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CHRISTIAN GROUP DEMANDS MORE INDOCTRINATION IN SCHOOLS

WILLIAM McILROY*

Many people who read the Longford Report wondered how long it would be before another specimen of blatant, Christian arrogance emerged from the twilight zone. We did not have to wait for long. The Order of Christian Unity, an assortment of religious worthies whose chairman, the Marchioness of Lothian, a Roman Catholic, is the upper-crust equivalent of Mary Whitehouse, has just published a report of its Education Committee. The report has the rather ponderous title *Ways Whereby Christian Education in State Schools Should be Saved*, and although it is a very Christian document, its link with education is rather tenuous. Its thirty pages are packed with pietistic trivia into which has been thrown doctrinal kitchen sinks ranging from an observation by the late Archbishop Temple to *Godspell*.

Suspect surveys

The Order of Christian Unity sent questionnaires to nearly ten thousand head teachers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It comprised nine statements which were couched in terms that would appeal to committed Christians, so it is not surprising that the organizers of the survey got the results they wanted. Elizabeth Green, in an analysis of the results, blandly claims that the survey was totally representative. "We asked everyone concerned", she writes, as if only school heads come into that category. Teachers, parents and those who are most concerned, the pupils, were not consulted. She adds that those who received the questionnaires were given a "particularly free option as to whether to answer or not". Less than twenty-five per cent of those who received the questionnaire completed and returned it.

Previous surveys, organised by Christian educationists with better judgement and greater expertise than the Order of Christian Unity can muster, have been exposed as prejudiced and unreliable. It is clear that by posing loaded questions, and by omitting alternatives, the outcome of any survey is a foregone conclusion. The O.C.U. survey is a ham-fisted exercise when compared to those initiated by P. R. May, O. R. Johnston and Ronald Goldman. However, these Christian educationists were doing their work at a period when the outcome of the new campaign against school religion—started by the National Secular Society in 1964—was uncertain. They were cool, subtle apologists for the *status quo*, and probably hoped, as others did, that the Secularists and Humanists would go away. But the campaign developed, and so did the general decline in religious belief and commitment. In this new situation we now have groups like the Order of Christian Unity abandoning restraint and demanding more religion in school, and more public funds to subsidize their private aberrations.

The report includes a letter from Mrs. Anne Baker, convener of the Education Committee, to the Secretary of State for Education and Science. Mrs. Baker puts forward a number of proposals the first of which is that the

teaching of Christianity in State schools should not only continue, but be improved. This should be done by "encouraging" local education authorities to "appoint Advisers solely responsible for Christian Education". There should be specialist courses in colleges of education for "those wishing to teach Christianity; for example Biblical Knowledge, Church History and Christian Ideal within the framework of Religious Education". Mrs. Baker is not modest in her demands: "We should like to see funds and facilities made available, so as to ensure the improvement in the status of Religious Education . . . We should also like to see the availability of teaching materials and books equal to that in comparable subjects, such as History and Geography and that similarly comparable time be allowed for Religious Education throughout the schools".

Cinderella of the Curriculum

The problems of children who are being taught in overcrowded classrooms and the scandal of totally inadequate nursery school facilities, and of old and decrepit school buildings are to be ignored while the whole community pays for "new ways of making Christianity a living reality". Fortunately for education and for humanity, rather than being a living reality, Christianity is now a dying duck.

A recurring theme of the report is deep concern for the pious British parents who wish their little darlings to become good Christian citizens but are deprived of this noble ambition by the machinations of humanists and atheists.

Lady Lothian, in a statement to the Press, plaintively enquires why religious education, "the subject everyone wants, remains the Cinderella of the Curriculum". Her ladyship appears to be unaware of a few basic facts of life in 1973. A large majority in the United Kingdom

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(with the significant exception of Northern Ireland) seldom set foot inside a church, and religion is no longer a relevant factor in their lives. Many of those who do belong to churches do not subscribe to fundamental Christian tenets. There is a continuing decline in church membership, conversions, baptisms, confirmations and Sunday school attendance. All this would indicate that if parents really are worried about the spiritual wellbeing of their offspring they have little confidence in Christian teachings and institutions. In fact parents' worries are usually centred on more important matters such as the price of shoes and how to find space for a growing family.

Lady Lothian must surely know that the 1944 Education Act makes only one subject, religious instruction, a statutory requirement. Rather than being a neglected Cinderella, the Christian religion is the blowzy old strumpet of our education system.

Captive audience

Of course, it is not the alleged frustration of parents who ardently wish to have their children brought up in the Christian faith that is the real concern of Lady Lothian and her cohorts in the Order of Christian Unity. They cannot be so incredibly wet that they actually believe their own propaganda. The truth is that the majority of British people, including a large proportion of parents, are totally indifferent to religion. They do not willingly attend or participate in acts of worship, and few parents compel their children to attend church or Sunday school. So the indoctrinators are particularly anxious that they do not lose their captive audiences in the classroom.

The Order of Christian Unity has hailed the outcome of the survey as a triumph for Christian education, although only twenty-three per cent of head teachers in the United Kingdom actually expressed support for the propositions on the survey form. The organizers are welcome to any comfort they can derive from this result. They may not be aware of the considerable resentment amongst teachers and older pupils who are compelled to take part in religious brainwashing sessions. Many parents, particularly of Lady Lothian's faith, are questioning the standards and even the desirability of church schools. There have been public expressions of discontent, and these will increase

as more Catholics realize they are being hoodwinked by their priests into regularly contributing towards the mythical twenty per cent which the church is supposed to pay for its schools.

Christian pressure groups are endeavouring to persuade Mrs. Thatcher and the local education authorities that there is such a spontaneous and overwhelming demand for religious education that funds and resources must be found to provide it. The Church of England has acquired huge assets in this way; now the Roman Catholics and others are determined to get some of the gravy.

Like most religious pressure groups the Order of Christian Unity seeks to justify its arrogant demand that Christianity should have a special place in institutions that serve, and are paid for, by all the community with parrot-like assertions that Britain is a Christian country. They are too cunning to argue their case from a legal standpoint, but interpret people's indifference to Christianity as evidence for their unquestioned acceptance of it.

Rites of passage

The report quotes approvingly a letter from a Midlands head teacher defending religious education on the grounds that "the majority of British citizens are still christened, married and buried according to Christian belief . . ." Now we know that for a variety of reasons, chiefly sartorial and least of all religious, the majority of British weddings still take place in church. But christening is not a ceremony which most people undergo voluntarily, and corpses have no say in the matter of their own disposal. So it is quite possible that the majority of squalling infants and dead bodies may be justifiably included in the grand total of committed Christians. It is during that period of our lives between being taken to the church in a perambulator and in a hearse that Christianity is of little consequence to most people. Rhetorical trumpeting about Britain being a Christian country are all wind and holy water.

Lady Lothian, in her Press statement already referred to, appeals for a "Bring Back the Bible" campaign. Why, she asks with a pious shudder, should the obscene *Little Red Schoolbook* replace the Bible in the nation's schools? It would seem that her ladyship is unnecessarily worried; humanists would agree that the Bible, like any other work of historical importance, should be obtainable from the school library. *The Little Red Schoolbook* has its shortcomings, but it is as suitable for children to read as is the Judaeo-Christian Bible with its obscenity, sadism, fanaticism and anti-intellectualism.

The Order of Christian Unity's report and its demands will, in the long term, be counter-productive. Even the religious Press has received it with a marked lack of enthusiasm, and it is unlikely to cause more than a flicker of interest in educational circles. But it will stimulate freethinking organizations and individuals to campaign even more vigorously for the abolition of R.I. and collective worship in State schools, the withdrawal of subsidies from church schools, and the introduction of syllabuses of social morality and citizenship based on realities rather than superstition.

NEWS

SAND NOTES

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

It is impossible for no comment to be made by *The Freethinker* on this conflict, with its worldwide repercussions. However, one asks oneself what is the point of expressing platitudinous hopes that the ceasefire will last, that fruitful negotiations will be initiated. It is clear that the Middle East is one of those intractable problems the British have a habit of leaving behind them. The British position of neutrality has been criticized as pusillanimous, but, given the situation as it is, what other position can be taken. The beginning of this month marks the fifty-sixth anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. It was marked by a demonstration of Jews and Palestinian Arabs outside the Israeli embassy. The Jewish contingent handed in a declaration renouncing their right of return and of becoming citizens. However, it is just as impossible, to put the clock back sixty years as it is two thousand. The circumstances in which the state of Israel was instituted were unfortunate, especially the element of salving Western consciences for centuries of recurrent persecution at others' expense. However, Israel and the problems arising from its existence are going to be with us for some considerable time.

Readers of *The Freethinker* will be familiar with the unsavoury religious ingredients which reinforce the differences between the two sides in the conflict, so these will not be reiterated here. It was unfortunate, then that publicity should have been given to a Reverend Mr. Ashmore, who while leading a group of Christian missionaries became involved in the war and "knew from the Bible the rightness of the Israel's cause". Generally speaking, however, the feeling in this country seems to be much more evenly balanced than during the last war. No longer is support automatically given, for whatever reasons, to the Israelis. This, one feels, is more in line with the ambivalence of the situation.

ABORTION

It is affirmed that 460 unborn babies are being destroyed daily in this country. I cannot believe that those who campaigned for the recent reform of the Law relating to abortion intended, or foresaw, that their zeal would have such appalling consequences.

These words are those of the Anglican Bishop of Birmingham, writing in his current diocesan news. He goes on to urge support for the many doctors and nurses who refuse "to lower their moral standards in what often amounts to indiscriminate abortion." As is well known there are many such in that city. Statistics just published by the Abortion Law Reform Association in a report sent to all M.P.s show that in 1972 the N.H.S. abortion rate per one hundred live births varied from 3.2 per cent (Birmingham) to 11.0 per cent (Newcastle)—national average 7.9 per cent. Such variation, says ALRA, constitutes the major defect in the working of the Act.

The report, entitled *Abortion Now*, also indicates that, having risen rapidly initially, the number of N.H.S. abortions has changed little in the past three years.

Due to the rapid development of the non-profit making charities, there is now very much less exploitation of women than previously. In 1972, only 15 per cent (18,000) of the total number of abortions carried out in England, Wales and Scotland on resident women (115,000) were performed in the commercial sector of private medicine. Even in this sector, which is now chiefly concerned with providing abortion for foreign patients, there is less profiteering than before. Despite inflation, and in a period in which virtually all medical and other charges and costs have risen sharply, the fees for abortion in private nursing homes are now no more than they were five years ago: in some cases they are very much less.

The profit making clinics are now largely concerned with foreign patients. In 1972, 25,000 women came from France; 18,000 from West Germany; 2,500 from Belgium, and 1,000 from the Republic of Ireland. Others came from Spain, Switzerland, Italy and Austria. About half were married women. Previously, large numbers of American women came to Britain for abortions. In 1972, however, following widespread reform of abortion laws in the U.S.A., only 133 American women were notified as having abortions in Britain. In France, West Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Austria and Holland, abortion law reform is now being either seriously discussed or is in progress. It can, therefore, be expected that within a few years the numbers of European women visiting Britain for abortion will be considerably reduced.

Another point brought out in the report is that, despite newspaper reports to the contrary, the proportion of so-called schoolgirl abortions has remained remarkably constant since the introduction of the Act. During the early 1960s the number of illegitimate births continued to rise rapidly, but since 1968 the number has fallen equally rapidly. Further, there is much circumstantial evidence that illegal abortion has declined dramatically. Again, abortion is less hazardous than childbirth:

In 1972, in England and Wales, there were ten deaths resulting from 157,000 legal abortions—a rate of six per 10,000. For the same year, maternal mortality was 15 per 100,000. Early abortion is even safer. In 1971, there were only 3 deaths of women aborted at under 13 weeks gestation without accompanying sterilization—a rate of only 3.5 per 100,000.

The report also comments that although the Act may have been partly responsible for a shortage of "eligible" babies for adoption, still the number of adoption orders made continues to rise and this must mean that babies who previously had little chance of adoption are now finding a home. The report concludes:

ALRA agrees there is room for further improvement in the working of the Abortion Act. But, within the framework of the law, changes for the better have already occurred and more can be expected. It would be shortsighted to think that if legal abortion was less widely available women would accept their lot or find some other solution to their predicament. Undoubtedly a few would, but the vast majority would do what their sisters did before reform and resort to illegal abortion with all its attendant risks and degradation.

(Abortion Law Reform Association, 22 Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, Herts.)

HUMANIST MANIFESTO

Humanist Manifesto II is largely the work of Paul Kurtz, editor of the American magazine, *The Humanist*. It aims to provide "an affirmative and hopeful vision" and calls for faith commensurate with advancing knowledge. Such "faith" many readers of this journal will consider misplaced, if given without qualification. The five pages contain statements that most readers would find little to disagree with. "We urge that parochial loyalties and inflexible moral and religious ideologies be transcended" is a typical example.

This is very much a consensus document; the signatories include many liberal religionists. This leads to much careful wording; consider the paragraph:

Some humanists believe we should reinterpret traditional religions and reinvest them with meanings appropriate to the current situation. Such redefinitions, however, often perpetuate old dependencies and escapisms; they easily become obscurantist, impeding the free use of the intellect. (Italics supplied.)

Or "We, the undersigned, while not necessarily endorsing every detail of the above, pledge our general support to *Humanist Manifesto II* for the future of humankind."

This document will give very little inspiration to committed humanists. Nevertheless, it may be of use in answering religious critics who suggest humanism would disappear if there were no religion to bash. A welcome feature of the manifesto is its avoidance of "blueprint-for-survivalism". "Technology", it says, "is a vital key to human progress and development. We deplore any neo-romantic efforts to condemn indiscriminately all technology and science or to counsel retreat from its further extension and use for the good of mankind."

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WORSHIP IN SCHOOLS

While many gut-reacting Christians demand more religion in schools, their more reflective colleagues have their doubts. There is a continuing debate in the more responsible Catholic press of the desirability of separate Catholic church schools. Now we note Mr. W. Owen Cole, Head of Religious Studies at James Graham College, near Leeds, writing a letter to *The Guardian* (6 November) to ask whether worship is an appropriate activity in state schools. "If worship is," he writes, "as I believe it to be, the responsive act of believing individuals must we not agree that it is proper to the home, the church, or the synagogue, perhaps to the denominational school but not to the county schools? . . . The present system is respectful neither of worship nor of the conscience of child or teacher."

Legislators please note. Unfortunately, it is the opinions of the gut-reactors that, for electoral reasons, seem to prevail in matters of education.

FUNDAMENTALIST CREDULITY

It was announced by the White House in September that President Nixon last attended church on Easter Sunday when he listened to a stern sermon on sin and redemption, including advice to break off old friendships and admit to having been wrong.

Whatever the President's reasons for allowing his devout image to be tarnished, no comfort can be taken in case it might reflect a general trend towards less religion in what must be the most religious secular state in the world. A recent poll published in the *Minneapolis Tribune* (9 October) revealed that most Minnesotans believed Adam and Eve were real people and that Jesus literally walked on the water. Thirty-nine per cent accepted as true the story of Jonah and the whale.

The only glimmer of hope in these figures is that fifty-six per cent of those surveyed considered the literal truth of biblical accounts was important for their religious belief. It is unlikely that these matter-of-fact mid-westerners would accept a wishy-washy "liberal" Christianity.

OUTRAGEOUS SUBSIDY

From time to time the privileged position of the Churches is taken so much for granted that those in authority forget that the Churches are not departments of state and should not, therefore, receive automatically substantial gratuitous assistance over and above that which is regrettably provided for in law. The latest incident to come to our attention prompted Miss Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, to write an open letter to the Secretary of State for Defence in these terms:

The National Secular Society strongly protests that the recent consecration of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Gibraltar, Mgr. Rapallo, was carried out at the expense of the British taxpayer. Not only did the ceremony take place in a large R.A.F. hangar, lent to the ecclesiastical authorities by the Air Commander, Air Commodore G. A. Ness, but members of the Royal Engineers, whose pay and upkeep is levied on all of us through taxation, were employed in cleaning and preparing the hangar for the ceremony. This extraneous task included erecting an altar and a sanctuary, putting in seating for three thousand people, and preparing a car park for one thousand vehicles.

We wish to enquire by whose authority Air Commodore Ness placed the hangar at the disposal of the Roman Catholic Church. Further, we seek an assurance that Service buildings and personnel will not in future be employed in this way.

We are used enough to the Established Church receiving massive hand-outs, but now it seems that these are to be made available to other churches, and not only in this country. Subsidy seems to be available in directly inverse proportion to the number of adherents to religion. Surely such a wealthy organization as the Roman Catholic Church can at least rent the buildings and services it requires?

• The other side of this question is to ask whether the defence forces do not have too many resources that they feel free to disburse them so freely. The Countryside Commission have complained to the Secretary of State that the recommendations of the Defence Lands Review Committee are too limited. As readers will know, the armed forces control many of the most beautiful parts of the country. In a time of reduced military activity, a considerable amount of this land could be released. But of an estimated 155,000 acres of Defence Land in special areas (national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty and "heritage coasts") only 15,785 acres are recommended for release, and of these only 3,269 acres are in national parks.

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CIRCUMCISION — WHY BOTHER?

L. M. M. BEADNELL

This article was originally published in the New Zealand Rationalist and Humanist. Dr. Beadnell is a medical consultant in private practice, is the honorary secretary of the Victorian Humanist Society, and was formerly medical officer to the Family Planning Association in Britain.

It is interesting to read that circumcision as a routine neo-natal operation has ceased in the Jessop Hospital for Women, one of Britain's largest maternity hospitals, delivering 2,000 babies a year. During the last ten years not one non-Jewish baby has lost his foreskin. It seems that at last the rising generation of doctors is beginning to think before it cuts, and to look into reasons why we continue to follow this ancient traditional practice.

In my day, I am ashamed to say, one reason was that it provided a handy little operation to give training to budding doctors in surgical procedures.

Circumcision is very old indeed, and drawings, which appear to indicate that it was then practised, have been found in Stone Age caves. It was certainly widespread among most civilised nations from the earliest times, and carvings of the operation date in Egypt from at least 4000 B.C., although the most famous one, at Saqqara, was only carved in 2500 B.C. The only peoples who appear never to have practised the operation are those of Indo-Germanic, Finno-Ugrian and Mongol descent.

Unquestionably the operation was originally of religious significance, and in most cases a stone knife, not a metal one, was obligatory; any question of hygiene did arise until later times.

The exact reason for the rite is obscure, but there seem to be two probable reasons: (1) that a part of the body be sacrificed to ensure permanent life for the whole; and (2) as an atonement for incestuous desires during infancy.

The operation was always conducted with great ceremony and was a necessary precursor to initiation processes—either into the tribe as an adult man or into some special office, as the priesthood. Among Jews the obligatory day is the eighth, while among Australian Aborigines, and many African and Polynesian tribes, the time is puberty. In ancient Egypt the age was six to twelve years and among many Arabian tribes it was performed immediately before marriage. Pythagoras (520 B.C.) was required to be circumcised before he could study at an Egyptian temple.

At present the operation is all-but routine among the English-speaking nations, about 95 per cent of new born infants undergoing it. Only those in our lowest social strata appear able to retain their foreskins! It is not nearly so common among continental Europeans, either the northern Scandinavians or the hotter climate Mediterranean peoples.

And what are the reasons for keeping up this traditional practice? According to Dr. Spock, that prolific writer in popular health and women's magazines, it should be done—if only as a status symbol—otherwise, he says, boys will feel inferior and different from their peers. If Dr. Spock had been precommunist Chinese, one wonders if he would have approved of the binding of women's feet for the same reason!

Another reason given is that, if the operation should ever become necessary, it is much more severe in later life than in infancy. This is certainly so, but except in cases of mismanagement (see below) how often is it necessary? Is it right that millions of normal boys should have an unnecessary and (in many opinions) undesirable operation,

on the off-chance that one of them may thereby avoid a later one?

It is sometimes said that venereal disease is less common in the circumcised, but I can find no venereologist who will confirm this. Again, cancer of the penis is said to be rare in the circumcised, but the disease is so very rare in either case that statistics can hardly be regarded as significant.

It is also said that cancer of the cervix is rare in Jewish women; but are not their strict marital and menstrual hygienic rules and practices at least equally important? And hereditary predisposition cannot be left out of consideration.

Neither cancer of the cervix nor cancer of the penis appears to be commoner among continental Europeans than among English-speaking peoples, according to published morbidity and mortality rates. Any figures which favour fewer cancer cases among circumcised men and their wives must also take into consideration the fact that it is among those from the lower social strata, where poor hygiene is prevalent, that we find a larger proportion of uncircumcised men. Therefore, the fires are not comparable.

To turn to the other side of the question, what is the purpose of the foreskin? Its essential function, of course, is protection—protection of the sensitive and delicate glans underneath. Anyone who has seen the terrible mutilations that can do result from burning and scalding accidents will, I am sure, never again cut off a protecting foreskin.

Among infants, too, it has tremendous value in protecting the glans from the painful and infected states which are caused by ammonia-urine or nappy rash.

Has the presence or absence of the foreskin any effect on the pleasure of either the man or the woman during intercourse? It is very difficult to dogmatise about this, for few women have had experience with large numbers of both types of males (or at any rate will not admit that they have had) and no man is in a position to be able to compare the two conditions. The very rare man who had the operation in adult life cannot fairly compare his two states, owing to the other factors involved which necessitated the operation. Moreover, will masculine pride permit a man to admit that another man might have the advantage of him sexually?

It seems to me, that in the absence of the normal protection of the foreskin, the delicate glans must be continually exposed to minute but oft-repeated trauma (such as rubbing against the pants), and must, as a result, lose some, albeit only a tiny part, of the exquisiteness of sensation. Also, a doctor who told men that he had a very long foreskin, said that in his early manhood he used to enter with the foreskin already retracted, but on gaining experience, he now enters with the foreskin over the glans, retracting it only when inside or partially inside. He says that in the case of a woman who is apprehensive or tight, the experience is much more pleasurable to her.

I mentioned above that one reason given for the routine operation was that it might become necessary in later life. If it does, it is almost invariably due to either unwarranted interference or gross neglect in childhood.

It is necessary to understand the anatomy of the genitals. The foreskin is a prolongation of the skin of the penis, extending over the glans, doubled back on itself, and then continues with the surface of the glans. The inner surface is modified and contains glands which secrete a whitish substance called smegma which, among other things, has a lubricating purpose. The foreskin is attached to the under surface (the front surface when erected) of the glans by an elastic membrane called the frenulum. In the adult the foreskin is completely retractable off and above the glans.

Note the words "in the adult", for they are the crux of the matter. In the infant the foreskin is adherent to the glans and does not become free and retractable until the child is from three to six years old. It should be left alone until this age.

One of the predisposing troubles is the misguided practice of mothers forcing the foreskin back during the bath.

This should not be done until, usually by chance, it is found to retract naturally at about three or four years old. If by this time the mother has not noticed a retraction, she can gently manoeuvre it back with sponge or towel. This can then become part of the routine washing. Only if, as occasionally happens, the glans is very late in separating, should she use any real effort or pressure to hasten the separation—or she may be faced with paraphimosis, when the foreskin has been forcibly retracted before it is ready, and cannot easily be pulled down again. If any difficulty arises, the child should of course be taken to the doctor.

At this age the child will be beginning to bath himself and he can be taught quite naturally to wash all his orifices. There need be no more fuss than over any other routine procedure, such as cleaning the teeth, taking a fluoride tablet, or, in Christian children, saying their prayers.

THREE TEMPLE EPISODES

R. J. CONDON

During the whole period between infancy and the commencement of his ministry there is but one incident recorded of Jesus, and that only in Luke. His visit to the Temple in Jerusalem at the age of twelve, when he sat in the midst of the learned doctors and astonished them with his understanding and answers, has generally been treated by theologians as historical, and there has been much speculation as to what Jesus did during the rest of his "hidden" thirty years, and why his precocious performance in the Temple was specially singled out by the evangelist. A papyrus belonging to the British Museum contains a story which is beyond doubt the source of Luke's narrative, since there are similarities of wording too close for coincidence. An English translation of *The History of Setme-Khamuas and his son Si-Osiris* was published in 1900 by F. Ll. Griffiths. The papyrus is of the second century A.D., but according to the translator its language is similar to that of the twelfth century B.C. It is therefore a copy of a much older document, and there can be no question of its having borrowed material from Luke.

In the story "Meh-Wesekht", the barren wife of Setme-Khamuas the son of Pharaoh, is informed in a dream that she will conceive and bear a child. Her husband also dreams, and is told: "The child that will be born, he (shall be named) Si-Osiris (Son of Osiris); many are the marvels that he shall do in the land of Egypt" (cf. Matthew 1:20-21). As the name implies, Si-Osiris is Horus, who has become incarnate in order to combat the power of evil, here personified as an Ethiopian black magician. He says: "I prayed before Osiris in Amenta to let me come forth into the world again. It was commanded . . . I flew right up (from the underworld) to find Setme . . ."

Luke prefaces his account with the words: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit . . ." (2:40). The Egyptian tale has: "The child grew big; he waxed strong; he was sent to the school. He rivalled the scribe that had been to teach him . . . The child, son of Osiris, began to speak with the scribes of the House of Life (in the Temple of Ptah); all who heard him were lost in wonder at him . . . Now when the royal Si-Osiris had attained the age of twelve years it came to pass that there was no good scribe that rivalled him in Memphis in reading or in writing . . ." Luke has used nearly all of this, omitting only the part in

which the child is sent to school and is found to rival his teacher in learning. However, it turns up in several apocryphal gospels. In the Arabic *Gospel of the Infancy*, Zaccheus the schoolmaster tells Joseph: "Thou hast brought a boy to me to be taught, who is more learned than any master." The evangelist appears to have been fond of the story of Si-Osiris, for we also find in it what is recognisably the original of the parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

The dispute between Jesus and Satan on the Pinnacle of the Temple is plainly unhistorical, while the impossibility of Jesus' expulsion of the traders from the heavily-guarded fortress that was Herod's Temple has been noted by more than one critic. Both these incidents may be traced with a fair degree of probability to a single Egyptian source. The original cleansing of the Temple was carried out by Horus in his character of Amsu-Heru, "the avenger of his father" (*Ritual*, chapters 17 and 145). This was in the Temple of Osiris at Annu or Heliopolis, which was fabled to have been occupied after the death of Osiris by his murderers, the devil Set and his associates the Sebaut fiends. The matter is referred to several times in the *Ritual* or *Book of the Dead*. In chapter 138 Horus, as Amsu, avenges the murdered Osiris, crushing his enemies and taking "possession of the house of his divine Father". Elsewhere in the *Ritual* he is said to have overthrown his father's enemies. Jesus calls the Temple "my Father's house", and symbolically overthrows his father's enemies by overthrowing the tables of the money-changers and the seats of "them that sold doves". Amsu the Avenger carries a flail or whip, the "scourge of small cords" with which Jesus drives them all out.

One name of the Temple at Annu was Ha-ben-ben, the House or Temple of the Pinnacle. It housed the ben-ben (cf. "pin" and "pinnacle"), a slender conical stone supposed to have solidified from the seed of Atum, the self-created. The contest between Horus and Set in the Temple of the Pinnacle is transformed in the gospels into a contest of wills between Jesus and Satan on the Pinnacle of the Temple. It should be added that our translations follow, not the *pterugion* or "wing" of the Greek versions but the *pinnaculum* of the Vulgate, which appears to have made use of a source more closely approximating to the Egyptian prototype.

THE CHRISTIAN PERVERSION OF MORALITY AND MARRIAGE

ALAN RICKARD

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It has been said that, in spite of church pretences, the making of marriage into a serious social problem has been the major negative achievement of Christianity. However the question is much wider than this. There are other aspects directly and indirectly responsible for destroying many inter-sex and inter-personal relationships, not only within marriage.

The commencement of this sorry state of affairs can be traced back at least to the beginning of the Christian Bible, the book of Genesis and the Garden of Eden story. It's a pity perhaps that such a picturesque legend has such undertones, but the fact remains that the evil doctrine of "original sin" springs directly from this legend, as well as the earliest denigration of women, pictured as an afterthought of God, a secondary creation from the rib of Adam, but also as the originator of "sin" in the world. Not that these aspects are by any means the totality of evil about the legend—the priestly injunction against man's search for knowledge (lest it destroy the power of the priesthood) also has its beginnings here and Satan already begins to emerge as superior in wisdom and humanity to the God figure. But that's another story.

Perversions of sexuality

Christian perversions of inter-sex relationships were implicit in the very beginning of this religion. They were apparent in some of the alleged statements of Jesus Christ himself, but they reached greater proportions in the attitudes of Paul, as for example in the first book of Corinthians. Marriage even then was seen as a necessary evil, intended only as the means of procreation, an attitude still rampant, particularly in the Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox and some Calvinist-based churches today. This factor in itself subtly destroys the richness attainable by human relationships. If this is the main purpose, then marriage, as such, has failed from the very beginning.

The early church forbade sex on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, also during the forty days of Lent and the forty days before Christmas, and even then the husband was expected to fertilize his wife without touching her unnecessarily, a fact which was probably an early basis of the one-sided sexuality of which the Women's Liberation movement justifiably complains today. It is obvious that these infantile attitudes, fortified in the writings of Aquinas, Luther and Calvin, amongst others, had disastrous effects for both sexes, and still have today.

However, it may well be that the effects have been equally disastrous in other directions. A code of morality which is not based on realism, and which conflicts with life as it has to be lived by the majority, is bound to cause psychological conflict in the minds of many individuals, who try to live by the code but find themselves unable to do so. It is only the odd individual here and there who analyses the matter carefully in all its aspects and, having done so, abandons the *mores* of the majority in favour of a better and more realistic way of life. Most people, on the contrary, will try to find some way of convincing their fellows that they adhere to the accepted code, but, unable to do so in fact, will often tend towards various

overt or covert perversions of mind or behaviour. The more overt of these will end in conflict with society and the law and in punishment for something which is not basically the fault of the individual at all, but of the religious-based moral code itself. We all know that often under the most puritanical surfaces of society we find the greatest maelstrom of conflict. This is an aspect on which careful thought and investigation would be most revealing. Having caused the trouble in the first place the religious-based society has no alternative but to punish those it has destroyed.

Yet another aspect lies in the fact that society and religion have inculcated the idea that people are incomplete without marriage, thus creating immense psychological conflict in the minds of many single people, leading to neuroses on the one hand or acting as a basic cause of subsequent marital trouble on the other.

In New South Wales the state education authorities are currently examining a proposed sex education programme for state schools. The Anglican church in Sydney, always a pillar of social reaction, has written to the department stating that it would be better if the programme stressed moral "norms" based on religious belief and the Christian moral code. This, of course, would have the effect of reinforcing sexual ignorance and superstition, which is what the churches have always done, resulting in traumatic circumstances later in many marriages and a probable effect on the majority in one way or another, due to religious suppression of knowledge. Church action to suppress birth control information over the years has added to this appalling effect.

The question of abortion

Speaking at this year's National Secular Society Annual General Meeting, Barbara Smoker referred to the god of the Old Testament (i.e. the god of Judaism, Christianity and Islam) as "the original male chauvinist pig" and quoted the bible passage; "Unto the woman he said, I will multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth thy children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee".

In the sixth century, bishops meeting in Gaul were seriously concerned with the question of whether women were human beings at all. In the thirteenth century, Aquinas, beloved of Catholic Action today, insisted that women were certainly not entitled to equality either in the church or in society generally.

It is more than likely that the current antagonism of the churches towards abortion reform is based on these attitudes also, since early theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, were determined upon the peculiar belief of Aristotle that a male foetus was endowed with a "soul" forty days after conception, though a female foetus did not achieve this "status" for eighty days. At this time abortion was permitted prior to "ensoulment". The fact that no one in those days was able to detect the sex of the foetus is probably no more ridiculous than many church attitudes today.

The policy of the Catholic Church stipulated in 1947 that a foetus could not be *directly* aborted unless the woman was suffering from uterine cancer, appendicitis, or tubal pregnancy where the foetus could not survive in

any case. Church dogma allows for no other exception, not even in the case of nephritis—an often fatal kidney disease. The present Pope stated in 1972 that the foetus has full rights to life from the moment of conception and that the woman has *no right* to abortion, even to save her life.

It all amounts to the church's contempt for women, who are, in reality, still regarded by the church as property rather than human beings. Most people have probably not considered these aspects in their entirety, but it is surely obvious that such dogmas, understood or not, must have a subtly deleterious psychological effect on female attitudes and indirectly on domestic relationships and on society generally.

Aspects of marriage

The words of the Christian marriage ceremony—"Who giveth this woman in marriage?"—are derogatory to women and are yet another facet reminiscent of chattel slavery. More important, perhaps, is the cultural and religious-based concept of arranged, manipulated or forced marriage, which often makes it little more than a business contract. The tension is complicated by the mediaeval idea of tying women to the home, thus denying them many of the possibilities of development afforded by life and laying the foundation for an increasing boredom, which soon becomes an irreconcilable conflict. It is largely from this that the brutally destructive "war of the sexes" develops. It is little wonder that women often become deceitful or aggressive in this situation, which is also the indirect cause of much male anti-social behaviour. The parrot-like statement, "I wouldn't let my wife work", shows a lack of understanding deliberately inculcated by church and society and is another manifestation of artificial divisions between the sexes. It needs to be realised that if a woman does what she wants to do she will live a more satisfying life and the psychological effect of this will spread to all those around her.

Organised religion is also guilty in its opposition to reform of the anti-human divorce laws in effect in many parts of the world. These laws have a viciously destructive psychological effect on vast numbers of people. Contrary to the dogmatic attitudes of the churches, people are better to separate and build their lives anew than to destroy each other in increasingly meaningless relationships. There is more, not less, reason to separate where children are involved, a happy one-parent home being vastly preferable to a continually disturbed environment, which has long term effects on many minds.

The sick attitudes emanating from the church are responsible for many inhuman absurdities of divorce law as it exists in Australia, such as the apportioning of guilt, an area which becomes extremely distorted in the inter-sex wrangling it causes. Rationally and humanely there should be need for only one ground to be cited in divorce cases—the fact that a marriage does not work. Again, church influence has much to answer for in the lapse of time before divorce can become a legal fact and the time factor can also have a devastating effect on the psychology of the individual. In all of this there may well be a relationship to the fact that church and state have traditionally, if silently, regarded marriage as necessary both for procreation and for the subtle economic coercion of people into a regimented work force.

As always when Christianity is forced to confront such social problems, the almost universal reaction is the suggestion that people should "search for peace in their own hearts" and concentrate on "faith and obedience". Thoughtful, sensitive people will not hesitate long in finding the only realistic answer to these anti-social attitudes, and, in fact, to many others emanating from the same source. To us the only answer is total, uncompromising atheism. The god in whose name these social evils were perpetrated is simply a figment of clerical imagination.

COMPASSION AND CONCEPTION

GEOFFREY WEBSTER

It is usually uncritically assumed that those who reject belief in a supernatural being and assume that death is the termination of existence must necessarily adopt a philosophy of life based substantially upon optimism or "meliorism". However, when we reflect that many convinced atheists (Schopenhauer, Thomas Hardy, some of the Existentialists) were of the opinion that life is an intrinsically burdensome, painful and melancholy business, why is it that many humanists seem to believe that a sombre or pessimistic outlook on existence is something invariably associated with the belief in organized religion? It should be borne in mind that life can be difficult, miserable and ultimately futile quite within the terms of reference of a purely natural interpretation of the universe—this is, for example, the sum and substance of Existentialism.

More important than this plea for a recognition of "pessimistic humanism", however, is the following, which can be said to be a necessary consequence of this. Now that contraception and sterilization are freely available in so many countries (despite determined opposition from many religious individuals and organizations), it is possible for people to enjoy sexual relations without having to be burdened with the thought of unwanted children resulting from their intercourse. In other words, contraception permits folk to regulate their families, so that we see, amongst

millions of people, the growth of a greater sense of responsibility, with reference to the whole question of producing children.

It would, however, be interesting to sound out free-thinkers on the very question of propagation of the species itself, to ask them whether it may not reasonably be maintained—unpopular as this view will be—that a truly compassionate humanist will decide that burdening children with existence would be an act of indefensible callousness. This is something totally distinct from one's personal attitude toward human sexual relations; the humanist can, if he is compassionate, make sure that his momentary genital exhilaration does not lead to some innocent being having to be saddled with the questionable "gift" of existence, for as the German philosopher Schopenhauer remarked, if life were a gift, anyone who examined it beforehand would promptly return it to the donor.

Since religious people all seem to give their approval to generation of children, it is high time that humanists showed their intelligence by being prepared to examine this question. If it is considered criminally irresponsible to have children one cannot afford to support, why not go on to ask ourselves whether it may not, from the point of view of compassion, be criminally irresponsible to have children under any circumstances?

REVIEWS

BOOKS

HUMANISM by Barbara Smoker.
Ward Lock Educational, 40p.

It now seems to be generally accepted by R.E. teachers that, in the later years of schooling, it is important to teach religion in a spirit of critical enquiry, and this is best done as part of a course in comparative religions. In practice this means that, after about ten years of compulsory Christian indoctrination, teenagers are allowed to be critical about Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism—and even humanism. Yes, humanism is now to be included in this Cook's tour of world faith, and this, Christians tell us, means that humanists should stop making a fuss about religion in schools.

Many secular humanists remain unconvinced about the claims for the "new R.E." and take with a pinch of salt the concession by which humanism has now been included on the syllabus. But that being said, it is important to see that humanism gets the fairest deal possible in schools, and for that reason Barbara Smoker's book, written for teenagers, is to be welcomed.

A writer on humanism is plagued, from the start, by the vagueness of the term—though, admittedly, some writers manage to turn this to considerable advantage. Barbara Smoker makes it plain, from the start, that she is writing about a "secular, scientific humanism—that is, a positive, man-centred philosophy of life based on rationalism that is either atheist or agnostic, being concerned with life in this world, not with supposed gods or a hereafter." Unfortunately she seems occasionally to stray beyond the bounds of this definitions and this has made for some ambiguity.

Barbara Smoker has chosen to throw her readers in at the deep end, and her book begins with two chapters on the "humanist tradition". These take one through brief expositions of the ideas of thinkers such as Protagoras, Democritus, Socrates, Plato and Epicurus and, ultimately, to Mill, Darwin, Russell and Monod. This section of the book is clearly written but will necessarily strike many pupils as rather dull, and they may pass rapidly to the chapter on morality.

Many would argue that it is in the area of moral education that a school-study of humanism is most useful—even if only partially to redress the imbalance of religious indoctrination—and certainly Barbara Smoker's chapter on "Morals: Right and Wrong" is the one that is likely to be the most studied and discussed in schools. The theoretical arguments about social morality and its practical implications, such as euthanasia and censorship, are handled quite well—though humanists may take exception to a few points here and there—but unfortunately the section on sexual morality is sadly inadequate and, ever more sadly, rather puritanical.

Miss Smoker starts off well: "Humanists are not among those who condemn all sexual activity outside marriage. Rather, they see sex as one of the great pleasures of life, not just the means of reproduction." But then she seems to become nervous of the implications of this, and a sterner voice takes over: "But it is certainly very immoral to risk conceiving a baby that you do not want and cannot look after". Of course Miss Smoker is entitled to go

round branding large sections of humanity as "very immoral" if she chooses, but it is unfortunate that she should choose to do so in the name of humanism.

Very few teenagers want to have children before they are married, and few could adequately care for children accidentally conceived. The only way to avoid a risk of this is to remain a virgin. But surely the more sensible and humane answer is a greater use and understanding of contraception; of course there will still be a *risk* of pregnancy, but this is why contraception has to be backed up by freely available abortion. Perhaps Barbara Smoker did not mean to say what she has written, but the damage is now done, and how many teenage readers of this booklet will get the impression that humanism is as anti-sex and just as lacking in sense and compassion as is Christianity?

Admittedly her section on homosexuality is much more humane, and so would be the section on abortion, were it not for the implication of her remarks about heterosexuality. Miss Smoker points out that legalised abortion "has enabled thousands of women to have abortions carried out properly in hospital, instead of risking dangerous amateur abortions or having babies to whom they could not give proper care." Miss Smoker does not remind her readers that these thousands of women have been "very immoral" in getting themselves into trouble in the first place, but we can be sure that the R.E. teachers will not be slow to follow her argument through for her.

For all its faults this book is one of the most daring that is likely to be used in schools. It deserves to be recommended on that basis. Inevitably it draws comparison with Kit Mouat's *Introduction to Secular Humanism*, also written for teenagers. Barbara Smoker's book has all the commercial advantages: a well-known educational publisher, a glossy full-colour cover, attractive lay-out and typography and plenty of illustrations. But Kit Mouat's book is equally and perhaps more deserving of circulation, and so if you are moved to donate one of these books to your local secondary or comprehensive school, why not consider donating them both? But don't let's be fooled into thinking that even two school texts on humanism make R.E. any the less objectionable.

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVES IN MEDICAL ETHICS
edited by Maurice B. Visscher. Pemberton, £5.

This is a set of fourteen essays ranging from the tradition and philosophy of medical ethics to specific questions where practical decisions have to be taken (for example, the ethics of birth control, human experimentation and prison medical work). It is a mixed bag of mixed quality.

For a start it is necessary to point out that the first word of the book title is not "humanistic" in the *Freethinker* sense. There are several approving references to Percival's *Medical Ethics*: and Percival was able to go on about moral truth being "properly regulated by the divine rule of equity prescribed by our Saviour". In such a context, 'humanism' means nothing more than a concern for human welfare.

The essays are written by American academics (more than half are, or were, professors), and so the contributions are heavily biased towards the United States scene. What emerges perhaps more clearly than anything is the deplorable state of medical ethics in that part of the world—from the machinations of the American Medical Association to experimentation on children, and the behaviour of medics in prisons and Vietnam.

In its eagerness to protect free enterprise medicine the A.M.A. has opposed "compulsory vaccinations against smallpox and compulsory inoculations against diphtheria, the mandatory reporting of tuberculosis cases to public health agencies, the establishment of public venereal disease clinics and Red Cross blood banks, Federal grants for construction of medical schools and scholarships for medical students, and free centers for cancer diagnosis". Furthermore, the A.M.A. has spent millions of dollars in its opposition to various forms of compulsory government health insurance.

Chapters 11-13, dealing with prison doctors and war, are horror stories. A former warden in the Arkansas Penitentiary System writes about extremes of medical neglect and even torture under medical auspices. One doctor invented the 'Tucker Telephone', designed to torture prisoners by means of electric shock; other doctors were (are?) prepared to sign that prisoners beaten to death died of malaria or pneumonia. The Tucker infirmary, approved by the prison physician for nineteen years, was sometimes flooded by water a foot and a half deep: "Fecal material floated around the ward and surgical room. When this occurred, the patients were encouraged to remain in their beds and meals were served by a convict doctor wearing hip boots." There is reference also to drug rackets, profiteering in blood from donors, and the disappearance of bodies. One doctor, excavating bodies at Cummins Prison, was prepared to testify that they showed no evidence of "trauma or violent death"—one body had been decapitated, another had a severely crushed skull!

The chapters on war in general and Vietnam in particular need little comment. Physicians have been present during torture and have sometimes aided the proceedings.

This book presents vast and seemingly intractable problems. Where the issue is clear-cut the approach is liberal. Euthanasia is favourably viewed, as is abortion and contraception. But who should decide whether a baby's deformity is extreme enough to deny it the right to life? And how can pressure be exerted on governments to cause money to be channelled into medical welfare rather than 'defence'?

I almost despair when I read a book like this: it is so long on questions, so short on answers. The underlying humanitarian ideal seems almost pathetic when confronted with the enormity of the injustices that need righting. Perhaps we should take heart at the fact that so many men, reared in a brutal culture, still emerge clear-headed and with their priorities humanely ordered.

G. L. SIMONS

CHRONICLES OF WASTED TIME. Part 2: The Infernal Grove by Malcolm Muggeridge. Collins, £3.

While the Good Fairy was busy bestowing upon Malcolm Muggeridge the Gift of Words, the Bad Fairy sneaked in and pinched his Judgement. Consequently, this second volume of his autobiography is written in the same flawless prose as his first, while his reflections, as before, veer wildly between the sound and perceptive, and the fatuous and outrageous. An example of the latter occurs when he reflects on the "realisation that, as grows ever more obvious to me, what is still called our free way of life turns out to be neither free nor a way of life; *safeguarding nothing that makes it worth defending*, and with no future prospects that make it worth protracting." Say

that to a Russian 'dissident' or to a Greek patriot! This is Muggeridge, at his insensitive, self-indulgent, complacent, Whitehousish worst—resembling nothing so much as those hearty British holiday-makers of the inter-war period, who, averting their eyes from other aspects of the police state, praised Mussolini for making the Italian railways run on time.

Judgements as worthless as these are scattered throughout the book. The stage army of the Wicked duly put in an appearance: the hapless Fabians, the naughty Webbs, the hypocritical Mafia at the *Guardian*, and others we have come to know and love as the story slowly unfolds. There is nothing to choose between them and Hitler and Stalin. Mr. Muggeridge inhabits a black and white universe, which makes life deliciously simple. How serious he is about any of this, it is impossible to say. Probably the best way to treat Muggeridge is as a kind of inspired clown, who occasionally stumbles brilliantly on the truth.

Those of us, for example, who labour in the vineyards of the abortion statistics, cannot but fail to be arrested by the following observation, derived from his period with the I.L.O. at the old League of Nations:

I cannot pretend that I threw myself with much zest into collecting and collating data about the co-operative movements. For one thing, the information came exclusively from government sources, and was therefore highly suspect. Some of it, indeed, was manifestly absurd, suggesting, as it did, that co-operative enterprises were more numerous and advanced in countries like Cuba and Afghanistan than in France and Switzerland . . . So, with these dubious bricks, we constructed our great statistical edifice. When I left, it was still far from completion. Perhaps even to this day it exists somewhere or other as a work of reference, to be quoted from, or used in arguing a thesis or making a case. Cholerton's famous comment on the Moscow Trials—that everything about them was true except the facts—might well be applied to it . . .

What serious British academics are busy arguing about in the abortion field at the moment is not anything to do with social policy for abortion, but how many criminal abortions might there have been in Britain a decade ago. (Anyone who thinks I am inventing this, should peruse *Population Studies*.) There is nothing wrong with playing statistical games provided they are not taken seriously. But everyone who indulges in this game, ought to hug Cholerton's words to his bosom. The French, with typical Gallic rigour, have invented a category of 'official under-estimates' (*sous-estime*) to attach to the number of women they are prepared to allow die of abortion in France. A pleasing concept that would have worked wonders for the I.L.O. had they thought of it at the time. ('Official over-estimates' might be nearer the mark in relation to the number of co-operatives in Afghanistan in 1925.)

It remains to be said that, like its predecessor, this is a very funny book indeed. Who, after reading about Muggeridge's exploits as a spy, would waste time thereafter reading fictional spy stories. One suspects that Muggeridge was one of the most talented and successful British agents in the business, perhaps because he treated the whole thing like a game, not being committed to the ideology of personal freedom. All the same, with such a ramshackle secret service, one remains amazed that Britain came out on the winning side.

The final line of the book warns us that religious conversion will be the theme of volume three. I am bound to say, I am quite impatient to discover how God found Mr. Muggeridge (when He missed so many).

MADELEINE SIMMS

CHURCHMEN AND THE CONDITION OF ENGLAND 1832-1885: A study in the development of social ideas and practice from the Old Régime to the Modern State by G. Kitson Clark. Methuen, £4.50.

As someone who has frequently been accused of espousing "nineteenth-century" views I am unabashed to say I find the nineteenth century infinitely fascinating. Largely, I suppose, because it was a time of excitement. Not physical excitement, perhaps; for finding the source of the Nile can hardly be compared with landing on the moon, or the Napoleonic Wars with the two World Wars. But intellectual excitement.

I know there was no dearth of mindless Tories in those days or "challenging" proposals in the "alternative press" of ours. Yet the nineteenth century seems to me to have produced more characters in all strata of society, and more fundamental political debate and social change took place then than—for all the bureaucratic and technological innovations that together cause "future shock"—now.

In what other period could one find cloying sentiment richly competing with savage satire, alternating prime ministers who wrote socio-political novels and theological treatises, basic contributions to knowledge in the physical, biological and social sciences? Or a radical advocating, as Holyoake did, an "intelligence franchise"? Only in an age which thought and cared about both intelligence and the franchise.

Among the most interesting of nineteenth-century institutions was the Church of England. Despite the knock-about comments of Nonconformist and secularist critics, Anglican clerics of the time were not all idiot sons of wealthy families or indolent absentee landlords. There was a good sprinkling of grandees, scholars and statesmen on the Bench of Bishops, so the expression "princes of the church" did not seem derisory. In parishes throughout the country were squarsons who dabbled in law enforcement or administrative experiments, revivalist hymnody or tractarian exhortation, social junketing or social history. This was before the Church had been overtaken by the *ennui* of irrelevance and the blight of mediocrity. If today's bishops have any talents at all they are those of business administration and estate management; while the only subject that seems capable of extracting eloquence from the generality of contemporary clergymen is the size of their stipends.

What were, of course, significant and abiding in the arguments of secularists, some Nonconformists and a handful of advanced churchmen were the following propositions: (1) regardless of the talents or dedication of individuals, social and educational needs were too vast to be handled by either private charity or a semi-professional Erastian church; (2) the Church of England (and every other religion, for that matter) had no special wisdom in social or political problems, its *raison d'être*, chief interest and expertise being 'spiritual' and ecclesiastical; (3) having down the centuries manoeuvred itself into a social rôle it had to lay claim to special wisdom which was, in fact, derived from pure superstition, scriptural injunctions which may once have been sound but had long been outmoded, and class interest derived from its personnel recruitment.

In his absorbing book G. Kitson Clark gives full attention to the first two but skates over the third proposition.

As an authority on Victorian England Dr. Clark does what most writers on church history do not; he puts religion in a total social context. His general knowledge is

well supplemented by research in specialist histories, monographs and parliamentary papers. Regrettably, with the exception of a section on the agricultural labourers, he makes little use of contemporary periodical literature, even of religious magazines. When writing on the nineteenth century (where they exist in special abundance and thoroughness) I have found the journals indispensable. In matters of controversy the real issues may not be set out till some months or years later, but set out they are before the painstaking investigator.

To enliven and qualify the official record, the author has turned to clerical biography and autobiography and random reports. "These examples are unfortunately only the result of selection by chance"—by both the author and sundry committees. The biographies were mostly written by relatives or acolytes, and the committees (mostly local) tended to reflect a concern which may not have been general. The result is that Dr. Clark has constantly to question the applicability of his conclusions. It is a further reflection on the richly endowed and staffed Church of England to observe how little it has contributed to a study of its own history.

Space is too limited to comment on more than a handful of issues in this book. I agree that, on balance, establishment has been "a privilege and an advantage" to the Church, even when linked to "an agnostic State", but can see no corresponding advantage to the State. I also question, save on the narrowest of interpretations, Dr Clark's observation:

Without doubt the controversy between those who spoke in the name of political economy, and those who claimed to speak for humanity lies at the centre of the history of social and public policy in nineteenth-century Britain.

It would be more accurate to speak of a controversy between the claims of political economy and those of humanity, often in the same person. Despite this quotation he is no trendy idealist and his comment that "the authors of the various early nineteenth-century utopian plans normally wildly misconceived the political possibilities of their own day, and the economic possibilities of any day" is perennially valid.

In his extensive references to education I am in like agreement and disagreement. "Rather poor religious education" is as prevalent today as a hundred years ago for the "process by which the church schools would be gradually squeezed out" by state education has not developed in the way suggested. In recent years a fresh demand for secular education on civil liberties foundations has gained ground with little Nonconformist support; but I agree with the author that, on the whole, educational controversy today lacks both the passion and the percipience of yesteryear:

This is unfortunate, for behind the ill temper, the ill-judged delays, the tedious reiterations and unendurable verbiages of these quarrels there is hidden an important issue of principle, and it may be suggested that though this dreary babble of contending voices has passed into silence it is still a live issue, that it has been evaded rather than resolved in modern Britain.

DAVID TRIBE

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ETHICS WITHOUT GOD by Kai Nielsen.
Pemberton Books, £1.40.

In this challenging little book Professor Nielsen seeks to refute the oft-repeated claims by Christian and Jewish theologians that morality, to be meaningful, must be based on belief in a personal God.

Nielsen has little difficulty in showing that when the theist asserts that we must do good because it is the will of God and that will must be obeyed, he is arguing tautologically. He is assuming that what God wills is good, and is therefore really only saying that we must do good because we must do good. Moreover, in order to have arrived at the conclusion that God is good, he must have had a prior idea of goodness. As the author puts it:

Without a prior, logically independent understanding of good, and without some non-religious criterion for judging something to be good, the religious person could have no knowledge of God, for he could not know whether that powerful being who spoke out of the whirlwind and laid the foundations of the earth, was, in fact, worthy of worship.

Morality, then, is in no sense dependent on religion for its justification. Indeed, it could plausibly be argued that religion is dependent on morality, for we often use our moral judgments in determining whether or not to follow the principles of any particular religion. Nor is it necessary to be a theist in order to be happy and have a sense of purpose. As a matter of empirical fact many non-believers (Nielsen gives George Eliot, John Dewey and Bernard Shaw as examples) have lived both happy and productive lives. Conversely, not a few believers, obsessed with a sense of guilt and the fear of Hell, have been neurotic and miserable people.

So far, Professor Nielsen argues convincingly and well. He is, however, less successful, in my opinion, when he attempts to construct a positive humanist ethic, based entirely on man-made values. Nielsen calls himself a "consequentialist", holding that actions are to be judged right or wrong according as to whether their effects increase or diminish the sum total of human happiness. This position, as he himself freely acknowledges, commits him to believing that, in certain circumstances, it is right to kill or maim innocent individuals. During the war, for example, it would have been right to bomb that part of a German city housing munition workers and their families if thereby the war could have been brought to a speedy end. (Curiously, Professor Nielsen does not discuss whether the atomisation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was also morally right, though it undoubtedly brought about the Japanese surrender.) Similarly, if there were two shipwrecked men on a life-raft: one an ordinary fellow, the other a famous scientist on the brink of discovering an infallible cure for cancer, it would be right for the scientist to throw his companion overboard if both could not survive. Thus Nielsen argues that there are no absolute moral principles (such as that it is always wrong to intend directly the death of an innocent person) which must be adhered to regardless of consequences.

Here, I feel, Professor Nielsen is guilty of some inconsistency. For it seems clear that he himself believes in at least *one* absolute moral principle, namely that we must strive to maximise the amount of happiness in the world and consequently minimise the amount of suffering, because happiness is good and suffering is evil. It seems to me that Nielsen is at this point making an important concession to the Christian and deontological absolutists, for this ethic would appear to be based on the assumption that good and evil are objective factors in the universe. Why should we follow the one and eschew the other if

they are merely human inventions? I agree that the hypothesis of a God does not provide us with a motive either, for the reasons already mentioned, but I find it hard to believe that, for example, the unspeakable horrors perpetrated at Dachau or Belsen were not wrong in some absolute and eternal sense. When Nielsen writes that happiness is good and suffering evil, he is surely making statements about the nature of things and not merely expressing his own, or even the majority opinion. Moreover, some actions are clearly right or wrong in themselves, irrespective of consequences. A familiar example in philosophical textbooks is that of the martyr who dies for his beliefs unknown, and his cause perishes with him. No good whatever has resulted from his action, yet we should still consider it praiseworthy and courageous.

Professor Nielsen writes with coolness and clarity, and is at great pains to present the arguments of his opponents fully and fairly. There are useful explanatory notes at the end of each chapter, but, regrettably, no index. It should, in my view, be made a criminal offence to publish a non-fiction book without this vital appendage. But, carping apart, *Ethics without God* is an invaluable addition to the Humanist Library series and ought to be on every free-thinker's bookshelf.

JOHN L. BROOM

DREAM TIGERS by Jorge Luis Borges.
Souvenir Press, £1.75.

CONVERSATIONS WITH JORGE LUIS BORGES
by Richard Burgin. Souvenir Press, £2.

The Argentinian writer, Jorge Luis Borges, is gaining rapidly in reputation, his work having been popular on the American campus for some time. At one point he narrowly missed the Nobel Prize for Literature and there seems little doubt about his stature as a writer, though I would maintain that reading his work is an acquired taste. Both these books serve as a useful introduction to his work.

Dream Tigers is a collection of pieces so short as to be cryptic at times; it consists of fables, metaphors, myths and is preoccupied with illusion and mirrors. The book also contains some dozen poems which come over in translation as dry, precise and laconic. The individual pieces may seem slight, but after a careful reading they add up to a fascinating picture of the man and the writer. His sources are frequently literary and he is perhaps at his best when he is playing what are almost literary games. In "Parable of Cervantes and Don Quixote" he speculates on the character of Cervantes. He comments on how Cervantes drew on the unreal world of books of chivalry and finds irony in the fact that Don Quixote has himself now become a legendary figure: "For myth is at the beginning of literature, and also at its end." In "Everything and Nothing", Borges depicts Shakespeare as a man who has adopted a myriad of rôles: he was all men and yet no-one. The story continues that Shakespeare said to God: "I, who have been so many men in vain, want to be one man: myself." These tales seem like exercises in ingenuity at times, but they all contain some subtlety and often contain fine aphorisms.

When Richard Burgin heard that Borges was to visit Cambridge University in America, he determined to meet the man, talk with him and write a book about him. *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges* is the result of this determination. Their conversation ranges very widely over

world literature—Kafka, Henry James, Dickens, and also shows his detestation of the dictator Perón and gives a picture of a man abundantly patient and generous in discussing his own stories. For this old, blind, literary giant to talk at such length with a student shows humility and extreme courtesy and the book reads as though the enjoyment in the conversations was mutual. His preoccupations shine through; he agrees that he is astonished with the universe itself. Borges's concern with metaphysical questions continually recurs. He is interested in the way memory is distorted, since each time we remember we are only remembering the last memory. Mirrors and reflections disturb him, and he admits to being afraid of them as a child; perhaps because in looking in a mirror we are forced to look at a distortion of ourselves, and, as Richard Burgin points out to him, "You often speak of a moment when people find out who they are."

Despite the metaphysical quality of much of his writing he disclaims the need for symbol hunting and suggests that people should just enjoy the tales and metaphors as they stand. On that level I have found myself wanting to dip further into the writing of Borges, but I would concede that they might not be everyone's cup of tea.

JIM HERRICK

MARX AND THE ORTHODOX ECONOMISTS

by Pat Sloan. Blackwell, £2.25.

During the century which has passed since Marx and Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto* there has been ceaseless discussion among the protagonists and antagonists over the accuracy of their view, known as the materialistic conception of history. But according to Pat Sloan in this book the matter still boils down to an opinion, or ethical judgement, on the sort of society man wishes to live in. Sloan writes, "He [Marx] does not accuse the orthodox economists of being unscientific within their terms of reference, but of having the wrong terms of reference."

Pat Sloan is well known to readers of *The Freethinker* as a defender of Soviet Marxism, and in his book the term 'orthodox economists' refers to capitalist economists. Since Marx was writing there have been moves within capitalist countries toward wider state control, but this has only produced larger corporations, monopolies, or nationally owned ones, where competition is less fierce. A so-called mixed economy is a misnomer as these still operate within the economic ideology of profit, and unearned incomes for shareholders. The richest 7 per cent of the population here owned 84 per cent of all private wealth in 1966. The deep division in society between those who manipulate the economy and those who only work within it still exists, and any suggestion that Marx is out-of-date in his analysis can be easily seen as groundless. However, it is important to distinguish between what Marx really said, and what his adherents practise in certain countries, beneath his banner.

There is small difference between the organisation of so-called socialist societies and capitalist countries: at least Pat Sloan is honest and uses the term 'top people' to describe those who control the economy in both varieties. I think his eulogy of Russia more a subjective choice than an objective judgement, although he quotes the following curious statistical evidence: "In the U.S.S.R. the maximum incomes are only 300 times the minimum, and only 100 times the average, as against 11,000 times and 7,000 times respectively in the U.S.A." It thus remains true as Orwell averred in his Soviet satire *Animal Farm*

that some are more equal than others! Sloan asserts that Russia has achieved socialism, as distinct from communism, the utopia it still has to reach.

Whether this is true or not, does not detract from the Marxian analysis of capitalism he presents. Indeed Marx's 'surplus labouring population', the unemployed, have recently been a feature of contemporary monopoly capitalism. Another factor common to most advanced capitalist countries is some form of prices and incomes policy. This is usually directed primarily at controlling wages, and not unearned incomes. And, of course, the Common Market is seen by Marxists as a direct spread of monopoly capital at work. In answer to critics who think inequality has decreased the following may come as a surprise: "Between 1951 and 1963 the total income of companies rose by 88 per cent and direct taxation on them rose by only 12 per cent," and, "In the same period indirect taxation on the people rose by ten times the amount of the increased taxation that fell on companies". This period coincides with the notorious 13 years of Tory misrule, a performance being repeated by the Heath repertory company today!

It is amazing that the workers have been restrained from getting at the throats of their rulers in this country, as they did elsewhere. But the inequalities have been tempered with some controls placed on the more overt and flagrant excesses of capitalism, and the 'cushioning' of the sick, aged, unemployed and strikers against abject poverty as depicted by previous generations. The capitalists have been very wise in these manoeuvres and have inevitably lengthened their days on earth in the process.

It has been commented, and Sloan accepts it as true, that Marx did not put forward a blueprint for a communist society, but rather concentrated on analysing the defects of capitalism. The path beyond the downfall of capitalism has never been successfully put into practice. The essence of communism must be in the community, and not in the central committee. Until this becomes the foundation stone, Marxism will remain stillborn.

Pat Sloan's book is, otherwise, an excellent introduction to capitalist and Marxist economics; it provides a simple analysis of the current scene in the West from a Marxist angle, even if this has been somewhat overtaken by New Left commentaries.

DENIS COBELL

ART

SIR LAWRENCE ALMA-TADEMA: The Allen Funt Collection. Sotheby's Belgravia.

Few artists have evoked the glories of imperial Rome and ancient Egypt as successfully and as popularly as did Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, O.M., R.A. (1836-1912); and for three all-too-short days an assembly of thirty-five of some of his finest pictures was put on view prior to their sale at Sotheby's Belgravia on 6 November last.

Alma-Tadema's Classical phase, which lasted some forty years, might perhaps be described as imperialist realism. The strong political theme, and the spirit of Republican Virtue, that is so evident in the French Classicists is quite absent from Alma-Tadema's scenes of Roman life; he turns a blind eye to the squalor and exploitation of those times and instead focuses his genius upon the breathtaking beauty that was enjoyed by the leisured classes of those days, and tempers his vision with a pre-

Raphaelite passion for truthfulness of detail—archaeological, architectural, anatomical and botanical—together with a gentle and exquisite sensuousness, particularly evoked in his “risqué bathing scenes”, and portraits of bland but incomparably beautiful young women in flowers-and-marble settings. It was a style ideally suited to the tastes of the late Victorian and Edwardian period, but that should on no account allow us to ignore the artist’s consummate ability, imagination and painstaking desire for authenticity, all of which are kept in a brilliantly balanced harmony.

Alma-Tadema was, as the catalogue honestly acknowledges, an agnostic, and his family were associated with South Place Ethical Society (as to which members, and how, I am not certain) and presented many books to the Society’s library—alas, no pictures! The artist’s attitude to life seems to be a blend of the Classical philosophies of Stoicism and Epicureanism, and is best summed up by the title of a picture in this exhibition, *An Earthly Paradise*, a mother-and-child scene inspired by lines written by the great freethinker and poet, Swinburne. Certainly *Orante*—obviously painted for Christian consumption—looks pretty insipid when compared with the *Bacchante* or any of the artist’s other languid lovelies. Jerry E. Potterton was not far wrong when he rather astutely summed Alma-Tadema up as “the Norman Rockwell of the Pagans”—but what Pagans!

This brief but breathtaking viewing at Sotheby’s Belgravia will have whetted many more appetites than it has satisfied. The last full-scale public exhibition of Alma-Tadema’s work was held in New York earlier this year, but one in Britain is long overdue. It is greatly to be hoped that the wait will be a short one, and that the new owners of these gorgeous paintings will lend them for exhibition purposes as generously as did Mr. Allen Funt.

NIGEL SINNOTT

FIFTY YEARS AGO

St. Enoch’s Church is one of the Glasgow City churches built by the Town Council. The site is public property. The Glasgow Presbytery has not paid a penny for the building or maintenance of the church. Yet they are to receive £36,500 from the Corporation as compensation for the demolition of the church to make way for a public improvement. This is the price demanded by the Presbytery . . . The church has practically no congregation. Last year the revenue from seats was £51 to meet an expenditure of £672. The Corporation had to make up the deficit of £621. The loss on the church for the past twenty years has been £9,781, which has been borne by the ratepayers . . . The Presbytery’s compensation includes £15,000 to invest to provide an annual income of £750 for minister, precentor and beadle; £1,000 for a new site; and £20,000 as the cost of building another church. But why build another church when there is no congregation and no minister? The Presbytery are only to build another church if “considered expedient”.

The Freethinker, 4 November 1923.

FREETHINKER FUND

We are most grateful to those readers who kindly contributed to the Freethinker Fund during October.

Our thanks to: Anonymous (£1), F. Bold (£1), R. Brownlee (£9.45), W. V. Crees (45p), J. Cullen (90p), W. H. Goodall (£1), E. Henderson (£1.40), J. G. Hillhouse (in memory of William Ingram) (£2.90), E. J. Hughes (£1.45), J. F. Robins (40p), P. Sloan (90p), W. Standfast (£3), W. R. Stevenson (£10). Total for October: £33.85.

OBITUARIES

Mrs. Elizabeth Baker

Mrs. Elizabeth Baker, who has died at the age of 84, was, like her late husband, a long-standing member of the National Secular Society. There was a secular committal ceremony at West Hertfordshire Crematorium, Garston, on 17 October.

Mr. Thomas H. Grimley

Mr. Thomas H. Grimley, a reader and keen supporter of *The Freethinker* for many years, has died. He was eighty years of age. Mr. J. W. Challand conducted a secular committal ceremony at Markeaton Crematorium, Derby.

Mrs. Nina Hornbrook

Mrs. Nina Hornbrook, who died recently in her 84th year, was a well-known figure in freethought circles. She was the widow of F. A. Hornbrook, who played a leading rôle in the affairs of the National Secular Society and of *The Freethinker* for over half a century. Until a short time before her death Mrs. Hornbrook had resided at Burnet House, West Hampstead. Mr. Lindsay Burnet, Housing Manager and Secretary of the Humanist Housing Association, told *The Freethinker*: “Mrs. Hornbrook spent a number of years with us. During most of these years her health was very poor, but she was amazingly positive in her outlook. However ill, she was always ready to have a constructive conversation, disregarding her own state of health. I remember so many pleasant little conversations with her over the years and my impressions were shared by the inmates of the house. Many visitors have also spoken of her courage and the sweetness of her character. She will be sadly missed.”

It was Mrs. Hornbrook’s particular wish that a funeral would not be held. Cremation has taken place.

Mr. F. H. Snow

We regret to announce that the death of Mr. Frank Henry Snow occurred recently in hospital after a long illness. He was aged 87. F. H. Snow was a regular contributor to the columns of *The Freethinker*, and had published two books, *No Names, No Pack Drill* and *The Moving Finger*.

The funeral took place at Hawkinge Crematorium, Folkestone.

LETTERS

Josephus and the Baptist

It would certainly be an exaggeration to say, as Professor Wells claims (October) I did, that the paragraph about John the Baptist in Josephus has no relation to its context. Actually I wrote that there was a remote connection, and I still think it looks out of place in an otherwise straight-forward narrative. Of course there are arguments in favour of its authenticity; there is something to be said for both sides of the question, so the piece is not beyond suspicion. I was careful to claim no more than this.

The point of the first part of my article was to show that the existence of John the Baptist is not demonstrable from history. Even if the Josephus paragraph were genuine, and we have nothing else, it would prove only that a tradition of the Baptist was current in the last decade of the first century.

As for the admitted interpolations about the John the Baptist in the Slavonic Josephus, these could be mediaeval for all we know to the contrary, so no purpose is served by comparing them with the passage under discussions.

R. J. CONDON.

Popper and Socialism

I am glad that Professor Flew now agrees that Popper did not invent falsifiability, but it is a pity that he could not have made this clear in his review. In fact all Popper did was to clothe an existing idea in language that made it attractive to academics as well as giving it a use value to the Marxist-bashing industry.

Professor Flew maintains that he does associate nationalization with socialism, and quotes the Labour Party's constitution as evidence in support of his contention. Had the good professor examined socialist theory, particularly the basic concept of a socialist form of society and the rôle of industry in it, he would have discovered that nationalization as we have it throughout the world is simply a form of state capitalism. Nationalization as envisaged by the Labour Party, or as seen in Russia and other states, operates within the context of economic systems geared for production for profit, not use. It seems, however, that Professor Flew, is unable, or unwilling, to relate what is said about nationalization with the realities of the economic system which operates throughout the world.

It follows from what Professor Flew writes about nationalization and socialism that nationalization equals socialism, thus he is left in the somewhat absurd position of having to accept as socialist, governments in Britain as far back as 1635, and as recently as the present Conservative administration which nationalized the Rolls Royce concern.

Professor Flew concludes his reply to me by quoting the opinion of Brian Magee that we do not have sufficient knowledge to propose "sweeping plans to change society". We certainly have many gaps in knowledge, and in all probability we always shall. However, we do know that capitalism is a world-wide system and that it operates in every country whether as private or state capitalism; we also know that working people—and there are only two classes, working class and capitalist class—throughout the world suffer from identical problems which arise from the economic system in which they live. To solve these problems calls for the transformation of capitalism into socialism, which means essentially a change over from production for profit to production for use. The fact that the problems that Labour and other parties seek to solve by "tentative, inquiring, piecemeal, social engineering" remain, and will continue to remain, despite all their efforts to solve them, is evidence enough that, if there is to be any genuine solution to them, it can only come through a world-wide change in the nature of the economic system and in the values that the system gives rise to. R. W. MORRELL.

Stages of Socialism

I make no apology for referring to "Socialism" and "Communism" as the first and later stages of Communism as described by Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. It is the stages that matter, not the name. Judex splits hairs over words and totally ignores the essential point, the necessary stages of development.

I have re-read my last letter to find any "dogmatic assertions and interpretations", but can find none. Is it "dogmatic" to repeat Marx's clearly stated view that it takes time for "the springs of co-operative wealth" to be made to "flow more freely"? Or is it simple (and humanist) common sense? Judex's own method of "verifying" what "Marx really meant" by hotch-potch quotation from his interpreters is a far inferior method to actually studying what Marx really said.

I share Judex's and Sakharov's repugnance for the crimes that we now know were committed under Stalin. But this does not absolve Sakharov from some gross exaggerations. It also does not justify anybody in ignoring the very real progress that was achieved during the Stalin period despite all its faults.

It is common for Judex and the capitalist press to pretend that the U.S.S.R. has not changed since Stalin. This is nonsense. In Stalin's day Academician Sakharov would never have got away with interviewing the foreign capitalist press and allowing himself to be reported as criticizing Soviet foreign policy. At the same time, however, as I wrote recently in a letter to the *Morning Star*, I am not at all worried that other Soviet scientists should be publicly dissociating themselves from Sakharov's interviews, since the capitalist press is obviously using his scientific reputation in order to present him as an authority on world affairs which he is not. Apart from his scientific work, Sakharov has done good work in the U.S.S.R. in the defence of civil liberties, and if he had stuck to that he would not have been condemned publicly as has recently been the case. PAT SLOAN.

'Third-way' humanism

I apologize to Trevor Morgan (October) for my having nearly missed the target of his criticism altogether. If I may have another shot: it is not "agnosticism *per se*", but the "degenerate, superstitious bilge" that comes from those who start "to theorize at a point somewhere above epistemology . . ."

Now, it seems to me that Mr. Morgan shows a questionable lack of discrimination regarding the quotations with which he illustrates his target. Surely, our claims to knowledge can only be justified in terms of our standards, our tests, our experiences. The statement, "I know nothing of the physical nor the psychical, but only some third", can surely be defended quite honourably. From a different point of view, the claim that the 'reality' of, say, "2+2=4" is neither merely private and personal nor public in the sense that it can be brought into the laboratory" is surely one that can be defended quite honourably. Further, there is surely something to be said for the claim that myths can act as a spur to scientific progress. The principle of falsifiability is surely one of the most honourable of principles for a scientist to follow in his continuing search for the truth.

As regards the quotation from Francis Bacon's *The Four Idols*, I am at a loss for words when confronted with "theology", "spirits and genii" as superstitious ingredients! CHARLES BYASS.

Church Unity in Australia

A poll of 1,043,570 members of the Presbyterian Church in Australia has just been held on a proposal to form a "uniting Church of Australia" with Methodists and Congregationalists. Preliminary trends indicate that about 75 per cent will favour the union. This should give a total membership of 2,250,000 for the Uniting Church.

Some churchmen evidently have wisely realised that in the present climate of disbelief they cannot afford the luxury of a multiplicity of slightly differing faiths. In the heyday of religious credulity, no splinter group was too small to win financial support from eager adherents. Nowadays however it is not so easy. National prosperity has reduced discipleship to the chronically poor, the dispossessed and the defeated. The Jesus Freaks cult, for example, seems to thrive mainly amongst those unable to come to terms with the stresses met and the compromises necessary to survive in today's world.

But freethinkers should not mistake the decline in religious belief for an unrestricted swing to rational thinking. Many of the naturally credulous are simply exchanging one superstition for another. Simple-minded seekers for certainty in a personally uncertain world are turning to astrology, numerology, fortune telling, spiritualism, black magic and witchcraft, and the trendy variations of transcendental meditation. Credulity is still alive and flourishing.

However, although the Methodists and Congregationalists appear eager for unity, the horrors of prospective schism have upset many Presbyterian elders. Late in October, the New South Wales Presbyterian Assembly reversed the earlier voting of the individual members, and delegates voted 217 to 197 against the proposed union. The other five Australian State assemblies had accepted the proposal.

The ownership of the considerable Church properties will become a cause of contention. While any Presbyterian Church remains, even in a diminished form, it will probably have complete control over all existing property in terms of its trust. The restrictive provisions of the 1881 Property Trust Act have never been amended. The Uniting Church would have to convince all State Parliaments that the continuing Presbyterian Church was unable to maintain its trust—a rather difficult matter. Much of the commercial property would be collecting large rentals, and therefore handsomely self-sustaining.

BENJAMIN BENSLEY.

Reactionary atheist

It may seem silly but I am wondering whether Sapper, creator of Bulldog Drummond, was an atheist.

In a book called *The Final Count* a man dies in baffling and horrifying circumstances. An overwrought policeman exclaims, "It's devil's work!" Someone else, "It look like devil's work but we know that does not happen".

In another book called *Tiny Carteret* a man has been murdered. A (supposed) monk makes a (supposed) benediction over him. A doctor says, "I suppose it's grossly materialistic of me but I'm blown if I see what good that has done".

At least three times Sapper brings in the theme of a master criminal masquerading as a clergyman. One of them says, "It's the best disguise there is". Was this hidden satire?

Apart from this, Sapper's views were reactionary and he is now considered dated in some quarters. But I think it's fair to say that at their best his books are first class entertainment and I suspect the late Ian Fleming of cribbing from him. I. S. LOW.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 698 Holloway Road, London, N19 3NL (telephone: 01-272 1266). Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the N.S.S.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Company, 698 Holloway Road, London, N19 3NL. 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.

Humanist Counselling Service, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG; telephone 01-937 2341 (for confidential advice on your personal problems—whatever they are).

London Secular Group (outdoor meetings). *Thursdays*, 12.30 a.m.—2 p.m. at Tower Hill; *Sundays*, 3—7 p.m. at Marble Arch. (*The Freethinker* and other literature on sale.)

Humanist Holidays House Party, Brighton, 23-27 December. Visits, theatre, table games, etc. Total cost £25 including full board, Yuletide fare, gratuities and V.A.T. For full details contact (as soon as possible) Mrs. Marjorie Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey (telephone: 01-642 8796).

Hall Manager and Lettings Secretary, Conway Hall. Applications are invited for this position, the appointment to take effect immediately. Details from the General Secretary, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Friday, 23 November: Annual Dinner, details from C. W. Millard, 142 Western Road, Hurstpierpoint (telephone: 833057). Meeting: Imperial Centre Hotel, First Avenue, Hove, Sunday, 2 December, 5.30 p.m.: Dr. STARK MURRAY, "Health care; its ethical problems".

Coliseum (London). KRYSZTOF PENDERECKI's new opera, "The Devils of Loudun", various dates till 7 December (telephone: 01-836 3161).

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. *Meetings, Sundays* 6.30 p.m. 18 November: R. G. LOOSMORE, "Christianity: a unique faith?"; 25 November: R. W. MORRELL, "Folklore and fossils"; 2 December: L. J. POTTER, "Divorce and happiness"; 9 December: Rev. C. V. A. HASLER, "Emanuel Swedenborg: In a State of Complete Wakefulness". *Debate*: Bosworth School and Community Centre, Leicester Lane, Desford, Leicester. Friday, 23 November, 7.30 p.m.: "This House believes that Religion is Irrelevant in Contemporary Society", proposed by Mr. A. Davis (President, Leicester Secular Society) and Mr. L. Croxtall (Treasurer).

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8. Sunday, 20 November, 7.30 p.m.: Mrs. PAT KNIGHT will lead a discussion on trade unions.

Nottingham and Notts Humanist group, University Adult Centre, 14 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham. Friday, 14 December, 7.30 p.m.: Dr. M. BASSEY (Conservation Society), "Where do you stand on *Blueprint for Survival?*"

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. *Sunday Morning Meetings*, 11 a.m.: 18 November: T. F. Evans, "Community Values and Local Democracy"; 25 November: PETER CRONIN, "Francis Bacon and *The Relief of Man's Estate*"; 2 December: HAROLD BLACKHAM, "The Achievement and Failure of the Ethical Movement"; 9 December: Lord BROCKWAY, "Did the Empire End Too Soon?" *Humanist Forums, Sunday*, 3 p.m. 25 November: PETER CRONIN, "Bacon and Shakespeare"; 9 December: W. H. S. FREEMAN, "Who Should Own Industry, and For What Purpose?" *55th Conway Memorial Lecture*. Tuesday, 20 November, 7.30 p.m. (admission 10p): JONATHAN MILLER, "The Uses of Pain". *Tuesday Discussions*, 7 p.m. (admission 10p). 27 November: "Community Politics"; 4 December: MARK MOSKOWICZ, "Co-counselling"; 11 December: FRANCIS CLARK-LOWES, "Mind the New Religion".

Worthing Humanist Group, Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing. Sunday, 25 November, 5.30 p.m.: RICHARD CLEMENTS, "John Stuart Mill: the man and the thinker".

PUBLICATIONS

TITLE	AUTHOR	Price	Post
The Dead Sea Scrolls	John Allegro	35p	9p
Comparative Religion	A. C. Bouquet	50p	9p
The Longford Threat to Freedom	Brigid Brophy	10p	3p
Religious Education in State Schools	Brigid Brophy	12½p	3p
Did Jesus Christ Exist?	Chapman Cohen	3p	3p
Materialism Restated	Chapman Cohen	25p	10p
Thomas Paine	Chapman Cohen	5p	4p
Morality Without God	Chapman Cohen	3p	3p
Ten Non Commandments	Ronald Fletcher	12½p	3p
The Bible Handbook	G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball	65p	10p
Bertrand Russell: A Life	Herbert Gottchalk	25p	7p
The Nun Who Lived Again	Phyllis Graham	2½p	3p
The Humanist Revolution	Hector Hawton	60p	10p
Controversy	Hector Hawton	60p	10p
The Little Red Schoolbook	Soren Hanson & Jesper Jensen	30p	7p
Rome or Reason	R. G. Ingersoll	5p	4p
The Misery of Christianity	Joachim Kahl	40p	9p
Humanist Anthology	Margaret Knight	60p	9p
Christianity: The Debit Account	Margaret Knight	3p	3p
The Case Against Church Schools	Patricia Knight	20p	4p
The Secular Responsibility	Marghanita Laski	10p	3p
An Introduction to Secular Humanism	Kit Mouat	45p	3p
What Humanism is About	Kit Mouat	52½p	13p
Ethics without God	Kai Nielson	60p	8p
Against Censorship	N.C.C.L	25p	4p
Birth Control	N.S.S.	20p	3p
A Humanist Glossary	Odell & Barfield	20p	4p
Rights of Man	Thomas Paine	35p	9p
The Vatican Versus Mankind	Adrian Pigott	20p	9p
Boys and Sex	W. B. Pomeroy	25p	7p
Girls and Sex	W. B. Pomeroy	30p	7p
The Martyrdom of Man	Winwood Reade	60p	14p
Impact of Science on Society	Bertrand Russell	60p	9p
Authority and the Individual	Bertrand Russell	35p	9p
Political Ideas	Bertrand Russell	30p	8p
The Conquest of Happiness	Bertrand Russell	60p	9p
Unpopular Essays	Bertrand Russell	45p	9p
Roads to Freedom	Bertrand Russell	60p	9p
Power	Bertrand Russell	65p	9p
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