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NSS DEPUTATION MEETS ITV CHIEF

A DEPUTATION from the National Secular Society met Lord Aylestone, Chairman of the Independent Television Authority, at ITV headquarters in Knightsbridge on Wednesday, December 20. The deputation comprised Miss Brigid Brophy, Mr George Melly and Mr David Tribe.

They submitted a case for there being more regular opportunity on Independent Television for the specific expression of Secularist views in relation to present-day social and ethical issues.

In a joint press statement issued by the ITA and NSS it was reported that: "After hearing the views expressed, and after some discussion of them, Lord Aylestone undertook to give the matter further consideration and to discuss the whole question with the Independent Television companies at the next opportunity".

The NSS have made deputations to the BBC in the past, but this was their first deputation to the ITA. As previously announced (FREETHINKER, December 22) a deputation from the Humanist Broadcasting Council met Lord Hill, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the BBC, on December 12. The British Humanist Association and NSS will shortly be issuing a joint statement relating to Humanist Broadcasting.

BHA AND HUMAN RIGHTS

THE British Humanist Association is beginning Human Rights Year by making its first official statement on Vietnam, and by helping an unmarried mothers' action group to get off the ground. The BHA's local groups will be arranging their own activities in support of the Year.

The Statement on *Western Involvement in Vietnam* has been sent to Mr Wilson, Mr George Brown and the US Ambassador. It calls for the cessation of bombing attacks upon North Vietnam, and for HM Government to come out in open opposition to them.

The BHA is also to give practical help and advice to 'Mothers in Action', a new group working to improve life for the unmarried mother, as a contribution to the third Main Objective of

the UK Human Rights Campaign—'Eliminating all forms of discrimination against women'. The group's independence will not be prejudiced in any way, and its membership will consist mainly of the unmarried mothers themselves.

SOCIAL AND MORAL EDUCATION

THE series of talks organised by the National Secular Society under the title 'Social and Moral Education' terminated on December 15 when David Tribe (NSS President) spoke at the final meeting held, like the previous three in the series, at Conway Hall, London.

At the first meeting (November 3) Michael Duane, a College of Education lecturer and former headmaster of Risinghill School, spoke about the 1944 Education Act and its implications and effects. He made the point that there were no religious clauses in the Act as first drafted but that these were added in deference to the Tories, thus distinguishing religious education from all other educational subjects in that it was given special legislation. Those who insisted on the Clauses demanded a daily act of corporate worship and daily 'indoctrinal' instruction. Mr Duane stressed that 'social' and 'moral' education were necessarily the same thing and that an artificial distinction had been created. The second speaker (November 17) was Diane Munday, a member of the BHA Education Committee, and she dealt mainly with the present difficult situation that teachers, children and parents find themselves in. Mrs Munday related some of the problems she, as a parent of children at

school, had to contend with and showed the inadequacy and injustice of the present 'opting-out' clauses.

Maurice Hill, the author of *Moral Education in Secondary Schools—A Suggested Syllabus* and teacher at Ealing Grammar School spoke at the third meeting (December 1). Mr Hill asked what common morality could there be for a divided people, and explained that while most people have a morality sanctioned by the 'common good', Christians adhere to a system of morality sanctioned in the name of God by age-old religious doctrines. Division was thus caused and could only be rectified by removing from the school syllabus the teaching of a religious morality which taught 'non-facts' as facts and employed punishment (and the threat of future punishment) as a means of establishing such morality. Mr Hill advocated that children be prepared to play a responsible part in a democratic society by being educated within a democratic system in which the child is restrained only by the needs of others and is conditioned only for freedom.

Finally Mr Tribe, author of *Religion and Ethics in Schools*, rounded off the series by running over all the various aspects of religious education and presenting the Secular-Humanist proposal as a desirable alternative to the present arrangement.

BUDDHISM AT LUTON

AT their public meeting in December, the Luton Humanist Group heard a talk on Buddhism given by a local resident, Phyllida Cumin. In her talk, Mrs Cumin gave an account of the evolution of Buddhism, the background of Buddha's teachings and an outline of the various Buddhist sects.

At their next meeting, January 11, there will be a talk on 'Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls' by C. R. Watson.

Report from: Clive H. Godfrey (Press and Publicity Officer, LHG).

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. Telephone HOP 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, MCRAE and MURRAY.
Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.: Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.
Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.
Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

- Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Regency House, Oriental Place, Brighton, Sunday, January 7th, 5.30 p.m.: CECIL BALLANTINE, "Humanism and Religious Poetry".
Belfast Humanist Group, War Memorial Building, Waring Street, Monday, January 8th, 8 p.m.: R. E. PARKER, "Evolution and its Implication to Society".
Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Sunday, January 7th, 6.30 p.m.: GILLIAN HAWTIN, "Is Secularism Outdated?".
Luton Humanist Group, Carnegie Room, Central Library, Thursday, January 11th, 8 p.m.: C. R. WATSON, "Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls".
Manchester Humanist Society, 36 George Street, Wednesday, January 10th, 7.30 p.m.: WINIFRED WHITELEY, "A Rational Approach to Sex".
South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, January 7th, 11 a.m.: Lord SORENSON, "Personal Ethics and Social Conflict"; Tuesday, January 9th, 6.45 p.m.: Dr JOHN DAVOLL, "Our Future—Utopia or Nightmare?".
West Ham Branch NSS, Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead, London, E11. Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.
West Kent Branch NSS, Public Library, The Drive, Sevenoaks. Public meetings on the first Wednesday of the month at 8 p.m.

PERHAPS TO LIBERTY

Jean Straker

PERHAPS because a handful of House of Commons Members actually care about individual freedom—perhaps because there are more freethinkers (in the *lower case* sense of that word) in this parliament than any other—perhaps because there are some 'liberty-loving' ministers, who, as Norman Lever said in the debate on the *Liberties of the Subject* (December 1, 1967) wish this Government to represent a 'free and independent' people—perhaps because Billy Hamling had a Bill ready-made to present, while others weren't so ready—perhaps because Cyril Black couldn't muster enough support to filibuster Quintin Hogg's unopposed *Maintenance Orders Bill* long enough to leave insufficient time for a following debate (though he did very well himself with two columns of *Hansard* to support a degree of 'compassion for illegitimate children')—perhaps because Mr Speaker made it clear that he had a sense of the value of time ("Order. Interventions prolong speeches")—perhaps because it was Friday, December 8, and there were other pressing demands on the time of Members—the House of Commons in a rare demonstration of urgency and skill gave Ted Willis's Sunday Entertainments Bill its Second Reading by 29 votes to 18 in an effort and haste to catch up with the secular habits of the masses ("Many Honorary Members", said Billy, "will know what I said to the National Secular Society")—perhaps because it is Human Rights Year . . .

* * *

THE PROGRESSIVE LEAGUE

THE three following resolutions were passed at the recent Annual General Meeting held by the Progressive League at Conway Hall, London.

1. RELIGION IN SCHOOLS

This Annual General Meeting of the Progressive League calls for the abolition of the act of worship and religious indoctrination in county schools in favour of social and moral education.

2. VIETNAM

This Annual General Meeting of the Progressive League calls for Her Majesty's Government to implement the resolution passed at the Labour Party Conference dissociating this country from American policy in Vietnam and urging the unconditional cessation of bombing in North Vietnam.

3. THE SAINSBURY REPORT

This Annual General Meeting of the Progressive League welcomes the report of the Sainsbury Committee on the pharmaceutical industry and urges the Government to put into effect the positive recommendations of the Report. It believes however that research into the discovery and use of drugs should be conducted by bodies without financial interest in the promotion of such drugs and therefore urges that this work should be primarily the responsibility of the Government working through the Universities, the National Health Service, research institutes and other non-profit-making bodies.

The first Resolution has long been part of the PL policy but it was thought worthwhile to re-emphasise it.

* * *

OLD NICK ?

THE start of a preliminary hearing in the City Court at Buffalo (New York, USA) was delayed recently when court officers found that the Bible used for swearing in witnesses had been stolen. Court personnel said the Bible was the second stolen from the courtroom in a month.



THE JESUS MYTH

IN our French contemporary, *La Raison*, a professor of philosophy reviews a new book, *La Fable de Jesus-Christ*, by Guy Fau.

More and more students join the 'mythological' school which asserts that Jesus is not an historical person but one of the many mythical personifications of the Sun, born as a babe in the Winter Solstice, whose adolescence in the Spring Equinox represents the resurrection of Life and Nature (Easter is still not celebrated at a fixed date in the calendar) and whose special day is the Sun-day. The Gospels, admittedly written over a century after the presumed event of the crucifixion, are unreliable and even contradict each other, so that the late Prosper Alfarc wrote: "Somebody unknown, whose name is uncertain, taught something or other about a Kingdom of God, as predicted by the Prophets, and then died, nobody knows how or when, on a cross for some unknown motif". But Pope Leo X (1513-1521) is reputed to have told Cardinal Bembo, his secretary: "For centuries it is known how profitable to us and the Church has been the fable of Jesus the Christ". And in his *History of the Popes*, M. Lachatre asserts that this very Pope did not believe in an historical Jesus but saw in him another personification of the pagan sungod Mithras.

THE CHRISTIAN ERA

In 1927 I published, in Vienna, a book (*Biblischer Stumfsinn*) a collection of dates and events in the Scriptures which make no sense—in which, *inter alia*, I confronted the Biblical dates with the facts of history, showing that if scriptures were historically reliable, Jesus ought to have been born either '4 Before Christ' or '6 after his birth' (see FREETHINKER, May 1, 1949, for more particulars). Our 'Christian Era' is wholly unfounded but was forced upon Europe by Charlemagne; therefore the habit grows to put plus (+) or minus (—) signs before historical dates after or before the 'zero point' of our calendar system. This is how the error arose:

"Dionysius Exiguus, Scythian monk, . . . lived in Rome c 500-550. . . . He was famous for his contributions to ecclesiastical chronology and canon law. When called upon to construct a new Easter cycle, he abandoned the era of Diocletian and (wrongly) accepting 753 A.U.C. as the year of the Incarnation he introduced the system still in use" (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*).

The Code A.U.C. (*Ab Urbe Conditia*) relates numbers measuring the time in years from the traditional founding of the city of Rome in 753 B.C. This is radically wrong since Rome was neither founded nor "built in a day"; it simply grew like other settlements.

A Soviet study (see my article *A Soviet Book on the Origin of Christianity* in the FREETHINKER, August 23, 1963) traces the beginnings of Christian hagiography—and in particular the Gospel stories—to Jewish settlements abroad, especially in Asia Minor, by people who no longer were closely familiar with the real conditions of and in Palestine, hence the many howlers and contradictions. There existed gospel stories galore, until the Nicean Council (+325)—which in fact codified the Christian religion—selected four and rejected the others because, as Irene put it, they have to correspond to the four cardinal points of the ecliptic. Astrology, in fact, is the explanation of the whole Jesus myth.

Accordingly, the oldest parts of the Bible know only of

Jesus the God, but the historical founder of the Christian sect, Paul, during one of his apoplectic crises had a vision and expressly declared that he merely preached 'Christ celestial' not the Man (Gal. 2). And no crucified human being is depicted before +325; it is merely the cross standing next to the lamb (e.g. in the St Peter catacombs in Salzburg).

THE FICTITIOUS MAN

If there ever was a man acting as Christ, he did not write what he said; nor did his twelve (solar) disciples who, as the Gospels assert, were illiterate. The hotch-potch of sayings didn't constitute a proper doctrine—that is to say before +325—and fundamentalists stand on a more shaky ground with their freely translated quotations of sayings written down 120-150 years later. To which must be added the difficulty of expressing, in Western language, oriental ideas couched in the eastern way of speech.

Impossible also is the whole crucifixion story which is said to have taken place during the Jewish Passah feast when no Tribunal or Sanhedrin could have sat, let alone condemned anybody to suffer a strictly Roman penalty.

Another late accretion is the traditional likeness of a Westernised Jesus. No bust or picture—purporting to be a true likeness—of Jesus exists, nor for that matter could one exist of Don Quixote, Hamlet or William Tell. And yet tradition has fixed their characteristics in such a way as to allow anybody to 'recognise' their faces, despite the fact that such personages never really existed.

OBITUARIES

WE have learned of the tragic death of Barbara Khan aged 20 years who, together with her fiance, was killed in a road accident in Ceylon last November shortly before they were due to marry. This news has come as a shock to her many friends in this country, some of whom have written to us expressing their sorrow. Mr and Mrs Ebury described her as "a pretty, vivacious, enthusiastic and intelligent recruit to young Freethought" and describe how she attended meetings at Tower Hill in her very early teens. She later spoke from the platform and, after moving with her parents to Australia, she spoke on Secularism in Sydney also. Her aunt and a friend have joined the National Secular Society and, in a letter accompanying their subscriptions, her aunt wrote: "Although we have been meaning to join for some years—we are 100 per cent atheists—the tragic loss of my niece this week has brought me to the point. . . . She sent me this form and much other literature from time to time. . . . I feel this is the best thing we can do in her memory which she would have liked. . . . the world is poorer for the loss of such an intelligent girl". We understand Miss Khan is to be taken back to Australia for burial by the parents of her fiance. Her own parents moved back to this country last autumn.

AT the age of 68 years Dr Louis Light died on December 4. He received his early education at Manchester and later took his Ph.D. at the University of Zurich. He was an Associate of the Royal Institute of Chemistry. In later life he also became a distinguished linguist and was well known as a translator of German and Russian technical works. He was a founder-member, and for the past two years President of the Tees-side Humanist Group; a member and keen supporter of the National Secular Society and regular reader of the FREETHINKER.

He is survived by his wife and only daughter. A kindly personality, he will be sadly missed in many quarters. The Secular Funeral Service, held at the Middlesbrough Crematorium, was conducted by his friend Mr J. H. Gaundry on December 7.

CHRISTIAN ACTION, HUMANIST ACTION, EVERYBODY'S ACTION NEEDED

Kit Mouat

THERE ARE NO religious or philosophical beliefs, alas, which act as a preventive for Multiple ('Disseminated') sclerosis: the disease which (in the days of 'consumption' and 'infantile paralysis') used to be known as 'creeping paralysis'. But Mrs Megan du Boisson (one of its victims) could not be more attractive or stimulating if she were as able-bodied as a seaman. Her five-foot nothing exudes initiative and optimism, and the purpose to which she has put her intermittent strength is as admirable as is her courage. It was in 1965 that she helped to found 'DIG' the 'Disablement Income Group', which is now a nation-wide organisation, at two levels, 'charitable' in its service and fund raising, and 'political' in its action groups.

DIG defines 'disablement' as *The medically ascertained defect, mental or physical, resulting in the long-term incapacity for work.* And the object of DIG is to achieve recognition of severe disability as a category (*irrespective of its cause*) for which proper provision is made. And to secure the payment of a National Disability Income for all severely disabled persons ordinarily resident in the UK.

Did you know that:

A man 100 per cent disabled as a direct result of his paid work, married, with two children, irrespective of earnings is entitled to a maximum of £26 per week; whereas a man similarly disabled from other causes (also married, with two children) only gets £9 8s. per week; while the house-

wife, employed full time in the home and disabled by accident or disease, is entitled to precisely NOTHING? If she goes to hospital, our society will pay up to £50 per week for her bed, and will take the children 'into care' of an authority at the cost of perhaps another £8 each per week. There is also public money to keep this disabled wife in a 'home'; but if she decides to stay and look after her family, she gets, I repeat, NOTHING AT ALL towards the heavy burden of expense resulting from her disability. Even in Switzerland, where women don't yet have the right to vote, the government provides a pension for the disabled wife and mother! It is obviously ideal that such a woman should remain at home just as long as possible, and the husband may give up his own job in order to care for her and the children. He must then depend on social security, for there will be no other money coming into the home. One man who was himself disabled asked, "Why doesn't the government shoot us? . . . other countries look after their disabled people, but in Britain we are punished . . ." And then one reads in the paper about a young woman, tied to a wheel chair for life as the result of a car accident, being awarded £25,000 for her injuries. It just doesn't make sense.

DIG quotes Baroness Woolton as saying that what most people with problems want is not more help from social workers, but more cash. Only money, DIG points out, can provide 'the dignity of choice'. We are learning that the best way to help others is not to distribute charity in return for thanks, but to provide the opportunity for the maximum independence. It must be hard enough to accept limited mobility. To expect the disabled to beg as well is surely too much.

Thanks to DIG the 'climate of opinion' is already clearing up. Once this particular and desperate need is generally realised the money available can be more fairly distributed.

Of course disablement doesn't wipe out the more universal human problems concerning marriage, parenthood, sex and loneliness. I am grateful that Megan du Boisson is mentioning the Humanist Letter Network (International) in her *Newsletter*, so that we may hope gradually to make contact with the disabled who share our own Humanist convictions and ideals.

I have never hesitated to scorn the excuse that Germans did not know what was going on in their local concentration camps, but I have now been shamed into realising that I do not know how many disabled people live in my own locality, nor whether they are adequately served by laundries and Meals on Wheels, or if they get priority for their children at nursery schools. I don't know how the housing situation affects them, nor if the Home Help service helps enough. But within twelve hours of Mrs du Boisson talking in Haywards Heath there were realistic plans for starting a branch of DIG. Perhaps you have one near you? If not, and if you are interested, you can always write to the Hon. Secretary, Mrs Megan du Boisson, Rellen House, Busbridge Lane, Godalming, Surrey. And if you agree with DIG's proposals, do write to your MP and make sure he is supporting them.

AGNOSTICS ADOPTION SOCIETY seeks second caseworker for adoption placements in London and the Home Counties. Post would include casework with unmarried mothers, foster placements for babies and work with adopters. Salary for trained person within range of £1,295-£1,740, but newly trained caseworker or graduate with relevant experience will also be considered. Applicants need not be agnostic and should be able to drive a car. Apply to Adoptions Administrator, AAS, 69 Chaucer Road, London, SE24.

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square, London, WC1
(Underground: Holborn)

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1st, 7.30 p.m.

PUBLIC FORUM

THE RIGHT TO DIE

Speakers include

NORMAN ST. JOHN-STEVAS, MP

DAVID TRIBE

LADY STOCKS

Chairman:

Archdeacon

EDWARD CARPENTER

Organised by the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

Telephone: 01-407 2717

FIFTY QUESTIONS ON THE NATURE OF THINGS: I

Charles V. Bryan, LL.B.

ISN'T this super-animal called "Man" a strange, even though familiar Being? Hasn't he all the good and bad attributes of the lower animals? Isn't he as animal-like in his instincts? Doesn't he outdo all others in cruelty, stubbornness, greed, acquisitiveness? Does any other animal surpass him in the ability and willingness and insane enjoyment of torturing living things, even of his own kind?

Outside of a tiny grey smudge called a cortex in his cranium, and an opposing thumb, does he differ in any major degree from other beasts—at least in his physical make-up?

Since the times of the cavemen, has human nature changed in the slightest, under the thin skin of civilisation? Isn't "civilisation" simply a matter of public policy gradually evolved for the preservation of the human race—to guard Man against himself? Is this civilisation, or co-operative society, more highly developed than the instinctive co-operation of ant- or bee-life?

What about that one supreme thing which distinguishes Man from beast? And why shouldn't Man have developed this brain, so superior to animal brains? Doesn't every animal specialise in some one faculty—one animal in strength, another in teeth, another in horns—night prowlers in specialised eyesight—birds in wings—cat-creatures in claws and teeth—some in thick skulls, others in long necks or snouts—some, like frogs, in big feet? Some in feathers or fur, others in hard shells, some in electric shock ability—some in repulsive odours, some in sharp beaks, poisoned fangs, swift legs, sense of smell, thick hides? Some, like dinosaurs, in sheer bulk—others in procreative ability?

Studies of strata tell us Man came late on the scene. What was left for him, the weakest of animals, to specialise in, except brain? Certainly the others had specialised in every conceivable alternate choice. In fact, brain was the only bodily part left which hadn't been monopolised. Would Nature, which had highly specialised every other animal part, neglect one and develop the rest? Is there anything supernatural in the development of this blob of nerves and mush called brain?

Wouldn't it have been strange if no animal had developed this one neglected organ?

If you take away the cortex from his brain, will not Man act by instinct alone, differing in no degree in his reflexes from the beast?

Has the nature of any beast changed through the ages? Can anyone prove that human nature has changed since time immemorial? Aside from convention (custom) and threats of punishment by expedient man-made laws, isn't Man as self-centred, cruel and reckless as his bygone ancestors? Isn't the threat of punishment for wrong-doing the only bar which holds the rapacious instincts of Man in check?

Despite dire punishments, don't we see men revert to jungle types every day? Evidently the evil desires of the moment blot out fear of reprisal.

Other animals are never accused of resembling Man. Also, we never hear of a dog which resembles a snake, or a pig resembling a lion or eagle. Yet many men resemble beasts in appearance and disposition. Haven't we known of men, whose facial expressions resemble wolves, foxes, lions, rats, dogs or pigs?

Since, even in spite of the doctrine of a life for a life or an eye for an eye, society has been unable to change Man's nature or fully restrain his acquisitive, sexual, murderous or other propensities, wasn't it a clever—and necessary—expedient to invent a Superior Being—one who had eyes not only sharp enough to watch a sparrow's fall but keep watch on Man in the most secret places—a Being which might reward or punish him in this life, but also set a torch to his hide in the next world?

Isn't that one of the reasons why we have a god—and gods? Doesn't this, by the way, provide a fat living for a part of the human race, together with fine structures, tax-free, in which to carry on? Is this favoured part of the race content with its much-publicised Public Eye in the heavens? Or has the confessional been invented as a sort of multi-faceted Private Eye in case the heavenly counterpart slept, or might possibly wink, at human frailty?

Isn't the Christian god termed "Almighty"? Is he? If so, he can create anything, do anything, even change natural law and human nature.

He is said to have created a four-cornered earth and to have provided winds for its four corners. He is said to have created a Big Light to illuminate earth by day, and a lesser light for the dark hours. As a by-product, according to Genesis, he "created stars also".

Assuming he, God, created everything, did he create Eternity? Did he create Space? Did he create the innumerable universes?

If he created Eternity, what was in its place before that creation? As to Space—did Space have to be created? If so what existed before? Did he create himself?

Thoreau said: "He who wastes Time injures Eternity?" How can that be since there is no Time in Eternity?

It is often said the human mind cannot grasp Eternity. As we face forward toward the future, anyone can easily grasp the fact that Eternity will never end. If one faces toward the past, cannot he as easily grasp the fact that Eternity had no beginning—also that whatever period of man-made time, our forbears, or our descendants, happen to be in, we are never anywhere but in the centre of Eternity? The universes that came into being billions of our "light years" ago, and those which will supersede the stars we now see, have been and will be smack in the centre of Eternity.

Many humans have reached the Biblical span of three-score years and ten. Some are centenarians. To the rising generation these people are antiques. The 1920s, the Purple Nineties, are of the past. The time of Christ is in the distant past. The cavemen lived in the dimness of prehistoric times. The hundred million years of dinosaurs is a vast, practically incomprehensible age we can dream about, but otherwise lump it as a unit of figurative speech, even though a vaguely measurable period of what we call Time.

Those who speak of a creation of 6,000 years ago have no understanding of Eternity and what might have and probably did happen in its course.

Instead of a period of a mere 6,000 years, let us take a larger unit of "time"—say 500 billions of years. This vast unit would not amount to one second in Eternity, for Eternity recognises no such thing as Time.

Let us take a larger unit, say a trillion raised to the trillionth power, and apply that figure to a term of light years. Still, this would not be the breadth of a second in measuring Eternity, for *Eternity has no measure!*

Considering the above facts, isn't anything and everything possible in the interchange of Energy and Matter during Eternity? The constellations we see at night in our skies were not there in ages past. If we could be transported backward in Eternity would we not see countless other stars and universes which have not only ceased to exist, but have been resolved into an atomic state and transformed over and over into other worlds now gone? And will not this process go on forever? Will not this Earth pass away, and the stars we now see in our heavens disappear?

In the vastness of what has happened during Eternity, does it not appear that our race of "intelligent" beings is nothing new—that intelligent, possibly human-like beings have come and gone throughout the Universes—that we are not unique?

THE MILITANT ATHEIST

I AM tired of hearing that the old-style Rationalist is out-of-date, that all the old battles have been won and we no longer need a militant Atheism. Christians, always quick to relinquish ground when science is cutting it from beneath their feet, are adopting a more liberal, tolerant attitude—even to the extent of joining in 'dialogue' with some Humanists. Traditional beliefs are being revised, re-interpreted, 'modernised'—we all know now that our earlier brethren were incorrect in literally interpreting scripture stories such as Adam and Eve which were *obviously* meant metaphorically. Modernists are asserting themselves and, as a result of the tireless efforts of Secularists in the past, traditional religious ideas are being re-thought and internal criticism increased.

Is this just cause to relax our struggle against dogma and discrimination? I think not. Certainly there is a new liberalising element at work in many high places. But letters to the *Times* or *Guardian* from such famous theologians as Charles Davis and Herbert McCabe do not reflect the official nor the general Christian attitude. To discover the opinions of the average believer we must turn to the *Daily Mirror*, or the numerous local newspapers, more in touch with the masses than the intelligentsia.

What do we find when we refer to these sources? Last July ITV's *World in Action* team devoted a programme to Religious Education. For days afterwards letters from Christians flooded the editorial office of my own local newspaper (the *Manchester Evening News*). Support for a revision of the 1944 Education Act? Not on your life! A typical example:

"I was shocked to hear of young people objecting to religious teaching in their schools. We are supposed to live in a Christian country, so why shouldn't it be taught?

We have our example today of the state of the world through thrusting God out of our lives—nothing but hate and greed for power.

I hope religious teaching will continue and show the world what England can do with the help of God."

This masterpiece of eloquence was followed the next evening by a letter from "A Believer", who was even more

Is not Space as illimitable as Eternity? It couldn't have been created—it needed no creator—it always was and is. There could be no boundary to Space. Certainly there is a limit to Matter and to the worlds which occupy Space. We can see differences in size of visible worlds, and limits to constellations. And if we could travel beyond ultimate Matter, what would we find? The answer is "nothing". And Space, of itself, is just that.

The human race is of no concern to anything but itself. It has no part in Eternity any more than Time has. Our human race will run its course, barring cosmic or Man-made cataclysm. And, like Tennyson declares, in one of his tragic poems:

"The homeless planet at length will be wheeled
Through the silence of Space,
Motherless evermore of an ever-vanishing race;
When the last worm shall have writhed its last,
And its last brother-worm shall have fled
From the dead fossil skull that is left
In the rocks of an Earth that is dead."

(To be continued)

Michael Gray

anxious to demonstrate Christian charity in action:

". . . it filled me with disgust to hear schoolboys being asked what they thought of religion being compulsorily taught in day schools. Why not ask them what they think of all the other subjects . . . ?

It is the birthright of every child to be given the chance to learn the Christian faith and at maturity they will be solely responsible for the consequences if rejected. But if the birthright is denied the children they will have no choice to make.

If I had my way I would not allow any man or woman to be a school-teacher who is not a Christian . . . (My italics.)

On another occasion the editor considered the following epistle so enlightened as to be worth featuring, headlined "THE DAY ENGLAND FORGOT HER GOD":

". . . Among my memories of . . . my teacher . . . is just one sentence which has stayed with me. . . . She told the class that the day England forgot her God she would go the way all the great nations of the past have gone.

. . . Are we living to see her words come true?

. . . Some MPs wish to make filthy practices legal because they are done in secret. They vote for the slaughter of unborn babies yet allow murderers to live."

Thus are the sentiments of one Christian expressed on Homosexual and Abortion Law Reform and the abolition of capital punishment. The letters quoted earlier illustrate some Christian attitudes to RI and demonstrate that even today some would persecute unbelievers, depriving them of their means of livelihood.

I do not suggest that these letters are typical of the general Christian attitude, but they do still represent the views of many and expose the false optimism that seems to be rife among Humanists today. My own cynical nature inclines me to the view that religious prejudice and discrimination will be with us as long as organised religion itself is. And that will not disappear until Man has matured emotionally in pace with his scientific advancement, which I personally doubt will ever happen. However, it is about time that even those who take a more optimistic view realised that that day has not yet come, and it will be a long, long time yet before we can afford to do without the militant Atheist—however much of an embarrassment he may be to his more faint-hearted colleagues.

OUT OF THIS WORLD Margaret Knight

THROUGHOUT most of its history, the Roman Catholic church has been concerned to safeguard its members' prospects in the world to come, rather than to improve the quality of human life in this world. Recently, however, there have been signs of a change of attitude—which cynics may suspect to be not unconnected with the challenge of Communism in the more backward Catholic countries.

However this may be, the Pope's Easter Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* shows a surprising move away from other-worldliness towards a concern with human welfare here and now. It contains none of the usual pronouncements about the ennobling effects of suffering and poverty. Instead we find a call for a "new humanism" (though this is carefully distinguished from "isolated", *i.e.* secular humanism), and an inspiration towards "building a world where every man, no matter what his race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed on him by other men or by natural forces over which he has not sufficient control".

This attitude is strongly supported by the left wing Catholics represented by the new periodical *Slant*; and it is equally strongly opposed by the Old Guard of the church. Thus Arnold Lunn declared recently in *The Tablet* (January 28, 1967) that "This preoccupation with economics and social problems is evidence of declining belief in the primary mission of the church: the salvation of souls and the conversion of those who now reject the supernatural".

Whether the traditionalists or the self-styled "new humanists" will prevail remains to be seen, and at this critical point of the church's history it is especially interesting to have an objective survey of the attitude of the (presumably) average Catholic. This is provided by a Catholic psychologist from London University, Dr Monica Lawlor, who in a book significantly entitled *Out of this World* (Stagbooks, 1965, 15s) has described an experimental study of the "value-judgments" of some 300 young Catholics, most of them students. They were given a well-known standard test (the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values) and another test specially designed to investigate their idea of the Christian ideal. The results may be given in the author's own words.

"[The idea of the Christian ideal] embraces an emphasis on the importance of observing the Church's requirements for public worship and the observance of rules generally. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God', they very properly affirm, but 'thy neighbour as thyself' has an altogether weaker flavour. Just as religion is private and personal . . . so the whole Christian life is seen as ideally little concerned with the wider community (pp. 16-17). . . . The Good Christian is seen as theocentric, concerned with his own conscience, but not concerned with the personal virtues and social involvements that characterise much of the English way of life at its best (pp. 62-3). . . . What does emerge very clearly is the essentially private nature of the religion they hold. . . . Clearly they are in no danger of being swept into an heretical over-concern with works (p. 130)."

The "new humanism" appears to be still over the horizon.

Another View on 'SOME OFF-HAND SAYINGS ABOUT HUMANISTS'

Joseph H. Hird

IN saying that these are 'of no value' the editor is mistaken.* Humanism is 'an anvil that will wear out many hammers', and prove its firmness.

It is right to reject a neologism if it merely adulterates the language, but necessary to accept it when the new thing or new thought cannot be accurately and neatly described otherwise. The term 'humanist' was justified. Some ideas are held in common by both humanists and the religious, but from different motives: the religious primarily to please God the Father, the humanist solely because he loves his brother.

R. Smith speaks of the 'religion of humanists'. Such expressions as 'Religion without revelation', 'Communism is a religion', 'Christian humanism', are mistaken. To be religious is to believe in a supernatural power. This is irrelevant to wide and deep thinking about existence.

' . . . the very mention of death brings about thoughts of despair, so they (the humanists) tell us.' One would like sources for this. Epicurus, quoted as saying, ' . . . death means nothing to us', adds, 'For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable . . . because it takes away the craving for immortality' (Letter to Menoeceus).

' . . . a happy death is a Humanist ideal', and so it should be. It would be inhuman to deny that death may be tragic, if brought about prematurely, by misfortune or folly, but it can be looked forward to with joy as the completion of a life well spent and a worthwhile task concluded. A humanist is like an actor in a play, glad of having had a role, and perhaps sorry that it was not longer, but accepting the fact that at a certain point he must leave the stage.

'Humanist philosopher' is not 'the biggest joke'. 'A blockhead humanist' is a contradiction in terms.

As for 'humanist censorship' and 'suppressing free expression', the appearance of his own article in the *FREETHINKER* disproves this. As a truth-seeker the humanist welcomes 'diametrically opposed' criticism. If there is truth in it, it will make him modify his views, if there is not, it will reassure him in his belief. On these grounds, R. Smith's attack is helpful.

* *FREETHINKER*, December 8.

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LETTERS

More Wagner

AS a matter of historic fact, there is no evidence that Richard Wagner was the kind of monster depicted by Mr P. G. Roy. As a man Wagner was not without some human faults and failings, but as an artist no man worked harder at his craft, or produced nobler results that can from time to time be seen and heard in all the great Opera Houses of the world. The notion that Wagner was in some mystical way responsible for Hitler is too preposterous to be discussed seriously. It is enough to point out that while Hitler was destroyed in the war of his own making, the post-war Bayreuth productions have given an entirely new meaning and significance to the works of the great composer.

Although Wagner was not an atheist by profession, he was certainly a freethinker and no humanist (despite Parsifal) could have been more "secular" than Richard Wagner. He was far more anti-clerical and anti-papist than he was anti-semitic. But the real enemy for Wagner through all his working life was the Church-State Authority, sometimes called The Establishment, against which he devoted all the force and power of his creative genius. In his supreme achievement, *The Ring*, Wagner brings to life and eventually to destruction all the sub-human greeds and fears and hatreds that block the way to human happiness. Life for Wagner was frequently a desperate struggle for existence but he enjoyed it to the full, and I doubt whether any life was more worth the effort required of it.

PETER CROMMELIN.

Bourgeois Arabs

IT should stand to reason that the political ideology of the Arabs cannot be that of a class-conscious proletariat but rather the one of an oil-profiteering bourgeoisie, coated with a transparent veneer of anti-imperialist slogans. However, for expansionist motives it fitted the books of the Soviet leaders to present these Arab nationalists as genuine socialists; they even made Nasser a 'Hero of the Soviet Union'.

If the lady who wrote from France as a self-appointed Cultural Attaché of the USSR can accept this as Socialist policy, I just cannot. The vile role of the USA imperialists requires no further comment. Now, however, the Soviet leaders too have their Vietnam, with armament deliveries, 'advisers', protective umbrella and all that, sent when Nasser the Fox pretended to be ready for a compromise with Israel. They are preventing a peaceful solution since if the Israelis were allowed to assist the Arabs, where would the Soviets then come in?

My concluding quotation from the radical review *Ramparts* summarised the position and was not taken out of context. Seeing the Russians in the role of the Americans as warmongers and Merchants of Death is nothing at which true Socialists can rejoice.

PERCY G. ROY.

"The humane standards . . ."

THE FREETHINKER is right to point out that a notable Humanist in Ireland spoke in favour of bullfighting not as a Humanist but as himself. But such expressions of retrogressive opinion from one such as himself do the Humanist movement great harm. In the same way as Methodism is damaged by the involvement of one of its well-known members, Lord Rank, in the vile sport of live hare coursing in England. All institutions and movements are judged by the actions of their members even when, as in the case of Humanism and Methodism, the humane standards of the respective bodies are beyond reproach.

GWENDOLEN BARTER.

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