

EDUCATION SECRETARY DISCUSSES SCHOOL RELIGION WITH NSS DEPUTATION

Mrs Margaret Thatcher, Secretary of State for Education and Science, received a deputation from the National Secular Society last week, and discussed with them the Society's views on the present privileged, statutory position of religion in the nation's schools. The deputation consisted of William Hamling, MP, (Labour Member for Woolwich West), Merle Tolfree, a member of the NSS Education Committee, and David Tribe, author of *Religion and Ethics in Schools* and *The Cost of Church Schools*. Since the 1944 Education Act was introduced Britain has become a country in which committed Christians are a minority of the population, with Church leaders openly referring to this as the post-Christian era. Non-Christian religions have attracted a large following and there has been a dramatic increase in unbelief and scepticism. So it was appropriate that, with a new Act being prepared, the Secretary of State should meet representatives of an organisation which has campaigned for secular education during the last hundred years and which, in 1964, initiated the new campaign against the religious clauses of the 1944 Act.

Segregation and Sectarianism

Merle Tolfree writes: The deputation was introduced by William Hamling and courteously received by Mrs Thatcher, who listened carefully to what was said. Mr Tribe, the leader of the deputation, pointed out the non-scientific nature of religious belief, and the lack of agreement among different groups of Christians. The diluted Protestantism that is taught in English schools is not accepted by groups of fundamentalists, Catholics and others. Whereas in science there is a broad basis of agreement, there is no such basis in religious matters, which means that what is taught becomes subject to personal idiosyncrasy. Mr Tribe also pointed out the divisive nature of religious belief mentioning India and Pakistan on the one hand, and Ireland on the other, where children are taught sectarian hatred in the segregated schools. Moreover, the argument frequently put forward in favour of compulsory religion in schools that children learn morals through religion, is disproved by the prison statistics, which show that a majority of the inmates hold religious beliefs. Morals and religion are not necessarily connected at all. Morals are concerned with human relationships and are best taught in real situations.

Mr Tribe also spoke of denominational schools, and of the difficulties of parents who do not want their children educated in these schools, but are limited by the kind of school in the area or by the manner in which children are allocated. He instanced the recent case in Stafford, where Catholic parents wanted to send their children to the local State comprehensive, but were made to send them to a Catholic school instead, because accommodation had been arranged for Catholic children there.

Other points made concerned the practical applications of the 1944 Act in schools. The problems of teachers, faced with authoritarian heads, were mentioned, and the adverse affects on a teacher's career that may ensue from "opting out". This leads to hypocrisy. The problems of parents who might wish to withdraw their children were also mentioned.

Reference was made to the unsuitability of many of the hymns children have to sing. Some of these are beyond the understanding of children: "Thou spread'st a table in my sight, Thy unction grace bestoweth, And oh what transport of delight, From thy pure chalice floweth". Some of the hymns have a racist content and do positive harm: "The heathen in his blindness, Bows down to wood and stone", and "The lesser breeds without the law".

Information not Compulsion

Mr Hamling, a former teacher, said that everyone had the right to know about Christianity. Such knowledge was part of the general culture of the educated man. But it should be part of history teaching, for compulsory worship and RI are inappropriate today. Some of the clergy in his constituency agreed with him on this question. They would rather religion were not forced on people.

Replying, Mrs Thatcher said that if hymns were unsuitable a different choice should be made, and that although she recognised that the teaching in some cases left something to be desired, this was not necessarily a reason to give up the whole subject. Improvements could be made. On Mr Tribe's point she said that many people had given serious thought to these problems, but had not necessarily come to the same conclusion as the secularists. She herself had studied science but she thought that there were some aspects of life that were not amenable to scientific explanation. In conclusion, she said that she was in any case bound by the 1944 Act, and no major change was envisaged at present.

Although no changes were promised, at least Mrs Thatcher had received a deputation and had listened to the arguments. There was a Press conference afterwards and David Tribe was interviewed in BBC Radio 4 and BBC Radio London programmes.

UN-JUST SO STORY

MAUREEN DUFFY

Once upon a time there was "Nature, red in tooth and claw" who kept the ecological balance by allowing her children to prey on each other, the bigger on the smaller all down the line to the plankton in the sea. Each species thrived as long as it had a food supply, room to turn round in and a tolerable climate. Then came man, mightiest predator of them all who wanted all the room and food; who built and killed until dozens of other animal species were on the verge of extinction and if they were to survive at all had to be protected by laws and put into special reservations which was no different from how men often treated each other.

In the reservation the animals began to multiply again until they became a nuisance to themselves, like men in overcrowded cities, and a nuisance to the humans round them. So every few years men were sent with guns and gas and poison and traps to cull them down to size so that the cycle could begin all over again. This Unjust-so story is the case for species control, including human, by contraception.

We have long been familiar with species like the lemming, that overcrowded themselves to the point of near extinction. This is nature's way and many ecologists argue in favour of it. Left alone, they say, a natural balance would be restored in any given area. At a certain point of expansion self-limiting factors come into force to reduce a population. Either there isn't enough food and its members starve to death or a large number of bigger predators is attracted by a rich food supply, or there is an epidemic or the mothers trample on, neglect or devour their own young. But even before these crisis points are reached there is a build up of misery.

Fishermen complain that seals are breaking their nets, Ugandan farmers have their homes and livelihood trampled into the earth by protected elephants, beautiful cities are damaged and soiled by flocks of pigeons and starlings, foxes invade suburbia. There is simply not enough world for us all to go on expanding in.

Rational Control

To constantly reduce populations by killing is ethically unacceptable to many people, among them, I imagine, most of the readers of this magazine. But this isn't the place to restate the arguments for an individual animal's right to its own life. For those who believe, either by biblical, evolutionary or selfish conviction, that man is top dog and can do what he likes with the rest, any appeal on behalf of the other animals must be to what is practical and economic.

It is uneconomic to reduce pest, for that is what they become, populations by culling because any gap in numbers is rapidly filled up again by an immediate increase in the survival and birth rates. After all we prune and cull to increase quality and reproduction. Any culling operation must be repeated continually. Unless the resulting corpses have a high value for pelts or food such a process must be uneconomic.

On the other hand as long as culling is employed as an accepted method of control there is no logical reason why controlled hunting should not continue. Thousands of roe

and fallow deer are kept like cattle to be shot every year in this country and for many people it is a moot point which is the worse of the two evils, this or the hunting of the 120-odd red deer that also takes place annually.

Furriers can claim that they are performing a service to the fur seal by keeping it from the misery of over-crowding. We have seen this year the National Trust forced against the wishes of its members and executive to accept the inevitability of a cull for the sake of the seals, the fishermen, and the other wild life of the Farne Islands. Every year thousands of unwanted cats, kittens and puppies are killed either humanely by the RSPCA or primitively in private. Factories, yards and shops allow their cat populations to become pests to keep down other pests and then have them killed off, saving one or two to begin the cycle again. We give and take away animal lives with wasteful largesse.

The rational way is surely to control reproduction rather than kill off already living creatures. But the immediate question then is: "Can this be done?" To that I can only answer: "Not yet". However a beginning has been made and I will try to summarise the progress so far.

Most research into the problem has been done in America where *Ornitrol* is already in use to control urban pigeons. The makers of *Ornitrol* have applied for permission to register their product for use in Britain but so far they have not been given this. Large grained corn is soaked in a chemical reproduction inhibitor, dried and fed at selected sites where pigeons gather to feed.

The Next Step

It cannot be used on rural pests like the wood pigeon because it is impossible to make sure that breeding game birds won't gobble it up too. This introduces some of the chief problems of inhibitors. How do you administer your contraceptive and how do you make sure that only the animals it is intended for actually get it?

Trials of antifertility agents have been made in America on red foxes and coyotes. Again the method was to treat food. In this country tests on foxes are promised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries but they are not, as yet, ready to begin. The RSPCA seems unwilling to consider the question of research until its tribunal has reported on methods of fox control.

Clearly we are a long way from an immediate answer. Yet the problems are not insuperable. Contraceptives for mammals already exist. Glaxo make one for bitches which, they claim, has no unpleasant side effects and even reduces the possibility of a phantom pregnancy. Hormone boosters, a related field, are used in livestock food production. We may wonder why so little research has been done for pest control and can, no doubt, each supply our own answers.

For research and pressure for research must be our next step. We need to know the best reproductive inhibitor for each species and how to administer it. We could begin at the Farne Islands with the grey seal. We should press for the Ministry tests on foxes to be begun as soon as possible

(Continued at foot of next page)

FREE INDIVIDUALS FOR AN OPEN SOCIETY?

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

"An open society that *evolves* through choice and creation of new patterns of living and optimisation of individuals, rather than *devolves* through blind assertion of and dependence on beliefs and paradigms of the past" (italics mine).

This is the main long-term objective of a new body called FIFOS (Free Individuals for an Open Society) that has set itself up to oppose "censorious and punitive moralities" that "deprave, corrupt and distort interpersonal relations", and to campaign instead for a society composed of "fully developed individuals interacting freely with open minds in an open society". Supporters of FIFOS, it would appear, are to spend a large part of their time in thus "interacting" with each other—which reminds me irresistibly of the Californian group-cult at Esalen whose initiates devote their weekends to various, and bizarre, forms of physical contact, such as nose-tweaking, on the grounds that contemporary Americans are starved of intimate touch-contacts. (Though, to be fair, FIFOS is an austere intellectual group whose interacting is on a more mental level.)

Committed, as they are, to the free circulation of ideas, FIFOS members are also to defend freedom of expression in the arts, sciences and mass media, and to oppose all threats to liberty and the concept of the "open society". The manifesto calls for co-operation with all "liberal and humane" organisations sharing the same general goals.

Now clearly a great deal of all this is quite unexceptionable, and would earn the sympathy of virtually all members of the National Secular Society, echoing as it does many of the concerns of the NSS and the humanist movement over the years. Why, then, did reading the FIFOS manifesto leave me cold? There are, perhaps, two explanations: either it was just my incorrigible conservatism breaking out again (as I suspect some *Freethinker* readers would have it) or the FIFOS analysis is wrong, or plain woolly, at certain crucial points. Personally, I prefer to believe the latter explanation.

The Real Threat

Thus, is it really true that "dogmatic mythologies contribute more to the burden of human unhappiness, injustice, distortion of the individual personality, and limitation of the real potential of man" than anything else? What exactly is a "dogmatic mythology" anyway? Who is to say whether my particular religious/political/economic belief is, or is not, a "dogmatic mythology"? The concept turns out to be a kind of ideological swear-word lacking analytic usefulness. Humanists may say, rightly on the whole, that those beliefs which cannot be justified at the bar of reason must be dogmatic, and therefore probably harmful. Yet the crimes committed in the name of reason and justice have been many. And the columns of the *Freethinker* itself display, from time to time, a tendency to the kind of rigid and "closed" thinking that we would be the first to condemn in religionists. One has to be very careful, it seems to me, in enthusiastically sweeping away all those "dogmatic mythologies" that appear to impede progress. For, very often, as in the case of the Russian Orthodox Church that stubbornly refuses to die in socialist Russia, a mythology provides security and stability, which a great many ordinary people prefer to freedom.

Nor is it self-evident that dogmatic mythologies are the main cause of human unhappiness. Most informed people today would agree, I think, that the principal threat facing the human race is our chronic tendency to over-breed and the consequent burden on the environment and the planet's resources—what might be called the life-support systems of Spaceship Earth. But where exactly is the element of "dogmatic mythology" in the hunger and misery caused by overpopulation? One can deplore, as I do, the reactionary opposition of the Roman Catholic Church to birth control, or the obstinacy of the Hindus in India in refusing to eat beef, thus depriving themselves of much-needed protein. Such deviations from reasons are, however, very small beer in the face of the main problem of grinding poverty and the real danger of human extinction.

Too Many People

The FIFOS manifesto turns out, on examination, to be an updated version of classical liberalism. But whilst opposition to bureaucracy and defence of individual rights remain valuable and essential, the political context in which such anti-authoritarian movements can take root is, unfortunately, increasingly antipathetic to old-style liberalism. For the growing irresponsibility of the human race in reproducing much too fast, and consuming too many of the world's scarce resources, will have to be curtailed somehow, or we go under. I recommend potential FIFOS supporters to study Paul Ehrlich's new book, *How to be a Survivor: a Plan to Save Spaceship Earth*, which portrays in detail the tough and unpleasant actions that will need to be taken, sooner than we think, to deal with overpopulation. Paradoxically, the future may not be quite so regimented as liberals may fear, once we have dealt with the problem of excessive numbers. For the more people there are, the more difficult it becomes to develop the potential talents and capabilities of each individual. If we're still around in maybe 200 years time, there will be more scope for FIFOS. And I'll be happy to write an article commending it to *Freethinker* readers.

UN-JUST SO STORY

(Continued from Previous page)

and for *Ornitrol* to be given official sanction. Above all we must make it clear that we, the public, want a more rational and economic form of control in principle than the present wasteful methods and that prevention is still better and ultimately cheaper than cure. Nor must we be put off by suggestions that we don't have the scientific knowledge to understand the problem.

Traditionally we are a democracy and this means government by the people not by experts. Even amid the densities of our criminal code we rely on the judgement of 12 ordinary men and women or benches of lay magistrates to decide the fates of thousands of their peers. It is up to us to decide the principles of control and up to our scientific experts to find ways of making them work though it may be we who have to pay for them. Only by offering a viable alternative can we stop repeated wasteful killing and suffering and remove the last logical propaganda from those who benefit by it whether financially or emotionally.

FREETHINKER

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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 officer, 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.

Always wanted: books on freethought and kindred subjects. Will call anywhere in the United Kingdom. Immediate settlement and clearance. Nelson's Bookroom, Lydbury North, Shropshire; telephone Lydbury North 219.

EVENTS

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Imperial Centre Hotel, First Avenue, Hove (sea front), Sunday, 5 December, 5.30 p.m. A speaker from the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science.

Eastbourne Humanist, Group, The New Hotel, Eastbourne, Saturday, 18 December, 7 p.m. for 7.15 p.m. Annual Dinner. Tickets £1.40.

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, 5 December, 6.30 p.m. A meeting.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 5 December, 11 a.m. Geoffrey Ashe: "Towards a New Patriotism?"

NEWS

IGNORING ROME

The attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards birth control took a knock from two different, and significant, sources last week. The Bishop of Kingston-upon-Thames (the Right Rev. Hugh Montefiore) described Pope Paul's *Humanae Vitae* as, ecologically speaking, "the most disastrous Christian utterance of the century". The bishop, who was giving the Rutherford Lecture in London, went on to say that in Holland there seemed to be no difference between the birth rate in Roman Catholic and Protestant families. In Britain the present lack of a population policy was "a national scandal". It was a hot potato which politicians had to learn to hold.

Bishop Montefiore said that Rome's attitude made the job of those Christians who were trying to contain the population explosion more difficult. The official policy of the Roman Catholic Church was that abstinence was the only proper way of limiting births. Fortunately, the Pope's ruling was falling upon ears which, if not deaf, were at least hard of hearing.

Evidence to support the bishop's view is contained in the result of a government survey on family planning which has just been published. It reveals that 47 per cent of Catholics interviewed were using birth control aids. And it also shows that 21 per cent of Catholic wives of mixed marriages who volunteered information to the interviewers were using the contraceptive pill.

The survey was carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, and 6,306 married women under 45 were interviewed.

NO CHOICE

For the second time in recent weeks the Eastbourne Humanist Group have been protesting against the building of church schools in the town. A month ago they wrote to the education authorities concerning the building of two Roman Catholic schools in King's Drive. They are now protesting against the extension of the Bishop Bell Church of England Secondary School at Langney.

Langney is a rapidly expanding area of mainly young families, and parents will be virtually forced to send their children to a Church school. For, as the Eastbourne Humanists point out, the extension of the Bishop Bell school means that any plans for a State school in the area will be pushed further into the background. They say: "We deplore the extension of this Church school, and request that plans be made for the provision of a non-sectarian secondary school in the Langney district".

By their action the Eastbourne Humanist Group have again highlighted one of the scandals of our education system. In many parts of the country the position is the same as that at Langney, and parents have no alternative but to send their children to denominational schools. It is impossible to calculate how many families are affected, for any enquiry to the Department of Education and Science is treated with bland evasiveness. But if enough people kick up a fuss about one-school areas the problem cannot be swept under the Curzon Street carpet indefinitely.

AND NOTES

MIXED MARRIAGE

That the stupidity and intolerance of religionists knows neither racial nor national boundaries is illustrated by the attitude of Israeli rabbis towards Jewish film director Otto Preminger. Whilst in Israel, Preminger married actress Hope Bryce who is non-Jewish. This was against the country's religious laws, and now the orthodox are up in arms suggesting that the marriage was not legal. The wedding took place in a Haifa hotel during the production of the film, *Exodus*, which has earned Israel millions of dollars and much publicity.

In those parts of the world where religion is still a force to be reckoned with, mixed marriages are regarded with disfavour, particularly by the full-time promoters of superstition. No doubt they feel that preventing their dupes marrying outsiders will ensure religious "purity". But it is only a short step from religious to racial and national "purity". And the history of the last hundred years, particularly where the Jewish people are concerned, is a grim example of what can happen when a country is ruled by people suffering from religious, racial or national *folie de grandeur*.

DAVID TRIBE

THE OPEN SOCIETY AND ITS FRIENDS

Foreword: PHILIP HINCHLIFF

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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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DISTORTION

As reported on the front page David Tribe, leader of the National Secular Society deputation which met Mrs Margaret Thatcher on 23 November, was interviewed in a BBC Radio 4 programme. Next day, a representative of the Association for Religious Education was brought to the microphone to reply to Mr Tribe.

Barbara Smoker writes: The interview with the representative of the Association for Religious Education (*Today*, BBC Radio 4, 24 November) was a washout. When he said that the National Secular Society was opposed to children learning about religions, he ought not to have been allowed to get away with such flagrant distortion of the NSS position. In common with all other humanist organisations, the NSS approves wholeheartedly of comparative religion being taught in school. But this is not what children are in fact given: they are indoctrinated with Christianity (or, in Jewish schools, Judaism), not only in the periods of religious instruction, but also, more insidiously, in the compulsory daily worship in all schools of a god whose existence is implicitly guaranteed by Parliament. Only in the sixth form (which the majority of children never reach) is any attempt made at teaching them about any other religion.

As for the argument that it is better for religion to be taught in church schools (as in Northern Ireland) than to be taught exclusively by presumably more fanatical teachers in Sunday school, this misses the main point made in the same programme the previous day by David Tribe—that the mere segregation of children according to the creed of their birth (quite apart from the actual doctrines that they may or may not be taught) helps to perpetuate religious strife by labelling children Catholic or Protestant and never allowing them to get to know each other. If they mixed in the same schools they would realise that the others were human beings like themselves.

The religious survey carried out last year by the Independent Television Authority revealed that only about half the population in Britain has a firm religious belief, and about half are more or less non-believers. Yet, not only is religious indoctrination compulsory in all schools (whereas, ironically enough, such indoctrination is actually against the law in the USA and in France), but the BBC also goes on pretending that this is a Christian country. No representative of a political party is allowed to make a statement without equal representation by the opposing party, but Christianity is allowed hours of radio and television every week, and the most outrageous Christian statements go unchallenged all the time. For instance, in *Thought for the Day* (19 November), the Bishop of Coventry talked about a Christian who had survived a serious operation and an atheist who had died—and if he was implying anything at all it can only have been that there is a statistical advantage in religious belief with regard to longevity! But there was no one else on the programme to question this.

THE COST OF CHURCH SCHOOLS

By DAVID TRIBE

Foreword: MARGARET KNIGHT

20p (plus 3p postage)

G. W. FOOTE & Co.

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Maurice Hill's many friends in the movement were saddened by the news of an illness which has led to a long period in hospital (Baxendale Ward, St Richard's Hospital, Chichester, Sussex). Mr Hill has played a prominent part in the activities of the National Secular Society, British Humanist Association and Humanist Teachers' Association. He is a popular speaker and the author of several pamphlets including "RI and Surveys" and (with Michael Lloyd-Jones) "Sex Education—the Erroneous Zone".

BOOKS

MEDIEVAL CHURCH AND SOCIETY

by Christopher Brooke. Sidgwick and Jackson, £3.25.

The cover says that these are collected essays but it turns out that they are collected lectures; a small criticism, especially as they are edited and with many mainly bibliographical footnotes. But editing has not removed occasional repetitions of points and fond phrases—a technique which may be useful when lecturing but is tedious in print. Readers may also find the title misleading, for whereas there is much about the Church, information about society has to be gathered indirectly. For a book with such a sweeping title, and for those who have no previous knowledge of the period, these disconnected lectures leave much to conjecture. It may be because of the pleasure Professor Brooks takes in his sheer erudition as a scholar that he has been led to neglect his own enjoiner that, though the present is better understood by understanding the past, the historian must use his imagination to penetrate the minds of people who thought so differently from us.

In an apologia for his trade as historian he quotes Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*; history, she says “tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of Popes and Kings, with wars or pestilences in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all, it is very tiresome; and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention”. Though his style is a bit pedestrian, Professor Brooke has a twinkle; he is not dull and the book is full of facts and comments. Neither does he invent anything; indeed, one lecture is on medieval forgery and the perils of believing the truthfulness of every ancient document. Yet time and again one wishes that he would use more of his imagination to get inside those minds and expand upon the motives of his characters and the influences upon them. “In the twelfth century the unity of Christendom was destroyed . . . the world of the eleventh century was a comparatively simple world, that of the twelfth century much more varied. Humanism, asceticism and dissent all flourished.” This is an amazing, fascinating period at the beginning of what has turned out to be—almost certainly—the most rapidly revolutionary era in the history of mankind. But Professor Brooke does not go far into the reasons which induced such turmoil, and often gives the impression that he is uncurious to know.

In a lecture on Becket he says the reason for the murder “lies deep in the social organisation of England and Europe in the twelfth century, and more immediately, in the personality of Thomas Becket himself”, but how deep is beyond the scope of the lecture. He points out that “the knights were no obscure assassins, but men of position in the royal Court and in the part of England where they lived. Nor was their work done in secret. They made their act as public and sacrilegious as possible; to kill a priest was sacrilegious, to kill an archbishop even more so; though they may have wished to do their work elsewhere, they made the sacrilege doubly bad by killing him on consecrated ground. And it is the public nature of the murder, the drama with which the main actors intentionally surrounded it, which makes it so exciting and so strange”. Yet having raised this very significant point he lets it drop and there is no attempt to explain it. Given that Henry II was explosive and autocratic and Becket self-opinionated and provocative, and this against the background of the well-known quarrel for authority be-

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tween Church and State, how was it even then that Becket's assassins went off on their task so eagerly? It is only at the end of the book, in the story of how the Merchant of Prato was persuaded by his solicitor not to leave his money either to the Church or to be administered by it, that any clue is given as to the strength of anti-clerical hate and distrust which was then common among even the very religious and spiritually minded. It is very possible that the knights who killed Becket thought that they were doing so in the service of God as well as of the King; once again it is necessary to see the motives for medieval deeds in medieval terms and not in modern ones.

A serious criticism of the book is that it scarcely mentions Mohammedanism, which was of profoundest influence upon the medieval Church. The reform of the Church under Leo IX (1049-54), the preaching of the first crusade by Hildebrand (Gregory VII, 1073-85) and the increasing asceticism of the clergy Professor Brooke attributes to a response to complaints by critics that the Church was being secularised. But the complaints were nothing new, and the reforms were prompted as much as anything by the fear of the Muslims, the uneasy belief on the part of those in charge of Christendom that it was their own wickedness which had displeased God, and the conclusion that they must pay stricter attention to his Laws as laid down by earlier divines in the halcyon days when, under quite different circumstances, Christianity was spreading. On the one hand they lashed out at the threat—which had the unexpected effect of importing yet more new ideas from the near East; and on the other they tightened up on the rules of the Church, which created an alienation of the clergy from the laity and an authoritarian atmosphere in which new sects and heresies which began to develop. As the clergy, concerned only with their own salvation, drifted further away towards heaven, so the Friars helped fill the gap; it may be due as much to the Friars as the momentum of tradition that reformation did not come sooner. When it came (at a time of further Muslim encroachment in eastern Europe) the revolution was of course nasty, for no people are more horrifyingly cruel and vicious to each other than faithful and schismatic.

If as Professor Brooke suggests, “we have not entirely grown out of a view of history in which the attitudes of Kings and Princes is the determining factor”, it is because the kings and princes, coping as they were with changing and ever more complex problems of State management in a time of increasing trade, wealth and learning, came out on top as they had to keep their feet on the ground. In *The Life-giving Myth*, A. M. Hocart tells us that the principal purpose of religion is to obtain Life—the good life of health, wealth, and long to live. Once, therefore, the religion is seen no longer to be producing these desirable goods the believers become restive and take action. Either they may try to reform the religion to accord to more contemporary ways of thinking, or—as in this case—they turn to other sources. Whatever their influence was at the beginning of the twelfth century, by the end of it the clergy had succeeded in estranging themselves from much of the populace, and Professor Brooke has a lecture devoted to how church design reflected the increasing dichotomy. (It would be interesting to know whether the Troubadour movement—probably an import from Spain—helped in turning the clergy towards a romantically symbolic union with the Church or the Virgin.)

REVIEWS

Another lecture, on the effects of Gregory's reforms of clerical marriage (whereupon, for instance, direct and openly hereditary transmission of benefices became nepotistic) shows again that however much some people may admire asceticism and may be persuaded to believe that it is half-way to heaven, the very postulation has removed it in their minds from the realities of life. Having constantly opposed new ideas, having set its face against science and medicine, having tried to monopolise education for itself, having frowned upon the ends as well as the means of commerce, and then having loftily disassociated its officials from the essential business of procreation—let alone the pleasures of sex—the Church put itself on a steady loser; for the only reward left for adherence to the faith became the uncertain, undemonstrable and intangible promise of a life hereafter. (To keep adherents the Catholic Church by its nature still has to rely to a far greater extent than any other Christian sect on miracles and other tales of the supernatural, and has a vested interest in scientific ignorance.) Though a pope like Innocent III saw “no boundary to his authority in theory and could allow none in practice”, in his conscientious and sometimes frantic pursuance of his policies he succeeded mainly in demonstrating where the real power lay. In the end, as Luther was to show only too clearly, the kings and the princes—and the merchants—cracked the papal influence which had become too remote. Professor Brooke is rightly critical of Weber and to a lesser extent of Tawney, and says: “The idea that there is an inherent connection between ‘Protestantism’ and ‘Capitalism’ seems to me absurd; but if one believes that Puritan principles, extreme anti-clericalism, and the commercial spirit commonly went together in seventeenth century England, it is interesting to observe how frequently they appeared together in various parts of Europe in the Middle Ages”. If he gets further than Weber in capturing the truth of the situation he does not get far enough. Perhaps he will expand upon the subject in a book which has greater claim to the same title than this one manages to have.

One lecture is devoted to St Francis and another to St Dominic, and we are told the stories, probably apocryphal, which crudely characterise them: of St Francis, who simply retreated into the middle distance when his cell was in flames, saying he did not wish to hurt “Brother Fire”; and of St Dominic, who picked the feathers off a live sparrow, saying that the devil was in it. Freethinkers will drily consider the work of these two formidable Christian preachers, both of whom derived their quite different philosophies from the New Testament, and both of whose Orders were seen by Gregory IX to be admirable instruments for the setting up of the Inquisition.

LORD RAGLAN

STRANGE SECTS AND CULTS

by Egon Larson. Arthur Barker, £2.00.

“To such curst deeds religion could impel.” Lucretius’ famous line could have formed the sub-title of this study of some of the strange and often anti-social organisations which constitute the lunatic fringe of religion. *Strange Sects and Cults* is not a history—that would require a whole library—but “a layman’s dip into the ocean of human folly and ferocity, extravagance and gullibility”

ranging from the Assassins of the eleventh century to the Aetherius Society of our own enlightened times.

In the medley of weird beliefs and practices here described it is difficult at first sight to find a common denominator, but as the book proceeds it becomes clear that the thread running through a large proportion of cults, either overtly or covertly, is sex. If any of them deserve special mention on that account it must surely be the Skoptsy. Edward Gibbon remarked that “the painful and even dangerous rite of circumcision was alone capable of repelling a willing proselyte from the door of the synagogue” a human frailty which might have been expected of the would-be Skoptsy, who faced a much more drastic sacrifice. But this appalling sect of eunuchs spread like an epidemic throughout Russia and its neighbouring countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, involving not only whole trades such as goldsmiths, but bankers and high court and government officials. There were two degrees of initiation, the “lesser seal”, meaning what is usually understood by castration, and the “great seal” or complete removal of the genitals. The operations were performed, often by women, at religious orgies recalling those of the Dea Syria described by Lucian in the second century. As compensation for their loss the Skoptsy expected to receive a supernatural gnosis which would enable them to take control of the State. Proscribed by the authorities as a dangerous nuisance, the Skoptsy yet survive in out of the way places.

The Dukhobors, a related sect, seem almost normal compared with the Skoptsy; instead of amputating the privities they merely expose them during their frequent clashes with authority. Persecuted in their native Russia, the Dukhobors were offered a home by the Canadian Government. They have repaid their benefactors with arson and dynamite, causing millions of dollars’ worth of damage and not a few deaths.

One of the most murderous cults of all time was the Thugs, who killed tens of thousands a year in propitiation of Kali, the Indian goddess of destruction. The eventual wiping out of the Thug organisation was virtually the work of one man, Captain William Sleeman. For nearly half a century the British authorities in India had been reluctant to take action for fear of offending a native religion; hardly “one of the brighter chapters of the British Raj”, as Mr Larsen calls it.

The author does not conceal his contempt for the leaders of the outlandish cults he writes about, who all too often live in style on the offerings of their dupes. But he does have a kindly word for such as Joanna Southcott, who in her saner moments realised she was deluded and said so. The Southcottians, now the Panacea Society of the well-known comic advertisement, have managed to get themselves registered as a charity. So, too, has the Church of the Final Judgment, whose leaders claim to be in touch with Satan, and who advocate every imaginable form of sexual perversion. Humanists and rationalists, with recent events in mind, may think it high time the legal definition of a charity was overhauled.

Why, asks the author, are people so ready to accept irrational beliefs in this age of science and education? Partly, he thinks, as a sub-conscious protest against the faculty of thinking which has caused man so much trouble down the ages. Many join sects because they want to give that faculty a rest. “It saves a lot of mental energy if you are ready to accept, unquestioningly, what some prophet or dogma tells you”.

R. J. CONDON

CINEMA

SUNDAY BLOODY SUNDAY

Continentale Cinema, Tottenham Court Road, London.

Human relationships, their frailty, their complexity and their arbitrary nature are exposed to scrutiny in an English middle class intellectual setting in John Schlesinger's *Sunday Bloody Sunday*. An attractive and artistic young man (Murray Head) has acquired himself two lovers whom he visits in turn. One a sensitive woman (Glenda Jackson) in her late twenties, separated from her husband. The other a middle-aged Jewish doctor (Peter Finch). These two are both lonely, subservient and dependent on the caprice of their silent but passionate lover. They are jealous of each other but from either enlightenment or expediency they willingly promulgate the situation. The bisexual youth is the most enigmatic of the characters, though one gradually realises that his indecision and seeming callousness conceal a yearning for fulfilment far stronger and far less tainted by realism than the more comfortable goal of an exclusive relationship sought after by both his lovers.

The young artist whom one first sees as the cad of the film slowly gains in one's appreciation as one realises that his infatuation with another human is not the most important thing in his life as it is with the others. This is brought out in the film by showing his two lovers doing things other than being with him, while he appears only in the company of one or the other of them. The doctor is shown in his surgery, at a hospital, at the barmitzvalh of his nephew at which he is clearly bored and out of place. The woman is seen at her job finding work for out of work executives, a job she leaves because she's fed up with it. She also has a brief affair with an out-of-work executive purely to arouse the jealousy of her younger lover. In contrast the lover is striking because he seems only to do things which have meaning for him. His work, making kinetic sculpture, he enjoys. His love affairs he enjoys and wants no more from. How he attained this form of enlightenment one can only surmise. Certainly he is uninhibited.

Schlesinger observes the traits of these three with humour, meticulousness and the penetration which made *Midnight Cowboy*. The film lacks the overwhelming sense of tragedy and therefore the punch of *Midnight Cowboy*. It is slight in comparison, but nonetheless it has the excitement generated by Schlesinger's artistic use of the camera. He has become a sort of domesticated Visconti. The vision is there but unlike Visconti's it is overlaid by the urbanisation and human entanglements of the twentieth century. The combination produces compelling and worthwhile films.

DAVID REYNOLDS

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LETTERS

Political Dogmatism and the God that Failed

It is most unfortunate that Pat Sloan should seek to justify the political dogmatism of Lenin and undermine the principles of humanism and freethought.

In his major work, *The State and Revolution*, Lenin asserted that the "proletarian state will begin to wither away immediately after its victory". But it is plain that just the opposite has occurred. More than 50 years of Communist Party power have seen the extension of state control and repression in Soviet Russia. Indeed, Paul M. Sweezy, one of the world's leading Marxist economists, stated in a recent address that the Soviet dictatorship is not only not socialist, but is not moving in that direction either, and is not in transition between capitalism and socialism but between one form of class exploitative society and another. Neither is there any parallel between a Public Opinion poll in a free society (one that does not produce a Stalin) and the dogmatism of Bukharin.

J. JUDEX.

Experience of China

Without attempting to enter into the discussion between Pat Sloan and Phillip Hinchliff regarding the theory and practice of Marxist, Leninist and Soviet attitudes towards the class struggle, it is well to take account of the completely new range of experience in dealing with class taking place in China. Mao Tse-Tung was very conscious of all former theory and practice when he wrote: "Not to cut the feet to fit the shoes".

It is still not easy for British people, whether "fixed" on bourgeois values or the experience of the Soviet Union to get beyond the general misrepresentation of developments in China. But those who are keenly concerned about the contradictions amongst the people can fairly easily find recent visitors to China, or they can contact the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding, 24 Warren Street, London, W1. But don't bother if you are very concerned about how Marx and Lenin said things should be done, or if you want to dodge manual work for yourself or your children! At least that is how it might seem today, but Mao's theory and practice in China is that most people can reform their ideas, their "work styles" and their class differences.

JIM LITTLE.

DAVID TRIBE'S PRESIDENT CHARLES BRADLAUGH, MP

This time the author is wholly in sympathy with his subject. Bradlaugh was republican, atheist, friend of Annie Besant, assiduous litigant, and the centre of a complex and furious controversy when he was elected MP for Northampton and desired to affirm rather than to take the oath. Yet he was also a most intensely reputable rebel, cut from the same Victorian cloth as Gladstone; and the story is in the classic Victorian form of the poor boy who made good.—Methodist Recorder

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