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A HAPPY NEW YEAR?

WITHOUT wishing to appear unduly pessimistic one feels bound to point out that though 1969 may turn out to be happy for some individuals, for many and for the human race taken as a whole it is far more likely to be unhappy—that is if 1968 is anything to go by.

No doubt many newspapers and journals will be publishing detailed analyses of 1968 in the near future. To add to this verbiage here is unnecessary. It will suffice to mention and stir the reader's memory of a few of the more memorable disasters such as the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the continuing wars in Vietnam and Nigeria, the strife between Israel and the Arab States, the restriction of freedom in Greece, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King and the subsequent debacle at the Democratic convention in Chicago. In Britain we have now grown used to the economic restraint, which dominates a country, in which regionalism and nationalism are gaining ground. It seems also that we have the makings of a police-state in our midst in Northern Ireland. The gloomy picture extends even into the world of sport, with the riots and demonstrations of black power at the Mexico Olympics, the cancellation of the MCC tour of South Africa,



and other lesser disruptions. Pervading the whole sombre story is the steady and deadly advance of the population explosion. World unrest is exemplified by the actions of the now international student movement.

A depressing tale indeed, still worsened by the Papal Encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, and the slow, but nonetheless tangible progress of ecumenism. In the midst of this turmoil the progress of secular-humanism has also been slow—too slow. The high-handed attitude of Lord Hill over the allocation of broadcasting time for Humanists has perhaps been the major stumbling-block to British Humanists.

There seems little reason to suppose that merely because one more full year has passed since the alleged birth of Jesus Christ, things are going to improve. In this light it would seem to be tending towards a bad joke to wish anyone 'A Happy New Year'. However, personal happiness can be derived during collective hardship by those who are satisfied that personally they are contributing towards the alleviation of the misery of the human race as a whole. Hence, one hopes that one will not be dubbed patronising when one shouts, loud and long, 'A HAPPY NEW YEAR'.

PROGRESS OR ANOTHER HURDLE?

IT APPEARS THAT in future Christians may cease to celebrate the birth of their Lord, or the son of their God, on December 25. The National Association of Master Bakers passed a resolution at their annual conference urging that in future Christmas should be observed on the nearest Sunday to December 25 and should be followed by two full days of national holiday. This was because of the disruption to their industry brought about by a mid-week Christmas.

Inspired by the men whose raw material is dough, those with a less tangible basis for their business, namely the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England and the Free Churches replied that they had no theological objection to this. The Church leaders went on to say that the government rather than the churches should take the initiative in this matter.

The official reason for this, at first sight surprisingly liberal attitude of the churches, was explained to Edgar Holt, the ecclesiastical correspondent of *The Sunday Telegraph*, by the Rev John Gunstone, who has written a book in which he suggests that Christmas should be observed on the last Sunday in December.

He admitted that December 25 was not the historical date of Christ's birth but that it had been chosen in the fourth century because it coincided with the Winter Solstice. He added that May 20 and November 16 are two dates on which, it had been calculated, the birth of Christ might have occurred. The Rev Gunstone pointed out that an advantage of always holding Christmas services on a Sunday was that there was a likelihood of larger congregations. He also said that all the comment he had had on his suggestion had been favourable.

Theoretically this is, of course, a triumph for secularism but it is by no means a cause for complacency. For in practice it is yet another step in the reduction of the myth surrounding the Christian religion in order to keep the church in step with science. As has been admitted it is,

(Continued overleaf)

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Editor: David Reynolds

amongst other things, a bid to prop up the flagging Christmas congregations. More important it is yet another bid to dissuade the average churchgoer from withdrawing his allegiance to a religion, whose basic precepts his education now enables him to dismiss.

Religion is still very much with us. Its mythology has lost its lustre and is being replaced by something even less tangible and more deceitful. The average churchgoer is unsure and caught up in a fur-lined web of diminishing mythology and increasing tendentious intellectuality. He is kept from trying to struggle out of his deceptively comfortable web by a fear of the world beyond—a fear aggravated by the clergy. The web can easily be climbed out of. It is to dispel these people's fear of trying that is the greater problem.

BIAFRA

OF ALL the tricky political situations in the world today, perhaps that which arouses most controversy, more even than Vietnam, is the civil war in Nigeria. Liberal and leftist opinion is deeply divided on this issue. Many people are outraged that the British government should continue to supply arms to the Federal Nigerian government. In a recent press release, issued by the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society and no doubt destined to cause no small degree of animosity, David Tribe, the President of the Society, while exhorting the world powers to encourage the Nigerians and Biafrans to negotiate a peace settlement takes the view that: "The first step is *not* to remove arms supplies from Nigeria but to restrict supplies to the rebels and back the Federal forces subject to guarantees of humanity and justice to the secessionist peoples".

His central argument is that in the long term few will benefit from an independent Biafra, while many will suffer, "If Biafra were to be recognised, it is certain that the Ijaws of the River State and the Ibibios and Efiks of the South Eastern State would next demand their independence (from

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). 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 and MCRAE.

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.

INDOORS

Worthing Humanist Group: Moreland's Hotel (opposite the pier): Sunday, December 29: New Year's Party.

the Ibos). In a continent of thousands of tribes this process of balkanisation could go on indefinitely, with a continuum of civil wars and revolutions". He makes clear that once started this kind of tribalism could infect the world including England. The argument is strengthened by the fact that an independent Biafra would not in fact provide tribal justice, because for the sake of seven million Ibos the interest of five million non-Ibos would have to be sacrificed.

David Tribe explains why Biafra has got so much support in the Western world. He shows how sympathy is engendered with tactics permissible to Oxfam but not to a body who should be proving a political point. The starvation and suffering of Biafran women and children is used to gain the same section of opinion that believes that Ian Smith and his supporters should not be sacrificed to African nationalism. The Biafrans are set up not as our 'kith and kin' but as 'our Christian brothers'. David Tribe answers the pacifist argument, "Let us stop the war on any terms", by pointing out that "thirty years ago some equally well-meaning people said that we should yield to the demands of Herr Hitler".

Another argument of those in favour of the Biafran secessionists is that the Federal regime is committing genocide of the Ibos. "One Catholic writer has however recently stated: 'If genocide is in question it must be laid at the door of Colonel Ojukwu himself; he seems prepared to let his people die in the uttermost misery, so long as there is some hope of international recognition of his *own* claims'. (Tom Burns in the *Tablet*, December 7, 1968)". Tribe continues, "But the claims of one individual do not receive international prominence unless they are in tune with those of vested interest".

He goes on from this to demonstrate that the active supporters of Biafra have vested interests. "Firstly, there are the French. They are anxious about their declining status in Africa and pleased to embarrass Britain, while Colonel Ojukwu has given a £10 million mineral concession to a French firm." Tribe shows that the main mineral is oil and that this is found only in non-Ibo territory, and indeed some of it in the Mid-West state, which is not part of Biafra at all but which the Biafrans have invaded as part of their expansionist programme.

The other supporter of Biafra is the Vatican. "Following the time-honoured tradition of putting the temporal interests of the Church before the needs of men, women and children, the Vatican, supported by Cardinal Heenan is directing its major energies towards proclaiming Biafran independence. Officially world Catholicism, through Caritas Internationalism, wants only to stop the war on terms Col. Ojukwu would accept (independence) and meantime fly in provisions to starving Biafrans. But why, the cynical observer asks, do Caritas planes fly from metropolitan Portugal and the island of San Tomé, where gun-runners are known to operate, and where are the rebels obtaining arms if not from the 'mercy flights'?"

Thus in the long-term interests of the majority David Tribe urges that "Colonel Ojukwu must be made to realise that a mere handful of countries support his regime and that he must accept a return to federation—with perhaps additional safeguards—as the only way to preserve African stability. Meanwhile it would be mischievously foolish for Britain to deny arms to the Federal authorities while the Ibos in Biafra are receiving arms from abroad and encouraged to go on fighting for a fanatical dream of selfish independence".

THE SAME OLD FRAUD

A. J. LOWRY

AS ONCE AGAIN we are at a season of the year, notorious for its cribs, donkeys and 'Away in a manger', it is, perhaps instructive to reflect on how frail is the Christian's claim to the veracity of the event which he celebrates annually. That the date at least is wrong, has for long been beyond dispute, since the severity of the climate in that district necessitates that shepherds do not 'watch their flocks by night' between the months of October and April. Jesus, therefore, if ever he was born at all, was certainly not, according to the story, born during mid-winter.

The Christians, however, are in more serious trouble than this, as not only do we not possess the date of this occurrence, but we are devoid of the slightest reason to believe that it ever took place at all. For their own sacred records concerning the wonderful event, were so obviously composed either by imbeciles or by rogues, that the words of these men, that the event ever took place cannot be credited with even the most qualified reliability. As space by no means allows me to produce a full inventory of their mistakes, I intend to consider in reasonable detail only some of the untruths contained in the Gospel of St Matthew, that the reader may, having examined the reliability of a man alleged to have been chosen by Christ himself, come to his own conclusions concerning the testimonies of the other Gospel writers.

It will be observed that the early chapters of Matthew's gospel contain reference to an abundance of prophecies, all of which the nativity or boyhood of Jesus supposedly fulfils. The first of these, Matthew 1 : 22, 23, claims to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah 7 : 14, namely that a virgin would give birth to a son. However, not only is it a fact that in the 'prophecy' the correct translation for 'virgin' was really 'young woman' (which is not at all the same thing), but an examination of Isaiah 7 shows that this verse has nothing to do with the coming Messiah, anyway. It is seen that Ahaz, the king of Judah, faring badly in a war against Israel and Syria, was given a sign by God (through Isaiah) to show that all would be well (Isaiah 7 : 1, 10-16). This sign was to be a child, born of a young woman, who would not learn to choose right from wrong until the king's who fought against Ahaz would be overthrown. Isaiah 2 : 3, 4 tells how Isaiah aided his prophecy by helping a prophetess to conceive. The fact is, however, that whichever way the prophecy is construed it came to naught, for whilst the child was supposed to be called Immanuel, Christ was called Jesus, whilst Isaiah's unfortunate son received the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

The next attempted fulfilment, Matthew 2 : 4-6, refers to the place where, supposedly, the Messiah was to be born. The reference for this is Micah 5 : 2, and since the first six verses of that chapter obviously refer to the same person, one might reasonably expect to find other indications of the divine nature of Jesus in that place. We are told in verse 6, however, that this man will "deliver us from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land", but the extermination of these people 600 years before Jesus was born made it somewhat difficult for this to come to pass. Here the Christians may choose either side they please, since both are against them for either Micah 5 : 1-6 is a reference to the Messiah, in which case Jesus could not be the Messiah, as much of its content does not refer to him; or the passage is *not* a reference, in which case Matthew has no right to treat it as though it was.

Matthew 2 : 15, though supposedly the fulfilment of Hosea 11 : 1, is, in reality, nothing of the sort. For Hosea, with a clarity which even a Gospel writer should not fail to perceive, explains that the reference here is to the Exodus, and hence has no relevance to the coming Messiah. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt", God is supposed to have said, but the writer of Matthew's Gospel by quietly dropping the reference to Israel, presumably hoped to delude into belief, those who lacked the initiative to obtain the scriptures from which he purported to quote.

Matthew 2 : 17, 18 fares no better. Though it claims that the lamentations of the mothers of the children slain by Herod are fulfilments of a prophecy in the book of Jeremiah, this is, in fact, untrue. Matthew is mis-quoting Jeremiah 31 : 15, and had he continued to read the verse which follows, he would have found the promise that "they shall come again from the land of the enemy". How could the children of these mothers "come again" from any land, seeing that they were all dead? Instead (it is obvious from the preceding verses (Jeremiah 31 : 10-14)) that the prophecy refers to the return of the Israelites from captivity, since they are the children of Rahel (Rachel), the wife of Israel (Genesis 29 : 28, 32 : 28).

But the last of these prophecies, Matthew 2 : 23, is perhaps, more hilarious in its atrocious scholarship, than all the blunders we have so far considered, even if they were combined. Long and diligent searching for the verse of which this is supposedly the fulfilment, has produced from the cross-references only two suggestions—Judges 13 : 5 and 1 Samuel 1 : 11. The former of these verses contains instructions from an angel, informing the pregnant mother of Samson that her child should not cut his hair, as he was to belong to the holy order of the Nazarites (see Numbers 6 : 2, 5). Whether it was stupidity or something worse which led Matthew to confuse *Nazarite* (a holy man) with *Nazarene* (an inhabitant of Nazareth), I do not know, but this verse stands as one of the best examples of the tortuous lengths to which the Gospel writers were forced, to find some pretensions to prophetic reference for their alleged Son of God. To pretend that Matthew 2 : 23 fulfils 1 Samuel 1 : 11, is to be so silly as to be no longer amusing, as what connection exists between Hannah's promise not to cut Samuel's hair, and Jesus living in Nazareth a millenium later, I leave for Christians to discover with the eye of faith, as I am sure that it is far too slender to be observed by me, with the eye of reason.

In view of the fact that so much frantic effort was so stupidly employed to prove that Jesus fulfilled the Hebrew prophecies concerning the Messiah, and since the Pharisees, who undoubtedly know their scriptures best, were the sworn enemies of Christ, and all who followed him, it becomes difficult, to put it very mildly to continue to maintain that this man was the Son of God. Were he so, one might reasonably have expected him to fulfil real prophecies, and have given his disciples something better than bad scholarship and lies on which to base his claim. And yet in this supposedly enlightened society, we continue to practise the absurd fraud of worshipping, at the wrong time of the year, a being whose claim to Godhood is no more substantiated than our own. How long must we wait before man acts with sense?

MAN'S FUTURE: HELL ON EARTH OR . . . ?

MARTIN PAGE

HUMAN RIGHTS YEAR is officially over; and at this time, supposedly distinguished by peace on earth and goodwill toward men, it is fitting that we should assess man's future on the basis of present trends.

Only a few months ago the Secretary-General of the United Nations said of the world population crisis: "A present population of three and a half billion is expected practically to double by the year 2000, but with the current unsatisfactory growth of resources the world will become more hungry, more crowded, more pressed in every sense. Half of those now living and two-thirds of those still to be born in this century face the prospect of malnutrition, poverty and despair. In many of the developing countries of the world, population growth rates tending to reach three per cent a year outpace food supply, education, employment opportunity and economic development". Indeed, for most of this decade world population has already been exceeding world food production: in 1965-66, for example, there were 70 million more mouths to feed, and no increase in food production! As the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal said: "There would have been intensified mass hunger in India and Pakistan and in many smaller countries had it not been for large scale food imports from the surpluses in the USA. These surpluses have now virtually disappeared".

Every second 2.2 more people are added to the world's population. At that rate, by 2045 there will be some 15,000 million people—that is, about four times as many as there are now; and the situation is already critical! Today 38 per cent of the world's population is urban; but urbanisation is accelerating so fast that half the world seems likely to be urbanised by 1984; and by 2025, within the natural life-span of every child born today, the entire human race would be city-bound, on present trends. So Lord Ritchie-Calder assured us, only a few weeks ago, in his Presidential address, entitled 'Hell upon Earth', delivered to the Conservation Society.

Even with foreign aid, it is unlikely that the underdeveloped countries will be able to devote to urbanisation anything like the tremendous sums of money which the developed nations have spent on their own conurbations. Yet underdeveloped countries are now overtaking developed ones in the speed of their urbanisation; and the urban sprawl of their latter-day Industrial Revolution has already resulted in the proliferation of slums and shanty towns. This situation is a direct consequence of the population problems of the under-developed countries: the "have" nations—the developed, industrialised countries of North America, Europe, Japan and Russia—now have an average annual population increase of 1 per cent, whereas the "have-nots"—the under-developed, food-deficient countries in Asia, Africa and South America—have an average annual population increase of 2½ per cent. Confronted with these facts what freethinker can completely rule out the possibility of a fatal conflict between the rich nations and the poor nations over food and Lebensraum, of a class war on a world-scale consummated by the roseate glow of a nuclear holocaust? Is *that* a consummation devoutly to be wished?

Britain, in any event, is already beset by the problems of population and urbanisation. In relation to many other parts of the world, birth-control techniques are widely used

in Britain; yet, even at our present population growth rate (another million every three years), the nation will have to build the equivalent of 70 new Nottinghams or Cardiffs within the next 32 years. Already the population density of England and Wales (more than 800 per square mile) ranks as the highest in Europe with the exception of Holland. On average per square mile, Britain's population is at present denser than Japan's, more than twice that of India and about four times that of China. More than twenty years after the ravages of World War II, our urban and population growth has entailed: a still substantial shortage of schools, hospitals and homes; the increasing congestion of towns and roads; cities vitiated by increasing noise and petrol fumes, degraded by charmless functionalism and garish uniformity; picturesque villages and historic buildings disfigured or contemptuously condemned to dusty death. Less than half the total land mass of the UK now remains for food production, and about 50,000 acres of farm-land are being lost each year. In the USA, by comparison, a baby is born every 12 seconds and a car every 5 seconds. Together they set up a demand for living space and road space which eats into the land at the rate of two acres per minute.

Moreover, large classes in over-crowded schools—a result of the population explosion—are inimical to individual tuition and the fostering of human originality: at present in "Great" Britain one child in sixteen leaves school illiterate. Over-crowding in towns leads to mental illness, vandalism and crime; already there is evidence of a higher incidence of neurosis among inhabitants of high-density flats than among those of detached houses. In the haste to build homes quickly and cheaply, even adequate safety measures receive far less attention than they deserve—as the recent tragedy at Ronan Point has revealed. Britain's metropolis "requires" a third airport, which, if built at Stansted (the most probable site), would destroy acres of some of the richest farm land in the country—land essential to human survival. Such are the absurd positions into which modern man is forced through the imbalance between his technological and moral progress. Man has become like a god in the power he wields; the task is, to ensure that he uses that power without the irresponsibility of a god.

There is a real danger that, with the increasing complexity of modern societies, the opportunities for effective democratic control of any kind will be strangled by the growing red tape of bureaucracy. There is a real danger that increasingly authoritarian régimes will ride triumphant on the crest of the waves of an ever-rising population. Such régimes would set out to ensure "acceptable" levels of production and industrial efficiency and the maintenance of essential supplies; and, in the interests of "national survival", they might sanction compulsory sterilisation. At present the British Government is devoting its efforts to securing a substantial increase in the population of a country that is already one of the most densely populated countries in the world! Apparently this governmental policy is buttressed on the Wilsonian *non-sequitur* that "an expanding population means an expanding market".

Inexorably accompanying the world's unprecedented population growth is the alarming rate at which natural resources are being consumed and wasted. Man continues to cause unnecessary soil erosion and has, in other ways,

maltreated the very land on which he depends for his survival—whether it be an immensely expensive botched-up irrigation scheme in the Indus Valley, or man-made deserts as in North Africa and Mexico. Within the last 50 years alone, more than 40 species of animals have become extinct, and many more are doomed if present trends continue; traces of pesticides have now been found in man and virtually all animals, and the eggs of some animals may be sterile as a result. Human beings need open spaces, air, water, and food in order to live, but each of these is becoming increasingly diminished or polluted. Said Lord Ritchie-Calder only a few weeks ago: "Presently we shall need a Freedom from Thirst Campaign. . . . To die of hunger one needs more than fifteen days. To die of thirst one needs only three". Yet even the most "advanced" countries have poisoned their lakes and rivers (the plentiful fish of Lake Erie, for example, have been killed by industrial wastes). Many of Britain's south coast beaches have been spoilt by tar and oil pollution. In 1958 over 5,000 miles of Britain's rivers were polluted.

Every year in the USA, millions and millions of tons of carbon monoxide, sulphur compounds, oil and sooty substances, dust, acrid nitrogen compounds, and other gases and vapours are discharged into the air. In Britain the annual score is 1½ million tons of grit and ash, 2 million tons of smoke and 5 million tons of sulphur gases; the resulting damage is officially estimated at £350 million a year. Almost certainly as a result of pollution by sulphur gases, rainfall has become increasingly acid over parts of Europe; and acid rain has apparently already blighted the fertility of Scandinavian forests. As Lord Ritchie-Calder recently indicated, the 6,000 million tons of carbon dioxide now mixed annually with the air have already had an appreciably unsettling effect on the natural balance maintained by the carbon cycle. Man's burning of fossil fuels has increased the carbon dioxide content in the atmosphere by 12 per cent in the last 150 years; even without rising living standards, the world's store of timber will be dangerously depleted within the lifetime of every child born today, and all remaining coal and oil will be consumed within a century or so from now.

To crown it all, the world is an armed camp; and in his criminal folly, man has embarked upon a suicidal arms-race, lavishing millions on a chauvinistic race to imperialise the moon, and stock-piling nuclear weapons at the rate of at least 100 tons of TNT for every man, woman and child on earth, not to mention the bonus of research into chemical and biological warfare! Thus do men persist in misdirecting their resources even after they have become aware that they have brought upon themselves the greatest crisis in their history. Nationalism, racialism, ruthless economic and religious exploitation, still frustrate the aspirations of mankind at large for a higher standard of living and for greater security. Indeed, the contemporary problems of population and resources demand, for their solution, a degree of co-operation between men that many governments and many individuals, accustomed to cultivating their own sectarian and parochial interests, will find difficult to accept.

"Tho' much is taken, much abides." To become aware of the facts concerning some of the tremendous problems that confront mankind is, in itself, a liberating experience, a prerequisite to constructive action. More and more human beings, it seems, are coming to realise that no man, no country, is an island entire of itself, and that survival and security for themselves and for their children are best

secured by ensuring the survival and security of the human race. That is not only a moral advance: it is also a gain for the democratic spirit. Eternal vigilance is indeed the inescapable price of freedom; and the increased leisure resulting from increased prosperity, produced by the industrial and technological revolutions, should enable citizens to explore avenues for greater participation in government and for the more democratic control of their resources.

The growing mechanisation of agriculture has stimulated production as well as reduced the size of labour force required—and this, combined with the fact that scientific and social progress has resulted in people maturing earlier, marrying younger and living longer, reinforces the case for smaller families and birth-control as basic steps towards a better life for all. Fortunately, more and more governments are recognising the need for birth-control and for disseminated knowledge of its techniques. With the use of modern machinery and the application of modern knowledge of soil conditions and proper fertilisation of crops, much can be done to increase still further the yields of land already under cultivation—and this is particularly true of the under-developed countries, where the population pressures are greatest. Three-quarters of the world is covered by sea, and half the land is so far "uninhabitable". Doubtless efforts will be intensified to harness the sea and to make the waste places of the earth tillable and habitable. Modern technology makes such a transformation possible.

In any event, it is surely incumbent upon every self-avowed freethinker and humanist to practise birth-control and to defend its merits. The man who wishes reason to prevail may also be stirred to action by memory of the remarkable achievements of the horticulturalist Luther Burbank, or roused to fresh endeavour by the work in constructive community development that is being done today in Bihar and Botswana—projects that enjoy the active support of the British Humanist Association and other enlightened organisations. He may decide to join the Conservation Society,¹ which was founded in 1966 to make people more aware of the effects on human environment of the population explosion and the unwise use of technology, and to take appropriate action to remedy social ills arising from such effects. He may be interested in getting friends in other countries to set up similar groups. He may decide to join a political party. He may try to persuade MPs to press for Government initiative in curbing waste and in seeking adequate measures to combat pollution of international waters and air-space, for example.

In a runaway world the need for rationality is heightened, not diminished.

¹ The Society's Secretary is Mr S. G. Lawrence, 21 Hanyards Lane, Cuffley, Potters Bar, Herts.

TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS

Free copies from

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Annual report of the

National Secular Society

THE MEDIEVAL PAPACY

F. A. RIDLEY

WHATEVER OPINION one may form upon the controversial subject of the religious and moral values of the Roman Catholic Church and of its leader the Papacy, no one, whatever his specialised attitude towards it, can deny that the Church of Rome represents one of the major social and political institutions in the recorded annals of the human race: "the ghost of the Roman Empire sitting crowned upon the graves thereof", to repeat the famous aphorism of the old English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. One can relevantly add to this definition that this "ghost" has both outlived, and lived far longer than its secular original the Roman Empire of the Caesars.

Rome's golden age

The long and chequered evolution of the Papacy can be conveniently divided into several sequential epochs. With regard to the degree of authority that it exercised over its contemporary European society, the medieval Papacy may conveniently be equated with the millenium between fifth and fifteenth century. This undoubtedly represents its golden age; the era of Rome's maximum power and influence, an era to which ever since, it has nostalgically thought to return. It is this precise epoch, one coeval with the medieval Papacy, that Professor Geoffrey Barraclough deals with in *The Medieval Papacy*.¹ Prof. Barraclough is a specialist of Papal history and has made a special study of the institution in the Vatican archives. Himself a Protestant, he is scrupulously objective with regard to his facts; though at least from the angle of traditional free-thought, he appears to be guilty of, what Roman theology technically describes as, "sins of omission" as I shall presently note. One must however pay this book well deserved tribute both for its excellent scholarship, and its really astonishing grasp of technical details: one almost unique for such a comparatively short book (195 pages). One must also note its profound objectivity. This is objective specialised history at its best: a welcome relief after a flood of partisan writings that have appeared upon this most controverted of all historical epochs and institutions. One must also congratulate the publishers for their many excellent illustrations.

Popes and Consuls

Put briefly, the evolution of the medieval Papacy between the fall of its secular prototype the Roman Empire, and the Protestant Reformation that may be said to have ended the Middle Ages (circa 500-1500); can be divided into three successive periods marked by its rise, meridian, and the eventual decline. The learned author concisely traces the rise of the Papacy in Roman times, its emergence as a separate political force during the era of (what German historians term) "the wanderings of the nations" (circa 400-1000); its apogee as a theocracy under the great popes between 11th and 13th century; a period which marked its zenith, when "all roads led to Rome" and medieval Europe resembled modern Tibet from the point of view of ecclesiastical hegemony over secular society. Lastly, the period that marked simultaneously the decline both of medieval Europe and medieval Papacy between 1300 and 1500; an epoch marked in ecclesiastical history as one of continuous struggle between the monarchical Papacy and the rise of national churches. During this period, the rising nationalism in Europe made repeated attempts to subordinate the centralised Papacy to "general councils" representing these national churches. We learn already, a century

before the Reformation, that (in the words of a 15th century pope) "the King of England, not the Pope, is the real ruler of the Church in England"! This was a century before Henry VIII! Evidently, the 16th century Reformation merely developed tendencies already well established within the medieval era.

Men and Institutions

In the course of his lucid survey of a much tangled era, our author strikes a rational balance between individuals and institutions. Despite the existence of the great individual Popes, such as Gregory VII and Innocent III between the 11th and 13th centuries, it will be perhaps correct to deduce that throughout its chequered evolution, the Papacy as an institution has always been fundamentally more significant than were its individual popes? What we have before us in reality, is not a succession of gifted individuals but the evolution of bureaucracy; perhaps most powerful and persistent of all bureaucracies. The author for example, traces the successive stages in the evolution of the Roman Cura the head quarter of that bureaucracy (it would be interesting to have his present opinion upon the changes now being made in relation to that institution). Prof. Barraclough writes here with the authority of a specialist long immersed in the details of the complex subject: the overall position that emerges is that the medieval Papacy at least, while ostensibly religious, was primarily a political and administrative one: "the ghost of the Roman Empire", etc. as noted above.

A bird in the hand

Upon one point however, a point of omission as indicated above, we must join issue with this otherwise most judicial scholar. Since perhaps unintentionally, he certainly appears to play down unduly the important role of terrorism in maintaining the shaken power of Rome particularly during the decline of the middle ages from the 13th century on. An era when the age of crusades were succeeded by that of the Inquisition: and when the crusades themselves were directed not against infidels as originally; but against heretics, notably the Manichaeans, Albigenses of Southern France. Throughout this ruthless era, the Church fought back against the mounting tide of heresy with both demonology and terror. Demonology was represented by the popular preaching of the newly founded Dominican and Franciscan Orders (first half of 13th century), to the activities of which due attention is paid here. But the sustained terror practised from the mid-thirteenth century on, by the also newly founded Roman Inquisition, that ecclesiastical "Gestapo" and by the incredible cruelty of the Papal crusaders against the Albigenses, were at least equally effective. Though this point is made most inadequately in this otherwise balanced narrative. "The heretic is worse than the infidel". Even the gentle St Francis, that patron saint of the birds and beasts, did not extend his compassion to heretics. In the eyes of this "Second Christ" a bird in the hand is apparently worth two Albigenses in the bush, or at the stake! At least, he does not appear to have made any intercession on their behalf.

Wanted a sequel

This curious blindness to the epoch of terrorism expressly organised by the Papacy appears to be however the

only major weakness in this otherwise excellent and informative book. Apart from this one lapse, we recommend it unreservedly, and hope that the readers of the *FREETHINKER* will learn from this as much as did this reviewer. It is much to be hoped that the author will follow up this concise account of the medieval Papacy with a sequential volume dealing with the modern Papacy from its origin in the Counter-Reformation up to and including, its present ecumenical phase inaugurated by Pope John XXIII and by the Second Vatican Council in the course of the last few years.

¹ *The Medieval Papacy*: Geoffrey Barraclough (Thames & Hudson, 21s).

ENOCH

F. H. SNOW

WE PREEN ourselves, in this our England, on the privilege of free speech. Not like Russia, China, Spain or Turkey, where the tramp of heavy boots, and the thump of heavy fists, may be the prelude to imprisonment between stone walls through incautious talk.

We are emancipated from that sort of thing. We may express our thoughts, be they unconventional, unpatriotic, irreligious or revolutionary. We may speak our minds, with essential reservations in the interests of law and order, about the Government, the Church, the Monarchy, the powers that be in all respects. It is a happy state.

All peoples are welcome at our national hearth; we have a great name for hospitality. Blacks, browns, olives, yellows, are as cordially received as whites—in fact, more so, as needing greater sympathy on account of their outlandish conditions and tribulations. Our missionaries go to the far-flung places from which they come; we offer them both spiritual and material food. We facilitate, or did till quite lately—their escape from the misery of malnutrition in their native lands, and arrival in our 'right little, tight little Island'.

It is wrong that some of our people should wish these unfortunate folks elsewhere. It is wrong that they should wish those of dusky or other hue who are not unfortunate, in some place that isn't England. For, be it noted, not all of our immigrants are unfortunate. Quite a few are financially comfortable; some are owners of property and able to house a good many immigrants. Some are good landlords, not overcharging or impervious to the conditions of their tenants; some, sad to say, are bad landlords, extorting big rents from their compatriots and others for miserable accommodation.

The worst of it is that, owing to the acute housing shortage, many Britons suffer precisely as the African, Asian, West Indian and Mediterranean migrants, in regard to decent homes. Naturally, being here before them, and this being our native land, most of us have jobs; they, coming here mostly workless and largely moneyless, and depending on our bounty, have to put up with what there is to spare. Which is as it should be, unless Jesus Christ is in all our hearts, which he isn't. Those who profess that he is, don't see fit to do any different from those who candidly say his precepts are impracticable, or do little more than others, or less. We wonder how our people would fare at the hands of the coloureds—the devoutly (fanatically?) religious coloureds—were the position reversed. Would they not study their own folk's interests first? We rather think there would be no haste to practice the precepts of their Jesus, for our benefit and to their great advantage.

Now, when Mr Enoch Powell protested that we ought to study those of our own countrymen first, and ensure them homes and jobs before the 'strangers within our gates',

whether white or coloured, an emotional outcry arose from many kindly British folks for fair and liberal treatment of our enormously increasing 'guests'. Mr Powell and those who supported his view were regarded by those kind persons as racially prejudiced. There are undoubtedly racially-minded Britons who wouldn't care a damn how dusky or darkies fared here—or anywhere—just as is so amongst the latter, but Enoch Powell is not responsible for them. He, like myself and many others, is astonished at the wish of certain of our people, to shut him up, particularly if they claim to be freethinkers.

The privilege of freedom of speech regarding secularist views for which Charles Bradlaugh fought, must be extended to the political, social and economic fields, else we shall deserve to be classed with the tyrannical of all denominations. It is highly laudable to speak and write on behalf of immigrants, but let us do so equally on behalf of those of our own race who, disgustingly in this age, are unable to get away from slum conditions.

Of course we want fair play for Jew and Gentile, white or dark people, when they are dependent on our hospitality. More than enough immigrants, however, crowd into our towns, overburdening authorities and contesting with our long-deprived for their rightful amenities. We want no more of them. Mrs Renée Short, MP, sought the prosecution of Mr Powell for stirring up resentment at the plight, not only of many of his constituents, and hers, but of all so situated in the country—is this eloquent for the cause of Civil Rights?—but has now come very nearly round to his repatriation proposals. By all means help those immigrants who want to return to their native soil, to do so, and offer them monetary incentive, rather than perpetuate a condition of things demoralising to them and potentially disastrous for Britain.

To permit the continued existence of a heavily-breeding core, threatening our over-populated Isle with dire consequences, is not kindness towards our dusky friend, but just insanity.

This is the season of Peace and Goodwill. The three hundred and sixty-five days of 1968 have all but expired. I have raised my Xmas glass to Enoch Powell for his brave stand for justice in this immigration business. So, I am sure, have millions of other reason-loving persons. Unlike the Biblical Enoch, he will not live for 365 years, but may his remaining life span be of the happiest in the service of his country and of common humanity.

BOOK REVIEW

PHYLLIS GRAHAM

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. Sister Edna Mary (Pelican Original, 1968). HOPEFUL READERS will find here no personal or intimate cloistral revelations. But a wade through the bog of theology will throw up some startling innovations. 'It is intended', states the Foreword, 'to give some account of a way of life which may seem to those unfamiliar with it to have come straight out of the thirteenth century, but which exercises an undeniable fascination in the twentieth; and is designed for those who wonder what satisfaction there can be for the individual, or what relevance to society, in so mediaeval a structure'. Sister Edna Mary's presentation shows the mediaeval structure amply fitted with mod. cons., while retaining its historical lineaments and much of its legendary lure. The Anglican conventual set-up seems to have achieved a nice mingling of the thirteenth century myth with twentieth century realism. Who would deny the fascination? But let no one imagine the foundations have been tampered with they remain, to the last rock, firmly theological. The structure rests on the basic assertion of the Christian God-man relationship, which 'the reader may not be prepared to accept, but which he must recognise underlies all that follows'. Clearly a serious apologia for the Religious Life, in contemporary context but not in the 'pop' sense.

(Continued overleaf)

The book is excellently set out, with sub-headings, copious Notes and Bibliography, and Index. The authoress, a member of the Deaconess Community of St Andrew, is a Cambridge graduate (English and Law), studied theology at King's College, London (B.D. Lond.), and lectures on the latter subject among many other activities. She writes in a quiet, unassuming style unsalted by humour—except the occasional unconscious kind . . . 'In every religious community a funeral is a time of joy' . . . ! If somewhat over-solemn and 'eschatological' (an oft-recurring term) at least her scheme is heaven-orientated; the four-letter word at the other extreme never appears once. For this is Anglican country, and therein lies the interest of the book and its significance for Free-thought.

For what emerges is a view of monastic life founded on the old orthodoxy but modified in the Anglican tradition, adapting itself yet further to contemporary pressures; reflecting the nature and development of the Church that inspired it. Whatever one may think of our Church By Law Comfortably Established, it is home-grown; its best aspects show the flexibility of the home rather than the rigidity of the institution. Its way is the English way: compromise, not compulsion. It takes adaptive attitudes towards moral and social problems which Rome still meets with unchanging harshness (e.g. the 1958 Lambeth Conference on Marriage). And its view of the Religious Life remains uniquely its own. Unlike Rome, 'The Anglican Church, while admitting its validity, has never regarded the Religious Life as higher than the secular. It is a particular way, not a better way'. No doubt there are connections here with Sister Edna Mary's claim that 'the Anglican communion has never been so deeply influenced as the Roman Catholic Church by the Augustinian attitude to sex'. Some inner temperament of the 'Via Media' harmonises with English nature; retains, like bell-music across English meadows, a nostalgic appeal. It has to do with something very deep and fundamental in the English character, perhaps best expressed by our words *home* and *homeliness*. Their bitter irony for today's tragedy of homelessness could well be applied to some aspects of the Church which are anything but homely; but I feel the principle remains valid, a powerful factor in Anglican survival.

It shows itself again where perhaps one would have least expected—in the maintaining of the Liturgical Office, which is recognised as the unique responsibility of the religious communities. 'It is the regular offering of praise, on behalf of others as well as self, which is the first task of religious.' The Opus Dei represents continuity and unity, strongly upheld by the Anglican communities, which, unlike many Roman congregations, keep up the full Office whatever their work may entail. This fact is of importance when considering these 'houses of prayer' as centres of collective devotion. 'There is an increasing flow of people who come to such houses, for long periods or sometimes for a day or part of the day, or just drop in for an office. Some come for formal retreats, conducted or in private; others just for a time of peace and relaxation, or to be able to join in the regular offering of praise.' This growing accessibility of the public to conventual precincts and practices may point to a new source of power in the Church and influence over the laity. It is also in harmony with what is described as 'a move away from some of the elaboration of Christian devotion of the past and towards a more simple and integrated spiritual life, such as has its roots in the older English tradition of "homeliness with God"'. The connection of this most significant phrase with what I said above will be obvious.

The other peculiar obligation of religious, the keeping of Vows, is interpreted freely in the modern context. 'Poverty' today is a relative term, when religious for the most part are comfortably housed, fed, clothed, have the use of modern inventions from washing-machines to motor cars, and even the enjoyment of luxuries like sweets and tobacco! The criterion seems to be 'a simplicity of life that identifies the religious with the poor, but not with the destitute. How this is to be worked out has to be re-thought in each generation'. 'Chastity', which the authoress is at pains to distinguish from 'celibacy', does not preclude 'rich personal relationships both within the community and with particular people outside', or 'scope for real friendships' (also in and out) 'including friendships between men and women'. Foreshadowing, no doubt, the 'social joys of heaven'—whatever they are—and that permissive state of bliss where 'the deepest love, which on earth is normally expressed in marriage, can be extended to everyone, and it is "as if everyone were married to everyone else"!'. 'Obedience' is certainly less irksome nowadays, for religious who are free to move around, travel, enjoy annual 'rests' with their families, and mix socially and intellectually with chosen groups among the laity. *Autre temps autre moeurs*. As Sister Edna Mary points out, 'What matters for the Carmelite community is not

"what Mother Teresa said" but "what Mother Teresa would say today." I cannot help wondering *what!*

However, all this must be seen in contemporary perspective. No doubt these freedoms are essential if religious are to maintain the ideal of 'harmony in tension' which is seen as their contribution to Unity and Peace in the world and the Church. Such modern concessions to individual development support Sister Edna Mary's claim that 'somebody who had lived life to the full and had enjoyed it greatly could enjoy it even more in a religious community'. Especially with the help of those friendships. One can appreciate her charming comparison of 'a bed of asters' with 'a herbaceous border'—and agree that a rich, harmonious (though controlled) variety is more fun than uniformity. But this by no means prevents stability, which she insists is the most valuable gift of religious communities to our restless, changing, bewildered society—just as it was in the ferment and lawlessness of the Dark Ages. (Chapters II and III, by the way, are an excellent refresher-course in the history of monasticism from the end of the third century onward.) The lostness and rootlessness so prevalent today could find an antidote in the security offered by the presence in our midst of the religious 'family'. Mention is made of the Simon Community, an experiment 'to provide for people who need such a stable community as a permanent base . . . into which others can be drawn in the degree and for the length of time they need'.

How far is all this an esoteric dream of a small, privileged group swathed in a cocoon of religious complacency? Or is community life in the Anglican Church an expanding power, dynamically at work on the tragedy of our times, busily persuading 'Cathy' to 'come home' to God? I don't know the answers, but I do feel that the Home Front needs watching.

LETTER

IN HIS ARTICLE on 'Free Will' (November 30) G. L. Simons denies society the right to punish criminals because owing to their genetic build-up they are not free to act differently. What then does he consider the 'unfortunate necessity' to adapt them to civilised conduct 'without having to inflict suffering'? If victims there have to be, why, I ask you, must it always be the law-abiding citizen, the girls and children and not their killers and rapers? (It depends which side you're on.)

If they are born with criminal propensities, then admittedly no threat of punishment is any use. However, the question is: what can society do to protect itself from violent and dangerous men? We do not want them to vegetate behind prison walls, we don't want to maintain prisons and warders and pay for inhuman ways of keeping wrongdoers separated from society, and then for hunting them down if they escape. The only solution seems to be to send them deep down, e.g. into separated parts of uranium mines from where there is no escape, and keep them there doing dangerous but necessary work for the community. It is not always their genetic build-up that, for instance, leads them to wage-snatching and the like but the fact that crime—highly organised nowadays—does pay far better than decent work. *This* is the crux of the problem.

And the irresponsible drinker or drug-addict who commits an act of murder ought to be reminded of the ancient statesman Pittacus of Mytilene who enacted by law that any crime committed in a state of intoxication incurred a double penalty. In Ancient Greece he was considered one of the 'Seven Wise Men'.

P. G. ROY.

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