

## JEHOVAH'S DUPES DEPRIVE CHILDREN OF HIGHER EDUCATION

It was reported last week that large numbers of children are unable to go to university or college although there are neither academic nor economic reasons why they should not do so. Why, then, are they deprived of higher education, and not even allowed to take their O- and A-levels in the General Certificate of Education? Simply because their parents are Jehovah's Witnesses. Although the sect has no ruling on the matter it appears that the parents feel it is purposeless for their children to continue at school beyond the legal minimum. Instead, they attend classes in their churches, and go out preaching to the unconverted. The headmaster of a South London secondary school described this as "a dreadful waste of good academic brains". In a statement to the *Freethinker*, Mr Wilfred Gooch, presiding minister of Jehovah's Witnesses in Britain said: "Clearly, the approach of any conscientious parent to such a vital matter as education will be prejudiced by his sense of priorities. A parent who cares wants to take the course he believes to be in the highest interest of his child, for his greatest welfare. In the special case of Jehovah's Witnesses strong priorities have a marked influence on the decisions they make on their children's behalf."

### Biblical Prophecies

Mr Gooch continued: "Specifically, Jehovah's Witnesses as Christians believe that the present system of things is nearing its close. They believe that many eschatological passages of the Bible have seen fulfilment since the year 1914. There are a great number of detailed prophecies in the Bible, both chronological and circumstantial, that have been fulfilled in our lifetime. Biblically speaking, quite apart from what our natural senses tell us, this is a unique generation. According to Jesus' words, this generation will 'by no means pass away' before God's kingdom brings a close to the present world scene and replaces it with the Messianic rule of Christ, under which the earth will gradually be restored to a state of perfection. It is in this setting that the view Jehovah's Witnesses take must be considered if it is to be understood.

"May I draw attention to two points, then: Firstly, that we are most strongly in favour of education, both of a general nature and, naturally, of the specialised form with which our work is largely concerned, that of the Christian ministry; and secondly, that it is the responsibility of parents to decide when their child has completed his basic education and should now embark upon a specialised course, the Christian ministry if that is the desire of parents and child.

"As to when this latter point is reached, that will largely depend upon the particular parents' views. Some will decide the child has received his general education at 15; others at 16; others at 18; or following a university course. It is a personal responsibility they must take, and I hope I have made it plain that as a body we certainly have no ruling on the matter."

### Toleration in a Democratic Society

Margaret Knight, author of *Morals Without Religion*, said that the ideal of the democratic society inevitably involves a measure of toleration for cranks and crackpots. Because of this, awkward problems can arise on how far toleration should go. "But when archaic supernaturalist beliefs can endanger the lives not only of the believers

themselves but of their children, as when Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to allow blood transfusions, society has surely the right to intervene", said Mrs Knight. "An extreme example of this was the British Government's action to put down the practice of suttee in India. The present issue is far less dramatic, but it is arguable the same principles apply."

David Tribe, president of the National Secular Society, commented: "The Witnesses are part of the millennialist movement which ever since the beginning of the Christian era expects to see the consummation of the world in its



Margaret Knight

## VERDICT ON VD

DENIS COBELL

There is a group of doctors in Britain who seem to take delight in pronouncing on the state of morals in this country at the same time as commenting on the rising incidence of venereal disease. They fail to make a clear distinction: morals are a personal affair outside the medical field, and venereal diseases are a group of sexually transmitted infections readily amenable to treatment.

The National Secular Society and others recently sought to have the ban on advertisements regarding the whereabouts of VD clinics lifted; provided people have a little knowledge about their dangers, the precautions necessary to avoid contracting VD, and how easily they may be treated, the subject could and should be left there. However, there are specialists in the world of venereology who would foolishly have us believe the increase in the number of attendances at clinics is a cause for major national alarm.

The latest "scare" article appeared in the *British Medical Journal* (17 September) and included the old and by now familiar lament that the decline in religious authority was to be deplored. The authors of this article, *Crisis in Venereology*, Dr R. D. Catterall and Dr R. S. Morton, regret the shortage of facilities and staff for VD clinics. Remarkably, the same issue of the *BMJ*, does not contain one advertised vacancy for a doctor specialising in venereology.

A brief glance at any medical textbook will show readers how small is the subject of venereology. In fact diagnosis and treatment are so simple in this age of antibiotics, that it is doubtful whether the subject need be medically isolated. Isolation of venereal disease patients is only desirable to those people who wish the stigma surrounding them to remain.

Syphilis, the most serious of the venereal diseases, and the most rare today, was indeed considered a punishment from God for adultery. During their wanderings in the wilderness the Israelites were subjected to the "Plague of Moab", which killed not less than 24,000. Presumably this was syphilis, for Moses affirmed its venereal origin; it was also known as the plague of Baal-peor (Deuteronomy 4, 3), or the god phallus. The drawn out progression of syphilis, the pox—"majestic" Baudelaire described it—may be seen as symbolic of the eternity of hell, for those believing in such phantasies. Syphilis may lie dormant for over 20 years before causing brain and heart damage, but can be cured quickly if discovered early. It causes very few deaths today in Britain.

Gonorrhoea in men is no worse than having a small boil or abscess; in women it may lead to sterility if undetected. In both cases a single penicillin injection is usually sufficient to cure. Many other diseases can lead to far more dire consequences if they are untreated! The problem is one of removing reaction against publicising help to VD sufferers, rather than a medical crisis; as David Tribe asked of the Home Secretary in a comment published in the *Freethinker*, 6 June, does "the offence of helping people with medical and social problems come into the category of exceptional depravity"?

### Moral Straitjacket

Five years ago, Ambrose King, then adviser to the Ministry of Health on VD, wrote a pamphlet, *Sexual Promiscuity*, published by the Society for Promoting

Christian Knowledge. It contained no advice on how not to catch VD beyond that of self-restraint. The present adviser to the Ministry, Dr Claude Nicol, also deplored the decline in moral values when speaking at a world forum on syphilis in 1962. Yet the rate of incidence of early syphilis is only four per 100,000 of population in England and Wales. Early infectious syphilis can be completely cured by a fortnight's course of daily penicillin injections. Sir Alexander Fleming revolutionised the treatment of this former scourge of humanity—it remains to revolutionise people's attitudes towards it.

There are 84 consultants in VD in England and Wales according to the *BMJ* article, but barely more than 2,000 cases of early syphilis for them to take care of. Hardly a crisis situation, or even of gross overwork?

Dr R. D. Catterall, one of the co-authors of this tirade, has written elsewhere of late syphilis—the end stage of the disease with most serious consequences—"... many patients with late syphilis are treated by general physicians, surgeons, cardiologists, neurologists and other specialists". In other words, those cases requiring more constant and complicated treatment are seen by doctors from other specialist areas. And there aren't too many such cases nowadays. So what is the venereologists' complaint, and what motivates it?

From their continued emphasis on the lack of religion and decline in moral standards, it would seem they have a not entirely unprejudiced approach to medicine. Most doctors still have an upper-class background, and these venereologists retain an idea more common to Victorian days: the lower classes need an authoritarian moral straitjacket. This attitude is largely responsible for the magazine *Contact's* verdict on VD in its July 1970 number, "The Big Conspiracy". This article also repeated the point that both syphilis and gonorrhoea can be cured quickly, but rightly added, "the only reliable cure ultimately proposed to contain this particular social disease rests in the 'moral' solution which is an attempt to blackmail those who have 'transgressed' into changing their way of life". It is this attitude of doctors, which must be altered, before the subject of VD can be placed on a rational basis.

## SECULAR EDUCATION APPEAL

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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 BROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, SE1

# MUSLIMS DEMAND SCHOOL RELIGION

MERLE TOLFREE

The Muslim Educational Trust submitted a memorandum on the religious education of Muslim children to the Department of Education and Science. Although the document was prepared for the consideration of Edward Short, who was expected to introduce a new Education Act, it still merits attention. It brings the point home that we have among us a large and articulate group of people who share our national life but whose opinions have on many important matters been so far ignored. (Even the liberal Social Morality Council, which recently produced a well publicised report on this issue did not apparently include a Muslim.) And yet there is a substantial number of Muslims permanently resident in this country, who constitute one of the largest religious minorities. They point out the difficulty they have had even in finding out what were their rights under the Act; but now as equal citizens they claim fair and just treatment.

As Humanists we welcome the Muslim community among us, as we welcome all others without distinction of race or creed. They not only "improve the economy" by their work, but they also bring their ideas, their view of history and world affairs, and their artistic traditions. An interesting article in the September *Humanist* draws attention to the fine achievements of Islam in the cultural field, and compares the Islamic religion with the Christian, to the disadvantage of the latter in many respects.

The Muslims claim, and this cannot be denied, that we have now in this country, a multi-religious and multi-cultural society, but that in the schools the Christian religion has a monopoly of religious education. They notice that the Act provides for worship, but that it does not specify Christian worship. Muslims worship five times a day, and two of these periods fall within the school period, with extra prayers on Fridays. They have also religious regulations about diet and clothing and holidays, and they ask pertinently if the conscience clause only applies to certain periods on the timetable. They demand not only that these aspects of their religion should be respected, but also that their children should have properly qualified Muslim teachers, for they say that their religion is the means of transmitting their culture, and is of paramount importance.

## "Intellectual Weaklings"

They totally reject the Humanist solution. To impose the Humanist or Secular viewpoint on those who do not subscribe to it is as bad as is the imposition of the religious view on the Humanist. "Education which tries to be neutral in an artificial way produces only intellectual weaklings and ideological vagabonds", says the Muslim Educational Trust. It is no argument to say that religion should not be taught because the religious do not agree among themselves. Do the Humanists and Secularists agree? Religion has after all, they claim, provided some basis for morality, even if not a complete one, for the question of morality is one for the whole of society, which, according to some observers, is in a process of disintegration. The Humanist case for moral education rather than religious education is therefore not tenable. What is needed is to widen the scope of religious education to enable it to serve the needs of the different communities in Britain.

As Humanists we recognise the right of all to freedom of belief and worship in the community as a whole, and we object as much as the Muslims to the domination of the Christian viewpoint in the schools, yet we do not agree (at least I don't) that the solution is simply to give more specific religious teaching in the schools. To list objections on the practical level, would be (although perhaps interesting to administrators) strictly speaking irrelevant, because if the thing is good in itself, practical difficulties would have to be overcome. The real question lies rather in the nature and relevance of religious teaching to the educational process. To refer again to L. P. Compton's article in the *Humanist*, he points out that the undoubted achievements of Islamic religion relate to the Middle Ages (as with Christianity); that no new ideas have come out of Islam since that time; and that "only secularism can release society from bondage to an ideology destined for a simple pastoral people". We might add to that, that although customs are changing, and some Muslim women are gaining emancipation, education and independence, the fact remains that the traditional teaching has been to put women behind the veil. They have been ascribed a position inferior to that of men, whose chattels they are, and the religion has been used to keep them subservient.

## Religion for the Private Life

All this is tied up with the question of authority. If, as this pamphlet maintains, the authority of religion is needed to make men moral; and if the forms of the religion correspond to an antiquated structure of society, what is going to happen when people no longer believe either in the antiquated structure or in the religion? Surely a new basis for morality must be sought. Science has now taught men flexibility of outlook; it has challenged the old authorities and the old gods; and has rejected old forms of submission in favour of the spirit of inquiry and investigation. The openness of this attitude is the opposite of totalitarianism, in so far as it is totally open to ideas without being forced into an unnatural submission to any of them. The solution is therefore to keep religion for the private life and to keep the schools free from particular teaching of any dogmatic sort.

If, however, a complacent Establishment can be made to see that the present situation satisfies nobody, and that the 1944 Act is out of date by any standards, this document will have served a useful purpose.

MEMORIAL EDITION

## WHY I AM NOT A CHRISTIAN

BERTRAND RUSSELL

Preface DAVID TRIBE

Introduction Professor ANTONY FLEW

PRICE 3/- (plus 6d postage)

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

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editor: WILLIAM McILROY

103 Borough High Street,  
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Telephone: 01-407 1251 (editorial)  
01-407 0029 (business)

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

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

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

## EVENTS

Irish Humanist Association and Northern Ireland Humanist Association. Rostrevor Hotel, Rostrevor, Co. Down, Saturday, 31 October and Sunday, 1 November. Second annual conference; theme: "Remember Your Humanity". Speakers include Margaret Knight and John Hewitt. Programmes from Basil Cooper, 46 Cadogan Park, Belfast BT9 6HH.

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1. United Nations Day, Saturday, 24 October, 7 p.m. Public meeting on South Africa. Speakers include Professor Julius Lewin; sponsors include National Secular Society.

London Young Humanists. Party at 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8, Sunday, 18 October, 8 p.m. Bring a bottle.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 18 October, 11 a.m. Kathleen Nott: "East is West". Tuesday, 20 October, 7 p.m. John Baker: "Neighbourhood Democracy".

Leicester Secular Society. Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 18 October, David Tribe: "The Cost of Church Schools".

## HAPPY HOLIDAYS

You can't beat the Irish for optimism. 1971 has been designated "Come to Ulster Year" by the Northern Ireland Government.

# NEWS

## CATHOLICS AND ADOPTION

It is satisfactory to note an announcement by Father Dunne, administrator of Liverpool Catholic Children's Protection Society, that "Catholic" coloured babies are to be placed for adoption in non-Catholic families. Apparently there is a shortage of Catholic families willing to accept them. It has long been notorious that that Catholic label attached to an unconscious child has greatly restricted its chances of adoption, and a coloured Catholic child has been doubly handicapped.

Father Dunne greatly regrets having to accept non-Catholic adopters, and still hopes to solve the problem in future by persuading more Catholics to adopt coloured children. While wishing him well in his endeavours to combat colour prejudice in his church, it is to be hoped that he will not be resorting to couples who are not really suitable adopters in his efforts to find Catholics.

This relaxation of the traditional Catholic attitude is one of the fruits of their modern theology. It is no longer claimed that hell is the inevitable destination of non-Catholics. As long as they preached this pernicious doctrine, their logic forced them to insist that a child brought up in a Catholic institution was better off than one in the best of non-Catholic homes—despite all the evidence of the defective personalities institution produced.

## DEMOLITION

There is a fine rumpus going on in Thetford, Norfolk, over the decision by the Borough Council to pull down Grey Gables, an old house built on the site of Thomas Paines' home. The decision (taken by one vote) means that the house will be demolished to make way for office development. At a recent meeting of the Council there were hints that members let friendships and business interests influence their voting.

It will be recalled there was vociferous opposition to the erection of a statue of Paine in the town a few years ago. It came from "God-bless-the-squire-and-his-relations" elements who claimed that the town's most famous citizen was unpatriotic, anti-Christian, etc. There was a much sounder case against the project; the spending of huge sums of money on statues is a bit irrational, particularly when freethinking organisations and publications are limping along on slender resources.

However, I hope the Thetford planners will think again before demolishing a house of historic interest to make way for yet more offices.

## BETTER LATE . . .

The current issue of *Humanist News* carries a statement by David Pollock, the new chairman of the British Humanist Association. Mr Pollock speaks of "the development by the BHA of the idea of the Open Society, a responsible, caring, democratic community with participation in politics, education, industry and all its institutions, where people of all manner of views and interests live together in co-operation and no group—racial, religious or political—has any privileged position". He also refers to "the final rejection by the BHA of any form of secular sectarianism". Sectarianism is, of course, quite reprehensible, and the BHA is to be congratulated on coming into line with the rest of the movement on this question.

# AND NOTES

## DECLINE

It was recently announced that during the last year 7,000 members had left the Boys' Brigade (object: "The advancement of Christ's Kingdom among boys"). Now we are informed by Dr John M. Gibbs, retiring president of the National Christian Education Council, that Sunday schools are running down fast. Dr Gibbs says that work in the schools is running on capital, "staffed by an ageing company of teachers and officers with about ten years service in them".

Dr Gibbs outlined various reasons for this decline, like poor leadership and preoccupation with scripture examinations, prizes, anniversaries, etc. No doubt some of these problems can be solved, but the basic issue remains: how can anyone persuade even children—unless they are indoctrinated from the cradle—to accept clapped-out Christianity?

## CINEMA

### THE VIRGIN AND THE GYPSY

Odeon, Haymarket, London

D. H. Lawrence's novella, *The Virgin and the Gypsy*, combines the make-believe world of the fairy-tale, with the frightening reality of middle class morals 50 years ago. Ken Russell's *Women in Love* showed that Lawrence can be rendered celluloid with spreme effect. Christopher Miles' *The Virgin and the Gypsy* emphasises this fact.

This simple love story, with its almost ridiculously basic plot, is used by Lawrence to put over a multitude of observations. The virgin is the daughter of an Anglican country clergyman in a northern mining village. She is, however, too intelligent to remain such. The agonies of the girl, and the consistent hypocrisy of her father and other relatives are put across with great subtlety, although the film is filled with scenes of comic satire. (Anything untoward in the village is without fail ascribed by the family to "those wicked non-conformists", whom one gathers outnumber the Anglicans in this particular part of the world.)

Joanna Shimkus plays the bewildered and beautiful innocent with such subtlety and grace that one's sympathies cannot but be strongly aroused. Though the story spans only a few months she grows from a silent sufferer through an outspoken rebel who delights in shocking her ignorant relatives to the doors of emancipated womanhood. The gypsy, played with simplicity and strength by Franco Nero, symbolically releases the virgin from a life dominated by the fear of God and the wrath of the neighbours, by making her what her father describes as a "filthy sinner", but it is in fact a couple, living "in sin" due to the man's inability to obtain a divorce from his wife, who show her

that life can be different and that God either does not exist or if he does is of no importance.

Again the process by which the girl slowly gains appreciation of the way of life these two lead is treated with great subtlety. The couple, the girl's family and others such as the gypsy's wife and the well-to-do but brainless young man for whom it is hoped the virgin will save herself, are without exception brilliantly cast.

For this and for the sheer and unceasing beauty of the film much tribute is due to Christopher Miles.

DAVID REYNOLDS

## TELEVISION:

### The Genuine Article

PETER COTES

Sir Neville Cardus is a "natural" on the box for the simple reason that he's got a lot to say, says his lot simply and sincerely, and is more interested in what he's saying than in the effect he's making. The effects made are enormous. He makes rings round the self-conscious sages and telly know-it-alls. *Late Night Line Up* on BBC is like the proverbial curate's egg but in a recent late Monday interview, Cardus proved himself a wonderful one-man entertainment. His appreciation of music, literature and cricket, as well as his loyalty to the old *Manchester Guardian*, provided a base for some delightful digressions on women, Australia, friendly skirmishes with that giant among editors, C. P. Scott, and finally what he'd like to remember from cricket and music in the Elysian Fields. (He seemed a bit uncertain of seeing the latter.) The Kaiser Waltz accompanying the opticals and nostalgic mentions of Jack Hobbs, Dennis Compton and "Ranji", made a charming and grown-up ending to the best television interview since Leonard Woolf was a subject a few years ago.

*Horizon's* piece on the anti-vivisectionists was strongly slanted against the antis. However, as a programme this was a lot fairer than that journalistic "compiler" of TV programmes who, writing for one of the quality Sundays before the screening, prejudiced the issue in a "trailer" criticism, and was hopelessly wide of the mark in alleging that all those who didn't want vivisection were emotional, whilst those who did were reasonable. And then, to illustrate his own lack of objectivity, this chump commented upon polio sufferers and described the appearance on the programme of Brigid Brophy—a militant animal welfare propagandist—as "buxom" and her audience of attentive women as "healthy". How did he know? Talk about emotion . . .

The dramatisation of the Chicago Conspiracy Trial by Stuart Hood, produced and directed by Chris Burstall, had an especially fine performance from Morris Carnovsky as Judge Hoffman. But the entire cast was fine and the production rivetting from start to finish. This type of documentary drama is superior to TV's straight drama in every way. On the same night we saw yet another episode in the saccharine Finlay series; a vivid illustration of the difference between the spurious and the true.

## BOOKS

## A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THE MUSHROOM MYTH

by John C. King. Hodder and Stoughton, 25s.

When John Allegro's sensational book *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* was published, a spokesman for Hodder and Stoughton took the extraordinary step of issuing a statement saying *inter alia* that "the book will prove unnecessarily offensive to many people and should not be on our list", and that they would shortly publish a reply by a Christian. Now, had Mr Allegro written a defence of Christianity "offensive" to Hindus, Buddhists and atheists, would they have promptly disowned it and issued a non-Christian reply? The answer is an Eliza Doolittle!

However, the reply to Allegro has now appeared, and proves to be a readable, and on the whole, convincing refutation. The author, the Rev John C. King, a former editor of the *Church of England Newspaper* and now a teacher, clearly does not agree that attacks on Christianity, however extreme, should be censored. "We Christians have no reason to be so fearful of our standing that we must scream at any man who dares to question our beliefs", he writes. While there are some signs of haste and unnecessary padding, Mr King writes wittily and with gusto, giving his chapters such trendy titles as *The Sacred Mush of May*, *Jubilant Code-cracker*, *A Mushroom a Day* and *Glory be to Fecundity*.

Though the author admits he has difficulty in taking Allegro seriously, he decides that his book is not, as has been suggested, an elaborate literary hoax. He attacks Allegro's theory on three main grounds, linguistic, botanical and because of its inherent incredibility.

Allegro claims that the books of the Bible (and particularly the Gospels) were the creation of an underground fertility cult which worshipped an hallucinogenic mushroom (*Amanita muscaria* or fly-agaric), which was also a phallic symbol. A proof, he claims to find in the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New, many hidden references to the beliefs and practices of the mushroom cult. Both Hebrew and Greek, he asserts, are derived from the ancient Sumerian language, and with the aid of his knowledge of the latter, he triumphantly cracks the code of the punning mushroom eaters who forged the Gospels. However, as Mr King points out, more of Allegro's fellow Sumerian scholars accept his basic hypothesis that Sumerian is a bridge between the Semitic and Indo-European languages. Indeed as King writes, "on Mr Allegro's own admission (p. 16) the number of Sumerian texts available is small and the proportion of speculative word-forms (indicated by asterisks) proposed by him is high. The Sumerian index contains 875 entries, of which no fewer than 404 are provided with asterisks". Mr King does not himself know Sumerian, but he states that all the Sumerian experts he consulted when writing his book, rejected Allegro's reconstructions. "In their view, Mr Allegro had rushed into a little understood linguistic field where no self-respecting angel would ever dare to tread."

However Mr King points out that "the fact that philologists find Mr Allegro's reasoning to be inadequate, will not be sufficient to squash the mushroom theory . . . the all-important matter is the positive symbol. When the philologists have finished with Mr Allegro's supposed breakthrough, the mushroom will remain". And Mr King has little difficulty in showing that while Mr Allegro may

## FREETHINKER

be an authority on ancient Sumerian, his botanical knowledge is sadly defective. As Nigel Sinnott indicated in his review of Allegro's book (*Freethinker*, 27 June), there is no evidence that the fly-agaric has ever been grown in Palestine. Indeed, it is highly improbable, since this species of mushroom normally flourishes only in temperate forests with the pine as its host tree. How then, could supplies of the sacred plant have been made available to the adherents of the cult in Judaea? This difficulty, as Mr King says, makes the existence of the cult itself extremely unlikely. The onus of proof for the mushroom theory, as Mr King emphasises, must always rest on Mr Allegro: "It is he who is proposing extraordinary explanations of matters already accounted for otherwise; it is he, therefore, who must offer substantial support at every possible point if he is to persuade readers to abandon views already held. The absence of positive proof of the fly-agaric being indigenous to the country where it is said to have assumed such importance, is a serious weakness in Mr Allegro's case". Incidentally, in recent weeks the mycologist R. G. Wasson has asserted in the correspondence columns of the *Times Literary Supplement* that the sole illustration of the plant in the Allegro book does not represent the fly-agaric at all. Mr Wasson also severely criticises Mr Allegro's account of the chemistry of the sacred mushroom.

King's main criticism of Allegro's theory is that its acceptance requires a greater act of faith than the acceptance of Christianity. "If it is difficult to believe the articles of the orthodox Christian faith, it is even more difficult to believe that the story of Jesus is really a hotchpotch of clues about the fly-agaric." Moreover, as with all myth theories of the origins of Christianity, Mr Allegro's betrays a staggering lack of historical imagination. It presupposes that the authors of the Gospels were men of "literary astuteness, imaginative ingenuity and Machiavellian cunning that can never have been surpassed. The mushroom worshippers did a job not merely good enough to fool the Roman and Jewish authorities who were making life uncomfortable for them; they did a job good enough to fool generation after generation of linguistic scholars, source seekers, form critics. The mind boggles at such a performance. Yet such a performance as this we must accept if Mr Allegro's theory is correct". The mushroom men must also have been creative artists of considerable stature. "The stories of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son are of self-authenticating excellence; it is impossible to conceive of any worthwhile scale of values that would regard them as mediocre." Yet, according to Allegro, these timeless parables were invented and put into the mouth of a mythical Man-God by the devotees of a penis-worshipping fertility cult!

Towards the end of his indictment, Mr King overdoes the sarcasm and overstates his case. He claims that from the Gospels, the reader can construct a coherent consistent portrait of their principal character. This is not so. As the form critics have shown, Jesus is always seen through the eyes of the evangelists, and they were not professional biographers. Again, Mr King's examples of people whose lives have been "given another dimension" by their belief in Christ, does not prove that Christianity is true, any more than the number of Christians who have been converted to humanism guarantees the validity of that philosophy.

# R REVIEWS

In one chapter, Mr King retells the story of a man accosting the Duke of Wellington in the street with the words, "Mr Jones, I believe," to which the Duke replied, "If you believe that, you will believe anything". I am inclined to agree with Mr King that the credulity of any reader who swallows Mr Allegro's mushroom theory, is almost as great as that of the Duke's accoster.

JOHN L. BROOM

## THREE ISSUES IN ETHICS

by John Macquarrie. SCM Press, 32s.

A glance through Professor Macquarrie's notes and index causes the spirits to fall. All the trendy names in the theological firmament are there: William Temple, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, Robinson, Chardin, together with the existentialist philosophers. Happily the text has fresh and often critical things to say about them. While liberal in morality the author repudiates the higher fatuities of "new morality" and "situational" ethical theory. This he sees as putting too great a load upon individual creativity and *agape* (what used to be plain love). For a solid counterweight he turns to "natural law", which he tries to rehabilitate in an evolutionary context. He also believes that it "points to an ontological interpretation of morality which has at least some kinship with the religious interpretation". To help the ontology along he has devised, or borrowed from the existentialists, such irritating descriptions of man as a "being-on-the-way", "being-in-the-world" and "being-with-others". All this is tied up with fashionable paradoxes like "self-transcendence" and "man's end is to be". Somewhat more healthily he proposes to stress creation rather than redemption. In this way he hopes to link "Christian and non-Christian moral striving".

To achieve this aim he has to choose—or, it may be, he simply has that restricted reading-list which tends to be characteristic of theologians (he is Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford)—a very narrow band of non-Christian writers with whom he feels *en rapport*. Mainly these are French existentialists and marxists like Sartre and Garaudy, and Czechs like Mahovec (Machovec) who turned up at the Christian-marxist dialogue at Marienbad in 1967 and about whom one could read in *Slant*. Today it is very much "last year at Marienbad", for in the meantime *Slant* has disappeared and if the Czechs have not met a like fate one suspects they are less vocal than of yore. When the author turns to Britain the only non-Christian writer he mentions is Harold Blackham, "director of the British Humanist Association and author of an outstandingly clear and judicious book on humanism". This is the Pelican *Humanism*. Mr Blackham is, by the way, one of the very few English humanists sympathetic to existentialism.

Secularisation is a phenomenon familiar to all modern Christians and about which they seem to agonise ceaselessly. Most of them know or care nothing about the philosophy from which this outlook has arisen. Professor Mitchell follows the familiar ground. When he seeks information he turns to "theologians of the secular". I doubt therefore if this book will achieve its superecumenical purpose, but it is gracefully written and achieves probably as much as its presuppositions allow.

DAVID TRIBE

## JEHOVAH'S DUPES DEPRIVE CHILDREN OF HIGHER EDUCATION

(Continued from front page)

lifetime. This has led to every sort of eccentricity and folly. The Witnesses have put the Second Coming of Christ variously at 1844 and 1874, with Christ's establishment of the Kingdom in 1914. So time is fast running out if something spectacular is to happen for the generation then alive. I am not surprised at the recently publicised attitude of the Watchtower people to education. A sect that tries to deprive dying children of the right to blood transfusion is, however, incapable of shocking outsiders further".

### The Rights of Children

Maurice Hill, secretary of the Humanist Teachers' Association, said they were appalled to hear that a large number of Jehovah's Witness children leave school at 15. "As teachers we see this as a waste of human potential, and we deplore the inevitable damage to the child's personality. We can only hope that Christians will eventually recognise the dangers of indoctrination, and the necessity of an open and rational upbringing. The one-sided conditioning of fanatical groups can only be harmful. Either we give all our children freedom to think or we distort their minds and personalities".

Michael Armstrong, chairman of the Comprehensive Schools Committee, told the *Freethinker*: "Certainly I don't want to deprive parents of the right to take their children away from school. But it is outrageous the way in which many parents make a decision for their children without discussing it with them. As parents we should give objective and disinterested advice, but it is a monstrous imposition on children if they are forced or bullied into doing what we think is good for them".

### Parents or Victims

Of course it is probably unnecessary for the JW parents to force their children to leave school at the age of 15. The children will have been well indoctrinated, and if you believe the nonsense about a Second Coming and the establishment of God's kingdom, higher education is not very important.

It would be wrong to blame the parents for this folly. A great many of them were probably "born into" the movement, and are themselves the victims of religious indoctrination. The delusions and errors of Christianity are perpetuated from generation to generation causing social mischief and wasting human talent. Jehovah's Witnesses' preoccupation with the end of the world . . . Roman Catholic opposition to contraception . . . Orange intolerance in Ulster . . . Margaret Knight summed it all up succinctly when she wrote: "The conversion of Europe to Christianity was one of the major disasters of history".

## THE COST OF CHURCH SCHOOLS

By DAVID TRIBE

Foreword by MARGARET KNIGHT

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## LETTERS

May I reply to Margaret McIlroy, Marjorie Mepham and Paul Rom? (*Freethinker*, 3 October).

Margaret McIlroy says: "I do not apologise for attempting to give *Freethinker* readers an objective outline or views I do not myself hold, without recourse to the abusive clichés . . .". My point was it is not useful for *Freethinker* to carry routine, uncommitted book reviews which *New Statesman*, *Sunday Times*, etc., can do better. It is our function as *Freethinkers* to call falsehood by its right name, and to be abusive when necessary. I was glad Margaret McIlroy makes clear she is no believer in penis envy.

Perhaps I think teachers, but not parents, have "an exciting and highly skilled job of enormous social importance"? Yes, I do. I would not think this of a teacher whose whole teaching was as tutor to my own children. I'm all for education for parenthood, but to confuse household activities with a profession does not help any.

Margaret McIlroy's comment, "Love exists, however distasteful the idea may be to Connaire Kensit" bears no relation to anything I wrote, but I take it as a compliment since the context makes it clear that the "love" referred to here means desire to own another human being, irrespective of his wishes. Distasteful as it may be to Margaret McIlroy, there is another kind of love, which treats the beloved not as property but as a free fellow-man whose rights and feelings are to be respected.

I agree that "A girl who is inveigled into bed . . . can suffer greatly". So can a boy! Once you fall for the notion that sex for fun is wrong because "an enhanced intimate relationship should be the goal" (Paul Rom) you are wide open to the worst type of seducer. I guess those inveigled into marriage suffer even more, and according to my lady friends males are as guilty of *that* kind of inveigling as females. All this inveigling depends on exploiting the prevailing lack of sexual freedom.

Margaret McIlroy claims that "Connaire Kensit's refusal to recognise the cost of sexual freedom . . . is largely wishful thinking". The same has been said of my non-recognition of Divine wrath. Sexual freedom cannot cure the condition of those who want something that does not belong to them (e.g., marriage with an unwilling person), but can alleviate it by giving them part of what they want (sexual gratification). Half a loaf cannot be worse than no bread. "How glib", but how true.

Marjorie Mepham says I consume your space to "criticise a critique". Successive editors have made the *Freethinker* a forum for debate (including criticism of critiques) among Secular Humanists—she should blame you, sir, not me. She asks: "Why does your correspondent assert that there 'are no snags to sexual freedom—only advantages' without mentioning the great snag . . . venereal disease?" Answer: (1) Having said there were no snags, I didn't want to contradict myself; (2) Sexual freedom involves no more risk of infection than traditional sex behaviour (with its division of women into "nice girls" and "whores"). Precautions against these infections are simple; under conditions of sexual freedom they would be routine. Sexual freedom is a necessary condition for the control of such infections, for control depends on tracing contacts—the patient's spouse, lovers, and spouse's lovers. The adultery taboo ensures that such contact-tracing is not done.

What is an experienced woman? I meant one with sexual experience, normally mature but not necessarily middle-aged. How do I know about American sexuality? By reading A. C. Kinsey *et al. Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (1948), and ditto in the *Human Female* (1953). I mentioned the former in my last letter (*Freethinker*, 19 September).

Paul Rom seeks to "throw into the discussion . . . the concept of human dignity". Very well. I say human dignity is violated whenever an individual becomes the personal property of another individual. To sacrifice one's individuality for the people, the Party, one's pupils or one's patients might be dignified. To sacrifice it for a lover cannot be.

CONNAIRE KENSIT.

### Keep Your Hair On

I highly commend your article on the length of boys' hair. F. J. Corina missed the point completely—you were not saying that short hair affects the mentality, but that it is irrational to force boys to get their hair cut.

One of the reasons headmasters give for ordering boys to get their hair cut is that it looks scuffy and dirty, and will give the school a bad name. However, the majority of people with long hair keep it well washed and combed, and those who do not would not with short hair either. And why should it give the school a bad name? Do people really think that the length of one's hair affects one's mind.

Some headmasters think that forcing people to get their hair cut will keep discipline. It merely causes resentment, and a feeling that the headmasters are trying to turn them into the "yes sir, no sir" vegetables many of them were.

D. R. B. HOPE.

Attending an authoritarian school is really a bind because they want you to be a robot. When some lads wished to have their hair in a short crop, the headmaster sent a letter to their parents saying this style offended the staff, and that he reserved the right to refuse them entry to the school if they had their hair cut so short again. Then in his logical, fair, reasonable way, he ordered other boys to get their hair cut because it was "unhealthy, untidy and affects thought". Anyone who seriously believes this ought to campaign to make short hair compulsory for women.

MIKE STEVENS.

I object to having to walk around in my own time looking how the headmaster wants me to look. I find that long hair suits me, and members of the opposite sex agree.

The headmaster should, in my view, have more respect for his pupils as human beings, and at least discuss the matter before jumping to conclusions.

P. A. LINCOLN.

### Nationalism

Mr I. S. Low (Letters, 3 October) seems to be afflicted with that peculiar myopia which affects people who view history only in terms of their single pet thesis.

It is quite irrational to say that "Nationalism is a thoroughly evil thing"; nationalism is certainly not intrinsically evil, and like everything else requires the checks and balances of common sense. One might just as well denounce sex and love because of the existence of prostitution; or education because schools spread infant epidemics. World government is fine, again if properly arranged, but without devolution of power at local/national/regional level it would itself degenerate into a tyranny: a vast centralised Mammon. Imperialism is really a parody of nationalism, and it involves depriving one's neighbours of their claims to national, local, or self-determination.

Mr Low would surely concede that the Italy, France, and South America for which Garibaldi fought was a far nobler ideal than the reality of the nineteenth century Kingdom of Naples or Papal States; one cannot create Utopia in one fell stroke!

NIGEL SINNOTT.

### Malcolm and the Good Book

Malcolm Muggeridge's Bible-punching role over the last few years may make it rather difficult for opponents to make appropriate comments when he simultaneously adopts the role of question-master, but one would have thought that the very title of the television programme, "Why the Bible?" called for the question, "Why the Bible What?" In the event, the 4 October programme turned out to be a discussion aimed at endeavouring to find an explanation as to why so many eminent thinkers, past and present, took the Bible seriously. The reason for people believing in the veracity of the Bible is, of course, of a psychological nature which concerns the individual mind, intelligent or otherwise. As we cannot yet look into people's minds, we cannot be expected to find what reasons the minds give themselves. What can be shown, however, as one of the speakers did point out, is that the Bible is a conglomeration of truths and falsehoods, forgeries and interpolations, substitutions and additions. To hold that such a book is a revelation of God and provides a good reason for any religion based on it, must be a matter of gullibility and self-delusion. "Why the Bible?" in the sense adopted by Mr Muggeridge resolves itself into a question of why some people's minds work in the way they do against the most irrefutable evidence.

Meanwhile, the dog-collars and their supporters who were present at the discussion revelled in Malcolm Muggeridge's insistence that there *must* be something about the Bible in order for it to stand up for so long, but the only cause they could provide for this was that there was a "truth" in it which had to be discovered and that this truth was contained in the Bible taken as a whole. Now "truth" in its abstract sense has been found rather difficult to define or explain, but the *truth* of any particular statement or proposition is dependent upon the knowledge available to support it and in this respect the Bible falls short of any reasonable cause for belief. To insist that the many statements in the Bible concerning God are true means that the various atrocities ordered and performed by God must be true, so that by any human standards both God and the Bible are automatically discredited. To continue to use the Holy Book as the instrument for the administration of the oath, "I swear by almighty God that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth", is therefore a travesty of truth both in the abstract and the raw.

H. RICH.