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'NATURAL' AND FOSTER PARENTS

THE CONSIDERABLE publicity accorded to the case of nine-year-old Jeanette Bartlett, who screaming and struggling was last week taken away from the woman who had been her foster mother since she was six months old, has, despite its providing an excellent example of the lack of taste and humane feelings prevalent in Fleet Street, brought into the public eye a problem on which it is clear there is need for new legislation.

Perhaps Jeanette and her foster mother will not so much mind having their tearful and violent parting reproduced on the front pages of national newspapers, when some time in the future they can appreciate that their suffering made them martyrs to the cause of all those in similar situations.

The law as it stands at the moment gives a child's 'natural' parents the primary right to the child's custody, and they only forfeit that right if it can be shown that they are incapable of providing the child with a proper home, or, of course, if they have signed adoption papers. Thus, in the case of Jeanette Bartlett both Dorset County Council and the High Court which backed them up on their ruling that Jeanette should rejoin her natural mother, did no more than apply the law as it stands.

It is perhaps Western civilisation's fanatical concern to preserve the family system which is the root of the problem. However, knowing nothing of the background to this particular case, one is in no position to take sides, but what can be said is that such a matter should never be settled by a hard and fast law. That there should be no room for discussion on a question, the answer to which greatly affects the lives of the foster-mother, the natural parents, the six brothers, and most important the girl herself, is not a good testimony to our social services or our lawmakers.

It has been suggested that the law be amended so that after a child has been in the care of a foster parent for five, or it has been suggested, three years, then the natural parents' claim to custody should be forfeited in favour of the foster parent. Thought this might in some cases produce a more satisfactory outcome, again we would have a law which allowed no room for discussion of the special factors which will inevitably arise in each case. There can be no panaceas when a child's way of life is involved.

The answer is surely to institute, what Leo Abse has been suggesting for many years now, a body of people, experts on child welfare and the family, to consider each case from every angle on its merits. In these cases there is almost bound to be suffering on the part of someone involved, but if they could see that all facets of the problem had been fairly considered by people with special knowledge of the subject, then at least they could feel that their suffering was the result of a misfortune rather than an Act of Parliament. In the last few years in the

penal field we have been progressing towards prison sentences and a parole system tailored to the individual case. It is high time that the laws on fostering followed this precedent.

ACTION NEEDED NOW

IN THE House of Commons last week Sir Keith Joseph, the new Secretary of State for Health and Social Services, said that it was not yet clear whether the time was ripe for a full inquiry into the working of the Abortion Act. Though this does not put the Act in the immediate danger, it is obvious from his statement that it might well become "clear" to him in the future that an inquiry is needed. The likelihood of such an inquiry blossoming into an amendment of the Act is, of course, far more likely now that we have a Conservative government.



Should the inquiry be instituted it is more probable that evidence will be brought forward to show up the Act in its worst light, than evidence to demonstrate its humane aspect. Naturally, the Abortion Law Reform Association

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will do their best but it may well be heavy going. It is to be hoped that the Humanist organisations and indeed individual humanists will submit whatever evidence is at their command.

While not wishing to sound like those who argue that euthanasia will lead to the extermination of all misfits, there is the likelihood that once one of the Acts which brought in progressive legislation in the last six years has been amended, the opponents of this type of social progress will try it on with some of the other Acts.

It is thus essential that starting from now humanists take action to prevent such amendments coming before parliament.

SALVETE AND VALETE

THIS ISSUE of The Freethinker is the last under my editorship. Next week Bill McIlroy will be in the proverbial chair. Editing this paper has been very rewarding for me and I am thus indebted to the readers, writers, printers and The Freethinker board members, all of whom are essential to the paper's existence and all of whom have provided me with differing kinds of help and stimulation.

It is very appropriate that my successor should be Bill McIlroy, at present the General Secretary of the National Secular Society, a position he has held since November 1963. I have myself been very fortunate to have worked with him for almost two years and to have been able to draw on his wide knowledge of the freethought/humanist movement. That he has aided all the recent Freethinker editors behind the scenes makes it particularly appropriate that he should now take on the job himself. One of his prime considerations will be to promote The Freethinker's sales and thus gain it wider recognition.

The National Secular Society's loss is very much The Freethinker's gain. However, the Society is gaining Martin Page, at present a member of its executive committee and associate editor of *The Ethical Record*. Martin Page's name is very familiar to Freethinker readers. I am personally most grateful to him for the many articles he has contributed, particularly those on J. M. Robertson and his reports of the meetings of societies which the humanist movement supports, such as The National Council for Civil Liberties and The Conservation Society.

I should like to express the hope that Freethinker readers will give him and Bill McIlroy the support they deserve, and finally to venture the prognostication that with these two men working in the same building the freethought/humanist movement will be spoken of a lot more before long.

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 Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

Humanitas Stamps: Help 5 Humanist charities. Buy stamps from or send them to Mrs. A. C. Goodman, 51 Percy Road, Romford, RM7 8QX, Essex. British and African speciality. Send for list.

Humanist Holidays. Youth Camp, the Wye Valley, late July and early August. Family Centre, Aberystwyth, Monday, August 17 until Tuesday, September 1. Full board just over £2 per day with reductions for children. Details from Mrs Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone 01-642 8796.

COMING EVENTS

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.

PUBLICATIONS

TITLE	AUTHOR	Price	Post
RI and Surveys	Maurice Hill	1/0	4d
Religion and Ethics in Schools	David Tribe	1/6	4d
Religious Education in State Schools	Brigid Brophy	2/6	4d
Ten Non Commandments	Ronald Fletcher	2/6	4d
Humanism, Christianity and Sex	David Tribe	6d	4d
103: History of a House	Elizabeth Collins	1/0	4d
Freethought and Humanism in Shakespeare	David Tribe	2/0	4d
The Necessity of Atheism	Percy Bysshe Shelley	1/6	4d
The Secular Responsibility	Marghanita Laski	2/0	4d
The Nun Who Lived Again	Phyllis Graham	6d	4d
An Analysis of Christian Origins	George Ory	2/6	4d
New Thinking on War and Peace	A. C. Thompson	1/0	4d
A Humanist Glossary	Robin Odell and Tom Barfield	3/6	6d
The Vatican versus Mankind	Adrian Pigott	4/0	1/4
Evolution of the Papacy	F. A. Ridley	1/0	4d
Lift up Your Heads	William Kent	5/0	1/0
Men Without Gods	Hector Hawton	2/6	10d
The Bible Handbook	G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball	7/6	1/2
What Humanism is About	Kit Mouat	10/6	1/6
The Humanist Revolution	Hector Hawton	10/6	1/6
Pioneers of Social Change	E. Royston Pike	10/6	1/6
The Golden Bough	J. G. Frazer	20/0	2/6
Religion in Secular Society	Bryan Wilson	15/0	1/3
The Humanist Outlook	Various	35/0	2/2
Catholic Terror Today	Avro Manhattan	12/6	1/6
Materialism Restated	Chapman Cohen	5/0	1/4
The Rights of Man (Hard-back)	Thomas Paine	14/0	1/6
The Martyrdom of Man	Winwood Reade	10/6	1/9
Morality Without God	Chapman Cohen	6d	4d
Catholic Imperialism and World Freedom (Secondhand)	Avro Manhattan	15/0	2/2
From Jewish Messianism to the Christian Church	Prosper Alfaric	6d	4d
Age of Reason	Thomas Paine	3/6	10d
Rights of Man (Paperback)	Thomas Paine	7/0	1/4
Police and the Citizen	NCCL	4/0	5d
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GOD AND THE THEOLOGIAN

THOMAS W. HOGAN

WE LIVE, it has been said, in a great age of religious innovation. Hardly a week passes without some divine pronouncing in august tones on scripture. The notion that the secular is subservient to the divine is supposed, and every opportunity is taken to amplify God's bountiful message. After two thousand years it is a source of wonderment and not dismay that the Bible yields some fresh nuance of meaning. The fact, however, that the message is, in the main, falling on deaf ears is often overlooked.

The reason for religion's apparent lack of vigour is not hard to seek. It is derived from its basic premise. It seeks to impose a fixed pattern on a world of flux. But this is mistaken philosophy. The great concept of biological thought is the necessity for constant readjustment. Planets, kingdoms and nations have fallen beneath the descending stroke of Chronos. Necessity, it has been said, is the mother of invention. The Church, if it is to survive, must change, but change is revision to what is claimed as an immutable gospel. Thus the fraudulent nature of the proceeding is apparent.

Advanced Churchmen, of course, know this. It is a grim commentary on Christianity that its most cogent representatives have fostered the humanist cause. The remainder, whom conscience prompts them to speak out, reserve their credos for the impunity of their retirement.

The fact that the *avant garde* within the Church identifies itself with the humanist outlook is apt corroboration that our principles are well founded. They unwittingly have paid us a compliment. How far they can go and still retain their Christian loyalties is a moot point. It is, of course, destructive of fundamentalism; but fundamentalism is the only assurance Christians have of the integrity of the Bible. If doubts are cast on the authenticity of some passages, then why not all? Pushed to its logical conclusion the revision necessary for changing circumstances adds weight to the humanist counter that secular radicalism is the only solution.

But the Churches have their interests to retain. As custodians of a book which supposedly serves as a model for Western morality they will concede defeat only when they have no other course. When they do, the Evangelists use of language provides a convenient excuse. How often has the unbeliever built up a case against the most assinine of opposition only to find his opponent trying to discredit the exegesis by a cheap debating trick. It is palpably obvious from the New Testament that the catastrophic end of the contemporary world was expected—the Evangelists were, of course, completely mistaken. The reader is advised to prove this point in debate as an exercise in religious prevarication.

One point emerges which is quite clear. The fundamentalist religious mind is so constituted as to reject even the likelihood of evidence against the religious exegesis. This comes as no surprise; Freethinkers could furnish examples of their own experience. The laudable notion that free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilised society is overlooked in the general wreck of superstition.

The tenacity of purpose found in those of a religious persuasion is derived from dogmatism. The fact that believers are disinclined to examine their beliefs shows that these beliefs are particularly susceptible to doubt. A dog-

matic and authoritarian body indeed, the Church of Rome, has claimed that a flexible line with the polygamous heathens of the world would ensure their conversion to Rome; but, claims the Church, it adheres to its ideals and fosters monogamy. Here, it is urged, is an occasion when the Church by remaining firm frustrates its own expansion. But to this viewpoint there is another slant. If the Church had the moral rectitude to make concessions to the humanist standpoint the very fibre of religious conviction would be undermined. Thus a predilection to dogmatism serve a useful purpose.

The picture on the whole, is however, brighter than it was. Mention has been made of Christian innovation; we must add fuel to the bonfire. If the Church wrestles with itself we must applaud the combatants. The referee of such a contest is, of course, history. The outcome can only mean diminished faith in the scriptures for the common man.

It was sound strategy for humanists to take the offensive. The best form of defence is attack. Gutter evangelists will, of course, wrestle and corrupt the Biblical text, in a manner which we have seen, when put on the spot; but one must be mindful always of the amorphous floating mass, who, when witnessing the verbal fireworks, will come down on the side of reason and sanity. It is to the uncommitted—and there are enough of them—to which we must turn.

But all of this has not happened in the twinkling of an eye. Spiritual upheavals take a long time. The heresies of the nineteenth century are the commonplaces of today. Shall we say that humanism assails and captures outposts which are only relinquished by Christians when the dust of battle has settled? The process of re-orientation by Christian apologists, so wearying to the unbeliever, may be dismissed as cant. The sum of Christian theology left after the plue pencil of revision has erased the deadwood is recondite and so subject to qualification as to be beyond mortal comprehension.

It is obvious that the chips are stacked against Christianity in Europe. The Church of England as an active agent is moribund. Rome thrashes like a great whale in shallow water over married priests, abortion and the contraceptive pill. The future for them is unpromising. The minds of the proletariat have turned to graver social and economic issues. The common mass is ripe for humanism.

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MYSTICISM

JOHN L. BROOM

BY ITS very nature, mysticism is hardly susceptible of exact definition. It is based, however, upon the conviction that behind the visible world revealed by the senses, there exists a higher order of reality, and that the ultimate end of each human being is to attain knowledge of, and communion with, this Divine ground of existence. This can be achieved, say the mystics, by following certain well-defined techniques of meditation and contemplation. Mysticism, therefore, bypasses the rational arguments for the existence of God by claiming that he can be apprehended immediately by anyone who takes the time and trouble to practise the necessary spiritual exercises.

The earliest mystics were probably Aryan and Chinese. Hinduism, especially that section of it known as the Vedanta, is permeated with mystical conceptions. Here arose the idea of the Atman or the God within. Salvation consists in man's realisation of the fact that his immanent eternal Self (the Atman) is identical with the transcendent Divine Principle (Brahman). The philosophy of the Vedanta has had a profound influence on certain twentieth century writers and thinkers, particularly Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood and Gerald Heard.

Buddhism also has its mystical aspect, although, as I pointed out in my recent article, neither Hinayana Buddhism nor Zen would describe the ultimate liberating experience in theistic terms. The same is true of Taoism, where, in the "Tao-te-Ching", the Tao itself is spoken of as the Nameless—"The Tao that can be told of is not the absolute Tao". Sufism, which appeared among the Mohammedans of Persia in the ninth century AD, was a reaction against the rigid monotheism and formalism of Islam. The mysticism of the Sufi philosopher-poets of whom Al-Ghazzali was the greatest, was pantheistic in character and expressed, in often sublime language, the desire of the poet to become "absorbed into" Allah.

In the west, mysticism did not become a prominent factor in religion and philosophy until the early years of the Christian era. Neither Plato nor Aristotle could properly be described as mystics, though the former's theory of Ideas was given a mystical interpretation by the neo-Platonists, whose chief exponent was Plotinus (204-269 AD). Plotinus was a dualist, who held that the soul could only apprehend God if it escaped from the prison of the body. He himself was unwilling to name his parents or his birthplace and seemed ashamed of his earthly existence. To attain complete identification with God, Plotinus believed that thought itself must be transcended. The final union is not so much knowledge as ecstasy or coalescence. Such an experience must necessarily be very rare. "I have myself", wrote Plotinus, "realised it but three times as yet, and Porphyry (his disciple) not once."

Neo-Platonic mysticism was introduced into Christianity at the end of the fifth century AD, by the unknown writer who impersonated Paul's first Greek convert, Dionysius the Areopagite. Though there are many mystical elements in the Confessions of St Augustine of Hippo, the first great mystic of the medieval church was Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153), whose mysticism was largely a protest against the intellectualism of the early schoolmen, particularly Abelard. Meister Eckhart (1260-1329) is possibly the best-known of all the pre-Reformation Christian mystics. I use the adjective "Christian" here loosely, as Eckhart's theology was much more akin to the Vedanta than to the

orthodox Christian tradition, and indeed on several occasions he narrowly escaped being arraigned for heresy. "The Ground of God and the Ground of the soul are one and the same", he taught, which is a precise restatement of the doctrine of the identity of Brahman and the Atman. Moreover, Eckhart's God is very far removed from the loving heavenly Father of the Christ of the Gospels. "God is not good, I am good", he wrote, and "Why dost thou prate of God? Whatever thou sayest of him is untrue." Eckhart's God is the non-personal attributeless Ultimate Principle of the Eastern mystics, rather than the personal all-good, all-powerful Being revealed by Jesus of Nazareth.

In an article of limited length, it is possible to mention only a few of the later Western mystics. Among Eckhart's immediate disciples, Henry Suso (1295-1360) and John Tauler (1300-1361) are the best known. In the Netherlands, John Ruysbrock (1293-1381) was also influenced by Eckhart, although his mysticism was of a more practical kind than that of his master, being concerned more with the means whereby the ultimate knowledge is to be attained, than with its metaphysical implications. In 1516, Martin Luther published the *Theologia Germanica*, an anonymous handbook of mystical devotion, which lays particular stress on the necessity of self-forgetfulness and non-attachment. Luther professed to love this book above all others save the Bible, but to judge from his subsequent career, he seems to have learned singularly little from the principles inculcated therein. Famous Roman Catholic mystics of the Counter-Reformation period included St Theresa of Avila (1515-1582) and St John of the Cross (1542-1591), while in the Protestant tradition Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) and his English disciple William Law (1686-1761), are worthy of mention. Since the eighteenth century, mysticism seems to have declined in the west, possibly because the atmosphere of the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath did not exactly conduce to the contemplative life. One notable twentieth century English mystic, however, was Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941). The more tranquil East has produced a rich crop of mystics in the past two centuries, particularly in the persons of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo and the Swami Vivekenanda.

No-one can doubt the burning sincerity of the practitioners of mysticism throughout the ages. There can be no question that most of them have believed that in their visions they have acquired immediate knowledge of a supreme and ultimate Divine principle. But, of course, mere intensity of conviction is no guarantee of the truth of any proposition. If it were, directly contradictory philosophies of existence would be equally valid, since they have been believed in with equal sincerity by their respective devotees. Accordingly, we must apply other criteria to test the objective validity of the mystical experience.

A serious difficulty confronts us at the outset. In the nature of the case, the mystical experience, is strictly speaking, incommunicable. The truth of a mathematical proposition or a scientific experiment can be easily demonstrated to a person of normal intelligence. But the truth of the mystical vision cannot be so demonstrated to the non-mystic, any more than physical pain can be described to someone (if such can be imagined) who has never suffered it. "If Mr X", said Dr Johnson, referring to an obscure poet of his day, "has experienced the unutterable, he would be well advised not to try to utter it." But most mystics

have an uncontrollable desire to try to "utter" their experiences to those not fortunate enough to share them. And when they are not understood, they point out that language developed to express the ideas of this world is totally inadequate to express those of another, higher existence. However, non-mystics can legitimately reply that it is precisely the objective reality of this "higher existence" that is in question.

There seems little doubt that the content of the mystical experience is, to a great extent, determined by the individual mystic's heredity and environment. Thus, the "Ultimate Divine Principle" apprehended by the far-eastern visionary is, as we have seen, mostly of a non-personal character, analagous to the attributeless Being revealed in the Hindu Buddhist and Taoist scriptures, while that of his western and near-eastern counterpart, tends to correspond with the personal heavenly Father expounded by the founders of Christianity and Islam. Admittedly, the fact that God appears in different forms to different apprehenders is not a proof of his non-existence, but it does surely indicate that a strong subjective element is involved in the experience.

During this century, mysticism has come under severe scrutiny by students of psychology. It is clear that many of the leading mystics were highly abnormal personalities, suffering from some kind or other of mental disorder. This seems specially true of those in the Christian tradition. St Augustine's childhood was an almost classical example of the Oedipus situation, while his adolescent sexual adventures and his later exaggerated sense of guilt towards them, follow an equally familiar Freudian pattern. St Francis of Assisi also hated his father when he was a child, solved his later sexual problems by self-castration, and exhibited many masochistic symptoms. He rarely washed, since he held that regular ablutions showed too great a concern for the body (which he referred to as "Brother Ass"). The masochism of St Theresa of Avila is also well-known, and the essentially erotic nature of the language in which she expressed her love for Christ cannot be gainsaid. Yet, again, recognition of the fact that some mystics were mentally unbalanced, does not in itself establish the subjectivity of *all* mystical experiences. It may seem strange as George Godwin says that "the Almighty should have chosen such cracked vessels into which to

pour his good wine", but as Aldous Huxley puts it (*Ends and Means*, p. 289): "There are good and bad mystics, just as there are good and bad artists".

Critics of mysticism often contend that remarkably similar experiences can be induced by the administration of physical drugs, such as the fruit of the soma plant, LSD, mescaline and alcohol. "The power of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour" (William James). There is much truth in this, but the essential difference between the two types of experience is that those attained by the different practices of meditation, unceasing awareness and non-attachment, inevitably result in a striking and permanent change of character, of which humility, self-forgetfulness, and above all, boundless charity, are the main features, whereas those achieved merely by swallowing drugs, result in a state of emotional euphoria which soon wears off and which has no lasting beneficial effects on the participants. The ethical facet of mysticism is often forgotten by those who accuse mystics of living in a kind of contemplative ivory-tower and shirking their social responsibilities. The mystic claims with justice that as a result of his spiritual exercises, social problems can be tackled with a new energy and in the right way.

Whether or not the mystics' contention that they have attained knowledge of the ultimate Ground of existence is true, must remain, I think, an open question. It may well be, that, as Olaf Stapledon claims, they are confusing an emotion with a perception. Indeed, certain mystics of the Taoist and Zen Buddhist schools would deny that their moments of supreme enlightenment have any metaphysical significance at all, since time and eternity are one and the same. However that may be, the fact remains that, by their writings and in their lives, the greatest mystics have enriched the world. No-one of any sensitivity can read such classics of mysticism as the Confessions of Al-Ghazzali, the Cloud of Unknowing, the works of Meister Eckhart, the Lankavatara Sutra, the Tao-te-Ching, the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna or the *Theologia Germanica*, without feeling that he has come into contact with minds of the most profound wisdom and insight. Perhaps the best modern anthology is that compiled with a perceptive commentary by Aldous Huxley under the title of *The Perennial Philosophy*.

THE BIBLE IS NOT THE WORD OF GOD

JONATHAN STORY

IN MAKING a statement such as the above title, it is necessary to say which God we are talking about. Let us consider first the Jewish God who turned Christian. I say this because most Christians seem to assume that Jehovah, the God of the Jews, is the same God who fathered Jesus Christ.

Also, for the sake of argument, we may assume that all we know about this God is what is contained in the Bible, the book referred to as "the Word of God". This book contains 39 books of "The Holy Scriptures," the Old Testament of the Jews. It also contains the 27 books of the New Testament of the Christians. These 66 books are published in one book called "The Holy Bible".

The professing Christian simply venerates "The Holy Bible" in its entirety. If he is a Fundamentalist, he believes and teaches that all 66 books are "the divinely-inspired,

infallible and inerrant Word of God". He then worships both the God of the Jews and the Christian God. The Jew, however, recognizes only the 39 books of "The Holy Scriptures", and he worships *JHVH* (or *YHWH*, the ineffable name), read Adonai, which means "the Lord", (Ex. 6: 3). And "the Lord" is *not* Jesus Christ.

The Jew considers his 39 books as revealed to Israel through law-giver, prophet, psalmist and sage. His Pentateuch is "The Law". Then comes 21 books of "The Prophets", followed by 13 books of "The Writings". The first six books of The Prophets are also known as "The Historians". It is interesting to note that the Jews do *not* list the book of Daniel among The Prophets. Some scholars consider Daniel a forgery anyway, and Daniel's nightmares are almost as silly as those of The Book of Revelation

(Continued overleaf)

Fanatical evangelists use both of these two books to delude the credulous and naive in their congregations.

Again, for the sake of argument, let's assume that Jesus is *not* God. Jesus is quoted as saying "I and my Father are one", and John 10: 36 quotes him saying "I am the son of God". "The Father is in me, and I in him" may be taken to mean they are alike, or that God is in all of us. Jesus, if there ever was such a character, mistakenly thought he was the Messiah. But the Jews and Essenes didn't accept him as such. And to get into any 3-in-1 controversy would border on Christian mental masturbation which often leads to Christian phreneticism.

So let us consider what is attributed to God, and what he is reported as saying. I assume God was a "he", since Jesus refers to him as "Father". This also implies the existence of a mother. Now Mary is called "the Mother of God", which would make her Jesus' grandmother! Yet we are told she was Jesus' mother, Joseph's wife a virgin besides, and lately that she floated off to heaven when she died! She must have been a very versatile airy creature indeed, if she ever existed! We had best omit this fictitious character from any further consideration here of "the Word of God".

"In the beginning God" (a sorry bit of clerical commercialism on the part of the Apollo 8 astronauts) are the first words of Genesis. However God soon says "Let us make man in *our* image." Although we are not told who these other Gods were, we can assume they were both male and female, and looked like us, because God said so.

Then God made the first Commandment, regarding the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He added, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." But Adam did eat, and 930 years later he died! (If "year" should have been written or translated as "moon", then $930 \div 13 = 71$ years, or a normal age. 1 year = 13 moons or lunar months). This proves one of three things: that a day equalled 930 years, that God didn't keep his word, or that the Bible is *not* "the Word of God."

Further quotations from the Old Testament tell of God's character and attributes. "Every man child among you should be circumcised"; yet on the 6th day of creation "God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good". Later he destroyed both man and beast, (Gen. 6: 5-7) because he repented having made them. What had the poor beasts done except multiply?

"I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." This sounds a bit vindictive and cruel, certainly not the words of an "ever-merciful" God.

"I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me" (Isa. 45: 5). Evidently there was no room for any Jesus Christ or Holy Ghost. "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things," (Isa. 45: 7). Now we know where evil comes from, if we believe "the Word of God". But occasionally God repented his evil thoughts, as in Exodus 32: 14.

In Isaiah 38: 8, God reversed the direction of the Sun's travel by ten degrees, not knowing it was the Earth that moved. Also, in Joshua 10: 13 he stopped the Sun for about a whole day, "for the Lord fought for Israel."

"Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man

see me, and live," (Ex. 33: 20). Yet "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face," (Ex. 33: 11), and Jacob said: "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved," (Gen. 32: 30). Are all these little stories about God simply fiction? Or is the Bible "the divinely-inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God"? The 7th-day Adventists say they believe "every jot and tittle in it, without any cavil or emasculation whatsoever," possibly a very good indication of their perspicacity.

A few of God's many cruelties and atrocities, as reported in the Bible, are noted as follows: Ex. 9: 3-6, 23-25; 12: 29-30; 32: 27; Num. 11: 1, 16: 46-49; 31: 1-18, 32-41; Deut. 2: 30, 34; 3: 6; 13: 6-10; 28: 57; Josh. 10: 28; 1 Sam. 6: 19; 2 Chron. 14: 12-15; Job 1: 18; 2: 3. Is the command to insane slaughter "the Word of God"?

All Gods originate in the minds of men, who create them in their own image. Thus, if a God is jealous, cruel, and vindictive, he is only reflecting the character of the men who invented him. Wouldn't it be better if such a God were dead?

But let's go on to the Christian God, who seems but a slightly different character. From Genesis in 4004 B.C., according to the Bible chronology of Bishop Usher, we come to 4 B.C., when Jesus was born. His being born 4 years before Christ requires some Christian mental gymnastics here.

It also requires some mental gymnastics to believe the following New Testament Bible absurdities and errors attributed to "the Word of God": Matt. 2: 2, 9, 16; 3: 16, 17; 4: 5-7; 5: 22; 17: 20; 27: 52, 53; Mark 6: 41-44; 9: 43-48; 13: 26, 30; 16: 15-19; Luke 14: 26; 17: 29-30; 24: 51; John 2: 6-11; 3: 13; 6: 19; 11: 44; 14: 13, 14; Acts 19: 12; 1 John 5: 7; Rev. 2: 18; 5: 14; 7: 1; 20: 10.

It should be evident that the Bible chronologers, manipulators, embellishers, transcribers, translators, and authors were not divinely inspired. It would have required too many divinities at work.

In addition to the Authorized King James Version, we have the Revised Standard Version, several versions of the Jewish Holy Scriptures, the Moffatt Bible, the Catholic Vulgate, Douay Bible, and many older ones, as those of Coverdale, Tyndale, Wycliffe, etc. If you take a trip to the public library, you can easily learn about the source and design of the various Bibles. Simply look under the word "Bible" in the encyclopedias.

What we call the Bible is merely a collection of five and a half dozen different man-made literary works. Some are composites recognized by duplications, and some were copied from older Oriental religious writings. The 35 or more authors are *all* unknown, and the writings took place over a period of 1300 to 1500 years. Various denominations consider their adopted versions as "divinely inspired". And some have even invented "inspired" Bibles of their own, such as "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures", and the phrenetic writings of 7th-day Adventist "Prophetess" Ellen G. White and "The Book of Mormon" by Joseph Smith.

While each denomination considers its Bible as "inspired", it usually considers the other Bibles as "spurious translations". The doubter merely goes one step further. He says they are *all* merely books, about as "divinely inspired" as "Pilgrim's Progress," or "Alice in Wonderland."

The "Christer" or God-worshipper should define just what *he* means when he speaks of "the Word of God."

Which Bible, and what version is he talking about? This article will give him a better idea of what I think "the Word of God" is.

I wonder if any Gideons and others who place their Bibles around the world know that they are simply helping to perpetuate false hopes, fear, ignorance, and superstition. The collected Bible writings of many ignorant men and cunning priests contain much absurdity, atrocity, broken promises, contradictions, immorality, indecency, obscenity, and many dreams, nightmares, and foolish prophecies. They should not be palmed off on a credulous and naive public as "the Word of God".

"The Holy Bible" should be recognized for what it is: the ancient, man-made writings of the religious, family, social, and political experiences of Asiatic Semite tribes. It was greatly embellished for clerical prestige; and it also contains much allegory and mythology, along with some books of real literary value. It is essentially an historical narrative or novel, and it should certainly not be accepted as a manual of theology by any intelligent person or organization in this Post-Christian Age.

1 'Christer' is a term for fanatics who are always quoting the Bible on what Jesus was supposed to have said.

WORLD GOVERNMENT, NATIONALISM AND CULTURE

I. S. LOW

IN HIS ARTICLE "The Celtic Cultural Problem" (June 20) P. Berresford Ellis says that the force behind Celtic Nationalism is a reaction to "A world sickness . . . the tremendous drive . . . towards a world state, a world government".

I might just as well say that the drive towards world government is a reaction to the world sickness of nationalism, whose symptoms and effects are two world wars, lots of smaller ones such as Korea and Vietnam, millions of people killed, dictatorship, lies, hatred and economic muddles.

The main argument of Berresford Ellis' article is that (1) Celtic culture will die out if Celtic nations haven't got national independence; (2) lack of a culture will degrade the Celts.

Much can be said against this. First, I suggest that if a culture has to have an elaborate political structure to support it, it's not much good as a culture. Poland was split up between three different empires when Chopin composed his polonaises. The fact that Italy was dominated by Austria didn't stop Bellini, Rossini and Verdi composing great operas. Goethe and Schiller wrote great poetry when Germany was divided and politically powerless, and Ibsen and Bjornsen wrote dramas when Norway was more or less ruled by Sweden.

Secondly, how does Berresford Ellis know that individual Celts are "degraded" by lacking a culture? Some Celts might prefer the culture of other peoples. Lafcadio Hearn, an American, preferred the culture of Japan. T. E. Lawrence plunged into the culture of the Arabs. Bernard Shaw would have been furious if he'd been cut off from the culture of the wider world (as you'll see if you read *John Bull's Other Island*). The truth is Berresford Ellis wants people shut up in cultural cages whether they like it or not. It is he and the Celtic Nationalists who want to impose "uniformity".

Thirdly, the culture of any nation is inevitably narrow. The culture of the world is greater than that of any nation. Under World Government the culture of Ancient Greece, the philosophy of Asia, the music of Germany and Italy, the literature of England would be that of the Celts, while the Greeks, Asiatics, English, Germans, Italians and others could share in the Celtic culture.

It's often said that the average man is awed by the bigness of the modern world, and that we must have smaller units so that the said average man can feel he has control over his destiny. This argument is fallacious.

First, in the modern world small nations don't really have

control over their fate at all. Economically they are at the mercy of things that happen in other countries (according to *The American Take-over of Britain* by James McMillan and Bernard Harris, the Americans own quite a lot of Scotland already). In military and diplomatic matters the small nations are pushed around by bigger ones and forced into policies that serve the interests of the latter. For instance Britain since 1945 has been more or less tied to the USA. We know what happened to independent Czechoslovakia. Berresford Ellis and his fellow Celtic Nationalists are decreasing the power of their fellow-countrymen, not increasing it.

Secondly, National Sovereignty is a cause of uniformity. Under National Sovereignty you are likely to have war. To fight wars efficiently you must have everyone working together under the same direction. The main example of this is Hitler's Germany, when the different regions of Germany were "gleichgeschaltet".

World Government would avoid both these things. The common man in every country would have some control over world policy by his vote for the members of the World Authority. Since war would be abolished, it would be possible to give autonomy to regions such as the north east of England (Lewis Mumford tacitly admits this in his book *The Culture of Cities*).

You don't inevitably get culture if you have National Sovereignty. You get war. You get poverty. You get narrowness and pettiness and lack of vision. The finest example of the "cultural" results of nationalism was given after the First World War—when Eastern Europe was split into different nations. This was called "Balkanization". The nations of Eastern Europe started to squabble with each other and culture became distinguished by its absence.

We can choose. We can have nationalism and the Balkanization of the world—or World Government and a new age, like the Athens of Pericles or the Renaissance.

OBITUARY

WE REGRET to announce that Louisa Martineau Mosley has died at the age of 88 years. Mrs Mosley was the wife of Thomas Mosley, whose secularist activities and public speaking in the Nottingham and Leicester areas spanned many years, throughout which Mrs Mosley constantly supported him. She was the daughter of James Cartwright who joined the National Secular Society in 1876 and who was an active member of Leicester Secular Society for forty years.

Mr Mosley has our deepest sympathy.

Book Review

FAITH SPICER

Scandal in the Assembly, Morris West, Robert Francis. (Pan Books)

THERE ARE, I suppose, three ways in which man, faced with frustration can deal with it. He can attack the cause of frustration head on and try to remove it, he can retreat from it altogether, or he can learn to live with it by deflecting his sense of frustration and his energies into other channels capable of an easier solution.

Roman Catholics, along with any other group of 'believers', communists, Free Masons, even Humanists, not only, I think have fundamental belief (faith) but also are prepared to adhere to the rules and regulations set by that belief, in order, to achieve the end they seek, be it personal goodness and a place in heaven, or group happiness on earth. Believers can abnegate the self sometimes even to the level of martyrdom for the sake of their faith. But this is not only a masochistic abnegation; the giving up of personal needs and goals for the sake of another, be it a person, a creed, or a political belief, has its own reward, not so much acclamation of fellow man but in the realisation that one is a part of a body corporate. So that the rules and regulations of a 'faith' can offer protection and a sense of self value and belongingness.

It is only when as this book suggests there is a realisation that the Religion has 'set the Institution above the person, public order above natural and supernatural justice', that the frustration of not achieving what one needs, begins to become real.

It is fairly easy to keep rules if they have a meaning apparent to all in the group and offer a support to the group by being there. It is extremely difficult to do so, if they are not only hard to abide by, but also appear ludicrous and contradicting the aims of the original 'faith'. Communists as well as Catholics have realised this.

This book is a polemic against the ludicrous marriage and divorce rules of the Catholic church. It is certainly possible to get a divorce if you are a Catholic, *provided* your reason comes under the various very odd categories, that you know intimately the vagaries of the Catholic Law and state your case precisely as it should be stated (generally with only a very busy and untrained Parish Priest to help you), that you are prepared to wait for years and years, that you realise that at no time will you be able to state your own case verbally, and that, in certain circumstances, if you get your application wrong in the first instance, you won't get a second chance to apply.

The Catholic marriage laws not suprisingly, have a fine dual standard so that men and women are judged differently and they set an amazing reverence upon unimpeded intercourse, so that most of the divorces allowed are to do with whether or not a man has or hasn't been able and willing to penetrate the woman.

Some of the case histories desembled in the book are appalling—not only for the injustice to the partners, but as examples of the dreadful inefficiency and bungling of the Catholic legal system.

It was most illuminating though I wasn't entirely suprised to learn that these Catholic laws have *not* been unchanged for hundreds of years. It was, for a very long time, possible to get a divorce for adultery, and in fact, if the marriage really had broken down.

The authors, both very convinced christians, one a Catholic, argue very cogently for a change in Catholic law. Firstly, they want it more efficient and speedy, secondly, they want a far more honest appraisal of what the marriage means to the partners. The statement 'whom God has joined together let no man put assunder' is examined closely, and the suggestion

made that a marriage that has failed is ipso-facto, not then a sacrament. This may sound like splitting hairs but presumably if one believes in God one can believe that He either has or has not joined his people together whether they were married in church or not. The whole book therefore revolves around the discussion as to whether an act - marriage - is sanctified by outward rituals - the service, or by inner grace, 'god within one' - the sacrament. If christians really can begin to take off the outward rules, and look inward they are of course getting nearer and nearer to non christian attitudes whether whatever is within is thought of as God, the Super Ego, a 'man's' innate goodness, and reach a stage where there is trust by an individual of his own goodness, without the necessity of endless discipline, acts of self abnegation and contrition, but it may well spell the end of organised Religion.

LETTERS

Buddhism

JOHN L. BROOM in his article on "Buddhism" (July 4) remarks that the view that the Buddha never existed "like the myth theory of the origin of Christianity, has now been abandoned by all serious scholars, and it is generally agreed that a reasonably accurate picture of the life of the founder of Buddhism can be built up from the various sources available to us".

This is the sort of soothing unctuous statement one expects from a "modern apologist for religion, but hardly expects to find in the FREETHINKER. Which scholars is he referring to and by *what* criterion are they judged "serious"? By *whom* is it generally agreed"?

I am not acquainted with the literature dealing with the origins of Buddhism, but I do have a slight acquaintance with that dealing with the origins of Christianity. Does Mr Broom regard the work of John M. Robertson, L. Gordon Rylands, Herbert Cutner and John Allegro as not being "serious"? If so, can he indicate how their researches have been discredited and by whom? Has some new piece of contemporary evidence been discovered that conclusively proves the historical validity of the New Testament Christ?

Mr Broom writes regarding the Buddha that "it is difficult to disentangle historical fact from pious legend". How, then, is it possible to build up a "reasonably accurate picture"?

Mr Broom concludes his article by claiming that Buddhism is "a philosophical system of great wisdom and insight". I submit that, if his account is anything to go by, the claim is unjustified. Stripped of its legends, supernaturalism and transcendental metaphysics, what is left but a rather wishy-washy compound of ethical homilies common to most, if not all, of the "great" religions? Just why a freethinker should regard this religion as being different from other religions I am at a loss to understand, but, then, I am not a "reverent rationalist".

S. E. PARKER.

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