church, those outside it but closely connected with it, and other practices which have no direct link with the Church. I would discuss the first two of these; in the first I would place the Mass, Sunday School, Baptism, and Confirmation.

In the Mass there is a startling analogy with the speeches of Hitler. Nazi gatherings began with some stirring music; we all know how effective this can be in making people feel emotionally receptive. Then there followed a long harangue from Hitler and his associates. The listeners were affected by the speeches and the crowd-ferver to the point where they acclaimed their leader after every sentence. Finally there came a fanatical adoration with chants of "Heil Hitler!" This tended to induce acceptance of Hitler within

people, even against their will. This process was furthered by promises that they would receive all they wanted.

Comparing this with the Mass, the scale is of course reduced, but the essential elements are there. Before the service starts, there is usually someone playing the organ; this is the counterpart of the military music, making people more susceptible to the implantation of ideas. When the service begins, the burning of incense and singing of hymns produces a state of receptiveness; incense, spreading through a Church in minutes, has quite a strong effect on people, leaving them half entranced.

From wherever the text is taken, the sermon usually ends with the preacher holding out promises of life everlasting. It is worth noting that American advertising agencies have been offering since the 1950s to train preachers by psychological methods—the so-called 'depth approach'. This all tends to reinforce even luke-warm acceptance of Christianity.

For many children, the Mass is followed by Sunday School. At my church, this was for children from five to thirteen. There children were told stories about 'Gentle Jesus' or given elementary lessons in Christian doctrine.

The possibility of questioning what is taught does not exist; I was once told that it was wicked not to believe the teacher.

What of Baptism and Confirmation? If I remember correctly, the purpose of Baptism is to forgive a child for sins which he has never heard of, but which he has inherited from Adam and Eve, who must have had quite extraordinary genes. Two god-parents are appointed, whose duty is to look after the child's religious well-being. Few parents or god-parents think seriously of these responsibilities. Most seem never to give the matter another thought once the ceremony is over. At Confirmation, the child is expected to undertake to live a Christian life. Obviously the child should fully understand what is involved, yet there is a disturbing trend to confirm children at the age of seven or eight, instead of twelve as formerly. The Roman Catholic Church has, of course, confirmed children at even younger ages for many years. Children cannot understand Confirmation at twelve, let alone at eight. Thus, these rites merely propagate erroneous 'reasons' for worshipping God. This is indoctrination.

My second category includes Religious Instruction and worship in schools, the Boy Scouts and similar movements, and the influence of parents. Religious practices in schools tend to establish a connection between authority and Christianity. The result is that the child thinks it right to worship God "because we do it in school". Many pupils

who opt out are regarded as 'not quite nice'. Hence, to gain acceptance, they worship with the rest of the school. So indoctrination proceeds.

Perhaps most important of all is the influence parents have on their children, for during a child's formative years his parents play the greatest part in the building of his character. If his parents impress upon him that he should believe in God, there is more than an even chance he will remain a Christian throughout his life. A belief implanted in this fashion is not a carefully weighed decision, it is simply indoctrination of a child's defenceless mind. It can enslave him to a lifetime of unthinking obedience.

The practices I have mentioned inside the Church are not the most dangerous, since they affect only those who for various reasons go to Church. Whether this is due to conviction, habit or social pressures leads me to this conclusion: that 'the contents of my second category, school religion and parents, are the most dangerous. The recipients of their attentions are usually caught unawares, and worse, the practices are part of a system that condones them and makes them seem right. Thus the most sinister aspect of all is the way children are indoctrinated. Even today a surprisingly large proportion of them believe in God, a tribute to the efficiency of those who made them believe. Until the 1944 Education Act is changed and parents realise it is better to let their children decide about religion for themselves at the age of reason, this indoctrination will continue, and Humanists will have to oppose it.

ATHEISM: A Guide to the Debate

THE debate around atheism (Editorial, and AGNOSTIC OR ATHEIST? by E. Hughes Jones, November 24, 1967; Letter "Dogmatic Atheism?" by Henry Meulen, January 19, 1968) unfortunately still goes on in terms of medieval theology. Once it is couched in scientific terminology, the discussion is seen to be about a trivial truism.

In scientific terms, the talk is concerned with either all the gods which have survived in the numerous mythologies, or it is about a particular god in a particular mythology. Regarding the Christian Bible, the scientific discussion is about the Hebrew-Christian-Muslim beliefs in the West Semitic God, Yahweh of the Hebrew prophets, in Yahweh's incarnation Yehoshuah (Jesus) and in Yahweh's breath-soul (Holy Ghost).

In medieval theology, Yahweh (Jehovah) is not mentioned by his prayer name, but only by his titles, "the Lord" or "God" (without the definite article because Latin had none).

Freethinkers must, at least, abandon the misleading theological jargon about "God" and start using exclusively "the god Yahweh" which is the only correct, original usage in the Hebrew Bible, but which was distorted out of all recognition in Greek and English translations as "the Lord God".

These basic texts must always be kept in mind: (1) "Yahweh is our god, Yahweh alone" (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29—Doctor of theology R. Bultman's translation); (2) "The God of Jesus and of his followers is indeed Yahweh of Moses and of Israel" (*Hebrew Religion* by

Oesterley, DD, and Robinson, DD, London, SPCK, 1952, end paragraph); (3) "Beyond question this so-called 'Jesus of History', the 'real' Jesus in distinction from the Jesus of the Church's faith, is a creation of fantasy, the arbitrary invention of the unbeliever" (*The Primitive Church* by N. Micklam, DD, in *The Christian Faith*, p. 180, London, 1936).

That the Hebrew-Christian-Muslim beliefs in the existence of their God Yahweh, his incarnation (or son) Jesus, his breath-soul (or Holy Ghost), were all false, is a trivial truism nowadays. (Incidentally, the Christian Gnostics believed that the god of the NT was their god Abrasax, and not the god Yahweh of the OT whom they rejected.)

That belief in gods was false, was also a truism to enlightened Greek philosophers of the fifth century before the Christian era. Diagoras the atheist wrote in his book against superstition: "No gods exist at all" (compare: "*Nullos deos esse omnino Diagoras Meluis at Theodorus Cyrenaicus putaverunt*", Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, 1. 2). This is indeed the classical definition of atheism: "Denial of the existence of all gods whatsoever", and it is the only correct definition for modern usage. The usual explanation found in Christian dictionaries, "disbelief in God", is useless for the general debate as it concerns only the disbelief in the West Semitic god Yahweh, referred to here as the "God" of the Bible (with a capital initial; see Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, revised 1963 edition, under "God"). By the way, *atheos* popularly meant "refusing to worship one's gods", and thus Christians and Greeks called one another "atheists", which was, of course, contrary to

Gregory S. Smelters

Diagoras'—and our modern—usage.

With the rejection of the distorted theological definition of atheism, all those nonsensical distinctions of atheists as dogmatic, sceptical and critical, also must be rejected as the apologists' tricks. All gods are trivial fiction, a primitive survival. A negation of such fiction is a truism, about which there cannot be any debate anymore.

Now, all freethinkers should give due credit to Diagoras for his definition of radical atheism that is admirably suited to modern thinking.

Says Professor Felix Jakoby in his monograph on *Diagoras Ho Atheos* (Berlin, 1959, in English; price 12/6):

"The main thesis of Diagoras' book consisted in the assertion that gods did not exist at all: 'there are no gods', not 'the gods whom the mob supposes,' or 'there are no man-like gods', or whatever else, but a repudiation pure and simple of the whole concept, an atheism radical, extreme, and uncompromising. That is an opinion rarer in antiquity than it is in modern times. But it is the opinion ascribed to Diagoras directly by all our witnesses down from Aristoxenos and Epicurus, and obviously by Aristophanes too. Diagoras was the first to make out a clear and (in a manner of speaking) comprehensive case against the concept of divinity, denying the very existence of god(s). This book made him the champion in the war on superstition; and composed as it was as a radical and in a certain degree sensational doctrine, a doctrine rare in all times, it secured for him a place not only in ancient doxography, but in the history of Greek and European thought."

Now, what about agnosticism? In the light of Diagoras' definition, agnosticism is ruled out. You can't be agnostic to a trivial myth, as you know certainly that Yahweh does not exist—by definition (mythology!). As Huxley himself explained, agnosticism is a pompous name for a reserved attitude to doubtful facts until enough evidence is collected for or against them. Such an attitude should not be dragged into the debate on atheism which is true—by definition. See my "Patterns of Religious Decay" and "Christian Moonshine," in *The Australian Humanist*, No. 4, 1967).

Letters to the Editor

NOTE: Letters exceeding 200 words may be cut, abbreviated, digested or rewritten.

Go south young humanists

I CANNOT resist the temptation to support Don Baker's plea (March 22) to those students who are foremost in the humanist movement to lead in the crusade to help overseas people through the Ministry of Overseas Development.

Those of us Africans who are non-believers are handicapped in our discussions with believers because it is rare to find agnostics who are doing the work the missionaries are doing in our midst. This also leads to the false assumption that service and self-sacrifice are exclusively Christian concerns.

One of the chief attractions of Marxism to the youth of Africa is that Marx questioned the validity of supernaturalist religions. The only philosophies which seem to be taught in African universities are those which accept, *a priori*, the existence of God.

As an observer in this country, quite frankly, I think 'God is dead'; but He is much alive in the under-developed territories and that is where the struggle ought to be. S. EGWUEKWE.

Cannabis: evidence

IF Derek Marcus will send me details of the article he quotes I shall be delighted to add it to my list of over 130 references to cannabis, but I feel unable to take it very seriously. The association of malnutrition with cannabis is simply ludicrous if one considers the unanimity of the finding that it enhances appetite. See, among others:—

Adams, R.: *Harvey Lectures*, 1941-2. 37. 168.

Ames, F.: *Journal of Mental Science*, 1958. 104. 972.

Bromberg, W.: *Publications of the Association for Research into Nervous and Mental Disease*, 1939. 19. 180.

I wholeheartedly agree with Mr Marcus' call for more research. As was pointed out in my report (February 16), such research is seriously hampered in present circumstances. There is also no reason to ignore existing evidence. The official UN bibliography on the subject (Economic and Social Council Document No E/CN.7/479) lists 1,860 items. I suggest that those who favour the present system of incarceration of cannabis users might consider it incumbent on them to read some of them. DON AITKEN.

REVIEWS

Dagobert D. Runes: "The War Against the Jews"; Philosophical Library Inc., New York; 1968.

"This is not a book of writings. This is a book of war. . . . The War of the Christian Churches against the Jews!"

THESE words from the Preface are an accurate description of all that follows. It is a book devoted to recording some of the major acts of intolerance, injustice and cruelty perpetrated against the Jewish people in the name of Christianity, from the time of Jesus (?) until the present day. It is not an atheist or secularist work but carries all the marks of freethought in its outspoken account of Christian atrocities.

It isn't perhaps surprising that the compiler of such works as the *Concise Dictionary of Judaism* and the *Dictionary of Philosophy* should choose to arrange this book also in alphabetical order. Its 192 pages, and over 500 entries, comprise a small encyclopaedia of anti-Semitism; not exhaustive, but making for easy reference while remaining very readable as a continuous narrative.

I have not been able to ascertain the price at which this book will sell in this country, but its price in the USA, \$6.00, suggests it will be available to English buyers at about 50s. With the details above, and the Library of Congress Catalogue Number 67-13371, retailers should have no difficulty in obtaining copies.

Despite all the horrors practised throughout Christian history upon heretics, witches and freethinkers, none have suffered more than the Jews. It may prove a salutary lesson to find from this book that some of our rationalist heroes are among the guilty: Giordano Bruno's expressed wish that the Jews' offspring be exterminated before birth, and his reference (in his *Spaccio*) to the Jews as a mangy and leprous people who "deserve to be exterminated", shows Bruno to have been, at that time, more the Dominican he was than the rationalist he became.

Two recent Christian comments upon *The War Against the Jews* may be worth noting:

"Every Christian will be shaken to the sole of his feet by the black pages Runes lifts out from history. We all need to hear what he says in order to understand the very real difficulty his wonderful people have in seeing the Christ of the Bible with so many of us around who distort the Gospel of salvation."
—*Southwestern Journal of Theology* (USA).

"This is not a book that Christians will enjoy reading, but it is the sort of book that we shall have to accept in penance for our collective sins."
—*St Luke's Journal* (USA).

Runes' claim that "Christianity has anti-Semitism built in part of its dogma" and that "Christian faith is not anti-Semitic; it is anti-Semitism itself", being so adequately supported by evidence he produces, may be considered ample grounds for—not only penance—but for Christians to realise that Christianity is itself defective, and that such "collective sins" are an essential part of a full adherence to the faith.

KARL HYDE.