

THE VATICAN WILLING TO MAKE PEACE WITH RED GOVERNMENTS?

In recent months there have been indications that the Roman Catholic Church and the Communists have been attempting to improve their relations. The Vatican has been particularly accommodating in countries where the Communists are in power or command a mass following. The Pope's personal intervention resulted in Cardinal Mindszenty's return to Rome and removed an embarrassment to the Hungarian Government (and an unwelcome guest from the American Embassy in Budapest). The terms of his departure are not known, but despite the flowery and flowing tributes to Mindszenty it is clear that Pope Paul was not prepared to allow the self-imposed exile of this stubborn old reactionary to spoil the Church's chances to win concessions from the Communists. The Vatican denied any deal between the Holy See and the Hungarian Government, and claimed that the amnesty was a unilateral decision by the Hungarians. But Mr Kadar, the Communist leader, said in a speech that Mindszenty was allowed to leave after long negotiations with Rome. The decision was "in the interest of improving relations between Hungary and the Holy See".

Some Catholic leaders have welcomed the United States' new and realistic attitude towards the Chinese Communists. This is even more significant, for the Chinese have not adopted the soft-line policy of Hungary, Poland and the Soviet Union towards the Roman Catholic Church. China's admission to the United Nations which would have caused pious yelps only five years ago is now likely to be accepted with little protest.

Here in Britain, the Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism is to increase its activities and will soon launch a fund-raising appeal. The Centre, which was established a year ago, has as its chairman Sir John Lawrence, a distinguished Anglican. Its patrons include the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Koenig of Vienna, the Chief Rabbi of Britain and an assortment of prominent Non-Conformists.

Catholicism in the Classroom ?

The Centre aims to observe the changing attitudes towards religion in various Communist countries. It studies a wide range of newspapers and publications, and attempts to give an objective appraisal of how the Communist governments deal with organised religion. It varies greatly from open hostility in Albania to the Soviet Union where there is a clause in the Constitution which guarantees religious freedom. But the anti-religion campaign which has been waged in Russia for 50 years seems to have been effective and although some sects can muster sizeable congregations, none have a chance of making a real impact.

It is in the new Communist states where Catholic influence is still very real that the Church hopes to consolidate and make progress. The hierarchy is aiming to once again exert Church influence in the educational sphere.

GLOOM IN ROME

The problems of priests, particularly those which result from the celibacy rule, have dominated the proceedings at the Rome Synod. The opposing views on this issue have been represented by Cardinal Alfrink of Holland and Cardinal Wright, head of the Congregation for the Clergy. He supports the Pope's view that abandoning "the brilliant jewel of celibacy" will not solve the serious problems facing the Church.

There is deep concern about the world decline in vocations, and the anti-celibacy forces argue that the ban on marriage deters many men who would otherwise consider entering the priesthood. But, in reply, the conservatives say that the Protestant churches are also experiencing difficulties although they allow their clergy to marry. Bishop Weber of Austria told the bishops that 3,000 priests leave the priesthood every year. There is a desperate shortage of priests in many countries and seminaries are deserted. He also warned that many young priests have no confidence in their bishops.

The Pope is clearly of the opinion that secularisation and the decline of faith are at the root of the problem.

LORD SORENSEN DIES

Lord Sorensen, who died in hospital on 9 October aged 80, often lectured for South Place Ethical Society at Conway Hall, London. He was the Labour Member of Parliament for Leyton from 1950 until 1964. Within three weeks of being returned in 1964 he was offered a life peerage which was accepted "after much reflection and some reluctance". Patrick Gordon Walker fought the seat as Labour candidate and was narrowly defeated by the Tory.

INDOCTRINATORS LET THE CAT OUT OF THE BAG

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

Christians frequently claim that the secularist case against religion in schools has been out-dated by sweeping changes of curriculum and method in this subject. Humanists are accused of living in the past, and we are told of the new, enlightened syllabuses, and of teaching that is impartial, objective and, of course, "open". Those humanists who are frequently involved in the controversy are familiar with this argument from Christians. But when Christians talk to Christians, a rather different line is taken. They feel free to abandon the diplomatic bromide and say what they think Religious Education should *really* be about and what it should be intended to achieve. An examination of books and magazines written by and for RE teachers, casts a revealing light on their pretensions to impartiality and objectivity, and their disclaimer of any intention to indoctrinate.

The journal *Spectrum* is described as "a magazine for Christians in education", and since it is edited by Peter Cousins, whose job is to train RE teachers at a college of education, it conveys a good impression not only of what is going on in RE lessons today, but also what is likely to be going on tomorrow. And it is clear that all this is not so very different from what went on yesterday.

The Good Book

The current issue contains an interesting article on the place of religion in the teaching of biology. Its author, Dr Berry, a Reader in Genetics at London University, begins by regretting that school-children today are more interested in discussing pre-marital sex than in "Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and its possible relation to divine activity". He appears to blame this on "those ubiquitous dogmatic humanists" who, he claims, do not understand biology. He warns that biology is a difficult subject and that the non-biologist who aims to understand the ethical implications of biology must undertake "wide reading". And Dr Berry knows just the book to recommend—the Bible. The basis for a study of the ecology of man, he says, are God's commands as set out in Genesis. There is a drawback he admits, in that not all of God's commands are scientific propositions, but Dr Berry comforts his readers: "The fact that they have only partly received a rational basis by the second half of the twentieth century is a demonstration of the wisdom of God in revealing them to us as apparently arbitrary Creation ordinances".

The Bible is very much a popular theme in *Spectrum*. Another article, originally published in an American magazine, tackles the question of sex education and gives Christians some advice on what to do about it: "First, Christians should get involved in their local schools. They can do this through the PTA. They can review the books and other materials used in sex education courses. They can try to persuade school administrators, elected school-board members, and even teachers, to maintain standards that do not violate biblical teaching".

The headmistress of a Derby primary school contributes an article on "Religious Education for the Primary School Child". She recognises the importance of making "an early

start in teaching Christian concepts". She notes that children tend to accept literally whatever they are told and she has some advice for teachers: "What are the basic points to be remembered by teachers of religious education at primary levels? There are some fundamental ideas about God: that He is real and loving . . . that there can be communion with Him . . . that He is creator and heavenly Father . . . that God is holy and we are sinful . . . that God will forgive when we are really sorry".

Another contributor is worried that not enough Christians are taking up primary teaching as a form of "Christian service". He hopes that more and more Christians will come into teaching and tells his readers: "Those on the inside can affirm at every stage, 'It's tough, it's worthwhile, and it's influential!'"

Against Evolution

There are some interesting letters in the correspondence column. One criticises a recent issue for advocating a non-literal interpretation of the first three chapters of Genesis. Evolution, says this outraged correspondent, is "the grand delusion of our age". Another letter claims, "I believe all true scholarship has its roots in sound Christian scholarship . . . Some forget that *all* education in this country has its roots in Christianity".

One of the classified advertisements announces vacancies for teachers willing to train Sunday school teachers; the advertisement specifies: "Conservative evangelical Christians only". Like all careful advertisers they have chosen their media wisely.

This magazine provides no evidence that Christian RE teachers are able or willing to abandon the teaching of their highly disputatious doctrines as though they were fact. The purpose of religious education continues to be the conditioning of children to believe in a god. Humanists have no cause to relax their campaign against religion in schools.

YOUR 1972 POCKET DIARY

This year, for the first time, freethinkers, humanists, rationalists, secularists, or whatever, can have their own pocket diary, containing 16 pages of specialised information (mainly useful names and addresses, plus a few forward dates of 1972 events in the humanist movement), as well as the usual week-to-an-opening diary pages and all the usual features, including London theatre and Underground maps. All this, incredibly, in a small pocket size (4.1" x 2.8") diary that won a design award last year. Just the thing for your own use, and that of like-minded friends to whom you may (dare we suggest it?) send Xmas gifts.

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GOD OF THE TWILIGHT

R. W. MORRELL

The Jesus Movement, which has made an impact on the American youth scene, has come to Britain. One religious journalist describes it as the "new-time religion with the old-time message", and a leader of the Movement says their aim is to "turn people on to Jesus, to bring them a message of hope". The Rev Kenneth Leach, vicar of St Anne's, Soho, is not enthusiastic about the hippy followers of Jesus: "They are potentially harmful because the movement is basically escapist, intolerant and unintelligent". Margaret Knight has described the Jesus of the Gospels as "typical of a certain kind of fanatical young idealist: at one moment holding forth with tears in his eyes about the need for universal love; at the next, furiously denouncing the morons, crooks and bigots who do not see eye to eye with him". In this article, R. W. Morrell examines some of the evidence which is offered in support of Jesus as an historical figure and founder of Christianity.

Professor Wells, in direct contrast to Allegro, can be described as being in the mainstream of mythicist thought, and, in effect, carries on from where J. M. Robertson left off, making use of much of new material, such as the still largely unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls. These two works, if taken in conjunction with the ferment within Christian ranks as to what is historical in the New Testament and what is not, are illustrative of the fact that the myth theory is very much alive, contrary to the wishes of some rather glib theologians.

It is a commonplace Christian claim that Jesus was a unique historical personage; indeed in the highly critical review of Wells' book in the *Times Literary Supplement* (12 March, 1971) the anonymous writer asserted just this. Jesus, to him, was "stamped with a unique personality." It is not being impolite to describe this statement simply as rubbish. There is absolutely nothing of a unique nature in the rather mixed-up character described in the pages of the New Testament nor is there anything unique in the doctrines ascribed to him

Josephus and Jesus

What then is the evidence for an historical Jesus? This question has occupied the attention of some of the best minds the Christian churches have produced over the centuries, and in this respect it is of interest to note that the lack of historical evidence so alarmed the early Christians that they promptly invented some to fill the gap. Perhaps the best known example are the two faked passages in Josephus. This person was a near contemporary to the era in which Jesus was supposed to have lived and wrote a detailed history of the Jewish people that covered, among much else, that period. This account said absolutely nothing about Jesus. Naturally this so upset the early Church that it took steps to remedy the situation. The interpolated passages satisfied the uncritical scholars of the Middle Ages. However, with the development of modern historical methods and a much more critical outlook, it was soon observed that the passages could not be genuine. The main passage would have made Josephus into a Christian, consequently it was clearly recognised that Josephus had been tampered with by Christian improvers. This all too obvious fact has not prevented some theologians from seeking to salvage something from the wreck, and so we find Bruce, in the book already referred to, offering an emended passage, which, in his words, "preserves (or even enhances) the worth of the passages as an historical document" (p 112). We just might tend to think that this sounds a little like the story of the drowning man clutching at a straw.

Early Christians

The late Herbert Cutner declared that the Josephus passage "shrieks forgery" (*Jesus—God, Man or Myth?*, New York, 1950, p 105), and many Christian and Jewish writers have echoed this sentiment. Interestingly—and this is an aspect of the discussion Bruce pointedly ignores—several early Christian writers who knew and used Josephus, and who could have utilised the passages to good effect, knew nothing about them. An earlier Christian writer, Origen (185-254), claimed that Josephus did not believe in Jesus as Christ.

(Continued on back page)

Although largely unknown outside professional historical circles, it is a simple fact that the evidence advanced in support of a historical Jesus as founder of the Christian faith leaves much to be desired. Professional historians, for the most part, are happy to leave the story of the man Jesus to the theologians, or just mention him in passing, while concentrating their attention upon Christianity as an institution within society. This attitude has led to theologians claiming, as does F. F. Bruce in his book, *The New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable?* (London, 1960), that: "It is not historians who propagate the Christ-myth theories" (p 119).

The quotation from Bruce is interesting as much for its inaccuracy as for the particular use of the term Christ-myth instead of Jesus-myth. There is a world of difference between any approach to the question of Christian origins starting from a supernaturalistic premise as implicit in the title Christ, and one using the secular name Jesus. Certain historians might be happy to discuss Jesus the man in historical terms. However, most would hesitate to discuss the issue if based upon Bruce's implied supernaturalism. Actually Bruce's remark about historians is indicative of a subtle change in emphasis, for most earlier critics of the myth theory used to make much of the lack of theological qualifications (so they claimed) on the part of many of those who advanced the theory.

The myth theory has recently come before the general public with the publication of two books, John Allegro's *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (which reached a mass public through its serialisation in the *Sunday Mirror*, a paper claiming a six million circulation), and Professor G. A. Wells' *The Jesus of the Early Christians*. Allegro's book is a marked departure from the general trend of past mythicist ideas in that it advances the idea that Christianity was a cover story to conceal an ancient drug cult. The author, one of Britain's leading authorities on the ancient languages of the Middle East, relied heavily upon philology to support his thesis. This infuriated his religious critics who, lacking his qualifications, could not comment on his material; however, Allegro's theory was subjected to some telling criticism on historical and botanical grounds, and anyone reading it will soon become aware, if they know the myth story, that he displays little knowledge of the work of earlier scholars on the theory.

FREETHINKER

editor: WILLIAM McILROY

103 Borough High Street,
London, SE1

Telephone: 01-407 1251

The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The *Freethinker* is obtainable at the following addresses. London: Collets, 66 Charing Cross Road, WC2; Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross, N1; Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street (Angel Alley), E1; Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, N1; Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC2; Freethinker office, 103 Borough High Street, SE1. Glasgow: Clyde Books, 292 High Street. Brighton: Unicorn Bookshop, 50 Gloucester Road (near Brighton Station).

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 5p stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

EVENTS

Ashurstwood Abbey Secular Humanist Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone Forest Row 2589. Meeting every Sunday, 3 p.m.

Humanist Holidays. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone: 01-642 8796.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 17 October, 6.30 p.m. F. A. Ridley: "Giordano Bruno, Prophet and Martyr of the Space Age".

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8, Sunday, 17 October, 7.30 p.m. Nigel Sinnott: "Charles Bradlaugh and Ireland".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 17 October, 11 a.m. Harold Blackham: "Continuous Revolution". Tuesday, 19 October, 7 p.m. Jerome Liss: "Is There a Sexual Norm?"

Sutton Humanist Group, Friends' Meeting House, Cedar Road, Sutton, Thursday, 21 October, 7.30 p.m. David Main: "Values in Education".

Welwyn Garden City Humanist Group, Backhouse Room, Handside Lane, WGC, Thursday, 21 October, 8 p.m. Elizabeth Henderson: "Why do Young People Take to Drugs?"

DARKEN OUR DARKNESS

News that the sex education film *Growing Up* was to be shown at Conway Hall, London, to an audience which would include children, resulted in a protest meeting being arranged at Caxton Hall on 6 October. The organisers, presumably convinced they were doing the Lord's work and that he would provide an audience, booked a hall with a seating capacity of 500. But the Lord must have been off duty that evening, for the platform party gazed on hundreds of empty seats, and an audience consisting largely of senior citizens.

A buxom lady stood on the hall steps displaying a poster: "God Protect our Children Against Evil". When the meeting commenced there were just over 40 people in the hall. These included the stewards and a half-a-dozen freethinkers who, out of curiosity, had turned up to hear Lady Birdwood, Frank Smith (a Tory councillor and lay preacher), a gentleman from Wiltshire named Mr Shackleton and Dr Louise Eickhoff.

The chairman opened the proceedings, and announced that as this was a protest meeting he would accept questions, but would not allow any views contrary to the aims of the meeting to be expressed. He advised people who wanted to discuss or debate the matter to organise their own meeting.

Dr Louise Eickhoff, a consultant child psychiatrist at Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham, was the first speaker. Dr Eickhoff, whose views on sex education are always widely publicised, has to be seen, and heard, to be believed. Imagine, if you will, an ageing, rather fragile, smartly dressed figure looking for all the world like Joyce Grenfell, Alan Bennett and Mrs Shufflewick rolled into one. Much of her speech, patronising, condescending and punctuated with phrases like "the good Creator", sounded as though it might have been prepared for an assembly of confirmation candidates.

Dr Eickhoff said that some of her critics had accused her of being opposed to sex education. This is not so. She then outlined her professional career which included a spell in a VD clinic where she had seen "the wrong end of the human body in its nakedness and nastiness".

Unlike most of those who want *Growing Up* banned, Dr Eickhoff has actually seen the film. Judging by the way she described the experience, I got the impression that Dr Eickhoff found it only slightly less distasteful than working in the VD clinic. She recalled how the film "displayed the ugliest part of the human anatomy only made bearable by the sightless eyes of love". To make matters worse she knew that some people were "fiddling about" with themselves as they watched the film.

However, there is a better way of imparting sexual knowledge than by nasty films. The good Creator had arranged a splendid plan. One of her main points was that the Creator had made human beings with two ends—the accepting end above, and the lavatory end below. She believed that the bottom end should be hidden. At this point, members of the platform party and the audience seemed to lose the thread of Dr Eickhoff's case, and several of the stewards exchanged glances which could have indicated that "the Lord moves in a mysterious way". Better 40 than 400 listening to this.

Mercifully, your editor had to leave the meeting before the other speeches were made by Lady Birdwood, Councillor Smith and the gentleman from Wiltshire.

AND NOTES

DAVID TRIBE WARNS OF RELIGIOUS COUNTER-REFORMATION

On 8 October David Tribe gave the first of a series of public lectures which are being organised in London by the National Secular Society and the *Freethinker*. Mr Tribe was president of the NSS for eight years and is an authority on the history of the British freethought movement. The subject of his talk was his new book, *President Charles Bradlaugh, MP*.

Mr Tribe said it has become fashionable to criticise Victorian England for hypocrisy and naivety, and there was certainly a great conspiracy in its literature to avoid mention of the physical side of sex and discussion of the sexual mores that actually obtained. But in all other areas the Victorians showed a sense of realism and moral courage that make our own age look both shiftily and spineless. No group represented the fine traditions of Victorian England better than the freethinking radicals, and there was no better example of them than Charles Bradlaugh.

"Many of our modern sneers are entirely misplaced. It is said the Victorians developed a utopian cult of progress that, like most of their thinking, was simplistic and illusory. The real reason why such a cult developed, however, was that there was enormous progress over that period in productivity, learning, education, political and social reforms. Behind a sentimentality of expression there was genuine moral sentiment. As in all flourishing imperialist systems there was exploitation of overseas colonies and the local *lumpen proletariat*; but there were powerful figures like Bradlaugh constantly urging reforms. In the realm of science and philosophy we also claim to be more sophisticated today. Relativity and quantum mechanics, psychology and parapsychology are supposed to have exploded the old fuddy-duddy, dogmatic thinking that accepted atheism, determinism and philosophical materialism, and to have led us into the real world of an urbane agnosticism, human and even articulate free will, and a mystical dualism. Dare I say that this is all pure mythology dressed up in scientific jargon as part of the new religious Counter-Reformation?"

"Bradlaugh was as pragmatic as Harold Wilson or anyone else when it came to organising his resources. In the eighteen sixties he fought his radical fight under the banner of parliamentary reform, in the early seventies of republicanism, in the late seventies of land law reform, in the eighties of constitutional reform, and so on. What characterised him and the best of his generation was, however, his combination of consistency in basic principles with pragmatism in campaigning. Even in his own day some of his enemies said that he was growing Tory as he gained in respectability, or that the modern world was passing him by. In fact, he was the one who remained loyal to theory and evidence. Much of what is now called trendy leftism is a matter of the heart rather than the head and has not been demonstrated in our time, let alone his.

"Another aspect of his campaigning was his mobilisation of intellectual resources, organising power, street activism where necessary, but a consistent logic and dignity of approach. His journalism and oratory were not of the windy sort but packed with statistics and accurate quotations, closely reasoned logic and intricate detail. Because I tried to reproduce this in my biography—while I hope my style is a little lighter, if not colloquial—I have

been accused by some critics of obscuring my theme with details. But, as Bradlaugh himself said, 'It is the details that make up life'. If in this age of universal education it is too much for people to cope with what I regard as the barest minimum of factual content concerning the innumerable political, legal and financial contests in which he was engaged, it is a sad comment on the pop and pap of our television culture, the 'age of mediocracy' as Professor Halstead referred to it in a recent *Freethinker* article.

"Then, having decided what was a parasol and what was a spade, despite his great courtesy in personal contacts, Bradlaugh always called a spade a spade. Today it is impossible in radical circles to suggest, say, that criminals may be as thuggish as policemen or prison officers, without being called a fascist. It is impossible to hint that some supporters of 'civil rights' in Northern Ireland may be little better than cowardly brigands, without being called a Paisleyite. Indeed it is impossible to criticise the Roman Catholic Church at all without earning this label. Modern demonstrations may be more colourful than Bradlaugh's, but do all the gimmicks of Gay Lib, Women's Lib, Black Power, Student Protest and the rest really advance their causes? Bradlaugh consistently warned against an easy self-indulgence. His powers of leadership, his call to duty, his ceaseless thoroughness and hard work may be unfashionable in a world of *Play Power*, but their disappearance in our age may have something to do with the malaise and lack of direction in which Britain, and so much of Western society, now finds itself."

Mrs Ethel Venton, who succeeded David Tribe as president of the NSS, presented him with a cheque "in recognition of his service and devotion to 'the best of causes'". Members and friends had contributed, and she hoped that we would hear a lot more from David Tribe in the years ahead. "We hope that all you may do in the future will bring you success and happiness", she added.

THE COST OF CHURCH SCHOOLS

By DAVID TRIBE

Foreword: MARGARET KNIGHT

20p (plus 3p postage)

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At a meeting last week the Council of the London Borough of Islington accepted the health committee's recommendation to make free birth control supplies available to everyone over 16 in the borough. The chairman of the health committee said: "People have raised fears that it will lead to increased promiscuity, particularly among the young. I can find no evidence to support this supposition".

The five Tory members of the council voted against the proposal. A Roman Catholic Labour councillor abstained. Two other London boroughs, Lambeth and Waltham Forest, may soon follow the Islington example.

RADICAL POLITICS 1790-1900 : RELIGION AND UNBELIEF

by EDWARD ROYLE

65p plus 7p postage

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BOOKS

Edward the Confessor

by Frank Barlow. Eyre and Spottiswoode, £4.25.

Edward the Confessor has never featured very highly in any schoolboy league of kings. To most of us he is just that rather dotted-looking old man with a beard, whose death near the beginning of the Bayeux Tapestry is the signal for the fun to start. Then there is that sneaking patriotic feeling that if Edward had spent less time confessing and more time on his feet making it clear that Harold was to succeed him, we would not have the 1066 humiliation to look back on. And wasn't there something about Edward actually *offering* the succession to William at some stage? No, Edward the Confessor has never been a very popular figure.

The task of the historian is to ascertain, as far as is possible, the truth about the matter into which he is researching. He must sift evidence, hunt for clues, and finally assemble the most plausible case available. His work is not unlike that of a police detective. Professor Barlow's fascinating book on Edward the Confessor is such a piece of detective work, worthy of comparison with any performed by his television namesake. His investigations are ruthless and thorough, yet at the same time display a great depth of human understanding; and in the end Professor Barlow undoubtedly gets his man. On closing the book, the reader is left with as clear a picture of the Confessor and pre-conquest England as is possible from the evidence available. And all through the hunt he is led step by step, clue by clue, by the hand of an obvious master, whose policy that "A few clear drops of information are better than a larger but more turbid yield" (p 27) ensures clarity and incisiveness at each move. To those of a somewhat secular disposition who may shy away from the book's holy title, I can only say that the book is never boring and is certainly not on of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge run-of-the-mill saints' lives. In fact *Edward the Confessor* is of particular interest to free-thinkers, not only for its subject matter but also for the manner in which it is handled.

Edward was born in about 1005, the eldest son of Aethelred and his second wife Emma. The times were turbulent and at the age of 15 Edward was banished from an England ruled by the Danes and forced to live in exile on the continent. In 1041 he was invited by his half-brother Harthacnut to return to England, and upon Harthacnut's death in 1042 Edward became king, although he was not crowned until Easter, 1043. His long reign was remarkable largely for its uneventfulness. Edward was an adequate soldier and an adequate administrator. He was married, enjoyed hunting a great deal, and through a system of alliances and the careful use of his fleet when necessary, he maintained his kingdom intact. He never allowed himself to be dominated for long by one group, although he blundered badly when pushing his success to far after the banishment of the house of Godwin. (Godwin, the immensely powerful upstart Earl of Wessex, was the father of King Harold.) Professor Barlow suggests that it was Edward's very lack of distinctive characteristics that enabled him to survive in an age when the weak were trampled mercilessly and the strong so often were the cause of their own downfall. Then why was this very ordinary, undistinguished king canonised?

Carefully and clearly the author traces the growth of the legend of the saintly king, so that it becomes increasingly apparent that his eventual canonisation in 1161 was

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due to a series of personal and political manoeuvres rather than to a particularly holy life led by the saint himself. Professor Barlow reminds us that this was not an unusual happening for the middle ages: "Although a judgement on the past, canonisation rarely sheds much light on the person it honours", adding that "occasionally it appears completely irrelevant to, or even at variance with, the man's true historical character". As an example of this latter happening we are offered the story of another Edward, the step-brother of Aethelred, at the hands of whose household he was killed. The canonisation of this "unpleasant youth" was more a reaction to the act of murder than a comment on the life of the victim himself.

The case for Edward the Confessor is not so extreme, but it certainly looks as if his being raised to the company of saints was, if not directly contrary to his earthly life, at least irrelevant to it. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, taken from material largely written in Edward's own lifetime, saw nothing of the hero in the king, and Professor Barlow bids us remember that "If he was no hero to the analyst, neither was he a coward, a monster, or a saint". Moreover, 15 years after his death, the monks at Westminster Abbey were uncertain as to the exact whereabouts of Edward's tomb. This might just be understandable in today's plaque-cluttered museum, but to lose the grave of the one king buried there in an abbey only 15 years old was hardly an auspicious beginning for Edward's saintly career.

Then we meet prior Osbert of Clare, "a man who espoused causes". His abbey needed a fashionable shrine, in the same way as a stately home today needs a safari park or a Rembrandt, and Osbert chose Edward as the most likely attraction. It is suggested that it is not the fact that the prior decided to do this that should seem strange to us, but the length of time which the grave remained unexploited by the abbey. Osbert dug up some suitable miracles and forged royal charters. Unfortunately (or fortunately for the abbey) Edward and his queen Edith had not blessed with any children, and so, despite the fact that "The theory that Edward's childlessness was due to deliberate abstention from sexual relations lacks authority, plausibility, and diagnostic value" (p 82), it became the chief buttress of the claim for canonisation. In 1139 the petition went through to Innocent II, but the political situation was not favourable and the abbey had to wait a further 22 years for its saint.

In 1159 there was a double election to the papacy. The Roman pope, Alexander III, sought recognition by Henry II of England, and Henry gave it. By 1161 Henry was in the middle of his struggle with Becket and in return he sought a favour from Alexander III—the canonisation of Edward. With an *antecessor* who was a miracle-performing saint, Henry's claim to rule over the Church would surely be strengthened. And the abbot of Westminster was only too delighted to endorse the royal claim. So it came to pass that 95 years after his death King Edward was canonised.

Professor Barlow misses none of the irony of his subject, but he is never vicious or bigoted in the manner that so often mars the efforts of freethinkers when they seek to re-write the life of a Christian saint. His task is to discover the truth, not to pass moral judgement. Obviously there is far more to the book than can be mentioned here. The questions of Harold's oath to William of Normandy

REVIEWS

and of William's claim to the English throne are dealt with at length. The picture of pre-conquest England, the savage yet strangely dignified society, is convincingly and colourfully drawn. *Edward the Confessor* is well produced, with a good index, appendices, maps, etc. It is scholarly and expensive, but well worth the reading. Edward was "not a man of great distinction. But neither was he a holy imbecile. He was like many of his rank and time, a mediocrity. Nearly all his characteristics are commonplace". This biography, however, is not commonplace; around a basically dull man is constructed a most interesting story, and for the freethinking community it is a near-perfect example of how to destroy a myth with firmness, precision, clarity, dignity, and, above all, with sympathy.

STEWART ROSS

THE APPEAL OF FASCISM: A STUDY OF INTELLECTUALS AND FASCISM, 1919-1945

by Alastair Hamilton. Anthony Blond, £3.00.

It has always puzzled me what possible appeal Fascism, which at no time presented a coherent political ideology, could have had for the intellectual. I am still puzzled. This is not, let me hastily add, a reflection on the quality of Alastair Hamilton's excellent and lucid study; I rather feel that either the term intellectual has been bestowed on the wrong people or, that some intellectuals should have stuck with their chosen metier instead of venturing into politics.

No doubt Fascism appealed to the petty bourgeoisie who had lost their savings in the inflation, to the soldiers who felt they had been "stabbed in the back", to the industrialists afraid of advancing Socialism, to the law-and-order brigade to whom the liberal post-war democracies spelt decadence, and even to the millions of unemployed who were promised "Arbeit und Brot" by Hitler. But what gems of wisdom could the intellectual lift from *Mein Kampf*? What cerebral processes were activated by the buffoonery of Mussolini?

Any prizes for eccentricity, self-deception and sheer farce should go to the Italian precursors of Fascism. The gifted poet, Gabriele D'Annunzio, for instance had turned soldier, appointed himself dictator of Fiume, when his private army took that city, and even declared war on his own country before palling up with Mussolini, who in turn wooed and betrayed him. His attitude to Fascism may have been ambiguous, it did not prevent him from accepting gifts and honours bestowed on him by Mussolini. The philosopher Gentile became Minister of Education in Mussolini's first cabinet and was thus in a unique position to implement his philosophy. All-rounder Curzio Malaparte, when not fighting duels, composed handbooks on sedition. Having been a Communist he joined the Fascists in the ludicrous hope of combining the two ideologies. After the war he courted Communism once more before he was converted to Roman Catholicism on his deathbed. Even playwright and Nobel Prize winner Pirandello felt naked without a black shirt and proceeded to write pathetic eulogies on Mussolini. And yet, one cannot help feeling that had Mussolini been left to his own devices, his life may not have ended the way it did in front of that Milan garage. His type of Fascism never stooped to anti-semitism, genocide and the brutalities associated with the Hitler

regime. After all, Mussolini performed for Italian audiences and in a country where "spettacolo" forms a major part of life. His downfall began when he allied his country to Germany. Hitler, being a man devoid of humour and little understanding of southern mentality, took Il Duce's grandiose schemes for the re-establishment of the Roman Empire seriously. Subsequent events proved that whilst "Musso" could play a Roman Emperor to perfection; the performance of his legions left much to be desired especially when told to advance on enemies equipped with more sophisticated weapons than bows and arrows.

The German exponents of Fascism were probably less colourful than their Italian counterparts but even more determined to court disaster. The misanthropic Spengler longed for the return of the disgraced monarchy. Heidegger had a short lived flirtation with Nazism, Junger lent it enthusiastic support as did Gottfried Benn. Fascism found its devotees in most parts of Western Europe, and Mr Hamilton's book deals with its manifestations in England and France. The book contains too many illustrious names to be dealt with in a short review. One can but wonder at what prompted highly intelligent men to hatch such incredibly naïve political theories. For many the rude awakening came when their cherished strong men turned theory into bloody practice. Like the sorcerer's apprentice, the intellectuals were unable to master the spirits they had called.

S. D. KUEBART

The Clarence, Whitehall, London, SW1

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PUBLIC LECTURES

Friday, 22 October, 8 p.m.

BARBARA SMOKER

IS DEMOCRACY POSSIBLE—OR DESIRABLE?

Friday, 5 November, 8 p.m.

AVRO MANHATTAN

RELIGIOUS TREASON AND PLOT, PAST AND PRESENT

Friday, 19 November, 8 p.m.

RICHARD HANDYSIDE

THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLBOOK AND RELATED ISSUES

Friday, 3 December, 8 p.m.

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

SEXUAL MYTHOLOGY

Friday, 17 December, 8 p.m.

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LETTERS

The Barbarity of Hanging

The letter from B. Hobson in support of bringing back hanging is a reminder that freethinking rationalism does not necessarily lead to liberal or rational conclusions.

In what sense did Christie and Heath "deserve" to be put to death—let alone in such a barbarous fashion? Since normal human beings do not experience compulsive urges to commit horrible murders, these murderers were abnormal in the extreme, and cannot be held fully responsible for their actions. Needless to say, society must be protected from such monsters, and, since they are probably incurable, this means secure removal from society for life. It may well be less cruel (as Bernard Shaw insisted) to put a man to death than to lock him up for the remainder of his natural life. In any case, in my opinion, no human being should be condemned to lifelong imprisonment, or even hospitalisation without being given the option of an easy death instead. But this (whether self-chosen or not) should be carried out by the most humane method that modern science can provide—not only for the sake of the condemned man, but also for the sake of sensibility of the general public.

The barbarity of hanging could be tolerated only by a barbarous society, and those who are clamouring for its return today must be either lacking in imagination or suffering in some degree themselves from the Christie-Heath syndrome.

BARBARA SMOKER.

W. S. Ross and the Mackay Libel

In his letter (*Freethinker*, 25 September) J. Stewart Ross asks me to furnish evidence for the "suggestion" that W. S. Ross ("Saladin") was involved in the compilation of the libelous life of Charles Bradlaugh by Charles Mackay (1888). With pleasure: (a) Tribe, D. H., 1971, *President Charles Bradlaugh*, MP, pp 265-68; (b) Bonner, H. B., and Robertson, J. M., 1902, *Charles Bradlaugh: a Record of his Life and Work*, Vol. 2, pp 397-399; (c) Robertson, J. M., 1920, *Life Stories of Famous Men*, *Charles Bradlaugh*, p 108; (d) "Saladin" and "Lara" *Ananias, the atheist's god*. Addressed . . . to Mr C. Bradlaugh, MP, and quoted in the Mackay biography in some detail; (e) the advertising pages at the end of the Mackay biography (my copy, at least!); (f) *National Reformer*, 24 February, 1889, pp 121-122; (g) *National Reformer*, 3 March, 1889, p 137; (h) *National Reformer*, 23 June, 1889, pp 393-394.

As regards W. S. Ross' poetry, I was merely being generous! The point is that he was regarded as a good poet by his contemporaries, particularly in Scotland.

NIGEL SINNOTT.

GOD OF THE TWILIGHT

(Continued from page 331)

Another fragment of so-called evidence is taken from Pliny the Younger, who refers at an early date to Christians. Historicists, when calling attention to this, appear to have forgotten that mythicists are not disputing the existence of Christians; what is in dispute is the existence of Jesus, and the existence of Christians does not establish his existence.

We can ignore the passage in *The Twelve Caesars* by Suetonius; even Christians as uncritical as Bruce find this just a little too much to swallow, although they do quote it possibly just to add weight to a weak case.

This brings us to the much quoted passage in the *Annals* of Tacitus, which refers to one Christus as having been executed on the orders of Pilate, as well as being the source for the story of the Neorian persecutions. The first thing to strike one in this passage is that it refers to the title not the name Jesus. This one would expect from a Christian, but not from a Roman official. There is, in short, a rather Christian ring about this passage. The second striking point concerns the story of the persecutions

said to have been instigated by Nero. This tale appears to have been unknown to the early Christian writers, and the tale of the wicked Nero and the brave Christian martyrs are largely the product of modern story tellers and Hollywood movies. Had the early Christians known of this tale they could not fail but to write long chapters on it, as Georges Ory noted in his booklet, *An Analysis of Christian Origins*.

Into the Shadows

Tacitus is suspect not only in respect to possible interpolations such as briefly discussed above. Classical scholars have drawn attention to some odd features in respect to the work, although one hears nothing of this in the pages of such strong defenders of the historicity of Jesus like F. F. Bruce. In his introduction to his excellent translation of *The Annals of Imperial Rome* (Penguin Books, London, 1956), Michael Grant speaks of the strange neglect of Tacitus during the Middle Ages and draws attention to the tenuous character of the references to him both during that period and in the latter part of antiquity itself. Tacitus was written, says Grant, in "unusual and difficult Latin" (p 22), which was, he goes on, "by no means similar to any Latin at all that has survived . . . there is no doubt about its peculiarity" (p 23). He claims that there are good grounds for suspecting error to have crept in, for the work depends "entirely on a single medieval manuscript" (p 23). It will be observed from the above just how weak is the historical case when based upon so suspect a source.

The implications to the Christian Establishment embodied in the myth theory are fundamental, hence the reason why it is so feared. However, even if we allowed that the gospels do contain of themselves some historical data on Jesus (and this I do not accept), it is of such a character as to be all but worthless. Many Christians have sought to compile lives of Jesus based upon the gospels, and in doing so have come up against the fact pointed out many years ago by Bertrand Russell's father Viscount Amberley, that they were dealing with biographers who "have mingled in promiscuous confusion the supernatural with the natural, impossibilities with probabilities, fables with facts." Consequently, Amberley goes on, "the figure of Jesus must ever move in twilight" (*An Analysis of Religious Belief*, London, 1877. Vol. 1, p 255). This latter comment is most apt, for as historical scholarship sheds its few remaining links with theology the twilight figure of Jesus will fade into the shadows, there to be viewed by intelligent men in the same manner as they do the gods of remote antiquity—with interest but without belief.

FREETHINKER FUND

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