

# 72 The FREETHINKER

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## CITIZENS' RIGHTS

### A L R A's EVIDENCE ON ABORTION ACT

"I have been married for 11 years, and have three children aged 10, 7, and 3 years. At my last pregnancy I had a bad prolapse in the sixth month. Now, in spite of taking precautions, I am unfortunately nearly eight weeks pregnant. My doctor suggested an abortion because of what happened last time and he sent me to . . . a consultant gynaecologist . . . but Mr. — refused to perform the operation. . . I am desperately worried about it. We couldn't afford the financial burden of bringing up another child and if I have to go through with this pregnancy my health will suffer considerably, mentally as well as physically. My doctor wants to help me and he considers an abortion necessary but he feels there isn't much he can do."

#### No Regrets

The above is an extract from one of the 51 case histories published as an appendix to the Abortion Law Reform Association's submissions to the Lane Committee, which is inquiring into the working of the 1967 Abortion Act. Many of the cases are tragic and harrowing, but some end on a more optimistic note, for example: "You may like to know that we were eventually successful in obtaining an abortion accompanied by sterilisation for my [38-year-old] wife, and I am sure that the course of action that we took at the time has resulted in a much happier life for all our family and is something about which we have had no regrets at all"—despite the dire warnings of a G.P. who shouted at them: "if you do this you will have it on your conscience all your life!" In another case, an anti-abortion doctor told a mentally ill and suicidal young girl that she ought to have her baby because he thought this would make her "face up to her responsibilities and develop a more mature attitude to life."

ALRA's recommendations for the better working of the 1967 Act include the introduction of outpatient abortion using local anaesthesia; the setting up of special abortion units within the present hospital system; improved contraceptive and pregnancy advisory services and legislation to control severely the activities of commercial abortion bureaux. The report also recommends that the Department of Health inform Regional Hospital Boards that they should ensure that there are enough senior staff willing to operate the present Act to enable "every woman who has proper grounds for an abortion . . . to obtain it in an N.H.S. hospital within reasonable reach of her home."

#### Abortion "Folklore"

Of particular interest to readers will be Section III of the report, "Sources of Public Confusion", which deals

with "a whole new folklore" which has sprung up around the present Act, often at the instigation of its enemies. The section lays such ghosts as "crying foetuses"; and London's being "the Abortion capital of the World." The report further adds: "Press reports of nurses protesting against abortion are examined and shown to have little or no foundation. No evidence can be found that the Abortion Act has had any overall effect on recruitment."

ALRA regards the main obstacles to the working of the 1967 Act to be the unsympathetic attitudes of some G.P.s and consultants, coupled with a shortage of hospital facilities and unequal distribution of resources for abortion patients. The section on abortion deaths directly contradicts evidence given by the Royal College of Gynaecologists, and "many women have for the first time in history been in a position to make a real choice about their own lives." Otherwise, the law is as satisfactory "as any Act could be."

Copies of the *Evidence to the Committee of Inquiry into the Working of the 1967 Abortion Act* may be obtained from ALRA, 22 Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire, price £1 (postage included).

### PUPIL POWER ON THE STREETS

Judging from a television interview with a number of protesting schoolchildren it was obvious that some of them were simply caught up in the excitement, mouthing "revolutionary" left-wing clichés which they then admitted that they did not really understand. Equally, rightists and authoritarians have claimed that the present demonstrations and school strikes were being stage-managed behind the scenes by "sinister" political agitators—indeed, it would be surprising if the present unrest were not, at some stage, cashed in on by the publicity-hungry extremist fringe. Neither of these facts, however, should blind freethinkers to the basic fact that these children's grievances—and

(Continued overleaf)

some at least of the children *are* serious and "aware" people—are at root thoroughly justifiable, particularly their objections to mediaeval relics like corporal punishment, and to ugly, absurd school uniforms, "prescribed" hair length for boys, and other futile disciplinarian fetishes beloved by sections of the teaching profession.

### Barbara Smoker's Eyewitness Account

*One of the recent demonstrations by the children was witnessed by Barbara Smoker; the following is an account of what she saw:*

Going to the "Schoolkids' Rally" at Trafalgar Square on Wednesday, 17 May, as an observer for the National Council for Civil Liberties, I expected to find most of the demonstrators in the Vth and VIth form age group, but in fact a large proportion of the children could not have been long out of primary school. Yet those I spoke to were serious-minded in their objectives and amazingly articulate.

One little girl said that at her school they had a decent Head and the cane and school uniform had already been abolished, so she was there not on her own behalf but in support of less fortunate children. A cherub-faced little boy asked earnestly whether I thought their strike justified. A decade ago on the Aldermaston marches I used to marvel at the political awareness and sheer guts of the 18-year-olds. Now the age of political maturity seems to be down to about 12.

### Behaviour of the Police

The policemen—who for many years have looked to me mere youngsters—now looked like huge bullies towering over the children, and the behaviour of many of them was in line with this image. Some I saw pounce on boys who were doing nothing at all, and search through their pockets before releasing them. I went up to a police van in which two boys were being interrogated, and a policeman was removing the film from a small camera. Presumably one of the boys had photographed an incident that might have

shown the police in a bad light, so the evidence was being destroyed. I asked what the trouble was but the window of the van was immediately closed.

I saw one boy being manhandled by two burly policemen who were threatening to arrest him. When I asked for an explanation one of the policemen said that the boy had been swearing. The boy was then released and I asked him what diabolical language he had used. "I was just walking along with my friend," he replied, "and asked him if he had expected there to be so many 'pigs' about." Later I heard a policeman use quite foul language to another boy who had dared to step out of the single file into which the children were being forced along the pavement.

Trafalgar Square had been barred to the children as a rally site for speeches and the police had apparently been instructed to break up groups of children and to keep them moving. This was fulfilled to the letter. Any child who paused for a rest, whether to sit in the Embankment Gardens or merely to lean against a wall, was immediately moved on by the police. One boy who insisted on his citizen's right to sit in the Embankment Gardens was bodily removed. This tactic, of allowing the children no rest, succeeded in tiring them out after an hour or so—particularly as many of them had already marched to County Hall and back, and some, lacking the fare from their suburban homes, had made their way to the rally on foot in the first place.

### Defeat and Success

Physical weariness, lack of organisation, and sheer ignorance of central London topography combined to defeat the demonstrators. But as an indication of inner strength the demonstration was not only a great success in itself, but a promise for the political future of this country.

One cannot be altogether happy, however, that in the space of one hour and half a dozen streets the Metropolitan Police may well have made lifelong enemies of some of our brightest young citizens.

## MARXISM AND CHRISTIANITY—PART 2

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

(Continued from page 167)

For both traditional Marxism and old-style Christianity there is, of course, a basic dichotomy in *what* is believed. *How* it is believed, on the other hand, and how what is believed depends on certain assumptions about the nature of man and society, are much more important, if our object is to gain insight into the nature of the two faiths. And it is here, I think, that we are justified in calling Marxism a religion, which explains why it is that Marxism, this apparently secular ideology, has in fact filled the gap left by the decline of Christianity.

Firstly, Marxism provides an emotionally satisfying, if intellectually unconvincing, explanation of reality. Just as the Christian finds security in his relationship with God, so does the Marxist find a sense of purpose in the fight for the revolution. Lenin, in particular, was emphatically clear that Marxists must be not just revolutionaries, but *professional* revolutionaries. The Bolsheviks in Tsarist Russia

were a remarkable group of people: austere, resolute, secretive, suspicious, conspiratorial, dedicated. They believed, as do all good Marxist revolutionaries, that nothing matters outside politics, that political struggle was the purpose of life. Admittedly, the Bolsheviks were continually harassed by the Tsarist secret police. But exactly the same psychological characteristics can be found in adherents of the Socialist Labour League, a British Trotskyite organisation advocating immediate violent revolution; and the history of the British Communist Party attests the same psychology at work.

### The New Order

What inspires the revolutionary Marxist is his faith in the New Order, that final apocalypse guaranteed by the dialectic, in which the imperfections and evils of class society are sloughed off and human personality can at last flourish. Freed from what Marx calls the "fetishism of

commodities", man now enters into the realm of true freedom where work is undertaken, not for monetary gain, but for the welfare of society. This total transformation of capitalist society and its work ethic is brought about by the proletariat, the class destined by the laws of historical evolution to destroy the system of private property. This doctrine of the deliverance of the poor immediately calls to mind the gospel of Jesus and the early Christians, as readers of Archibald Robertson's wonderfully persuasive book, *The Origins of Christianity*, will concur; for the Marxist apocalypse is strikingly similar to the kingdom of God preached by the messianic Jews. In both cases, following the revolution, there comes the great divide: the final judgement separating the sheep and the goats, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

Moreover, the fact that both Christianity and Marxism see their final victory as assured is highly significant. Marxist dialectic rests on faith in the inevitability of progress, since the synthesis which arises out of the clash of thesis and antithesis is always a step forward, a move to a higher level of thought or society or whatever. And, although Christianity has never felt able to guarantee the salvation of most of mankind (unlike the Marxists, who foresee the polarisation of the class struggle and the consequent numerical growth of the proletariat, until they come into their own), the eventual triumph of Christianity is certain, since this is God's plan for mankind. To dwell with God in eternal bliss is the end for which man was designed, and is to be regarded as the right and proper goal of all human activity. Despite the inevitability of victory, for both Christians and Marxists the final triumph must be actively worked for: the Christian seeks the state of grace, which alone ensures salvation, the Marxist strives for universal class consciousness, without which the revolution cannot take place.

This belief in a golden future logically depends on belief in a golden past; for otherwise there would be no assurance whatever that sinful man, or class-ridden society, could change for the better. If, however, there was a state of innocence and grace in the past, then it could be achieved again in the future. So we have the myth of the Garden of Eden, and the introduction of sin with the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. And we have the stage of primitive communism which came to an end with the growth of private property, which of course led to the evils of class.

### Antipathy to Rational Approach

The evidence for the ultimate perfectibility of man, and for the possibility of the root-and-branch transformation of society into the communist utopia is, of course, as scanty as the evidence for God. And the adherence of Christians and Marxists to rational argument is carried so far, and no further, the difference being that most sophisticated Christians today do not seriously assert that their doctrine can be rationally demonstrated whereas Marxists are still inclined to hold that their ideas are guaranteed by science, which they certainly are not. In fact, both Christianity and Marxism are highly reluctant to rely on reason as their guide to the fundamental problems of life and the universe. For reason cannot, by itself, lead us to God, or show that Jesus is some way represents him, or that there is some kind of after-life. Similarly, it is impossible to prove that the tortuous workings of Marxist dialectic can ever bring about the communist revolution, or that the Marxist theory of society is correct; still less can objective examination of

the evidence support such notions that the history of society is the history of class struggle. The unpalatability of such conclusions impels both Christians and Marxists to forswear reason for faith, since reliance on reason alone would lead to some kind of agnosticism concerning ultimate reality, which naturally could not live comfortably with their ardent ideology.

Hostility to the rational approach is, interestingly enough, found as unequivocally in Marxist writings as it is in the more woolly variety of Christian. "Bourgeois" criticism of the more obvious weaknesses and shortcomings of communist societies or communist theory is dismissed on account of the inability of the bourgeois to understand the subtleties of the dialectic. One notorious example of the intellectual doublethink employed by Marxists was Stalin's defence in 1930 of his concentration of power into the hands of the state; this was not to be seen as an unwarranted departure from the original Marxist argument that the state would wither away following the revolution, for the more powerful and the more embracing the state became, the easier it would be to abolish it. This particular piece of nonsense could not possibly be taken seriously, except by an audience already well versed in the dialectic, which as Karl Popper has remarked is directly responsible for the decline in intellectual standards found in Hegel and his disciples. But, as Engels once said, "educated" people persist in finding difficulties in the Marxist case, unlike ordinary workers who readily see what is meant in (say) an exposition of Marxist economics, and can grasp truths which elude the intellectuals all their lives. As Trotsky observed, to understand Marxism you have to believe in it. Just as you have to believe in God before you can "understand" Christianity.

### Complexity of Truth and Reality

Antipathy to reason, and faith in a glorious future, usually stem from an ideology which tends to over-simplify the complex nature of reality. Religion very often subscribes to dualism as a working theory of the universe: God and Satan, or mind and matter, or heaven and hell. There is a continual struggle between the forces of good and evil, in which the various shades of grey are squeezed out, since when the millennium finally arrives good triumphs over evil and the great divide takes place. All those not unequivocally for God must be against him, which is why the official Catholic line on agnosticism condemns it as fiercely as it does atheism. There is no room for grey in this black-and-white world. Similarly, Marxism constrains the world into a dialectical framework in which "contradictions" arise, are resolved, and give rise to new, sharper contradictions; the class struggle increasingly polarises, the stark clarity of the choice between reaction and revolution grows more evident, the workers grow ever more class conscious.

All ideologies are inclined to deny the complexity of truth. And, as they are not ultimately based on a scientific or open-minded approach to the world, they become in practice reconcilable with any events whatever. The Christian will proclaim that God loves us whatever happens by war or famine or disaster; the Marxist believes in the coming revolution whatever the contrary evidence. Religious ideologies, however, exhibit these tendencies to unreason in a particularly virulent form, and it is this, as I have argued, which permits us finally to classify Marxism as a religion—abeit a religion which does not believe in a god.

## THE 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, WC1; Freethinker Bookshop, 103 Borough High Street, SE1. Glasgow: Clyde Books, 292 High Street. Manchester: Grass Roots Bookshop, 271 Upper Brook Street, 13. 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.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 5p stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

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

## 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.

Portsmouth Humanist Society, Havant Grammar School. Wednesday, 31 May, 8 p.m.: Dr. Peter Horsey, "Why Britain needs a Population Policy"; and Alastair Service, "The Work of the Birth Control Campaign."

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1. Tuesday, 30 May, 7 p.m.: Marcus McCausland, "Unconventional Healing." [No meetings on Sunday, 28 May.]

# NEWS

## BUREAUCRATIC SPITEFULNESS

The impounding by the Soviet authorities of a Jewish prayer book, sent by an all-Party committee of British M.P.s to 13-year-old Leonid Slepak, is a splendid example of petty bureaucratic spitefulness. However, our sympathies in this matter would have been stronger had the Parliamentary Committee had the tact not to have the book signed by the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition. Any student of the Soviet mind could have told them that getting the leader of a foreign state publicly to add his name to this gift was inept and would raise the Kremlin's hackles about political "interference" in the Soviet Union's "internal" affairs. Many states, not just the Soviet bloc, can get "touchy" about this.

Anyway, we hope that Leonid Slepak will finally, if belatedly, receive his Bar-Mitzvah present, and that the publicity will at least hasten the end of his family's three year wait to leave for Israel.

## ECUMENICAL SMASHER

"By the time you receive this," began an anonymous letter to the *Church Times*, "I shall, God willing, have deliberately broken a window at the Bishop of Willesden's house, 2 Church Road, N.6, as a protest against the failure of the Anglican-Methodist union scheme."

Alas, God was not only unwilling, but, it appears had had the foresight to arrange for the good Bishop to move house several months previously! as a result, the recipient of the brick, and a pile of broken glass, was the Rev. Frank Harvey, the new occupier. Asked by a reporter from the *Episcopophagist* if he felt at all responsible for his disciple's damage to Mr. Harvey's window, God is alleged to have replied, "I only gave him free-will; am I my brother's keeper, as well?"

## EDUCATIONAL "APARTHEID"

"The underlying divisions of Northern Ireland are not so much political as social, tribal, and religious, and they all meet and focus in the educational system, which is rigidly segregated along Catholic-Protestant lines. If this educational apartheid could be modified or got rid of altogether more would be done for peace and unity in Northern Ireland than by all the well-intentioned moves of Westminster politicians."

—Norman St. John-Stevas, M.P., writing in the *Sunday Express* (14 May).

## PRIZE FOR PROMOTING RELIGION

Freethinkers have known for a very long time that it is quite possible to serve both God and Mammon, and indeed, that the two as often as not go hand in hand. It will come as no surprise to readers, therefore, when they hear that a new annual prize of £34,000 is to be awarded annually to a man or woman "who has inspired a new thrust in religion and contributed to the knowledge or love of God." We note, with mixed feelings, that the value of superstition is keeping pace with world-wide inflation.

The prize will be awarded by Templeton Trust, founded by a financial analyst, Mr. John Templeton, who lives in the Bahamas. He is a Presbyterian and hails from Tennessee.

# S AND NOTES

The founder of this paper coined a phrase, popular in its day, of "Holloway here, and Hell hereafter." In these modern, enlightened times, it appears that the improving maxim to be placed before the noses of us godless lot is "£34,000 here, and heaven hereafter." Still, we old-fashioned rationalists have our crumb of comfort; another old cliché: "She was poor, but she was honest."

## NINETY YEARS AGO

A new publication has appeared with the bittersweet title of the *Catholic Freethinker*. It places first among the principles which it upholds, the following: "That license for Atheism, or for the negation of God, is incompatible with human liberty, as being against the natural right of man to affirm the highest of all affirmable things." . . . In these days of intolerable toleration it is quite refreshing to learn that in the eyes of the *Catholic Freethinker* those who deny Christian doctrines have no rights. This is putting plainly what has long been practised by the Church "with the dungeon and the sword for the glory of the Lord." But the old hag has lost her teeth; she can only gnash her gums.

—From *The Freethinker*, 28 May 1882.

## RELIGIOUS RACKETEERS IN ITALY

According to the *Sunday Express* (7 May) an Italian magistrate has named eleven religious charities as "middlemen" in a multi-million-pound racket in duty-free butter. Italian customs have allegedly been defrauded of £6 million duty in the last year in the case of 3,500 tons of butter, imported by these charities duty-free "to feed orphans and the poor."

The butter was imported at 10p a pound, but was then apparently sold to various dealers at 35p a pound, and finally resold at prices of 65p a pound and upwards. So far 23 laymen have been charged with fraud, and further charges, against priests and nuns, are expected. The Pope, who has followed these exposures with "grave concern", has ordered an inquiry.

## TOO MANY CHURCHES IN NORTHAMPTON

A deanery pastoral commission, in its report to the Bishop of Peterborough, is to recommend that three Anglican churches in Northampton, Christ Church, St. Lawrence's and St. Edmund's should become redundant. The *Church Times* (28 April) quotes the report as saying, that the decision "should be made and acted upon as soon as possible. An empty derelict church . . . gives the worst possible impression. . ."

Perhaps the Northampton Corporation engineers had better check the Bradlaugh statue as well, not for redundancy, but for splits at the sides!

## EXORCIST WANTED

The May Competition in Portsmouth Humanist Society's lively monthly, *Hemlock*, invites "applications for the post of Chief Exorcist to the Portsmouth Humanist Society." The successful candidate "will have the opportunity of planning his/her operations in the Humanist Movement." —No wonder this office's headless cavalier has packed his bags and quit the premises! Finally, "Recent experience in casting out unclean spirits will be an advantage."

## THE JESUS MOVEMENT—AND FRIENDS

"Young people in their teens and early twenties, nauseated by the shallow materialism of our age, have been captured by the person of Jesus," says the Bishop of Coventry proudly. Writing in the May issue of his diocesan newsletter, the Right Rev. Cuthbert Bardsley, further adds: "Many of these youngsters, in their search for reality, had tried everything from the Maharishi to free love, from crime to twenty-four hour television."

—And now they are really scraping the bottom of the barrel?

## BRIGHTON HUMANISTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group has requested the local town corporations to provide free advice and contraceptive appliances in their clinics and as a domiciliary service. The Group has also asked the Brighton and Hove Corporations to consider the necessity of providing more nursery places. "The need for pre-school education," they say, "is amply demonstrated by the large numbers of play groups which have sprung up in Brighton and Hove, but it is universally recognised that these attract largely middle-class children and do not cater sufficiently for underprivileged children."

## GIVING CHRISTIANS A BAD NAME

The government of Singapore has "deregistered" the sect of Jehovah's Witnesses, "dissolved" the local congregation on the ground that it was a hazard to "public welfare and good order," and expelled the Australian national in charge of distributing Witness literature. The Singapore authorities had received complaints about aggressive home visits by Jehovah's Witnesses and also about the Witnesses' teachings on non-participation in military service. One American Protestant missionary found the suppression not unwelcome: "This ought to clear the air for Christian work here. The government has been much more reluctant to approve residence permits for missionaries of any faith in the past year or two. We think their concern about the Jehovah's Witnesses was inhibiting to all Christians in Singapore. They gave us a bad name."

—Adapted from *Church & State* (Silver Spring, Maryland), March 1972.

## PERMISSIVENESS, 1872

As chairman at a meeting of the Manchester and Salford Asylum for Female Penitents last week, the Bishop of Manchester said . . . that . . . when he saw the flaunting dress and light air of very many young girls whom he saw in the streets at all hours of the day, they would certainly cause him irrepressible anxiety. . . He objected to the dress of children at the Sunday-schools, to the public gardens, to the dramas and burlesques at the theatres, and even to the Sunday evenings-out of maidservants, and then attacked the press. He said, "Look at the literature which was sometimes allowed to find its way to . . . drawing-room tables, the licence taken by even respectable prints, the cartoons which appeared in *Punch*, where the idea was at least verging on the impure, if not actually impure. Let them [respectable married gentlemen] look at all these things, and then ask themselves whether there was not among us much—too much—of an evil such as wrought the ruin of Corinth and Rome, an evil such as . . . to have been in great measure the ruin of Paris under their very eyes."

—From *The National Reformer*, 26 May 1872.

# REVIEW

**HUMANISM AND CHRISTIANITY** by Martin C. D'Arcy. Constable, £2.25.

When I was a student, nurtured on the Apostle Paul, John Bunyan and incredibly humourless Nonconformist tracts, some Catholic friends introduced me to pamphlets by Martin C. D'Arcy, S.J. They came as a revelation that the "holy" need not be solemn and, as they made whoopee with the higher absurdities of certain atheists and Protestants, democrats and Stalinists, awakened something of the pleasure brought by first contact with the early novels of Evelyn Waugh. After a time I came to shiver in these cascades of jests in and out of season and to resent the confidence trick whereby Catholicism was made to seem plausible by saying as little as possible about it and concentrating on the fatuities of some of its critics or the more vulnerable institutions and personalities of modern life. Though the style of *Humanism and Christianity* is less smart-alecky than the pamphlets I read years ago, it engendered similar mixed feelings. Before I come on to more serious matters let me also record my irritation that a book first published in America in 1969 should be republished in Britain over two years later with its original spelling and Americanisms like "sidewalk", especially when the writer is English.

Father D'Arcy's precise intention in producing this elegantly written book—other than that it seems to have been commissioned for a "Perspectives in Humanism" series—is uncertain from the text, but the blurb is probably right in saying that essentially "he reminds Christians of the necessary conditions for an authentic humanism by indicating the ironies as well as the errors in contemporary Christian attempts to adopt and adapt a secular humanism." The author himself is usually content to mean secular humanism when he refers to "humanism", but in an introduction the series editor Ruth Nanda Anshen offers a definition, for what it is worth, of what I take "authentic humanism" to be: "that which has something in common with intellectual achievement, with moral action, and with love."

Though he confines himself to pretty mainstream trends in theology, existentialism and humanism, Father

D'Arcy has a number of relatively fresh, and certainly deadly, observations to make, confirming my view that slipshod or plain stupid propaganda for any cause will eventually find its own nemesis. Thus he declares cogently that "the nonreligious moralists . . . generally fight very shy of giving us advice: in fact many of them have no advice to give"; that "many humanists are not sufficiently realistic in their thinking!"; which sees "happiness in terms of their own gifts, education, and culture," that "felt interior experience is notoriously difficult to put into words"; that Protestants find existentialism "a more up-to-date way of playing on the harp of religious experience, while among certain Catholics it too is a pet way of absolving themselves from reading the heavier volumes of St. Thomas"; that the "secular" Harvey Cox is often "dogmatic or metaphysical"; that "the strict scientist may be alienated by P. Teilhard's broad generalisations about nature and man and superorganisms"; and that "those who fasten on the new spirituality without much reflection will, I fear, have a rude awakening." But the author ruins his own case by quite a number of reckless assertions against what are the main hazards to modern Catholicism: Marxism and secularisation.

Heaven knows "socialism" and "communism", which he uses interchangeably, sometimes ideologically and sometimes politically in the best McCarthyite manner, are vulnerable enough to criticism and they take some good knocks on pages 68 and 69 (though Francis Chichester's voyage in *Gypsy Moth* seems a singularly inapposite example of human activity with "no economic aims"), but censures of Marxism on pages 67, 70 and 98 are half-baked to a degree. Among his more extraordinary observations on secular humanism are "humanism cannot subsist without the assistance and the stimulus of religion. The animal in us is too strong if there be no divine authority to fear and love; and in the higher part of us the self ends up at best in an enlightened selfishness, if the intimations of another world are ignored" and "a secularism, then, without some kind of a religion is bound to be short-lived or look sub-human. That happened very quickly in Germany with Hitlerism." The "success" of this sort of apologetics (which one does not find in the golden age of Aquinas, over whose passing Father D'Arcy sheds copious tears) is to mix theological assertion with historical inaccuracy while not even attempting to prove either.

DAVID TRIBE

## LETTERS

### Winwood Reade

May I as one whom Winwood Reade would call an "Oriental" be permitted to dissent—not simply because of that—from the general uncritical adulation of this man and his book, *The Martyrdom of Man*?

In doing so I put forward my finding that the secular movement in this country (I know no other) has been and still is very much a club for those not ready to discard the views of former imperialism and former Christian attitudes. Former, I use advisedly since many of the attitudes at present held by secularists have long since been discarded by most non-Freethinkers.

To support my finding I offer the following extracts from the Thinker's Library edition of *The Martyrdom of Man* which have given no offence to secularists and have passed without comment the recent reappraisal of Reade's book.

"Whether negroes are equal in average capacity to the white man . . . they can at least gain their livelihood as labourers and artisans . . . The educated negroes can live at less expense than Europeans" (p. 317).

"Asia soon takes a secondary place and Europe becomes the

centre of human growth . . . The Asiatic follows from blind prejudice the wisdom of the ancients (p. 406). "In Asia human laws have been still more fatal to human progress" (p. 405).

"It was an idea worthy of the Jews that they should keep the Creator to themselves and make their fortune out of the monopoly" (p. 171).

"How is it that some animals have progressed while others have remained at the bottom of the scale . . . , how Europeans have advanced while others . . ." (p. 132).

Finally, "As soon as they obtained self-government they showed themselves unworthy to possess it" (p. 167).

Reade's view on the Pharisees is based on an uncritical acceptance of the New Testament. So much of the latter is subject to re-examination by secularists and humanists but strangely (or not) the teachings of the Pharisees are left unexamined in case there is found there something which does not accord with secular humanist belief. In this respect many of your readers must have some sympathy with the medieval churchmen who were concerned only to bring all knowledge in line with Ptolemaic and Aristotelian concepts.

I make no objection to being described as an Oriental but Reade uses it as a term of contempt. Like most imperialists and formerly most Christian writers he defies both geography and history to use the term to describe those who originate to the south

and east of the Mediterranean while those to the north, however far to the east, are not. How would you or your readers define European I wonder?

Any "Oriental" at present in the secular humanist movement must ask himself how he strayed into such company.

Having swallowed the camel of *The Martyrdom of Man* will you strain at the gnat of this dissent? Perhaps the least ignoble description of those who share my "Oriental" history is that of "eternal dissenters"—a description which I suggest ought to have been earned by secularists who have more praise for those who disguised their dissent under the safer mantle of "theist." Your witness.

GERALD SAMUEL.

Once again I. S. Low displays a peculiar ignorance of politics—capitalistic politics, that and its contradictory morals. He calmly dismisses revelations of wartime trading with the enemy—Coleman's mustard (ingredients for poison gas); Portland cement (for building pill boxes in "No-man's-land") all this under the nose of the Royal Navy who did not dare to stop such traffic. Both of these revelations were silently suppressed—without prosecution of the authors.

As I pointed out in my first letter Lt. Col. A'Court Repington admitted in his Diary that Asquith's Government plotted the First World War—not because they really wished for war against Germany but as the only means of standing up to Germany as a trade rival. Of course I know that wars have happened independent of economic factors, more so in the pre-capitalistic era. I. S. Low unfortunately never grasped the essential fact that the struggle for markets has now taken on a world form, hence the Common Market—which starting with six nations is now widening to take in an extra three or four. Just as the small shopkeeper was lost in the Limited Liability Company restricted to a nation, nowadays we have the large international multiple. In the process the relatively big man is being either absorbed—if there is room for him, or crushed. Here in Britain we have what is now likely to be a permanent slump. Short of socialist revolution this means vast permanent unemployment with more and more business men, for whom there is no room even in an expanding Common Market, joining the dole queue.

It is furthermore, not unknown for business rivals to be *friends* even whilst planning each others' extinction as rivals. Capitalism, by its nature beset with contradictions and inner contradictions is accelerating its rapid decline. I. S. Low should try to understand the nature of capitalism.

Neither China nor Russia is yet Socialist in an advanced state, neither might produce a socialism that I like, yet neither will ever revert to capitalism—a distinct gain for humanity.

CHARLES DORAN.

### Pornography and Dehumanisation

Mr. David Holbrook's comment (*Freethinker* letters, 13 May) shows that he cannot take any criticism of his views without resorting to irrelevant personal abuse.

Whether or not, as Howard Bradworthy alleged in his review (22 April) of *Sex and Dehumanisation*, Mr. Holbrook hates sex, he is certainly obsessed by it. Indeed, he seems to be able to think and write about nothing else these days. As your reviewer pointed out, Mr. Holbrook does have a case, but he states it so hysterically, and with such ludicrous exaggeration, that few people take him seriously. For example, he condemns as equally pornographic the compassionate and moving film, *The Devils*, and the crude, mindless, *Dirtiest Show in Town*. This is a great pity, for hardcore pornography is dehumanising, and a responsible, unemotional approach to the problem is much to be desired.

JOHN L. BROOM.

### Early Christian History

Mr. Hinchliff is fully entitled to the *opinion* (13 May) that the Tacitus passage is hostile to Christianity; he seems to forget, however, that I rejected this in my first reply. I maintained that it did not appear in Tacitus at an early date and advanced reasons for this in my last article. On these reasons Mr. Hinchliff maintains a complete silence.

We are told that it is "word-chopping" to distinguish between the reference in Suetonius and that in Tacitus, which might be true had Mr. Hinchliff demonstrated an association between the two. This he did not even attempt. Any reader of Suetonius can soon discover that unlike the localised reference to a persecution of Christians in Tacitus his brief comment could apply to any part of the empire but has no particular association with the events supposed to have taken place in Rome, which are mentioned separately with no reference to the Christians.

The excursions into logic serves to conceal the fact that Mr.

Hinchliff fails to answer my question on the arbitrary choice of tradition on his part. We either use tradition selectively by advancing the grounds upon which we use one and not another or logically we are compelled to accept the lot as valid, an absurd state of affairs but one into which Philip Hinchliff has argued himself, and as far as I am concerned there I shall leave him.

ROBERT MORRELL.

Mr. Hinchliff (13 May) complains that my views entail "discarding the Acts of the Apostles as an early history of the Christian Church." Precisely this negative view of Acts has been cogently argued in Professor E. Haenchen's *Die Apostelgeschichte* (1956)—one of the outstanding achievements of post-war theological scholarship.

Mr. Hinchliff is also unfortunate in his choice of examples. In order to show that, on my (perverse) principles, it would be possible to prove the Pauline letters to have been written later than the Acts of the Apostles, he refers to Romans 13:1-7, a passage which is so un-Pauline that some theologians has set it aside as an interpolation (e.g. J. Kallas, writing in the 1965 volume of *New Testament Studies*). Proof that the Pauline letters existed before Luke-Acts is best provided by what Mr. Hinchliff calls "the kind of argument from silence" that I "use too often." It is that, whereas the epistles are quoted by early Fathers (Clement of Rome, Ignatius and Polycarp), no writer earlier than Justin Martyr can be proved to have known and used Luke-Acts. Of course, a foolish application of any criterion (including the argument from silence) can lead to erroneous conclusions, e.g. that Paul's epistles are later than Justin Martyr because he makes no mention of them.

Mr. Hinchliff also asks how "a divine or quasi-divine Jesus" could ever have been accepted as the Messiah of Israel. The implication presumably is that the Jews would only accept a human being as Messiah. But in fact the Messiah figures as a supernatural personage in the Jewish Book of Enoch, and I show in my book how, with the rise of apocalyptic literature, the Messiah naturally ceased to be regarded as merely human.

Finally, I hope Mr. Hinchliff's fears that readers are now "heartily tired of the whole debate" are unfounded. We two have obviously enjoyed arguing our differences, and I hope that we (and Mr. Morrell too) have given even those readers who find our differences small some information which has not bored them.

G. A. WELLS.

### Capital Punishment

I am one of those who are not entirely convinced that the abolition of the death penalty for all cases of murder is completely justified. Like a good democrat I am willing to abide by the will of the majority.

But the Editor's article about the subject (13 May) certainly caused me some astonishment; for he states that the death penalty may be justified for atrocities committed by troops in time of war.

But if he objects to its use for civilians on the grounds that miscarriage of justice may occur then surely this is just as likely to occur in the case of soldiers! In fact I would say far more so.

Soldiers are in general carrying out the orders of their superiors. It is the duty of the soldier to attack the enemy. That is what he is there for. If he exceeds his orders and kills needlessly he is certainly guilty of a serious crime. But can one honestly say this is in the same category as say the cold blooded murder of a policeman by a criminal in the course of committing a crime?

The enormously lengthy Nuremberg trials of German war criminals showed how tremendously difficult it was to allocate the precise degree of guilt in each case. They did their best to decide in each case. But the real guilty lay with the entire German nation for permitting the Nazi Party to get into power in the first place. Once the scum got into control the horror and brutality inevitably followed. We see the same picture where the Communists get into power. Nobody expects that there will ever be retribution for the ghastly atrocities committed by the North Vietnamese against their fellow countrymen of the South (or against their own peasants in the past if it comes to that) because nobody will ever have the power to bring them to justice.

In Britain the law is very humane, as a rule, and courts and juries will bend over backwards to give prisoners the benefit of the doubt. It must be very rare indeed for anyone to be falsely convicted of murder nowadays. Society has a perfect right (nay—a duty) to protect itself against the violent criminal. Capital punishment should be regarded not as a form of revenge but a form of protection.

Abolish the gallows by all means. Let death be brought about

(Continued on back page)

as humanely as possible—as it would be in euthanasia. If a murderer by his conduct has forfeited the right to be trusted by his fellow men then he may have forfeited the right to live.

Perhaps I am only a minority opinion. If so I gladly concede to the majority. But to tell me to have one law for the civilian and another for the soldier just does not make sense, and I challenge anyone else to show it does! CLAUD WATSON.

The cases of wrongful conviction for crime must be proportionately very small, and are not ground enough by themselves to warrant dispensing with the deterrent of capital punishment. Mrs. H. W. Nevinson, a magistrate and a socialist, declared many years ago that the British system of justice was almost divine in its endeavour to discover what could be said in favour of the accused. And we do not refuse to use motor transport because of the considerable risk that we may kill somebody.

That capital punishment is a deterrent is proved by the fact that when hanging was in force, almost every condemned man appealed against the sentence although he knew that the only alternative was a life sentence. And in those days a life sentence was a life sentence.

The argument that in former days, hanging for minor offences did not reduce the number of such offences, overlooks the fact that the police force and detective methods were then so inadequate that the great majority of offenders escaped punishment.

It is admitted that some criminals cannot be allowed at liberty. To keep such men in prison is a prolonged torture; it is also very expensive. Execution is better. Indeed, when a man returns to prison again and again for the same serious offence, I would hang him, unless he is obviously mentally ill.

HENRY MEULEN.

### Euthanasia as a Relief from Pain

J. Stewart Ross's letter (6 May) reminds me of the many sermons that I used to preach when I was a professional exponent of the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity. That was before I began to move in the direction of pure reason and secular humanisms.

It would be futile to deny that the lot of the aged poor could be made much more bearable by the more imaginative employment of Christian charity or philanthropic humanism without resorting to such extreme measures as euthanasia. None the less, the time must come for everyone, whether rich or poor, when it becomes more desirable to die than to go on living. Whether death be regarded as the extinction or the expansion of personal existence makes no difference to the value of death as a release from pain. It is sad indeed when persons with every right and claim to death are kept alive merely through the irrational fear that death is more terrible than any sort of life.

PETER CROMMELIN.

### No Cause for Excitement

The indefatigable I. S. Low has yet another bash at one of the classic over-simplifications of a basic Marxist idea. This time it is "that old story of war being caused by capitalism."

Let us put it scientifically: under capitalism powerful vested interests profit directly by wars, from war preparations; and therefore advertise "armaments" as other firms advertise their commodities. Toothpaste manufacturers warn against "Giant Decay"; the agents of the arms manufacturers scream about the "Giant Russia." Socialism abolishes these vested interests, and thus removes the basic cause of modern war.

However, many ideas from the old system survive for a time. Nationalist excesses are among such survivals, and strong ideological conflicts, with occasional frontier skirmishes, are still possible until survivals of capitalism in the minds of men are eliminated.

Once again Low triumphantly quotes Marxist sources as admitting that some West German capitalists oppose, for trading reasons, an anti-Soviet policy. Naturally, Marxists have always stressed the contradictions of capitalism, reflected in contradictory policies. Hence the "love-hate" relationships: capitalists "love" one another as against the working class and socialism, but "hate" one another as rivals and competitors. They "hate" socialism as a potential threat to their system, but "love" the U.S.S.R. as a possible profitable market. Contradictions of capitalism, that's all! Nothing for Mr. Low to get excited about. PAT SLOAN.

### Fabrications of International Zionism

Some weeks ago correspondence appeared in *The Freethinker* regarding Soviet Jews and Israel. Readers might like to read a résumé of a statement recently made on the subject by a Soviet Deputy Minister of the Interior, Boris Shumilin.

Western propaganda, he said, makes out that "hundreds of thousands" of Jews wish to quit the U.S.S.R. and go to Israel. In reality only a small number have applied to go. Their applications are, as a rule, granted.

The main reasons for applying to go to Israel are religious beliefs, the desire to be united with relatives, survivals of the past in people's thinking, and Zionist propaganda which influences some unstable elements.

Soviet Jews certainly do not form the main body of people emigrating to Israel. Since World War II only about 21,000 people have left the Soviet Union for Israel, whereas the total number of people who have settled in that country during this period is 12 million.

When applications to leave the Soviet Union for Israel are dealt with, it is only natural that consideration should be given to the situation in the Middle East resulting from Israel's aggression against the Arab countries, and its refusal to withdraw its troops from the occupied territories and agree to a peaceful, political settlement. For this reason, the Soviet government imposes certain restrictions on the departure of certain categories of Soviet citizens for that country, mainly those who have had certain military training or who are associated with work involving the national interest.

Zionist and imperialist propaganda keeps silent about another aspect of the matter—the growing number of people wishing to leave Israel. Many former Soviet Jews on coming up against the realities of Israeli "paradise" bitterly regret what they have done and apply for permission to return to the Soviet Union.

The fabrications of International Zionism and of certain periodicals abroad are thus completely at variance with the true state of affairs. The purpose of the slanderous campaign they have launched is obvious—it is to try to undermine the friendship between the Arab countries and the Soviet Union.

ERIC WESTMAN.

### Religious Allegiance in Britain

In a recent sociology lesson at my local grammar school we discussed Joan Brothers's book *Religious Institutions in Britain*, which stated that in an A.B.C. TV survey taken in 1965, nearly 100 per cent of the adult population said they belonged to a religious denomination.

I found this fact very hard to believe, and, being a regular *Freethinker* reader, thought that you might possibly be able to supply me with more accurate details. ALAN BROWN.

I would have thought that the figure for nominal membership of religious bodies was around 85 to 90 per cent in Britain. Does anybody have more exact figures to hand, please? (Ed.)

### Common Market Ballot

Mr. Heath argues that there is no need for a "national ballot" on Britain's admission to the Common Market since this is the business of the nation's representatives and they have already decided.

Applying his logic there is likewise no need for a national ballot among railway workers as their local and national representatives (i.e. shop stewards and union officials) have already decided.

If the Government insists on a ballot for railway workers, then logically it must also grant a national ballot on the Common Market. SIDNEY SIMON.

### New Humanist

The Editor of *New Humanist* (see *Freethinker* reviews, 13 May) has asked us to point out that the *New Humanist* subscription is, in fact, £2.25 per annum if sent direct by post; or £1.80 from a local newsagent.