

## WITHOUT DOGMA

Sir,—James K. Baxter in his review of *The Quaker Approach to Contemporary Problems* criticises the "absence of any creed to which the individual Quaker is required to subscribe" as "the root of much confused thinking." I wonder if indeed the Quakers are any more subject to confused thinking than other Christian groups who do possess a defined theology. Can confused thinking lead to such remarkable unity of action as the Quakers show?

The essence of Quaker belief is an inner light both rational and mystic that leads men from different starting points towards the one still centre of unity in God. All religion stems from someone's direct personal experience of God—your own, that of the authors of Scripture, or of the saints who make up the Church. The Quaker position rests upon the directly personal, not the second-hand experience. And an experience of God cannot be described in ordinary prose. Like its nearest human passion, falling in love, it calls for symbolism, hyperbole, flights of imaginative comparison, a describing of the indescribable—poetry.

The man who sets out to write a psychological analysis of his beloved is probably no longer in love. A group of theologians attempting to describe the nature of God (surely the height of human impossibility!), or to produce any joint statement of what they know about Him, are bound to be trite, or meaningless, incomprehensible, or compromisingly dishonest, if not all four. God is all things to all men, and knowledge of Him does not stay put.

How many people nowadays, for instance, really believe with complete intellectual assent in what the compilers of the creed meant by "the resurrection of the body" or the descent "into Hell," or even "the communion of saints"? By an intellectual assent I do not mean that abnegation of intellect that mistakenly passes for faith, but something that can be more truly described as loving God with all one's mind. A church that requires assent to any joint credal statement about God cannot be truly Catholic, for it must either split into sections or involve its thinking members in some inner dis-integrity. Better the honest if decently-unexpressed doubt, than the dishonestly-expressed affirmation.

The strength of the Quakers lies in a unity of Spirit that defies verbal analysis. The fruit of the Spirit never has been correct orthodox theology, but love, joy, peace, the doing of the Will of God. **JEAN IRVINE (Rawene).**  
(Abridged.—Ed.)

## BEARDS

Sir,—As one who has sported a beard for well over 30 years, I was naturally both interested and amused by your witty editorial on "The Beards of Monticello" (*Listener*, May 28). Very true is your maxim, that "to grow a beard, in a more or less clean-shaven age, is an enterprise to be undertaken carefully." You might have added that it is also one requiring forethought and not a little courage, for the wearer of a beard in this 20th Century must be prepared to face insult and, if necessary, to enforce respect for his hirsute adornment by heroic measures.

I have good cause to remember one occasion, many years ago, when I put these precepts into practice by punching the nose of a semi-drunken lout who had made unseemly reference to the subject of "whiskers," and voiced his intention of pulling them there and then. Instinctively I adopted the soldier's slogan that attack is the better form of defence, and although I was never a boxer—my hands

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being more adaptable to the keyboard than to the gloves—I succeeded in knocking this fellow off the back of the tram on which the incident occurred, much to the astonishment of my fellow-passengers, while I affected an air of nonchalance, as implying that such deeds were trifling and unimportant.

My secret elation, however, was quickly extinguished when a hospital X-ray examination disclosed compound fracture of the right hand—a dismal dilemma for a professional pianist, and one from which I have never completely recovered. But at least I had the keen satisfaction of having vindicated my outward "show of masculinity," perhaps guided subconsciously by Shakespeare's dictum:

He that hath a beard is more than a youth;  
And he that hath none is less than a man.

**L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).**

## FLUORIDATION

Sir,—Dr. Turbott did not mention that at least five cities in the United States which undertook fluoridation of their water supplies have now abandoned the experiments, nor that the dental profession in that country is emphatically against artificial fluoridation. It is true that fluorine occurring naturally in water and in such foods as fish, tea and sunflower seeds appears to reduce the incidence of dental caries. But the fluorine being added to drinking water by local authorities in various parts of the world (in Havelock North and Hastings, too) is a by-product of the manufacture of aluminium.

Seldom has there been such a blatantly undemocratic move. "Purification" of our water supplies is a completely different matter. Purification and fluoridation cannot be compared. Our dental clinics advocate a diet which, if faithfully carried out, will keep our children's teeth sound. This is especially true if the mother has observed a similar diet for at least a year before becoming pregnant, since the foundations of good dental health are laid in the first three months of pregnancy. The fact that New Zealanders' teeth are so poor is directly related to a lack of will-power in saying "No" to all the sweets, white sugar, white flour goods and similar rubbish which comprises 90 per cent of the average diet. **MARY I. STROOBANT**  
Auckland.

(Abridged.—Ed.)

Sir,—When Dr. H.B. Turbott declared that "the law allows a local authority to treat a water supply . . . for the advancement of the people's health," he presumably was referring to the section of the Municipal Corporations Act, 1933, which provides, "The Council may do all things necessary from time to time for the preservation of the public health and convenience."

To the average person, "necessary from time to time" means "occasional

measures demanded by circumstances which may arise," and was never intended to authorise the long-term use of the water supply as a vehicle for administering medicine for this or that specific disease. To dose the whole of the people, without their consent, with a drug intended for only the children's teeth is a clumsy and high-handed procedure. The Department of Health will need to devise some selective and optional method, such as the issue of monthly supplies of fluoride tablets to parents. It can be done.

**ADIT (Havelock North).**

Sir,—Your correspondent W. H. Thomas tells us that sodium fluoride is a poison. Many medicines and antidotes are poisons. Now because it is necessary to prescribe a certain drug for one section of a community who are suffering from a certain complaint, should it be universally prescribed? Are all the adults who have artificial teeth to be compelled to take sodium fluoride because it will help to save the children's teeth from decay?

Medical doctors consider that fluoride hardens the teeth and thus renders them less liable to decay. If it is sufficiently powerful to harden teeth it must have an injurious effect on the more delicate organs of the body. When parents allow their children to indulge in an excess of sweets and soft drinks as to make a visit to the dental clinic necessary, then surely is the time for the doctor to prescribe a daily dose of fluoride for such children. A young person is far more able, through exercise, to counteract the ill effects of the drug on other organs than is an elderly person.

It's a nice state of affairs in a democratic country to have a poison forced down one's throat.

**WATER-DRINKER (Wellington).**

## POETRY IN NEW ZEALAND

Sir,—It had been my intention to keep out of the current strife between poets, critics and public which is becoming an annual feature of your columns following a *Poetry Yearbook* review. Both sides have gone close to the slanging-match type of argument and I fail to see where either Mr. Reid's attitude to sex or his Catholicity are called to account. What should be examined is the justice, or lack of it, in the review—neither of which can be determined by reference to the above matters.

I agree with certain of the critic's judgments on this annual report on the state of our poetry—or verse. But I find certain of his methods of arriving there, harmful. The underlining or removing of mere words from their context in the manner of Mr. Reid surely rates among the most anti-poetic types of criticism attempted in this country—a collection of abstract facts, in the manner of the Kinsey Report—with little real use made of those facts. This is the worst

possible kind of academic study, for it leads to mere annotation without accepting spiritual and instinctive guidance which arises from a more relaxed reading. With poetry, the reader must surrender something.

This is most evident in the case of the critic's analysis of Hervey's poems. It should be evident that these poems move together; are on a related theme, and perhaps are part of a sequence. In which case, certain key-words are bound to recur. The vivisection of the poems has left none of this evident. The suggestion that Mr. Hervey was indulging in the same playing with erotic symbolism as other poets is most unfair.

The result can only be seen as too-hasty an assessment, arising, no doubt, from the fact that Mr. Reid the critic is more prolific, and achieves print more easily than our poets. In the period in which he was reading this book for review, he chaired the ZB review session, appeared on it as critic, wrote the review sections for two weeklies and a monthly, and has printed other reviews in other publications. All this as well as lecturing! Mr. Reid is something of a professional critic, much too busy to be capable of the surrender of which I spoke.

**LOUIS JOHNSON**  
(Wellington).

## REPETITION OF TALKS

Sir,—May I venture a slight difference with your radio critic "Loquax" about the return of talks from 4YA in either morning or evening sessions? Several of my listening friends and I agree that a repetition of talks is a good thing, especially if the repeats are close to the originals. The subject is fresh in our minds. We cannot always follow the whole series at one time of the day, and are delighted to notice that we can complete our listening through rebroadcasts in a morning session. With Olga Sansom's delightful Stewart Island series I got two in the Saturday morning sessions from 4YA, one in an evening, and this morning have been pleased to pick up the first one (hitherto missed) from Invercargill. Friends who are working during the day enjoyed Margot Ross in the evening, at an hour when as a busy mother, I couldn't listen quietly. Then I was pleased to get her in a women's morning session soon after I had been told of the talks, when I had a quiet kitchen in which to listen. From my point of view, I really welcome these repetitions.

**G. L. SUTHERLAND (Clinton).**

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

**I.H. (Whangarei).**—That programme is not included in the BBC Transcription Service.

**Just Another Dalbeattie-ite (Hamilton).**—Many thanks.

**Ros Fan (Wellington).**—Edmundo Ros is the son of Anglo-Venezuelan parents, and is a naturalised British subject.

**Verity (Dunedin).**—Cannot print letters which have appeared elsewhere.

**F.P. (Wellington).**—Sorry; too long.

**Harding Brown (Sumner).**—(1) Recruitment of the Armed Services is a necessary object of official policy, and radio as well as press and poster publicity legitimately serves it. (2) Not unfair to other Departments of State in any way; they buy time when they need it and are given publicity without charge as the occasion requires.

**D. Osborne (Hastings).**—Professor Oliphant's recorded address was broadcast from 2YC later in the week of its delivery. It will be broadcast from 3YC and 4YC at 9.30 p.m. on Monday, June 28.

**R. L. Harris (Levin).**—Because these variety shows run in series, and series run out. Another later, as soon as it's available.

**Plain Housewife (Wanganui).**—All the English ones possible; American, unavailable; the Australian ones come from several different production studios. Unlucky coincidences, seemingly. If they recur, please give instances.

**C.D. (Manurewa).**—Sorry; it is often difficult to fit them in.

## PARLIAMENT ON THE AIR

**J. H. ENSOR**, who appears on the cover of this issue, is one of the four broadcasting officers who will sit in the broadcasting booth at the House of Representatives during the coming session of Parliament, which begins at 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, June 22. When Parliament is on the air the Parliamentary broadcasting officer has the task of balancing the microphones as different members stand up to speak, so that their words come through "loud and clear" to listeners. He is seated before a control panel equipped with switches and knobs controlling the 19 microphones in the House. He also announces the names of Members as they begin to speak, and is assisted in this by a list of the probable speakers of the day which is supplied to him beforehand by the Parliamentary whips.