

## The Humanist World Weekly

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### HUMAN SOCIETY AND SECTIONALISMS

IF some unearthly intelligence could be persuaded to come and study the causation of the troubles facing the human race and then submit proposals for preventing such possibilities as the wiping-out of living things on this planet, I am fairly sure that it would tell us that human beings are the greatest source of such dangers.

Granted, there are dangers from bacteria and viruses—perhaps even from insects—getting out of hand, but generally speaking we seem to have got all the threats of that kind thoroughly under control.

Neither do I think that there are any supernatural beings or forces at work in such a way as to destroy us all. Even those who profess to believe in "gods" or "devils" hesitate to suggest this sort of thing—and would probably end up in a mental asylum if they did.

No, the real danger to human survival rests with the kind of teachings and purposes which parents, or organisations approved by parents, work so hard to place in the minds of the young people in the world.

Try to think about what is happening in the world, as an "unearthly intelligence" might see it, and you will observe that although children may be born without racist prejudices, religious prejudices, sex prejudices, class prejudices, nationalist prejudices, etc., they are effectively infected with these ideas very quickly and are then ready to join sectional groups with conflicting purposes.

Of all the possible types of "sectionalism" that the minds of human beings are prone to embrace there can be little doubt that the most menacing of all are the local nationalisms, because, in every case of a real nationalism or local patriotism, we find a desire to be ready to kill the members of other nations if need be.

"Patriotisms are deadly killers!" is something which should be kept in mind when we hear persons—who might even profess to be humanists—upholding some kind of local patriotism.

Social psychologists should recognise this, but where are we to find even *one* social psychologist who has the courage to state this publicly. I certainly haven't heard of any and I certainly have not heard of any being allowed to explain the situation in the press or on any of the radio or TV programmes. Have you? Has anyone?

Let us therefore face the facts of the deadly dangers, of these sectionalisms to human society, and consider calmly how such sectionalisms are to be rooted out and alternative loyalties encouraged in the minds of the people in the world—loyalties which will unite and pacify the world instead of leaving it divided into dozens of conflicting sections—each of which is impoverishing itself with desperate efforts to provide itself with ever bigger loads of armaments with which to try to enforce its selfish interests on its neighbours.

Clearly we are concerned with nothing more nor less than ideas and purposes in the minds of people like ourselves. "Put Scotland First!" is a cry I hear in Scotland today—and it is typical of the short-sightedly stupid attitude of similar non-thinking people all over the world. Wherever we look we see people being encouraged to be ready to 'die for their nation'. It may be anywhere, Rhodesia, Israel, China, Australia, USA, France—you name any country you like and you will be speaking for a comfortable majority of the people of that section of the world when you say "You people are all willing to die for your country!"

Now 'willingness to die' means also 'willingness to kill' and thus we can see how the dangerous nature of sectionalist ideologies originates in the minds of people and works itself out in practice.

There is of course a good aspect to nationalisms. They have come into being as purposes which were, and still are, superior to selfish impulses and family feuds. This is probably why we find it difficult to criticise patriotisms. They are actually among the most unselfish influences which most people are capable of providing and when really great thinkers say openly "Patriotism is not enough" we have a clue to the situation which can remedy the bad effects of sectional patriotisms. The remedy is to teach people to acquire a *larger* patriotism which will provide people with a *common purpose* where presently they struggle and kill each other under the influence of their *conflicting purposes*.

"I want to see a better Scotland" says the short-sighted Scot—and in his blindness he will find himself stuck with Scottish military forces, Scottish passports and customs, Scottish religion, Scottish language, Scottish law and so on—and later realise that all this has been tried in the past and found wanting.

The obvious alternative is to *think big*—in terms of mankind and the universe—and thus say "I want to see a better world".

When this purpose is adopted all over the world and overcomes the appeals of local or sectional patriotisms we will then have sound hopes of establishing Human Society on a basis which makes world-wide co-operation possible.

If the local nationalist movements have served no other purpose they have shown how it is possible for the patriots of *any* area to close their ranks and work together to put their patriotism *first*. For instance there are both theists and atheists, capitalists and socialists, ex-Irish and ex-English, etc., *all* uniting in the SNP to promote Scottish patriotic ideals. The same thing can hold good with a *world national party* with the all-important advantage that world patriotism can bring together not just some of the people in a small locality but people *all over the world* and

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

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

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN and MCRAE.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.: Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Regency House, Oriental Place, Brighton, Sunday, May 5, 5.30 p.m.: Tea-party followed by Annual General Meeting.

Luton Humanist Group, Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton, Thursday, May 9, 8 p.m.: PAUL ROM, 'Is Democratic Education Possible?'

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, May 5, 11 a.m.: Lord SORENSON, 'The PROBLEM OF GOODNESS'.

## HUMAN SOCIETY AND SECTIONALISMS

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thus pave the way for the dismantling of national military forces with a view to setting up a system of human social law and order in the world as a whole!

If the survival of the human race is important—and I, for one, have elected to believe that it is—then human society also is important and the cults of sectionalisms must be shunned and destroyed by all intelligent and thinking men and women. Let us go forward together to create a far more just and enlightened society for mankind than has ever existed in any section or era in human history.

### NOTE

THE REVIEW of Avro Manhattan's *Catholic Power Today* which appeared in the FREETHINKER of April 26 omitted acknowledgement to the contributor—Elizabeth Collins. We apologise for this oversight.

## IN THE PUBIC INTEREST

Jean Straker

THE fact that words 'pubic hair' can now be printed in a national 'family' newspaper is an indication that the battle is nearly over and the myth dispersing. The fact that one no longer has to use such evasive terms as 'a certain area' or 'private parts' in place of a direct anatomical statement means that we are all growing up to accept our bodies for what they are.

This is a battle against imposed ignorance that I have been fighting for ten years—since, in fact, Roy Jenkins' 1959 Obscene Publications Act gave for the first time in our history a right of defence to the artist.

Since 1929, when it was established in a case involving some drawings by D. H. Lawrence that pubic hair was obscene in law—for most of my lifetime in fact—you just went to prison if you painted a picture or produced a photograph showing the details of the female or male pubis. The issue is still uncertain, although some significant decisions have been made with regard to my own work.

These are the decisions which John Trevelyan has referred to in continuing to exercise a censor's discretion on behalf of the film industry, for what he said at that press conference recently (reported by David Tribe in the FREETHINKER for April 19), to me was:

"Mr Straker, you are the reason for our caution."

He is a neighbour of mine in Soho-square and has now sent me a note which reads as follows:

"As you know, I think the time has come for certain issues to be raised, and I hope that ultimately this may lead to clarification that will be helpful both to you and to us.

"I am interested to see the photograph which gave you trouble ten years ago, and I shall be even more interested to see whether any newspaper reproduces it."

The photograph in question is called 'Sun Worship'. It shows a nude girl applying sun-tan oil to her body, which is partly tanned and partly white, where she had been previously wearing a bikini—and her pubic hair is there, where it ought to be. It has not been retouched to suggest a marble statue, it has not been hidden by drapery or shadows. The model is not apparently any more conscious of her nudity than she would be in her own bathroom, or at a nudist camp, where everybody is naked; she is not leering at the camera, she is not adopting any suggestive attitude. Yet the police have been chasing this study for nearly eleven years.

They seized copies of this picture last May, when it was published in the Oxford University Student Magazine, *Oxymoron*. The Oxford City Police referred the magazine to the Director of Public Prosecutions. But the editor of the magazine, Peter Adamson, had a trump card—he had the consent of the proctors—and it is very difficult to mount a prosecution against a student at Oxford if he has proctorial consent for his action. So the Director of Public Prosecutions, in the event, decided not to prosecute *Oxymoron*, and at the same time returned the copies of 'Sun Worship', which he had seized, to me.

I have now distributed copies of this study to the editors of national daily and Sunday newspapers. The public's opportunity of seeing the picture depends upon the legal advice each editor must take before he can publish it. This is the uncertainty of present-day censorship. It puts pre-censorship in the hands of the lawyers. This is what John

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# FORUM ON DIVORCE LAW REFORM

THE National Secular Society's forum on Divorce Law Reform, held at Conway Hall, London, April 18, was, as luck would have it, the worst attended and the most lively. Of those who attended, barely a hundred, about 80 per cent were women, among whom a large section were opposed to the Bill working its way through Parliament. And this was what the meeting was really about: the Bill sponsored by William Wilson, MP, who was among the speakers on the platform at this meeting.

Other speakers were Baroness Summerskill and Professor O. R. MacGregor. David Tribe, NSS President, was in the Chair.

Professor MacGregor saw the issue as "the permissibility for estranged couples to divorce and re-marry"; this Bill afforded "a licence to marry again". The Professor drew a quick sketch of the history of divorce over the last hundred years, attempting to show that the new Bill recognises equality between man and woman, between the rich and the poor. Divorce had been the luxury of the wealthy. Referring to the 200,000 children born and raised in illicit unions, he stressed the advantage the new Bill would be as a solution to the problems of illegitimacy and home environment. The new Bill recognised, for the first time as grounds for divorce, the "irretrievable breakdown" in a marriage. There were three main categories: where both parties want a divorce, where one party objects to divorce, and divorces deriving from the "3-year" and "5-year" clauses. This last was the most difficult, the main objection to the Bill being that the woman may suffer financially where her ex-husband re-marries and is unable to maintain two women. The danger was duo-directional: the husband of slender means, unable to satisfy the Court that he could support two women, would be refused a divorce on the three-, or five-year basis. There was no way in which the law could remedy the financial inequality between the various married couples; there was a danger—in this one respect—that the old inequality between the rich and the poor in the eyes of the law may remain. Professor MacGregor thought the Bill should stand as it was, but the State should guarantee financial support for the divorced wife.

Baroness Summerskill, who was known to have called

the Bill a "Casanova's Charter", and to be strongly opposed to it, argued that marriage was man's best, and most irreplaceable institution; all law relating to it was of supreme importance, and had to be 'good law'; this Bill was not. The Bill was man-made, man-supported, and served only the interests of the male. It was of some significance that the platform comprised three men and one woman; two supporting the Bill and one against it. It was of equal significance that of those who sufficiently cared about this Bill to attend the forum, four-fifths were women.

Mr Tribe reminded the audience that the NSS had always supported sexual equality, "votes for women", etc., and explained that Baroness Summerskill was invited to take a place on the platform not as a woman, but as an expert.

William Wilson, the next to speak, and conscious of the points previously made regarding sexual inequality, began by announcing that, as a representative of the constituency which was associated with Lady Godiva, he tended to be very conscious of women's rights and fearful of in any way contributing to sexual inequality. Of the eleven women on the Committee which met to consider the Bill, only four didn't support it. Generally, women support the Bill "three-to-one". An important advantage of the Bill was that it encouraged and facilitated reconciliation. Again, while the law at present allows divorce where one party is 'insane', the Bill's five-year clause would be of benefit where mental health may be regained. Mr Wilson regretted that the argument was a sex battle and stressed that the Bill recognised woman as an individual unit, not as the lesser part in a male-dominated marital union.

These were the opening speeches; the open argument between those on the platform which followed, together with the contributions from the audience, considerably increased the liveliness and the information imparted. Both Mr Wilson and Professor MacGregor had to depart a little before the meeting was due to end, but Baroness Summerskill stressed that she was ready and willing to go on until midnight thrashing-out the issues relating to this Bill. One sensed that the greater part of the audience also would have been just as willing to carry on.

## IN THE PUBIC INTEREST

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Trevelyan means when he says that certain issues need to be raised and clarified.

I have been able to get a little official guidance, for the last time I was prosecuted at Marlborough Street Magistrate's Court, the Metropolitan Magistrate, John Aubrey-Fletcher said:

"I have looked at Mr Straker's photographs and there is not the slightest doubt that a great deal of them have extremely artistic value and cannot be regarded as obscene or indecent at all.

"I am going to take the view which may be more advanced than courts above have taken: I don't believe or hold that the display of pubic hair is in itself either indecent or obscene."

A pronouncement of a magistrate is not, in itself, the law of the land—other magistrates can come to opposite decisions—but it does mean that progress is being made in getting rid of one of the silliest attitudes of censorship in our time.

## Humanist Humour

BEGINNING this month, the *Humanist* is to regularly feature cartoons by Abu whose thumbnail sketches are so familiar to readers of the *Guardian*. They will provide a humorous and lively commentary on everyday issues of interest to Humanists.

Abu will also be editing a collection of cartoons drawn from the world's newspapers relating to Vietnam. These will be published in book form next August by Pemberton under the title *Verdicts on Vietnam*.

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## CONFRONTATION

**IF you are concerned with the difference and discord between supernaturalism and naturalism—between superstition, occultism and religion, on the one hand, and atheistic Humanism on the other—and if it seems important to you that your views should be effectively defended and spread—then what follows may also be important to you. The "Freethinker" is to initiate a massive believer/non-believer confrontation through these pages, with no predetermined time-limit, in which your editor (a thoroughly convinced atheist) will be advocate for the believer, and in which you may play a full part.**

The Editor's personal view is that such a confrontation may go some way toward re-vitalizing this paper, and to compensate for the inadequacies of the paper in recent times; an inadequacy of which the Editor has been keenly aware. This new arrangement is no certain or perfect solution, but it has good possibilities. For them to be realised, your help, your knowledge and, in the early stages, your imagination is needed.

The arrangement for a confrontation follows much thought on what this paper should do, and how it should proceed. Certain questions arose, and, below, the answers the Editor proposed are set out. You are invited to consider and propose amendments to all that follows before the arrangement is set in progress.

*What is the major task before Humanism today?*

The Editor suggests Humanism has two main tasks: to justify and make acceptable a secular interpretation of the world and life, and to work for certain legislative (and other) changes where the present system, greatly brought about by religionists and justifiable only to the religious, is seen to be detrimental to human progress, welfare and happiness. We are working toward a world system, secular in viewpoint, in which every individual accepts responsibility for the welfare and happiness of every other individual; this is the ideal.

*What are the immediate tasks before Humanism?*

As well as working for particular reforms, we must cope with the opposition. Most Humanist campaigns meet with opposition from the religious. Religious propaganda, and religious apologetics, must be countered by Humanist propaganda and apologetics; by the arguments for Humanism.

*Christians (for instance) usually include arguments for Christianity in their propaganda, but perhaps Humanists should concentrate solely on advertising the 'common-sense' of their individual campaigns?*

Humanist campaigns appear to represent common sense often only to Humanists; they are acceptable only to those who have embraced a Humanist attitude. To relegate Humanism itself (with its fundamentally atheistic assumptions) to the background, is to obscure the link which connects the apparently disassociated campaigns (e.g. RI in schools, Abortion Law Reform, Conservation, etc.) and to obscure the views which validate the campaigns.

*Since atheism is felt to be odious even by many of the uncommitted, wouldn't it be better to emphasise the 'positive' aspects of Humanism and to avoid mention of atheism?*

Modern Humanism, the Humanism of our movement, is essentially atheist for all practical considerations; it assumes that this world is all and that man is on his own. Since Humanism is fundamentally atheistic, to try to hide this fact would be as unrealistic and as ineffective as it would be dishonest. The type of supporter we need could not so easily have the wool pulled over his eyes; he would question everything before lending his support. It is important to be honest from the start, to openly declare our atheism and be prepared to argue in its defence. We want no "upstairs-window-entrants" who would remain with us only until they tumbled our atheism, or, until a particular reform of personal interest had been won. The Humanist movement should comprise wholly of Humanists.

*What form should our propaganda take?*

Two parallel forms: one concerned with bringing attention to each new campaign, and the other concentrating on those issues which separate us from our opponents; that is, informing people about Humanism, from its atheistic fundamental assumptions to the loftiest ideals to which it aspires.

*The campaigns may only be acceptable to those who agree with the Humanist views and values. The "lofty ideals" may be acceptable to most, but will the atheistic premises be acceptable?*

Not until we have fully presented our case and it has been duly considered and tested. This is where dialogue is so important; there must be a two-way discussion or argument; we must be enabled to put forward our ideas, and others must be enabled to refute them and challenge them to our faces; only this way are we able to come back with a further defence.

*But surely the old arguments between believer and non-believer are dead and fully exhausted? Is there anything new to add?*

If this issue is dead, then more shame to us; it is our job to revitalize it and give it the immense significance that is its due. The exhaustion may be due to going round in circles and, perhaps, simply requires direction. Whether there be anything new to add is of less importance than testing and emphasising those arguments which we have found valuable to ourselves. We have found in the past, and we still find in the present, that the uncommitted—and those committed to the opposite camp—may be amenable to reason; many have joined us as a result of rational discourse. After all, the decision to support one side or the other, is frequently the result of reasoned considerations, and these considerations can and should be tested.

*What part in such a debate can the FREETHINKER play?*

Of the openly atheistic papers, the FREETHINKER has one of the largest circulations, and it can act as an effective bridge between theists, the undecided and atheists. It is to papers such as this that the uncommitted should be enabled to turn and be sure of finding a systematic argument for atheism. Among the FREETHINKER's contributors and readers are many who have spent the greater part of their lives in studying theology and freethought literature; some have always been atheists, others include converts from the clergy. I believe that, together, they could amass such information and argument in defence of atheism that supernaturalists of every description would not be left an inch of rational ground on which to stand.

*Is the FREETHINKER, then, to act as an 'open forum'?*

Not quite; attempts at an open forum have not proved very effective in the past; they are subject to too many familiar defects: animosity arises which obscures the point; far too much extraneous matter intrudes; where there are more than one representative for either side, debaters tend to cease the weakest of the opponents' arguments thereby avoiding the more telling points; vital, central issues are skirted round and attention often becomes focused upon a peripheral matter which, won or lost, is no gain to either side; with more than two participants, issues become diffused and the point forgotten; the unavoidable time-lag in publication enables some to wriggle clear of defeat; scoring points from defects in the opponent's argument wins more success than a positive contribution and concern for the truth; worst of all, are the defects arising from lack of progress and direction. Of course, there have been many excellent contributions and arguments in this paper, but rarely has any been devoid of all these defects.

*How is it possible to present an argument which is progressive, constantly relevant, free of extraneous matter, central and directed? Surely it is impossible to ensure a disciplined argument which relies on a plurality of contributors?*

It is impossible to ensure a perfect argument, because it is impossible to know for sure what a perfect argument is; it is inevitably observed with a degree of bias; it must depend on the abilities of those contributing, and those judging. There is, however, a way of avoiding many of the above defects and ensuring some direction, and this brings us to the arrangement mentioned at the opening. There could be a single argument (appearing in print) which is an amalgum of a number of contributions; a single article in two parts: questions from one side, answer from the other. The questions may be allowed to come from those who wish to test Humanism, and the answer must be found by Humanists. All questions, all arguments are compounded, weeded of all extraneous matter and totally irrelevant content, and presented in a clear but simple form. The Editor acts as a sorter and packer, weeder and compiler.

*Isn't this to assume omniscience? What right or qualification has any man to decide which arguments may be put forward as valid and which should be omitted?*

If that was what the Editor was doing, then it certainly would be assuming too much. But, in fact, the Editor would not select from the arguments those which he felt were valid; he would reproduce every argument whether or not he personally felt them to be fallacious; all he would be omitting would be matter which was clearly extraneous and irrelevant or which contributed to duplication.

*How would direction be ensured?*

The Editor would have to steer; you cannot have more than one pilot and the Editor is obviously in the best position to direct.

*It is highly probable that an open challenge to Humanism and atheism would flush out some of our experts and act as an incitement to action to the majority of our correspondents and contributors, but since, in the past, Christians have been so backward in coming forward, what assurance is there that they would contribute now?*

The Editor has already gathered a number of believers together who have shown a readiness to participate (including two Anglican clergymen, a Roman Catholic layman and a Methodist layman). To three, assurances of anonymity

has had to be made, but it is hoped that the future will bring new contributors willing to identify themselves.

*As an avowed atheist, how can the Editor be unbiased and avoid favouring Humanist contributions by, for instance, softening points in Christian arguments?*

Assurance must rest on these grounds: the Editor is keen to make the challenge to atheistic Humanism as effective and testing as possible. By this process he feels he can draw out the best that Humanists have to give. He will, therefore, be acting as an advocate for the believers and be contributing his own tests also. He intends to test the case for atheistic Humanism to the utmost.

*Isn't there a danger that the Christians may feed tricky questions to which the Humanists don't respond. This would appear very bad for Humanism.*

Yes it would appear very badly for the Humanists, and it emphasises the need for every Humanist reader to be alive to the debate and to be ready to contribute their views and arguments. It is quite possible that much work will be demanded in the later stages; much research and careful thought.

*Isn't there a danger that a person who picks up the paper for the first time, seeing the Editor testing Humanist views, may entirely misinterpret the nature of the paper?*

This is a danger that must be avoided. If the Christians' section is unsigned there will be the danger of it being thought that these are simply questions which we put up for the pleasure of knocking down again. The anonymity held out to the Christians is to induce them to contribute. A signature should therefore appear as representative of the Christian contributors. For this purpose the Editor will use a pseudonym and thereby avoid the danger of the paper's nature being misinterpreted and also enable the Editor to speak with a different voice in other parts of the paper. This is explained here so that none will believe the Editor is trying to hide behind the pseudonym; those 'in the know' can pass the information on to others.

*What will the Christians' questions be seeking to discover?*

In the main, they will be enquiring into our reasons for rejecting Christianity and all supernaturalism. This may necessitate that the Humanists have considerable knowledge of supernaturalist teachings in order to answer satisfactorily. The Christians' will obviously be imparting their arguments for belief in their questions, though they will not be allowed to preach.

*This, of course, is an immense subject. How can so much ground be covered to enable the enquiring by-stander to find the information he requires respecting his personal reasons for tending to believe?*

We cannot ensure that the answers to all possible questions will be found, but the aim will be to concentrate on central and fundamental issues.

*But believers are of such variety: the Fundamentalist, Christadelphians and Jehovah's Witnesses in one camp, the Roman Catholics in another, those who rest their faith on the Bible's "internal evidence" and those who tend to dismiss the latter in favour of fideism—how can we hope to cope with them all?*

Again, by dealing with fundamental questions, and by

## C of E QUESTIONNAIRE ON RI

Answers by the British Humanist Association to a Questionnaire issued by the Church of England Commission on Religious Education.

### SECTION A

1. *Should Religious Education, however defined, form part of the curriculum of all types of primary and secondary schools?*

**Religious Instruction**, with its suggestion of inculcation or indoctrination can, of course, have no place in modern education. We think religion should be dealt with in secondary schools in an open way as teaching *about* religions. We do not think it should be a part of the curriculum in primary schools, but information should be given and questions answered as occasion requires.

2. *If it should not form part of the curriculum of such schools what kinds of moral and ethical instruction, if any, should replace it?*

Once again, we reject the concept of 'instruction' in this context. Every subject taught and every school activity does have a moral aspect, and moral education itself is rooted in the child's experience of the school as a community, and therefore depends on the school's quality as a community. When moral questions arise they should be dealt with, and not passed over as irrelevant. There should be ample time for life-centred courses which would include discussions of personal and social issues.

3. *If, on the other hand, it is a part of the curriculum, is it either desirable or essential that its position should continue, in any future legislation, to be supported by 'compulsory' provisions similar to those of the 1944 Education Act?*

It is neither desirable nor essential that the position of RI and the Act of Worship should continue to be supported by 'compulsory' provisions. As well as the moral content which arises from the subject areas, at least as much time as is now given to RI should be devoted to life-centred courses.

4. *If Religious Education continues to be 'compulsory' how would you improve or modify existing safeguards for the rights of those parents who on grounds of conscience do not wish their children to receive it?*

- (i) Parents should be informed of their rights and required annually to state whether or not they wish their children to attend the act of worship and/or receive RI.
- (ii) Proper provision should be made for those who are excused, and parents informed of this.
- (iii) The right should be exercised by the child concerned from the age of 14, and not by the parents.

N.B.—A modern integrated curriculum makes it impossible to exercise these rights.

5. *Are any additional safeguards required to protect the position of teachers who, on grounds of conscience, do not wish to take part in Religious Education and school worship?*

Adequate safeguards against the consequences of the Act are not possible. In the present unsatisfactory circumstances, questions concerning school assembly or any other oblique question to which the answer is calculated to reveal

the candidate's religious opinions should be prohibited at interviews for appointment to school posts, not least to headships. Heads of schools should inform their staff that they are not required to attend assembly nor to take RI.

6. *In any future provision for RE (on compulsory or non-compulsory basis) should anything be done to protect the rights of children (mostly immigrants) of other faiths? Should provision be made, in fact, where circumstances appear to justify it for religious education other than Christian education? (c.f. some existing maintained Jewish schools).*

We regard segregation of school children on religious lines as educationally and socially intolerable, especially as in most cases religious would coincide with racial segregation.

7. *Should a daily act of corporate worship (subject to the conscience clause) be a statutory obligation upon all Primary and Secondary Schools?*

No.

8. *If not, should all schools continue to make regular provision for acts of corporate worship, e.g. on a weekly basis, or on an age-group basis?*

Schools should not make official provision for acts of corporate worship but such worship could be allowed as an extracurricular activity.

9. *Is there still a place within the English educational system for the continuance of denominational schools, e.g. Church of England Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled Schools?*

Humanists argue that the State should not be involved either in sponsoring the non-denominational Christian teaching of the county schools or—still more—in financing and recognising the religious teaching of individual churches or religious bodies. This should be left to the home and the church, without either support or interference from the State. Humanists also regard it as actively harmful that children should be segregated into different religious groupings not merely for specific religious instruction, but for their school life at large: in preparation for an open society all alike would gain from sharing a common school experience. Under whatever auspices, exclusive experience of a closed school community is a wrong basis for education in what society has in common.

We would hope that in due course denominational schools will be given up on the ground that they are no longer necessary for the defence of the faith and no longer desirable because educational segregation is unacceptable. What is now totally unjustifiable is the continued existence of areas in which the only available school is a Church of England Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled School.

10. *Would you favour a complete 'secularisation' of public education involving the progressive dismantling of the traditional 'dual' system and the prohibition of religious teaching of all kinds?*

Yes and no. Yes, because the 'dual' system involves educational segregation. No, in the sense that we do not advocate "the prohibition of religious teaching of all kinds", but only the use of the authority of school and

State to make the Christian faith the compulsory basis of moral education. We are not against education of any kind: we are totally opposed to indoctrination and the limiting of a child's religious knowledge to almost total emphasis on one faith.

#### SECTION B

This statement applies particularly to county schools because they include 84.6 per cent of the nation's children, and because the regulations governing religion in these schools are far less justifiable than in the denominational schools. The argument against the voluntary aided schools is different.

The UK is acknowledged to be a plural society, and is increasingly so. In such a society the State does not have the moral authority to impose on the county school public education in and practice of a particular faith. If it is objected that the evidence of opinion polls is a warrant for the action of the State, the answer is (quite apart from a sociological critique of the polls) that when what was formerly a common faith has been seriously put in question by a substantial number of responsible citizens it is no longer available as the assumed basis of society, and to present it in the schools as if it were is dishonest in itself and confusing to the children.

If justification is sought on the ground that the Act provides options and makes discrimination illegal, the objection must be made that these provisions have proved unworkable and unfair in practice and have put many parents and teachers in a dilemma. Worse than that, by founding the school as a community on a false unity, they complicate and confuse human relations in the school, and in a bad case can poison the whole atmosphere. The existing regulations encourage pretence on the part of the teachers which is not missed by the pupils. A school needs an ethos, but this can be valid and effective only when drawn from values held in common.

Although indoctrination is explicitly and repeatedly disavowed, under the present regulations it is unavoidable. The Plowden Report on the curriculum explicitly stated that children should be taught to know and love God, and not be confused by being taught to doubt before faith is established. In *The Communication of the Christian Faith* it is regarded as the job of the primary school to send children on with Christian belief as an "assimilated assumption". Many of the agreed syllabuses proclaim openly that the aim of religious education in the schools is the full commitment of the pupils to the Christian faith and way of life. Even the West Riding syllabus, generally regarded as one of the most enlightened, insists that worship is the most important of school activities. In any case, the imposition by the State of an act of worship on the county schools at the beginning of each day is in itself an act of indoctrination. Children sense and resist indoctrination so that the moral purpose which indoctrination seeks to serve is defeated by the method.

A most serious result of the regulations is that moral education is assumed to be taken care of by religious education. This may mean (1) that the RE teacher is looked upon as chiefly or solely responsible, and (2) that moral standards are so identified with religious beliefs that the one is abandoned with the other. Moral education is a complex matter—as the Farmington Research Unit has already pointed out—which is hardly likely to be seriously

tackled so long as the false assumptions of the existing regulations remain.

For all these reasons we think that the religious clauses of the 1944 Act are unwise and have had deplorable consequences for education, for morals, and for religion.

Having stated our very strong objections to the regulations under which religion is at present in the county schools, we should like to indicate what we think would be reasonable.

1. Christianity is the long-standing European tradition and a thorough understanding of the basis of the faith and the record of the church has a necessary place in general education in this country.

2. Many teachers are believing Christians, and there is every educational reason why they should be fully free as individuals to bear witness to their faith in the opinions they express and the stands they take; as should other teachers whose views are different.

3. Although there is objection to an official act of worship in the county school in which the whole school is involved, there can be no objection to worship as an extra-curricular activity, participated in by believing Christians and offering the experience to others.

4. An assembly, not necessarily daily, of an inspiring and uplifting character, but free from the limitations now imposed upon it, has a part to play in unifying and reinforcing the personal and social values of the school community and extending the outlook of the children.

5. As recommended by the Crowther Report, education can and should play some part in the search of young people for a way of life. Christianity offers one such way and should have its due part in the orientation programme implied in this recommendation. We do not want Humanist Voluntary Aided schools nor Humanism substituted for RI. Any sectarian approach is obviously educationally improper today.

6. The kind of life-centred courses we recommend should blend subject discovery with self discovery, and enable the pupil to see himself and his society in the vast context of biological evolution and cultural history. Such courses, centred in 'situational teaching', could draw in teachers of conflicting outlooks and different specialisations, with their own contributions to make, and draw upon disciplines for which there is no formal place in the curriculum, like psychology, anthropology, and sociology, which are rich in human interest and insight. We believe that in the frame of general studies of this character young people today are likeliest to be stimulated and helped to find their bearings for a choice of life.

## RI AND SURVEYS

Opinion Polls on Religious Education in State Schools

By MAURICE HILL

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## CONFRONTATION

*(Continued from page 141)*

progressing slowly from the arguments of the fundamentalists and the arguments for Revelation to the more sophisticated and philosophical arguments. But these are only rough ideas for a general direction; the general course taken will depend greatly upon the questions put forward by the Christians and upon the response from the Humanists.

*Is the whole of the FREETHINKER to be given over to this debate?*

This is certainly not the intention, nor is it ever likely to grow to the magnitude where the material of the debate covers more than a page or so. Unlike this very long explanation, the actual questions and answers should be quite brief.

*Will the debate appear every week?*

This is most unlikely, especially in the early stages. Time has to be allowed for a sufficient response to questions posed. This may take three or four weeks in the early stages, but later, we may hope for the debate to appear every other week.

*When will the debate begin?*

In the next few weeks; perhaps a month from now. Arrangements have to be made with 'the opposition' and this may take a week or so. In the meantime, the Editor wishes to invite every reader—Christian, Mohammedan, Jew, Humanist or whatever—to consider the questions posed above and to contribute any amendments or suggestions to the plan that they feel may be an improvement or help. Is this plan of interest to you? Do you support it?

KARL HYDE.

## Letters to the Editor

### A private Index

IT is a pity that your correspondent of April 5, Mr J. Illingworth, has decided to place the FREETHINKER on his own private Index. It would be worth reminding him that the liberation of humanity brought about by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, which he views as one of the watersheds of history, included the liberation of the ruthless hegemony of the Communist clique, the freedom of one of the most insidious and brutal police machines in history, the emancipation of purges and forced labour camps, the dignity of deliberate and calculated war on a whole section of the Russian population, and the dignity of an empire covering all Eastern Europe.

Kerensky demanded of Lenin: "What are you, revolutionaries or policemen?"; the last fifty years has provided an unequivocal answer to those foolish enough to repeat his question.

So let us rejoice with Mr Illingworth over the bright shining gifts which the Bolsheviks so heroically gave to their people.

MICHAEL CREGAN.

### Jesus' Great Aunt

READERS have expressed displeasure with letters relating to such hypothetical areas as God's bottom, but do they know about His Aunt? The family memorials of the Sebright family in Falmstead (Hertfordshire) parish church include one which reads: "To the Greater Glory of God and in memory of his Aunt . . .";

ISOBEL GRAHAME.

### Atheism

THE disunity deplored by F. H. Snow (April 12) may have arisen from the dilution of the principle of atheism with other "isms". In the past, the term 'atheist' possibly fell into disrepute because it was regarded as synonymous with 'anarchist', 'polygamist' and 'communist'. Nowadays, the attempt seems to be to apologise for unbelief by linking it with widely approved movements such as charitable organisations, prison reform and provision of schools. This dissipation constitutes a weakening of the primary object of secularists. This object is the removal of the disabilities imposed on those who do not conform to the state religion.

The freethinker does not seek to abolish the right of the religious to worship as they wish provided that the maintenance of places of worship, and of the priests, is paid for by those who want them.

The freethinker is not necessarily humanitarian, and the trend to link atheists with humanists (whatever the definition of 'humanist' may be) is no more reasonable than to link atheists with scientists, artists or politicians.

Mrs. CONSTANCE N. AIREY.

[A number of points in the above letter deserve investigation. Firstly, isn't it just as likely that anarchism, polygamy (?) and communism may be in some disrepute because rightly or wrongly they are associated with atheism? After attributing the disunity deplored by F. H. Snow to the dilution of the principle of atheism by association with other "isms", the writer then moves on to secularism and freethought as though these were necessarily synonymous with atheism; that each is essentially atheistic is not to say they are synonymous with atheism but suggests, as is the case, that atheism has its place in these two systems. If the writer is willing to let atheism be associated with atheistic Secularism and freethought, then why not with atheistic Humanism also? Atheism, in itself, is an undynamic thing, but when it is associated with positive systems such as freethought Humanism and Secularism—which have always been broadly humanitarian—then it becomes a force. What is said of the freethinker in the second paragraph is perfectly true, but it may perhaps be necessary to point out that it is equally applicable to the Secularist and Humanist.—Ed.]

### A "newcomer" needs your help

I FIND myself moving to the Humanist camp; still a newcomer, this being my third week of association with Humanism. What I understand of Humanism persuades me that it is common sense and I have come to believe there is no God, no heaven or hell, and little truth but much rubbish in the Bible, the Book in which I have devoutly believed for so long. I sufficiently understand what I am leaving behind me, but I am not yet quite certain what I am moving toward. Therefore, would one of your Humanist readers kindly enlighten me on the following points (very simply please):—

- (1) Do Humanists derive their beliefs only from common sense? (What makes them tick? There must be a core somewhere.)
- (2) If not from common sense, then from what? And what makes such beliefs acceptable?
- (3) What should now be my goal as a 'good' Humanist?

(Mrs) HELEN STEELE (Spain).

### Humanism's religion

RELIGIOUS instruction bears no relevance to veracity or historical facts, it is merely dogmatic indoctrination based on medieval ideas. Parents who do not want this mumbo-jumbo rammed into the receptive minds of their children, can 'opt out' by informing the Head of the school.

Moral precepts are not the prerogative of any denomination; parents can instil them into their children by living a life of integrity and self-sacrifice, which is Humanism's "religion", quite divorced from churchianity.

GEORGE R. GOODMAN.

### Devaluation of Sterling

THANK you for publishing my letter (April 19).

With regard to your attractive offer, I will lend you £1, on the understanding that you repay double the amount as soon as we both enter the "other plane".

If God is, as I suspect, a Right-wing Social Democrat, Sterling will probably have been considerably devalued by that time, and that is why I would rather not make it £20,000.

JOHN SUTHERLAND.

[I am sure your caution is fully justified, and the Freethinker Fund accepts (very gratefully) the £1 you have sent as a loan to be doubly repaid in the 'hereafter'.—Ed.]