

SEX, LIBERTY AND THE LAW

—MAJOR CHANGES PROPOSED BY THE SEXUAL LAW REFORM SOCIETY

The law should not be used to enforce standards of morality in sexual behaviour upon individuals. It should be the right of all citizens to have the maximum freedom of choice in the exercise of sexual enjoyment subject always and only to the provision that others are not directly harmed or unwillingly involved. The whole field of sexual law should be reformed to bring it into line with these principles. These are the recommendations of a Working Party of the Sexual Law Reform Society that reported in September. The Working Party, after four years' study of the existing law, finds it to be very anomalous and apparently "based on the premise that all sexual activity except that between husband and wife is a bad or negative thing, and that the law should always discourage it and at times positively prevent it." The Working Party, therefore, makes specific recommendations for major reforms in all areas of the law relating to sexual behaviour.

Rational considerations

Freethinkers have always been concerned with the excessive interference of the law in sexual freedom, and have long been in the vanguard of those who sought to have the law's rôle based on more rational, realistic and compassionate considerations. For far too long the law has been used to impose the narrow prejudices of those who locate guilt in the groin and God in sexual frustration, itself undoubtedly a dangerous sexual deviation, but one to be practised in private, not in the law courts. Freethinkers will therefore readily agree with the authors of the report that it is not the purpose of the law to enforce standards of morality and that it is unjustifiable to have certain types of sexual behaviour characterized as so morally offensive *per se* that there should be a general prohibition against them.

Responsible human beings must be allowed—and indeed are surely entitled—to do what they choose with their own bodies and minds unless medically verified harm is done to others immediately involved. A law which denies this personal freedom is foredoomed to failure and will merely create more danger than it can prevent.

Anomalous hotch-potch

The law at present is an anomalous hotch-potch of prohibitions. Before considering how the statutes should be reformed in detail the Working Party sought to establish the principles on which the law should be based in its relation to sexual behaviour. The aim was that the reforms proposed would place human sexuality within a *positive* legal framework, instead of the present negative one. As a result the report arrives at a number of criteria, which, it is hoped, will provide an objective basis for future legislation, and so exclude as illogical assertions based on emotional and subjective reactions. It is held that future legislation should be based on the following fundamental principles:

1. There should be a general freedom, upheld by the law, for individuals to engage in such sexual activities as they may freely choose, subject only to restrictions which are clearly socially necessary, as set out in the following paragraphs.
2. These exceptions arise, and arise only, from the need to
 - (i) protect those who by reason of their age and condition are not fully responsible.
 - (ii) avoid the infliction of involuntarily sought pain, anguish or physical damage upon participants, and
 - (iii) punish affronts given to third parties, whose complaints are held by the Courts to be justified.

3. It follows that only those sexual activities should be illegal

- (a) which are not willingly consented to or which are subject to restriction on grounds of age or limited responsibility; or
- (b) which result in clinically demonstrable mental or physical damage or suffering; or
- (c) which have given rise to reasonable complaints from a member of the public.

4. It should also be an offence to indulge in any sexual activity or display where this is observed by others and causes them actual annoyance; but it should be a defence that no such observation could be reasonably expected, or that the observer did not object. (This defence should apply regardless of the numbers involved or the nature of the activities in question.)

5. Where an offence contravening any of the above principles is alleged, the burden of proof should in all cases lie on the prosecution, (except in the special defence mentioned in (4) above).

Emotionally charged

It is with these principles in mind that the authors of the report criticize existing sexual legislation, and put forward reforms they consider necessary. The first thing they question is the need at all for a separate category of sexual offences. They conclude that their elimination would be no social hardship, since areas where it would remain desirable for the law to intervene could still be covered by general provisions against assaults and other offences against the person, breaches of protective provisions for children, young persons and others such as the mentally handicapped, and offences against public decency and invasions of privacy. Such a move, it is believed, would begin to remove the emotionally charged atmosphere in which, at present, sexual offences are tried.

Once the libertarian principles quoted above are accepted as the basis for sexual law, how the law should be reformed is fairly clear and straightforward. However, one area of particular difficulty is to decide whether there ought to be an age of consent for sexual intercourse. One thing is clear: that the discrimination between heterosexual and homosexual acts should be abolished. However, is there an

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age "below which no young person can be deemed 'responsible', even though physically ready to exercise his or her sexuality"? On the whole the authors of the report are inclined to say no. Nevertheless, although they realize that any age taken is bound to be arbitrary and inappropriate in many cases, they put forward as a compromise solution a two-tier system of consent, based on the ages 14 and 18. Basically the age of consent would be lowered to fourteen for both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, but with a provision that in specified circumstances action could be taken under the Children and Young Persons Act up to the age of eighteen, for example where there was persistent and indiscriminate promiscuity, prostitution, or the young person had contracted a venereal disease. This latter provision belies the accusation made against the report that it represented a exploitative lecher's charter. Since the lowering of the age of consent is one of the report's most controversial recommendations, it is worth quoting the arguments put forward in its favour:

- (a) the present age of 16 is quite arbitrary and had no biological justification.
- (b) it takes no account of the willingness—not to say preparedness, both physiologically and emotionally—of many girls and boys under that age for sexual experience.
- (c) there is increasing evidence that the law is in fact widely broken and rarely enforced.
- (d) in these circumstances, the situation of counsellors faced with requests for contraceptive and other sexual advice from those under age remains uncertain, as some counsellors may, rightly or wrongly, fear that they are aiding and abetting an offence. And—as some of us know from our own professional and counselling work—young people engaging in sexual activity are frequently deterred from seeking advice or help by the knowledge that they are "criminals".
- (e) in a free society, it should not be the function of the law to make people (of whatever age) compulsorily chaste, even though their behaviour may be immoral.
- (f) the criteria of "harm" must be judged by common sense standards.
- (g) society must do its best to protect its immature or inadequate members, but legislation which restricts the freedom of most of those belonging to any particular group or section of the community cannot be justified merely in order to protect a minority of those affected by it.

In dealing with specific "offences" and laws, the report applies the principles enunciated earlier. Concern is expressed that many of the Acts describe offences involving unlawful (as opposed to illegal) sexual intercourse, and that the courts have held this to be any sexual intercourse outside marriage—clearly an unsatisfactory definition. In the

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case of rape it is recommended that the offence be abolished as a separate entity and be included in that of causing actual or grievous bodily harm. The crime of procuration should be retained where it involves force, duress, or lack of true consent. The offence of incest should be abolished, as its separate existence is largely the expression of an irrational revulsion. Where young persons are involved, they would be protected by the "consent" provisions described earlier. In the case of homosexual behaviour the law would simply be brought into line with heterosexual activity. As the report states, "The notion that young men need a higher degree of legal protection from homosexual assault than young women do from heterosexual assault strikes us as absurd."

Mixed-up criteria

Indecent assaults would be dealt with by the general assault laws, and not as at present carry penalties up to ten times as severe as for common assault. A good example of the mixed-up criteria that have gone to make up our existing sex laws is quoted in the case of abduction: abduction of a woman for the purpose of marriage or sexual intercourse in order to get hold of her property carries a penalty of up to fourteen years' imprisonment; abduction of a woman under eighteen without property, up to two years. In fact, abduction could be dealt with by general laws covering removal by force and assault. In the case of prostitution, insofar as the principal act is not illegal, the penalties for the associated "offences" are out of all proportion. The report recommends that these "offences" should be abolished, except in the case of procuration for prostitution of a person under eighteen. In general, the State should remain neutral towards prostitution. Street offences, especially their savage application to soliciting by homosexuals, should be abolished, unless covered by some general provision against offensive or pestering behaviour in public, but then only when annoyance was proved in the case of identified members of the public, so eliminating the all-too-prevalent police provocation in this matter.

Freethinker's manifesto

The report concludes by pointing out that the principles on which they have based their recommendations for the reform of the sex laws also have implications for the censorship laws. Clearly, if, with limited exceptions, individuals are free to engage in such sexual activity as they choose, it would be absurd to prevent their obtaining, reading, seeing, or hearing material conveying such activities, provided other citizens were not offended thereby.

Modern society should no longer rest content with a law which appears to equate sexual desire with depravity or its arousal with corruption.

The S.L.R.S. is to be congratulated in producing this report, both for its enunciating the basic principles for the action of law in sexual ethics, and for identifying how these principles would be applied in specific areas of sexual activity. The content of this report should find an important place in every freethinker's manifesto for reform.

(Report of Working Party on the Law in Relation to Sexual Behaviour. Sexual Law Reform Society, 18 Corsica Street, London N5 1JN.)

S AND NOTES

NO POPULIST SOLUTION

On 7 September Lord Longford organized a rally in London under the banner "The Deepening Crisis—What Can I Do To Help?" Some five hundred persons attended and many of them put forward their views. Towards the end of the day one of the platform speakers, Donald Watt, Professor of International History at the London School of Economics, expressed his concern at the arguments put forward. He considered many of them proto-fascist, and was particularly concerned at the consistent denigration of parliamentary government. The other main type of argument represented he dismissed as irrelevant. This type was typically put forward by the young London councillor who saw all problems in terms of abortion, birth control and pornography. In times of tranquillity, irrationality is often put out of mind, dismissed with a benign, sad smile, but in times of crisis it will emerge as a ferocious force to be reckoned with. Is it surprising that the views expressed from the floor at this rally were either dangerous or irrelevant, when the population is systematically fed irrationality in its schools and on radio and television? Indeed, those on the platform at the rally are themselves responsible, for what contribution towards solving any crisis, you may ask, was the remark of Trevor Huddleston, Bishop of Stepney, when he said, "The crisis now upon us is a judgment of God"?

MORE PRIVILEGES DEMANDED

Addressing the Brighton and Hove Humanist Group on 1 September, William McIlroy, General Secretary of the National Secular Society, commented on a recent speech by Mr. Norman St. John-Stevas, Opposition Spokesman on Education, in which he demanded even more privileges for Christianity within the State education system. Mr. St. John-Stevas had assured his listeners that the overwhelming majority of parents wanted religious education to continue in our schools and their children to study the basic principles of the Christian faith.

"Mr. St. John-Stevas is neither a parent nor a teacher," said Mr. McIlroy, "but a Catholic politician whose eyes are on the ballot-box and whose heart is in Rome". Mr. McIlroy claimed his concern for parental rights was commendable, but misplaced. "If parents wish their children to become Christian citizens they can try to ensure this by instructing, praying and worshipping with them. And if they feel unequal to the task there are plenty of churches and Sunday schools where Christian truths are imparted." Mr. McIlroy suggested, however, that in reality the Christian faith was irrelevant to the lives of the majority of British people, who never set foot inside a church except to attend weddings and funerals.

He went on to call for a movement similar to the environment lobby to prevent social problems being created within the education system by such short-sighted proposals as Mr. St. John-Stevas's. "The privileged position of Christianity in the nation's schools has already encouraged some Northern towns". Mr. McIlroy pointed out that if these demands were met such schools would be triply segregated by sex, religion and race. He urged that it was necessary to consider the rights of children as well as of parents,

and especially the right of future generations not to be burdened with social problems which are being created today "by those who are more concerned with promoting their religious beliefs than in human welfare."

(Mr. McIlroy pursues the subject of Muslim schools further in an article in this issue. There is also a commentary on Mr. St. John-Stevas's demands by Michael Lloyd-Jones.)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Readers will note that for the first time in nineteen years *The Freethinker* has changed its printers. Such a move is always exceedingly difficult and it was made with much reluctance and only after serious deliberation. *The Freethinker* was printed by G. T. Wray Ltd., who gave excellent service on reasonable terms. They always rallied in emergency situations and despite many problems ensured its publication.

The dispute which resulted in our decision to change to another firm originated with the appointment of a compositor with very fervent religious views. We are informed that whilst being interviewed for the job he was shown a copy of *The Freethinker* and told that his duties would include setting it. After commencing work at G. T. Wray Ltd. it soon became obvious that he regarded censoring *The Freethinker* as one of his duties for the Lord. He refused to set articles, and altered and omitted sections from those which offended his religious susceptibilities.

Protests were made on many occasions, but the decision to sever our business association with G. T. Wray Ltd. was made when their pious compositor refused to set sections of the July issue. We had secured permission to publish an extract from Phyllis Graham's new book, *The Jesus Hoax*. The extract, together with a display advertisement, was returned and we were informed that the compositor refused to set them. We understand that he refused also to set the front page article and sections of a book review for the same issue (a member of the firm did the necessary work and they were published).

We are very grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Wray and to most of their staff who have always done their best for *The Freethinker*, often in difficult circumstances. Our thanks are due also to the various editors and contributors who have been the chief victims of the impertinent and censorious behaviour of one employee. Our gratitude is also due to our new printers, David Neil & Company of Dorking, for undertaking the printing of *The Freethinker* at such short notice.

The foregoing will help readers to understand more fully the very difficult conditions under which *The Freethinker* is produced in a largely voluntary capacity.

WILLIAM McILROY,
General Manager, G. W. Foote & Company

OBITUARY

Mr Cecil Herbert Darby, whose death occurred on 2 September following a road accident, was a prominent figure in South East London where he had been active in political circles for many years. He was a former Labour Councillor and had served as Mayor of Woolwich for a term. Mr Darby is survived by his wife, son, daughter and other relatives. He was a staunch freethinker and there was a secular funeral ceremony at Eltham Crematorium on 13 September.

THE JESUS HOAX

By kind permission of the publishers, Leslie Frewin Publishers Limited, we reproduce below an extract from Phyllis Graham's The Jesus Hoax, published on 15 July. The book is a blend of autobiography and criticism, and describes her search as a Carmelite nun for the truth about the Jesus-figure and his religion, a search which in 1963 led her into the humanist and freethought movement.

It is not astonishing that the habit of unquestioning faith implanted in christianised humanity deadened — except in rare cases — the inborn urge of our simian curiosity. To someone like myself, who, though merely a convert to the ancient form of Christian theocracy, is born — by some genetic whim — with a God fixation in the psyche, the habit of belief is all but indestructible. One may rebel against certain aspects of the deity or object to his supposed commands: one may even be conscious of a subterranean loathing for religious authority, leaking dangerously into hatred of the deity it misrepresents. . . . Yet the structure of belief does not crumble. It will not crash to ruins until corrosive forces have at last undermined it. To be the unwilling host of these forces is hell. The old saying, 'The devils also believe and tremble' (James 2: 19) takes on a real and terrifying meaning. The God-Image that was once the believer's delight now hangs about his neck like a millstone, inescapably dragging him down to the devil's estate. To be rid of God would be heaven . . . to know that he does not exist would open up a new life of blissful release and happy human activity. But the struggling believer does not know that this is his secret desire. He cannot envisage the possibility, let alone give it shape as a thought. If and when he comes to the point of recognition, a long and arduous labour lies ahead of him before the goal of peace can be attained.

Mass of credulity

Such is the legacy bequeathed to us by a handful of Jews in Palestine two millenia ago. A compressed mass of credulity which becomes, to many an agonised legatee, in the words of Sir Julian Huxley, 'a burden on the human spirit, a cloud heavy with frightening incomprehensibility, overshadowing the landscape of human destiny' (*Observer*, 17 July 1960).

How fatally those words apply to the central Image of our Hebrew heritage! The reign of the 'Redeemer' — one of many, but the most disastrous of any — cast a blight on the world that most effectually checked the slow but steady upward trend of human intelligence. The rising spirit of man was not merely burdened, but temporarily broken, by the shameful implications of 'original sin' and the fearful consequences of Christian eschatology. A cloud indeed covered the sun that had begun to warm and waken the brain of Homo Sapiens to a life of true wisdom: the luminary that rose on Ionic Greece and reflected its glory through the meditative East, six centuries before the calamity of Christian darkness swallowed up the civilised world. The 'Cloud of Unknowing' came down on the progress of man towards empirical knowledge and humane culture. It sank him once more into barbarism, where ignorance was a virtue and intelligent enquiry a punishable offence. For a thousand years and more it completely overshadowed 'the landscape of human destiny' so far as Christendom extended its direful influence.

The nucleus of this Cimmerian nebula was the dubious Personality erected by his followers — or perhaps creators — to the status of divinity, under the ironical title of the

Sun of Righteousness. The temperament and actions of this claimant to Messiahship, as exposed in the gospels, appear to be those of a non-philosopher, not only ignorant but actually hostile to knowledge, to universal thought, to the wider issues that have occupied the greatest minds among mankind. His main business was to peddle 'faith' as the panacea for the moral ills of humanity, and for physical ones here and there among the favoured few. And 'faith', for him, meant unshakeable belief in himself, his word, his perfection ('Which of you convinceth me of sin?' [John 8: 46]) and, finally, his divinity. Whoso rejected the Pedlar's ware had the curse of the Pedlar upon him.

Blind belief

That this necessity for blind belief was deeply ingrained in the earliest members of the new sect was noted, and resented, by their pagan contemporaries. Significantly, no evidence is found that any of these critical observers were convinced, or even aware, of the Founder's historical existence. To ignore the febrile intrusion of the faith-mongers was, however, impossible, or eventually became so as they swarmed like bacteria over every stratum of society. Thus Celsus, Epicurean philosopher in the second century, complains of this faith-hysteria, inimical to thought, reason, and intelligence.

'Christians', he writes (from *The True Doctrine*, quoted by Origen, *Contra Celsum*), 'usually flee headlong from cultured people, who are not prepared to be deceived; but they trap illiterate folk . . . Their injunctions are like this. "Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near. For these abilities are thought by us to be evils. But as for anyone stupid, anyone uneducated, anyone who is a child, let him come boldly . . . Some of them do not even want to give or receive a reason for what they believe, and use such expressions as "Do not ask questions: just believe", and "Thy faith will save thee". And they say, "The wisdom of the world is an evil, and foolishness is a good thing".'

'But why,' asks the reasonable pagan, and after the long night of faith-created nightmares, Renaissance man awoke to echo the question, 'why is it bad to have been educated and to have studied the best doctrines, and both to be and to appear intelligent?'

Cloud of unknowing

Why, indeed? It is difficult to understand why such supreme importance should be attached, even today and by reasonably intelligent people, to the quality of blind faith in what cannot conceivably be proved by the scientific method, or even stand up to the test of everyday human logic and experience. Blind faith is always misplaced in any sort of human deal, and frequently disastrous. Why should 'thinking man' deliberately make a fool of himself in the realm where intelligence should tread with the utmost circumspection? What virtue can there possibly be in a freeman's selling himself to the slavery of irrational belief?

For whatever sophistries are brought to bear on this suicidal doctrine — and they are legion — the stark fact stares us in the face: faith *must* be blind in order to be pure. If total assent is to be given to the wildest absurdities, the grossest indignities against human reason and humane advancement, the only acceptable price is a wholehearted sacrifice to the 'Cloud of Unknowing'.

That this can still occur in an age when science has

PHYLLIS GRAHAM

materially triumphed over superstition, when every hour brings fresh knowledge to the restless intelligence of man, is due to the persistence of archetypal images planted long ago in the human unconscious, and sedulously nurtured by unscrupulous priesthoods. (Always allied to, and supported by, ruling cliques and the power of wealth.) The particular Image which has dominated Christendom has, until comparatively recently, been protected by diplomatic immunity from adverse criticism and logical analysis. Diplomacy being indispensable in this connexion, if one wished to preserve life and property and avoid unpleasant

forms of retribution.

Uninformed, uneducated, non-scientific man had no weapon to defend himself against the forces of unreason supported, aided and abetted by superior powers of greed and ambition. But man in the final third of the twentieth century has no such excuse for surrender. Since the world he lives in is only too obviously unredeemed, he has the right and the reason to ask why: to question the verity of the 'redemptive' creed that deformed his culture: to examine its history spread like a map before him, provided that his eyes are honest and his sources genuine.

THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

Until recent years R.I. teachers made no secret of their evangelical aims. Nowadays we are much less likely to hear school religion publicly justified as, for example, a means of ensuring that "the germinating seed of God's Word will fall on the good ground of God's growing children." (Cornish *Agreed Syllabus of Religious Education*, 1964.) Today's apologists for religion in schools have learned to be more circumspect and to talk disarmingly of their impartiality and integrity. Religious education, we are assured, is merely a way of helping children to an "awareness of the different lines along which man pursues his search for meaning in life". Meanwhile, behind the smokescreen of glib verbiage and weasel words, religious indoctrination is continuing.

But, from time to time, R.I. acquires a champion of the old school. So convinced is he of the divine truth and sublime virtues of his Christian faith that he speaks bluntly of the need to teach children to believe. Mr. Norman St. John-Stevas, Opposition Spokesman on Education, is of the old school, and his recent defence of religious instruction amply confirms the need for secular humanists to press on with their campaign against religion in schools.

Pious hope

Mr. St. John-Stevas sprang to the defence of R.I. in a speech in Staffordshire last August, when he declared his belief that the Conservative Party is "speaking for the overwhelming majority of the parents in this country when we say we want to see religious education continue in our schools and for the children to have the opportunity of praying together". I suppose this pious hope is based on the work of our old friends May and Johnston whose survey purported to show that nearly all parents supported compulsory religion in schools. This survey has been so completely demolished by secularist criticism that it is hard to see how Christians can continue to draw comfort from it. Of more interest and relevance are the findings of the 1969 National Opinion Poll (commissioned by the B.H.A.) which found that nearly three-quarters of the respondents did not even know that there was a compulsory daily act of worship in schools (which St. John-Stevas euphemistically refers to as an "opportunity of praying together"). Whether or not public opinion has, in any case, any bearing on the moral and educational issue of compulsory religion in schools is a question Christians prefer to ignore.

Mr. St. John-Stevas fears that "to remove the religious provisions of the Education Acts would be taken as a sign of national loss of faith and would be a strange way of responding to the spiritual starvation which is a feature

of present-day society." The fact of the matter is that there *has* been a "national loss of faith" and it is this which makes the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act not only immoral but also hypocritical. In no area of adult life would a daily act of compulsory worship be tolerated; it is only in schools that Christians think they can get away with it. Mr. St. John-Stevas has diagnosed "spiritual starvation"; his prescription amounts to force-feeding.

Commitment to the spiritual

St. John-Stevas is aware of the trend towards renaming R.I. 'religious education', and he has decided that he has no objection to that, provided it implies a commitment to the spiritual and not to a mere course in comparative religion. . . . Certainly parents do not want proselytism for any particular denomination and rightly so but they do want study of the basic principles of the Christian faith.

It is obvious that he is not thinking of an impartial study of Christian doctrines and practices. He wants teaching with a "commitment to the spiritual" and this must be indoctrination. It is proselytizing for a particular denomination that he rejects, not brainwashing into a particular faith.

No one will be surprised by the fervour of Mr. St. John-Stevas's support for school religion. His advocacy of "study of the basic principles of the Christian faith" with a "commitment to the spiritual" may sound old-fashioned, even doctrinaire, when set alongside the bland assurances of honesty, freedom and objectivity that we are used to getting from the new school of R.E. apologists. But the difference is only superficial. The smooth-tongued salesmen of the "new, improved R.E." are not likely to thank Mr. St. John-Stevas for his too candid defence of school religion. But they have no genuine cause for complaint. He has only made explicit what they have tried to conceal.

PHYLLIS GRAHAM

THE JESUS HOAX

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CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE AND RACIAL SEGREGATION:

THE CASE OF MUSLIM SCHOOLS

WILLIAM McILROY

As the law stands, Roman Catholics, other Christian denominations and Jews can set up their own schools with aid from the State. There is no reason why Muslims, Hindus, Jains or anyone else should not demand the same aid in order to help establish schools for their children.—The Freethinker, 26 July 1969.

In the near future another issue will arise . . . Already there are signs that some Muslims are restive and are asking pointedly why, if there are maintained Catholic schools and Anglican schools and Methodist schools and Jewish schools, there are no Islamic schools. If this argument were to prove irresistible and they and other oriental schools were to be established, at once we would have the concomitant establishment of racial and colour segregation on the American or South African pattern.—The Cost of Church Schools, by David Tribe, National Secular Society, 1970.

Secularist warnings about the likelihood of adherents to the Islamic and other faiths, now living in Britain and highly concentrated in some areas, seeking to establish their own schools have been derided previously as alarmist and even racist. The critics have ranged from Church people who regard the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act as another perquisite that is their rightful due in what they claim to be a Christian country, to those well-disposed educationists who have buried their heads in ecumenical quicksands, refusing to face the fact that religionists will engage in duplicity and put the interests of their faith before the welfare of children or of society.

Different direction

In 1969 a chief education officer complained that the Mosque was pulling in a different direction from the education system. The Muslim religious leaders evidently agreed, but were determined that the Mosque would win. During the last five years they have mounted a campaign for separate schools which, if successful, would mean that thousands of children will be triply segregated — by race, by sex and by religion. There was a significant advance in their campaign last month when an exclusively male conference in London decided to organize a national council whose first project will be to study the feasibility of starting a privately financed school which will be run by Muslims. More ominously, there was an appeal for Muslims in Britain (there are approximately one million of them) to demand their own schools within the State education scheme. Such a development would increase vastly the amount of public money being spent on segregated education; the social cost would be the creation of ghetto schools and a serious rebuff for those who are working to promote integration and racial harmony.

Segregated education

One of the speakers at the conference was Dr. Mohammed Iqbal, a lecturer at Hull Polytechnic and a strenuous advocate of segregated education. Earlier this year Dr. Iqbal published an article in *The Times Educational Supplement* in which he declared: "Education involving sex . . . is only permissible as long as it is part of a biology lesson, or a lecture at a professional institution such as a school of medicine. Even then, young women taking

medicine should not be in mixed classes, or be taught by men". During a recent confrontation with the Bradford education authorities one Muslim father stated bluntly that girls do not require education. Others keep their daughters at home rather than send them to secondary schools where they will mix with boys or possibly be tempted to wear "immodest" bathing costumes. Such attitudes, unless challenged and defeated, will put the Muslim community on the slippery slope that could lead to social and educational disaster.

Influence and authority

Religious leaders are in a position of great influence and authority within the immigrant communities now established in this country. It is easy for them to dominate their fellow-Muslims in Britain where they are often concentrated in enclaves suffering the disadvantages of internal social pressures and also hostility from outside. Many of them are handicapped through an inability to speak or understand the English language, confusion, exploitation and harassment leading to fear and uncertainty that are exploited by the more articulate and fanatical members of the community.

Those Muslims who are now demanding separate schools attempt to reinforce their case with quotations from the Koran. But although Islam has defined the rôle and status of women the practice of separating boys and girls in the classroom on reaching puberty is more one of custom than of doctrine. In some Muslim countries they are educated together and young Muslim women attend such institutions as the multi-national American University of Beirut. It may be that customs which are prevalent in parts of India and Pakistan have become, by usage, religious beliefs. But such confusion does not justify an extension of segregated education either within or separate from the State system.

Children's rights

Much emphasis is being placed on the importance of religious freedom and on parents' rights. Fortunately parents have not got absolute rights over their children, for there are those — including some Muslims — who would keep children away from school for financial, religious and other reasons. And Muslim children's rights must be considered too. Many of them have been born in Britain and will remain here for the rest of their lives. They will inevitably face racial and other forms of prejudice. Must they suffer the additional handicap of a narrow, insular form of education fostered by religious extremists, financed by the State and imposed upon them irrespective of the social consequences?

The girls will be the chief victims of such an educational system, for although we may not envy the life of a woman living in a Pakistani village she has at least the companionship of others as she fetches water from the well or washes clothes at the river. But the housebound Muslim woman trying to raise a family — often in sub-standard accommodation — in an English industrial town is a tragically isolated figure. If religious leaders have their way in educational matters they will impose a life of loneliness and inferiority on future generations of Muslim women who will be deprived of all the advantages of life in British society, whilst it will not be possible to give them the com-

pensations of life in their ancestral homeland. It is even doubtful if young Muslim males will want to marry the products of a Muslim girls' school.

Religious leaders within the Muslim community are exploiting the statutory position of Christianity in the county school curriculum and the enormous subsidy, soon to be increased, which denominational schools receive from the State. However, as the following examples show, religious leaders who purport to speak on behalf of "their" community are indulging frequently in wishful thinking or in sheer deception. Until five years ago Roman Catholic priests and educationists were proclaiming that the dearest wish of all Catholic parents was to have their children educated in Church schools. How many of them would make such an assertion today? When legislation was introduced to compel motor cyclists to wear crash-helmets there were hysterical protests by Sikh religious leaders that their followers were opposed to a law that would force them to remove their turbans whilst riding a motor cycle. (The fact that Sikh pilots and sportsmen did so was con-

veniently overlooked by both religious fanatics and the self-appointed defenders of religious freedom.) What was the reaction of the average Sikh on the Southall ombibus? He had an opportunity to express his opposition to the new law when a Turban Action Committee candidate contested that constituency at the General Election. The candidate received a derisory handful of votes and lost his deposit.

Muslim religious leaders, like their counterparts of other beliefs, are primarily interested in inculcating faith and conformity through their own and other institutions, like schools, which are for the service of the whole community. The majority of Muslim parents, like those of other religious faiths and none, want very simply the best for their children and to see them intellectually equipped for a successful career and a full life. Here, then, is a challenge to humanists, the women's liberation movement and those working for communal harmony to encourage the immigrant community to make a stand against those who put religious dogma before human welfare.

THE HUMANIST REVOLUTION:

SIXTH IHEU CONGRESS

BARBARA SMOKER

Some three hundred humanists from twenty countries participated in the sixth congress of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, which took place last month (August 5-9) at the Free University in Amsterdam. There were also observers there from UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Believers, the International Association for Religious Freedom, the World Conference of Religion for Peace, and the World Union of Freethinkers.

Important achievements

The theme of the congress was "The Humanist Revolution". The subsidiary themes for the discussion groups were "Democracy, State and Individual", "Equality", "Human Fulfilment and the Quality of Life", "Ecology and Economic Growth", "Strategy and Tactics of Humanist Social Change", and "Education"; each summarized in plenary sessions during the second half of the week, and summaries of the summaries being published later. There were also two plenary sessions on the Third World, together with a film on the work being done in Peru by the Dutch humanist organisation HIVOS. And then the usual run of resolutions. However, as at all such conferences, the really important achievements were made during the coffee-breaks.

There were absentees among the would-be participants. One of the invited speakers, Professor Svetozar Stojanovic of Yugoslavia, had been refused an exit visa by the Yugoslav Government. Similarly and more surprisingly, perhaps, Dr. Henry Morgentaler of Canada had had his passport impounded by the Canadian Government, because of his crime record — his "crime" being that of acceding to women's requests for abortions.

At most international conferences — and the previous IHEU congresses I attended were no exception — one's overriding impression is that members from different national backgrounds are simply not talking the same language — in the metaphorical sense even more than the literal; for disparate cultures pose disparate problems, and a shared philosophy can lead to the same answers only if the questions are the same. However, this congress

seemed to achieve genuine international communication and unity of purpose — partly, no doubt, because the national frontiers of primary concern have been swept away in the past five years or so by the rising tide of ecological problems, on which we are all in the same boat. Together with the increase in mutual understanding, there was a warm friendliness in the air, beyond the mere demands of sociability.

As for the literal language barriers, even the simultaneous translation service was almost superfluous for British and American participants, who were thoroughly spoilt by almost everyone else speaking English.

This was the second IHEU congress to take place in Amsterdam — the first being the inaugural congress in 1952 — and it seems a particularly appropriate city for international humanism, since it was Amsterdam, as the seventeenth-century refuge and meeting-place of religious dissenters from all over Europe, that fostered the revolution of thought which substituted human experience for divine authority. And Amsterdam, one finds with delight, has hardly altered physically since the seventeenth century, though still in the forefront of the "humanist revolution". Its priests defy the Pope; its royals mingle with the people; and its workers acknowledge no bosses; while Dutch soldiers are surely unique in having their own trade union. Moreover, in what other country could an avowed freethinker become Prime Minister?

Prime Minister

Not only is the present Dutch Prime Minister known to be a secular humanist: he actually found time to attend the closing session of the congress, at which he made an amusing speech (in English, of course) about the occupational temptation of politicians to employ immoral means to political ends. No one could miss the reference (though unspecified) to Richard M. Nixon, whose resignation had been international front-page news that morning.

Then, in the presence of the Prime Minister, the International Humanist Award was presented to H. J. Blackham, who received a standing ovation and made a witty and characteristically modest speech in reply. It was an

honour in which those of us from Britain felt we shared.

The congress, which had begun with a municipal reception at the Van Gogh Museum, closed with a memorable social and dance at the Amsterdam Zoo, where we were able to visit the animals before tackling one of those monumental Dutch buffet suppers, while a Dutch-Chinese magician, dressed in gold, performed close-up magic that really put rationalist scepticism to the test.

Full agenda

If I have one major criticism of the congress arrangements — apart from its high cost, especially to those of us exchanging deflated English pounds for stable Dutch guilders (though this was mitigated for some of us by the generous hospitality of local humanists) — it is that the agenda was too full to allow for any sightseeing unless one either played truant from some of the sessions or extended one's visit beyond the period of the congress. About one-third of the participants did, in fact, stay on for a four-day boat trip arranged for the following week. Meanwhile, congress events brimmed over to the Saturday, when the IHEU Board had their official luncheon and there was an organized visit to the flats built by Dutch humanists for the elderly. The following morning, at breakfast, I heard a Dutch radio programme about the congress, including interviews with some of the humanists attending from various countries — again, mostly in English.

A few hours later, a hundred of us went aboard the

Diamant for four days of visiting places of interest on what used to be the Zuyder Zee — now fresh-water lakes in reclaimed land. We were shown the technological marvel of land reclamation, and visited picturesque former islands (where the traditional Dutch costumes and clogs are still worn by the older inhabitants) and historical towns. At Zaanstad, prior to visiting an open-air museum of windmills and timber cottages, we were given an official reception by the Burgomaster, who told us (in English, of course) that a recent social survey of the area had revealed that more than fifty percent of the inhabitants professed no religious belief.

Our last evening on board was marked by spontaneous folk-singing by the galley-girls — who, in true Dutch democratic fashion, had spent much of their spare time hobnobbing with the captain on the bridge.

Back in Amsterdam, there was a last chance for a few hours' sightseeing. Suddenly we came upon an open gate leading into an enclosed square of delightful old houses with colourful gardens and, on one side of the square, two churches. The larger of the two was the English-language church — a medieval church which has been used since the sixteenth century by English seamen, merchants, craftsmen, and refugees from religious persecution. The second church was Roman Catholic. To my astonishment, I found it full of people, this Thursday lunch-time, attending old-style benediction — in Latin! Ironically enough, the defiant nostalgic Latin plainsong seemed, in 1974, positively libertarian, if not exactly "the humanist revolution".

THE UNTENABILITY OF THEISM:

SOME REFLECTIONS

Although there seem to be many people in the freethought movement who recommend that atheists adopt a frankly conciliatory, deferential attitude towards religion — "reverent disbelief", dialogue between humanists and Christians — the fact still remains that "the price of freedom is eternal vigilance". Nevertheless, in these days when fundamentalism is openly repudiated by increasing numbers of "liberal" Christians, and many professing Anglicans, Methodists and Catholics are probably private Unitarians (emotionally), religion is beginning to speak in less blatantly doctrinal terms to the unconvinced among the population. Whilst not openly rejecting the traditional dogmas, such as the Incarnation, Trinity, Atonement and Resurrection, we are told that the essence of Christianity is in its lofty morality (as exemplified in centuries of bloodshed, fanaticism and corruption) and its affirmation of belief in God, the Absolute Person, the Infinite, Benevolent Intelligence responsible for this carefree little globe we are privileged to inhabit, prior to entering the indescribable bliss of heaven — hell not being mentioned in respectable theological circles any more, for fear of increasing the alienation of you and me from Christianity still further. Thus, it would seem that religion is making a last ditch stand against the forces of disbelief, with the moral claims in one hand and the value of belief in God in the other. Discarding the question of Christianity's "sublime" (!) ethic, which, whatever else it may be, is certainly not original, let us briefly examine the other claim made on behalf of religion — the "need" man experiences for communion with his Creator.

As I see it, the fundamental difference between atheism

GEOFFREY WEBSTER

and theism is not that one man denies a hypothesis and another vigorously affirms it. No — the difference is rather in their respective attitudes towards the place of consciousness and intelligence in the universe. The atheist, accepting the findings of science, concludes that life and consciousness are consequences of material phenomena, and that the universe is originally or intrinsically unconscious — not, indeed, "unconscious" in a biological or psychological sense (the sense that a living thing is unconscious in coma or sleep), but in the sense of being totally insentient, and thus (presumably) purposeless. It will be noted that this is not a speculative outlook, but is supported by evidence, and is completely divorced from metaphysical conjecture — such as what is "behind" or "beyond" the infinite universe.

Opposed view

Now, the theist takes a diametrically opposed view. According to him, although animal and human consciousness are products of an historical and prolonged evolutionary process, there is a Supreme Personal Consciousness (designated "God") which existed prior to the creation of everything, which is not associated with anything physical (like a brain and nervous system), which has been what it is from beginningless time. Thus, the universe is purposive, because: A. It has produced life (i.e., man); B. It is the deliberate, intentional work of an intelligence. It may be said here that the derivation of an unconscious universe from a conscious creator is a very unconvincing doctrine — since that which is emanated or constructed by God is different from God, and therefore is

superior to him, because it possesses a quality not found in him, "absolute" as he is — unconsciousness. Far less absurd is the doctrine of philosophical materialism, which affirms that consciousness has emerged from matter in much the same way that water emerges from the combination of oxygen and hydrogen. This doesn't mean, of course, that mind in any way pre-exists body, brain and nerve — simply that particular physical combinations and interactions are necessary in order for it to exist and function.

Trinity of attributes

The attributes of God are legion — the "trinity" of omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, as also compassion, purposiveness, justice, to name but a few. Religious people fail to explain how a being that possesses autonomy and aseity — in short, utter independence — can possibly have any qualities, since qualities presuppose an environment in which they manifest themselves. In absolute, metaphysical isolation (the state of God before the Creation), would we not have simply a state of suspended animation or sleep? Indeed, since consciousness means "awareness of", an infinite intelligence would necessarily be permanently unconscious, since there would be no need for consciousness if one were literally *everything*. However — if we allow God is *conscious* and infinite (the only logical meaning of "infinite" being "spatially boundless"), how can he be distinguished from the universe? And, if he is pantheistically identified with the universe, how can we legitimately claim that an infinite, insentient cosmos is actually an infinite, sentient deity? In passing, it is worth mentioning the Vaishnava Hinduism teaches that God has a body, and that the countless world-systems emanated in "seedling" form from his slumbering body, at the beginning of a great cosmic period. Thus, the respiration of the sleeping Vishnu is the cause of the cosmos appearing, disappearing, reappearing.

Impossible mentality

Again, let us consider the general nature of existence and experience. First contemplate inorganic nature at its most turbulent and terrifying — the howling blizzards, the gigantic glaciers of the South Pole, or (by way of complete contrast) the battering, sweltering heat of the desert and tropics, the countless millions of tons of lava flowing down the side of a volcano, tidal waves inundating land, earthquakes, all the repertoire of forces which are yet completely unconscious and, consequently — mindless. Then, bring to mind the organic world — species after species struggling (with "masochistic" tenacity) to survive, often in very inhospitable environments, the bloody history of the particular mammalian species we belong to, so much in the way of pain, disease, uncertainty and conflict, on a planetary scale — and this but one planet in one tiny solar system. If there are innumerable inhabited planets, this means quintillions of little lumps of sensitive matter in the midst of this fury and maelstrom, innumerable streams of flickering awareness reacting to endless stimulation from the environment. Then, try and imagine what kind of mentality could or would want to have originated all this. It is impossible.

Religious believers are on the horns of a formidable and unavoidable dilemma when it comes to describing the nature of their God to us 'orrible 'eathens. On the one hand, the more anthropomorphic characterizations lead to the question, "How can an allegedly compassionate God permit so much suffering?" On the other hand, when we are given a sort of Neo-Platonic description of God as removed from everything remotely connected with man

(thought, emotion, passion), we are left with a virtually featureless, totally inaccessible, utterly incomprehensible "thing", a mere *deus ex machina*, or "First Mover," which, we are told, is beyond the limitations of personality, yet is still an individual. Here, our question will be, "If your God is so utterly 'other' than anything of time, space and matter, if he is so inscrutable, is he not also . . . inexperienceable?" The recognition of this has prompted religions to manufacture the idea of "Incarnation" as a means of bridging the gap between "finite" and "infinite." This introduces more problems, morally and philosophically speaking, than it solves — look at the polytheism of Christianity, in which we are told of the simultaneous identity and diversity of three personalities, God, Son of God, Ghost of God. Of course, no-one attempts to prove the existence of an infinite, malevolent god — Satanic theologians set to work, produce an "Honest to Satan". For, if limitless Love can exist, why not limitless (through frequently Machiavellian) Malice?

Order, beauty and mystery

"But," expostulates the Christian, "don't you atheists ever feel awe and reverence, confronted by the beauty, mystery, complexity and immensity of things in general?" For my part, I realize that it is a matter of sovereign indifference to the universe whether "it" is beginningless or cyclic, finite or infinite. Similarly, when I think of the much-advertised "order" in Nature, I reflect that this does not necessarily mean that "the order of things" is either harmonious or teleological. As to "beauty," I am sure it is a great consolation to a fawn being rended by a ravenous predator to be informed that it is such a beautiful creature. Finally, the idea that there is a "mystery" about the universe springs, if I may be permitted to introduce the idea, from one root only — the fact that man, a consciousness in the midst of cosmic insentience, cannot acknowledge that the universe is bewildering and frightening simply because he *is* aware in the midst of unawareness.

So, what will happen to theism in the next few years? Since I do not, malist that I am, give man more than another half century or so on the planet, whether he finally disappears through war, famine, pestilence or voluntary global euthanasia, I predict that the belief in God will be unable to sustain itself, in the face of both increasingly extensive and systematic scientific knowledge and man's growing, environmentally reinforced, recognition of the fundamental harshness and unhappiness of existence. Until the time when every church, synagogue, mosque and temple is closed, or converted into accommodation for homeless folk, we can rest assured of one thing — there will still be men and women who, confronted by a universe conspicuous for its obvious unconsciousness, amorality, and (with reference to life) ruthlessness, will offer as an explanation a monosyllable that, to the thoughtful man, is simply a waste of breath — "God."

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REVIEWS

BOOKS

THE JESUS HOAX by Phyllis Graham. Leslie Frewin, £3.95.

This book inevitably invites comparison with Joachim Kahl's *The Misery of Christianity*. The authors — one originally a Lutheran pastor and one a Carmelite nun — are both renegade Christians, whose former devotion has been replaced by a burning hostility. Both reject Christian ethics as wholeheartedly as Christian theology, maintaining that the moral teaching of the Gospels — with its mixture of ferocity and masochism, its obsession with sin and guilt, its exaltation of suffering and sacrifice for its own sake and its hideous doctrine of eternal punishment — has been a source of almost unmitigated evil. And they do not allow any consideration for Christian susceptibilities to inhibit them in the expression of this view. As Dr. Kahl writes, and Miss Graham quotes with approval, "Christianity has already cheated too many people out of their lives. That is why I want to get rid of it, right away".

In her opening chapters Miss Graham gives an account — moving, disturbing and at times wryly humorous — of her reception as a Bride of Christ and of the subsequent inroads of doubt. Her first doubts, understandably, were concerned with the doctrine of Hell. She took them to her spiritual adviser, and received the usual bromidic answer — "Don't think about Hell, my child. Hell is not for you. Think only of the love of God." But the recalcitrant nun was concerned for the posthumous fate of others besides herself, and she continued to think about Hell, and about other insoluble problems such as that with which St. Augustine grappled — "either God cannot abolish evil or he will not: if he cannot, he is not all-powerful; if he will not, he is not all-good". Study of the Gospels produced no reassurance but only further dread and confusion, and for years she was engaged in an agonizing struggle to make herself accept doctrines from which her intelligence and her conscience revolted. Eventually she sought release from her vows and left the convent; and after an uneasy period of half-belief and uncertainty during which she still remained nominally a Catholic, she finally found liberation in Humanism — where, as she relates, she experienced none of the desolation and nostalgia commonly held to be the lot of those who have "lost their faith", but rather a profound sense of relief at being "free at last from the torturing necessity of trying to reconcile the savage facts of planetary existence with the fantasy of a wise and benevolent Creator."

Much of Miss Graham's book is concerned with the personality of Jesus, whom she uncompromisingly describes as a megalomaniac psychopath. This is coming it rather strong, but she is undoubtedly right in emphasizing how distorted is the image of Jesus presented by the Church — an image produced by careful selection of passages in the Gospels which show him in a favourable light while other passages, no less numerous, which show him as harsh and vindictive are ignored or explained away. Miss Graham proceeds to correct this imbalance by selecting on the opposite principle. She assembles from the four Gospels all Jesus's reported sayings on hell-fire and the wrath to come, and all the furious denunciations that he heaped on his critics, and runs them together in one shattering

Appendix of fifteen pages which reduces the "gentle Jesus" image to fragments.

At some points the book is not quite internally consistent, which suggests that the writing of it may have been spread over a period of years during which the author's thought was developing. In the earlier chapters, though she rejects the morality of the Gospel stories, she does not appear to question their historicity — she expresses indignation, for example, at Jesus's unfeeling treatment of the Gadarene swine. Later, without apparent awareness of inconsistency, she writes that "the patchwork of the Gospels was cobbled by unskilful hands much too late to be anything but hearsay. One knows what happens at the party game 'pass it on', and what a parody comes out at the end". Later still, as a result of reading Professor G. A. Wells's *The Jesus of the Early Christians*, she is almost convinced that the historical Jesus never existed.

This inconsistency, together with a certain lack of rigour which it exemplifies, tends to reduce the book's effectiveness as polemic; as does also the slightly febrile vehemence of some of the language. On page 95, for example, we get within the space of ten lines "irritating", "nauseating", "disgusts", "infuriates", "hoodwinked" and "lies" — an excess of emphasis that tends to be, in the current phrase, counter-productive. But these criticisms are perhaps academic. Miss Graham's concern, clearly, was not to state and defend a conviction systematically, but rather to enable the reader to live vicariously through the experiences and the mental struggles through which she reached it. The book will infuriate many Christians, but as a record of a spiritual pilgrimage much of it is deeply impressive.

MARGARET KNIGHT

THE SECRET GOSPEL: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark by Morton Smith. Gollancz, £2.50.

Professor Smith's discovery of an eighteenth-century copy of a hitherto unknown letter written about A.D. 180 by Clement of Alexandria to someone called Theodore has proved a surprisingly promising lead into Christian origins. The letter refers to secret teaching of Jesus, alleges that some of it was recorded by Mark in an expansion of what we know as his canonical gospel, and that this expansion was used by the heretic Carpocrates, who flourished circa A.D. 125. From this and other evidence it is inferred that the secret teaching was recorded late in the first or early in the second century. Smith argues that Clement was mistaken in regarding the gospel containing the secret teaching as an expansion of our Mark, that our Mark is in fact an abbreviation of this secret gospel, which is therefore the earlier document and correctly records authentic secret teaching of a historical Jesus. Some of us may think it more likely that the secret gospel (whether earlier or later than canonical Mark) ascribes to Jesus ideas and practices of an early Christian community. Nevertheless, these ideas and practices are early enough to be of relevance to our views concerning Christian origins.

Clement's letter quotes a section from the secret gospel which, he says, belongs between verses 34 and 35 of ch. 10 of canonical Mark. It is a story of how Jesus raised from the dead a rich young man (not named) upon the intercession of the deceased's sister (also not named). This is obviously a variant of the story (recorded only in the fourth gospel) of Jesus' raising of Lazarus at the request of his sister Martha. Professor Smith shows that the fourth

evangelist elaborated this Lazarus story from one of his written sources, where the story is quite like the variant given in the secret gospel. Professor Smith thinks that this latter variant is even older than the story as it existed in the fourth evangelist's source; and he further gives very good reasons for holding that our Mk. 10:13-45, plus the story of the raising (which, in the secret gospel, belongs in this context), "was put together to accompany or explain an early Christian baptismal service" (page 68). That a number of important sections of early Christian writings — epistles and gospels — originated as liturgies for cultic acts of baptism and communion is obviously of crucial importance to proper understanding of the genesis of the texts, and makes it unnecessary to attribute much of what is alleged of Jesus in these texts to a historical Jesus. Here Professor Smith would not agree, for he is convinced that Christian baptism and eucharist were instituted by Jesus himself. But his findings and arguments are of great relevance to those of us who do not share this hypothesis.

Clement's quotation from the secret gospel includes the following incident, after Jesus has raised the youth from the dead:

And going out of the tomb they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus told him what to do, and in the evening the youth comes to him wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God.

Professor Smith argues that the six days' preparation, the linen sheet, the nudity, and also the whole context in which this story belongs in the canonical Mark, indicate that the "mystery" was a baptism; and that this enables us to understand the quaint story of Mk. 14:51-2, that Jesus, on the occasion of his arrest, had with him "a certain young man having a linen cloth . . . over his naked body". The youth was wearing the costume required for baptism, and Jesus's purpose was to baptize him (page 81).

As Professor Smith is well aware, there is abundant evidence that early Christians believed Jesus to have delivered secret teachings. All four gospels represent him as doing so, and secret teaching was the rule in the pagan and Jewish environments in which these works were written. But what precisely did Jesus teach as constituting the "mystery" of the kingdom, and what connection had this teaching with baptism? Professor Smith seeks an answer by scrutinizing the baptismal practices of John the Baptist and Paul, both active in the first half of the first century. The former proclaimed — against the official Jewish view that only sacrifices and repentance can atone for sins — that baptism can remit them and thus *prepare* one for entry into the kingdom. Paul believed that Christians were *already* in the kingdom, and that they entered it when, at baptism, the "spirit" of Jesus came upon them and made them one with him. For Paul baptism, not keeping the Jewish law, confers salvation; and the baptized are above the law. Professor Smith (who accepts that there was a historical Jesus, active between the time of John the Baptist and the ministry of Paul) supposes that Paul's rather cautious and guarded statements about the Christian's freedom from the law are watered-down versions of a secret libertine preaching of a historical Jesus. In the gospels Jesus is made both to endorse and to repudiate the law; and Professor Smith supposes that a historical Jesus did both. In public, that is when addressing those outside his inner circle, he taught that the law was still binding; but in private he considered that he himself was free from it, as were also those who had been baptized with his spirit. Professor Smith supposes that the essence of his secret teaching was that at baptism the initiate went with him on a mystical ascent into the heavens, and in this

way entered "the kingdom" and was set free from the laws ordained for and in the lower world. On this view, it was because the "mystery" of the kingdom involves this ascent that Jesus baptized the resuscitated young man at night. Professor Smith believes that a historical Jesus claimed to have himself experienced such a mystical ride into the heavens, and that this experience formed the basis of his claim to take initiates with him on a similar ride when he baptized them. The evidence offered in support is, to my mind, the weakest part of Professor Smith's argument. For instance, he adduces Phil. 2:5-11 to show that Jesus was believed to have been a man taken up into the heavens, transformed into a supernatural being, and sent back to earth for the salvation of man. But this passage clearly alleges that he was originally a supernatural personage who humbled himself by coming down to earth in human form. Professor Smith thinks that what he regards as the original view of Jesus has been "overlain" here by "later theories of a pre-existent Messiah" (page 110). I think that these "later" theories were the starting point for Christianity. But whichever of us is right makes no difference to the important evidence given by Professor Smith that very early Christians ascribed secret teachings to Jesus, and that this explains why so very many gnostic sects sprang up so early in so many parts of the Christian church. The difference is indeed quite small between no historical Jesus at all, and a historical Jesus whose teaching was secret and therefore virtually unknown, and to whom therefore almost any view could be ascribed by any of the numerous groups who held by his name.

Professor Smith's subject is Ancient History, and he writes with the learning of a theologian and the freedom of someone uncommitted to Christianity. The lay reader will be able to read his book without difficulty. Apart from its theories, it conveys much of the excitement of scholarly discovery, and shows its author to be a most patient and meticulous investigator.

G. A. WELLS

WOMEN'S RIGHTS: A practical guide by Anna Coote and Tess Gill, Penguin, 60p.

In the words of the authors this book is "a self-help guide, a catalogue of evils and something of a manifesto". It sets out clearly, readably and illustrated by Posy Simmond's delightfully witty cartoons, the facts about every conceivable topic of interest to women from Equal Pay (and employers' devices to avoid paying it), maternity leave, tax and national insurance without tears, to mortgages, maintenance, do-it-yourself divorce, birth control and legal aid. There are summaries of the pros and cons of being married or living together, and the section on children even covers opting-out of religion in schools. There are numerous pieces of useful, and not always well-known, information: for instance that married women get lower unemployment benefit than single ones, even though they have paid the same contributions; or that women on government training schemes get lower allowances than men.

Discrimination against women extends through every aspect of life. Because they live longer than men and retire earlier (owing to the 1940 Act rather than to their own preferences), women usually get lower pensions than men. As the book comments, "if we all promised to hurl ourselves under buses on our 72nd birthdays, (thereby ensuring a life expectancy equal to men on retirement), would we be granted equal pensions?" Women often need their husbands' consent to get a coil fitted, to have

an abortion, to be sterilized, to get H.P. or other credit. It is a crime for a woman to solicit a man but not the other way round. Girls are channelled into "feminine" activities and subjects at school, and grow up to become nurses, secretaries, canteen ladies and telephonists, but rarely managers, engineers or skilled workers in industry. Women are expected to be financially dependent on men, — the assumption behind the Social Security's notorious "cohabitation rule".

But as well as describing the status quo, it is also explained how women may use the law and other institutions to defend and extend their rights. The problems are not minimized however: "All union leaderships are dominated by men, and as a result trade unions generally don't take the special problems of their women workers seriously". Although women are joining trade unions in large numbers, many unions still have a verbal rather than a practical commitment to women's rights.

"Careers teachers may have a sexist bias, causing them to channel you into a 'female' job . . ."

"Judges still seem to believe that a woman's contribution to the home as wife and mother is less valuable than the man's contribution as breadwinner . . . and that men need more to live on than women." As a result many women after divorce find they have been allocated only one third of the value of the family home and capital.

Women who have been raped " . . . have to contend with the common male attitude that a woman is fair game for sex, and if she gets raped she probably asked for it and the man was doing her a favour!"

There are thirty times more men in prison than women, but prisoners' wives suffer financial hardship and social ostracism and have only recently organized to demand rights, for example, to improved visiting facilities.

The only drawback to publications of this kind is that, due to changes of law and of government, some sections quickly go out of date; for instance the Conservative government's anti-discrimination Bill, pensions Bill and tax credit proposals have now been abandoned.

But at sixty pence this book is a bargain. Its factual and concrete description of the exploitation of women and careful discussion of remedies make it a pleasing contrast with some of the more introspective and psychological works on women's liberation, which are being published. It deserves a place on every woman's bookshelf.

PATRICIA KNIGHT

THEATRE

BINGO by Edward Bond. The Royal Court Theatre.

The problem of the relation between a writer and his society is a fascinating one. This problem is interestingly tackled in Edward Bond's new play (premiered at Exeter last year) about the last days of Shakespeare's life. Instead of a man peacefully resting on his achievement we are shown a man tortured by doubts about himself and the cruel world around him. He comes to feel that he cannot dissociate himself from complicity with the acts of violence and injustice which he sees all around him. He is surrounded by people and events which prevent him from escaping into serenity: "Serene. Serene. Is that how they see me?" he asks ironically. His old housekeeper's husband has been reduced to childishness by a blow from

an axe which he received when he was press-ganged into a war. Shakespeare is estranged from his wife and daughter. A beggar girl is whipped and then hanged. The local gentry are planning enclosure, likely to cause poverty and hardship, of land which is partly owned by Shakespeare and he accedes to this provided his own profits are not diminished. The play is aptly sub-titled "Scenes of Death and Money".

Every writer writes in other men's blood. The trivial and the real. There's nothing else to write in. But only a god or a devil can write in other men's blood and not ask why they spilt it and what it cost.

This is above all what torments Shakespeare, he has acted the god with his characters and detached himself from the suffering of humanity. In a drinking session with Ben Jonson the contrast between the two men is marked: Jonson settled a literary quarrel with a sword and experienced the suffering of misery and poverty. This scene is brought to life by an excellent display of controlled ferocity in Arthur Lowe's fine performance.

Although the play is about violence it is not a violent play. He has stated that "I write about violence as naturally as Jane Austen wrote about manners" and he clearly feels the dramatist's duty is to confront the problem of violence in society. But he does not, in this play at least, feel the need to display the violence on stage: the total effect is cumulative, the violence off-stage or seething in men's minds, though there is some pretty strong description. Both Edward Bond's determination to confront important issues and his skilful writing, embodying dilemmas in marvelously concrete situations, result in a play of real stature. It is well served by a cast including John Gielgud, John Barrett and Hilda Barry, and the direction was restrained, detailed and well thought-out. Martin Duncan's spiky harpsichord music was most appropriate and I feel it worth mentioning that the programme, with a substantial introduction and several poems by Edward Bond, is very much better value than is usual in London. It will be a great shame if the play does not transfer for a longer run, as I would recommend it highly.

JIM HERRICK

DR. FAUSTUS by Christopher Marlowe, adapted by John Barton. The Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre.

The legend of Faust, who made a compact with the devil, exchanging his soul for twenty-four years' magic powers and vision, is a very old one, and has been drawn on by composers, film makers and puppet-masters, as well as writers such as Calderón, Goethe, Thomas Mann and Lawrence Durrell. There is much in the legend to appeal to the imagination, and provoke debate; the acquisition of magic powers, a man torn by the forces of good and evil. Faust's terror as his twenty-four years run out and his terrible punishment approaches, the fact that he was damned for the sin of despair at his fate rather than for his presumption.

The character of Faust himself is highly dramatic, with his arrogance, his demoniac hunger for knowledge, and his refusal to be tied down to the mundane, the accepted and safe. It is a character and story with a Marlovian breadth to it. There is in existence, though, no "Dr. Faustus" written solely by Marlowe. John Barton, aided by his cast, has made this adaptation from two plays attributed in part to Marlowe, dated 1604 and 1616, and from Marlowe's own source, *The History of the Damnable Life of Dr. Faustus*. The richness and drive of the writing remains.

but scenes set outside Faustus's study have been omitted or modified, and the play has become the more taut for being confined to a single location. Barton has also reduced the size of the cast, so that the black-gowned Lucifer doubles as the Chorus, which loads the dice even more heavily in the devil's favour. The Good and Evil Angels, who appear intermittently, warring over Faustus's soul and exacerbating his torment, are not played by actors. Faustus holds a doll up in each hand and speaks their lines, puppeteer-style. Likewise, the Seven Deadly Sins and Helen of Troy, who come to entertain Faustus, are lifesize puppets whose movements Faustus apes with grotesque delight. These phenomena become something infinitely more frightening than mere spirits. They are figments of an incurably diseased imagination.

Michael Annals's Gothic toyshop set bears this out. Annals is an inspired designer with a shrewd eye for detail. The whole set, caged in by vaults, is on two levels; the rear portion is raised and curtained off like a miniature stage, with an antique map of the world printed on the curtain. Faustus's study has all the clutter one associates with a hyperactive mind; a shrine, a harpsichord, baskets full of books, a rumped bed, and a clock with a platform which revolves on the quarter, displaying the figure of Death with his scythe.

Ian McKellen is the ideal Faustus for this rather busy production. He moves with natural grace, but when "establishing the character" or portraying unease, he is all joints. In the opening scenes of this play, he fidgets like a puppet—which is appropriate to this production as it happens, but is highly irritating. Tousled and lean, his Faustus has a sick, almost drugged-up nerviness. He has mouldered so long in his subterranean den, away from sunlight and everyday bustle, that he has become unnatural, has lost the rhythms of this world.

This is one of those performances, where I found myself analysing the actor's craft, dissecting the mechanics of his putting over the quirks and external signs that make up his interpretation. McKellen seems to derive a lot of his nervous energy from the superabundance of his ideas about the character he is playing, and by the heady business of transforming a character from the printed word to the living reality. Which is not meant scathingly. McKellen's theatricality is both his weakness and his strength. He excels at playing small boys who have refused to grow up and assume adult rôles, to accept compromise and mediocrity. He is at his best when playing men who in turn are playing at being the lower, the scholar, the king. He wears the trappings of sophistication and authority, the cloak and crown, with ease but there is something brattish about the wilful set of his mouth.

Faustus, "ravish'd" by magic is essentially a small boy, restless, untamed, reaching out beyond the limitations of the petty world and, finally, lost. There is a maniacal glint in McKellen's eyes as the magic takes its hold. He seems charged with unnatural energy. At the end, when his time has run out, he cowers in his chair, trying to escape the forces that will drag him off to Hell. He is lifted from the chair by a strength other than his own, and flung down into Hell beneath the stage. It is a moment which is highly effective because of its reliance not on gimmicks but on the actor's skill and concentration.

Emrys James is an excellent Mephistophilis, bland, still and dangerous. To my mind, the most exciting scene in this production is the wooing of Faustus by Mephistophilis. James is smiling and self-contained, while McKellen almost flirts with him, goading him on. When two strong, totally contrasting actors are pitted against each other, the result can be compelling harmony. VERA LUSTIG

LETTERS

Are religions necessary for modern man?

I would only complain on one point about the article in August *Freethinker* "Are Religions Necessary For Modern Man?". That complaint is that Anton Stanislaus dealt so perfectly with *isolated* Man, that many of the certainties might have to be looked at again, if we started to relate Man more to other forms of life. And I, looking in my own particular way for that breakthrough into some new effectiveness, think that it is in some difference between Man and all other forms of life, where alone any hope of some new effectiveness in ideas can possibly reside.

Anton Stanislaus did not feel it necessary to relate Man to other vertebrates, let alone to all other forms of life. He didn't ask why is it that Man is the only vertebrate, indeed only form of life, so far, that is religious? Man has, in principle, exactly the same brain as any other vertebrate. Why are not all these other species practising their religions?

And I would give the paradoxical answer that perhaps it is all forms of life other than Man that do practise religion, and it is only Man that doesn't! Hence the Religions and Human History. In other words, Life and Living are the real religion, and, in that sense, all forms of life are religious, and practise religion. Man is the one species that came along and, by some chance(s), became able to mess all that up and yet at the same time still as a species survive.

We are led to the question: "What would happen if some species ever evolved which could pick a quarrel with its own, inherited, deterministic basis-of-being—and get away with it?" Some species may have done it before and *not* got away with it—become extinct.

If that did happen in evolution, there would be no going back, for such a species. Go back, and history would only start again, with all its agony. We should hope that that agony was not all for nothing. We should want to finish the job off. This is the both glorious and hideous saga of a species.

Thus, it is Man's having lost his religion, because it was deterministic and unfree, that forced him to create religions. Religion is the Intangible aspect of Life. What is the Tangible aspect of Life worth alone!?

If there is no going back, where can we go from here? The answer is, that the "split mind" which resulted from the species's partly going-its-own-way, must, at this point be got quickly to where it was implicitly going. That is, forward, to religion again. In this way Homo Sapiens will no longer have need for religions. But, as I said, there is no going back to innocence.

The great discussion should begin. What exactly is it we have now to go forward to? We have to know exactly before not only humans, but all life on earth, perish. And *all life* would have to begin again, not just Man and Human History.

R. STUBBS.

Uri, humanism and the paranormal

Barbara Smoker, I fear, may have been a little too vehement in her condemnation of both Uri Geller and his autobiographer, Andrija Pulharich (Book Reviews, August). We have had many a friendly but polarized argument on this perplexing subject of the occult, as I expect many other freethinkers have done.

However, I feel it is a pity that Miss Smoker did not refer once to the credentials of those on the other side of the divide. Indeed as freethinkers it is important that we do so and thus keep within the best traditions of free enquiry; otherwise we will fall into the very snare of dogmatism and prejudice that we are in existence to combat. It is worth noting, for instance, that Professor John Taylor of London University (of the "Black Holes" fame) has taken a keen observer's interest in the phenomenon of telekinesis. He claimed in a recent ITV programme to have empirically verified, while it was untouched by hand, the bending of a rod of steel by Geller with the aid of electrical measuring devices. Quite responsible and impressive research work on the subject has also been done by the eminent Stanford Research Institute in the U.S.A., with Geller among others, and some remarkable findings have also come out of the U.S.S.R.

Such courageous scientists (i.e. courageous in the face of disparaging attacks by religionists and fellow scientists as well as humanists it seems) are surely not foolish enough to risk their reputations on futile tests with sundry conjurers, mystics, hysterics and the like.

Yet it is easy to see why humanists tend to dismiss the issue of the paranormal. It all reeks of the *supernatural*, and they erroneously assume that the very foundations of their anti-religious platform will crumble away if an aspect of the paranormal has any basis in fact. However, the existence of occultic powers in individuals can only strengthen the humanists' case. All the Uri

Gellers of this world are demonstrating, as the Hindu Yogis have done for centuries, is that hidden, magical powers reside within the individual being, if anywhere at all.

Humanism supports the aggrandizement of untapped mental or psychic powers in the individual, as distinct from the supernatural powers of any nameless cosmic deity. Indeed, the humanist can go one step further than the sociologist of religion by showing that the miraculous is simply a perversion or misunderstanding of such powers; inasmuch as God or the gods were carnal beings who had such powers more accentuated than most.

Western humanism is regrettably fast sinking into oblivion as an active intellectual force, when paradoxically intolerance and dogma in society are on the increase. The last great challenge to science is presented by the occultic legends of lost continents, interplanetary miscegenation, psychic powers and so on. The tragedy is that when progress in these spheres is made, humanism will suffer its greatest crisis and may go under completely just because it chooses to ignore some unpalatable facts rather than rethink its philosophy or re-align its commitments to established orthodoxies.

I am, in fact, preparing a publication on humanism and the supranormal, but I realize it will be an uphill struggle since I am prepared to accept the evidence of certain phenomena *at its face value*, rather than to dismiss it out of hand *a priori*.

In the meantime perhaps we could throw the argument open to the freethought movement as a whole to see how other readers feel on the subject?

ANTONY A. MILNE.

Nobody likes vaccination

The Freethinker quite properly always gives the N.S.S. President a good press. This time she is credited with saying "nobody likes vaccination or dentistry either. But they are often the lesser of two evils." Dentistry is a science which fills a useful niche in our organized life.

Vaccination against smallpox is another kettle of fish entirely. Today the practice is absolutely discredited; few people believe in it. We *know* today it does not prevent smallpox—neither does it instigate it. The only thing we have to understand is how the belief arose, how it was fostered and how its different claims have all been shown to be false.

I often wonder why it is that freethinkers who have "a nose for superstition" don't investigate the problem; if they did they would find its claims untenable.

A book which I think of high quality deserves mention. Being away from home I speak from memory but the title is *The Story of a Great Delusion* by William White. There is another by Milne called *What about Vaccination?* Unfortunately, I fancy these volumes are now out of print and as there are no big questions arising nowadays the interest in the subject is about as feeble as the interest in the fight against the established religion and religious superstition generally.

I think I have understood Miss Smoker aright, and I trust she will shortly repudiate her remarks.

HAROLD I. BAYFORD.

Religiosity denied

Now someone whom I don't think I know and who presumably does not know me aligns himself with Judex and dogmatizes that I am "deeply religious" with Marxism my "religion" and Marx my "prophet".

Nonsense.

I am no more "deeply religious" than any freethinker who has been convinced by Darwin, the theory of evolution and Darwinism, or by Einstein and the theory of relativity, and who has tried to propagate their theories.

If only Ross-Judex could read, they would know that I have seriously criticized, in Marxism in its original form, the total lack of analysis of what happens under capitalism at its monopoly stage. This approach is not "parroting" nor worshipping, but scientifically applying an existing theory in the light of changing conditions.

PAT SLOAN.

Religious thought-habit

I am glad Mr. Charles Byass (Letters, August) agrees with the ideas about World Government I put forward in my July letter. It is hoped that the nations will see that unity is in the interests of all, as he says, but in case they don't I think ordinary people should act.

My old friend Mr. Trevor Morgan (Letters, August), in criticizing Judex, says: "One can't help but notice the similar religious thought-habit existing between 'Professors This That or the Other . . . say' and the Bible-babblers 'Paul, John, Matthew, Luke . . . say'". Right! Most Marxists repeat "Marx, Engels, Lenin . . .

say" so on Mr. Morgan's authority I take it a "similar religious thought-habit" exists between Marxists and the Bible-babblers. Also Mr. Morgan says: "The mere necessity of the need to appeal to such a multitude reveals the uncertainty and inadequacy of the individual". Right: Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* and Lenin in (hem!) *Imperialism* appeal to "a multitude" so from what Mr. Morgan says I assume Marx and Lenin were "uncertain and inadequate".

Mr. Morgan also says that Judex has produced "a veritable Niagara of nonsense". It happens I recently had the pleasure of seeing Niagara Falls. There was a lot of noise, much spray and mist so you couldn't see in some places, and although Niagara is a nice waterfall it's not as impressive as others, including our own High Force in Teesdale. In fact—it's a bit like Mr. Morgan's latest eruption.

I. S. Low.

Equation of free speech

The proposition advanced by your correspondents Connolly and Morgan that "free speech should not be equated with the right to lie and cheat" is extremely disturbing and dangerous. It is precisely the excuse which has been offered by totalitarians throughout history, from the accusers of Socrates to those of Solzhenitsyn, for suppressing the views of those whom they consider "enemies of the state".

JOHN L. BROOM.

Totalitarian ethic

Trevor Morgan's August letter, with its confused ranting and libelous personal abuse, testifies both to the intellectual bankruptcy of the doctrines to which he subscribes and to the vicious threat they present to humanism, freedom of thought, and hopes for a better society. Since he has the effrontery to talk about "complete falsehoods committed in the name of freethought", I must remind him of the Communist and Marxist record in this respect. As Martin Milligan has confessed publicly in *Marxism Today*, theoretical organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain: "We know and firmly acknowledge that Communists *have* sometimes indefensibly lied, broken promises, even tortured and killed people or in other ways caused or allowed people to be hurt or degraded". And Dr. John Lewis has likewise admitted: "There is a type of Marxist ethical theory which can give rise to a cruelty, tyranny and untruthfulness which is indefensible" (cited in *Communism Today*, D. Hyde, 1972).

After two years' silence, Mr. Morgan now seeks to dismiss as "nonsense", a point to which I alluded in August 1972 in a brief *Freethinker* article on "Marxism In Perspective". Citing A. J. Gregor, I said that it was of interest to note Stalin's announcement that "The part played by so-called objective conditions has been reduced to a minimum; whereas the part played by our organizations and their leaders has become decisive". The point of interest was that this inverted the Marxist thesis that it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but their social being that determines their consciousness. According to Stalin, says Gregor, "man's consciousness, represented by the party and its leaders, was to create the material conditions of man's life". If Mr. Morgan is unable to understand this argument, or wishes to pursue the matter, I would refer him, as stated in my 1972 article, to Gregor's fully documented *Contemporary Radical Ideologies* (Chapter 3).

It would be more fruitful, in my opinion, if—instead of blindly and tediously repeating Stalinist and other "sacred texts" about "objective reality" and Marx's "inversion" of Hegel—Mr. Morgan would give some evidence of some serious critical study of the subject. He could begin with Professor F. Wiedmann's *Hegel* (1968). He will find that Wiedmann says (p. 128) that "In point of fact, Hegel was not turned upside down; instead, a non-existent theory was turned into its opposite. Any serious criticism of Hegel would have to begin with his monistic principle, but this very fact was disregarded by Marx and particularly by Engels. Hegel never claimed anywhere that reality is "a copy of the absolute Idea", nor is Marx correct when he says that for Hegel "awareness determines social being". Or, again, as I have indicated in a letter to *The Freethinker* (March 1973), whereas Lenin laid it down in 1908 that "our consciousness is only an image of the external world", in 1914 he wrote in his *Philosophical Notebooks* that "Man's consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but creates it".

As for the relationship of dialectics to Christianity, Mr. Morgan would, I think, have been better advised if—before committing himself to offensive and ill-informed remarks that I am "insulting the intelligence of freethinkers" and so on—he had acquainted himself with the views of such scholars as the Marxist philosopher Lucio Colletti, the well-known freethinker J. M. Robertson (*A History of Freethought In The 19th Century*, Vol. 1, Chapter 8), or some of the various other authors referred to in my writings. To take some further examples, Jean Hyppolite, in his *Studies On*

Marx And Hegel (1969) says: "One may see in Christianity, as it is interpreted in Hegelian philosophy, the source of everything in Marxian humanism". And Edgar Faure (*The Heart Of The Battle*, 1972) refers to "the dialectic, whose similarity with the Christian Trinity has, moreover, often been commented upon".

One reason why I base my work on what Morgan calls "a multitude" of sources is that this provides a safeguard against the Stalinist technique of minimizing any attempt at reasoning and concentrating on invective. Thus, when Communists or fellow-travellers, like Morgan, seek to vilify someone like Solzhenitsyn with whom they disagree, they find themselves confounded by the Marxist historian, Roy Medvedev (see my August 1974 letter), who defends Solzhenitsyn against slander. "Solzhenitsyn does not depart from the truth", says Medvedev, "when he writes that Stalin unleashed mass repressions, deported millions of people, used torture and fabricated trials long before Hitler came to power. Moreover all this continued in our country many years after the defeat of German fascism. . . . Obviously there exists a continuity between the party which took power in October 1917 and that which governed the U.S.S.R. in 1937, in 1947, in 1957, and in 1967. . . . Before his arrest, Solzhenitsyn considered himself a Marxist. After the terrible experiences described . . . Solzhenitsyn lost belief in Marxism. . . . Solzhenitsyn did not deceive or betray anybody".

Whatever the record of Mr. Morgan's own beliefs may be, my position is that I have never put my trust in the God-that-Failed or given any support—blindly or otherwise—to any form of totalitarianism or to what George Watson calls "the greatest act of mass-murder in human history". Neither am I inclined to rely on the utterances of those described as "indefensible liars", or anyone under their influence.

JUDEX.

Radical tradition

The Freethinker adopts an attitude of having no political responsibility or connection and in the process becomes weak and negative forgetting that its radical connections in the early days of free-thinking were very strong.

The fact is that atheism combats one of the ruling class's strongest weapons. A weapon which provides a smoke screen of hypocrisy, lies and superstition which has been in use for thousands of years.

A real and genuine atheistic movement cannot avoid being involved in politics. And there is no need to become involved with any existing political party. Both the Labour Party and Conservative Party have religious connections—Mr. Wilson is a non-conformist.

As one who became a Communist and a Literary Guider fifty years ago I can assure you that there is no Communist Party in existence in this country today as the Communist Party has been taken over for its own motives by the Catholic Church. Very much as it has taken over the C.P. in France, where it has rendered the latter impotent.

JACK BOND.

Chicanery of the Right

How sad to see *The Freethinker* being used for the malevolent purposes of the Right by those who have failed to comprehend the techniques by which they were so indoctrinated. Chicanery has been used to mislead with regard to data, logic and language. That such chicanery is never exposed in the dominant Rightist media is no surprise; but must it find a true echo in *The Freethinker*? Judex, Byass and Hinchliff (July) are unconscious victims of the Press and its "bag of tricks".

If an "honest opinion" is not a lie, who is to declare it "honest"? Many a lie is protected by the ruse of calling it an opinion! If a fact exonerates its sponsor from a charge of lying, are we to see each fact as a separate entity? No such fact can exist. If a reactionary offers a fact, he does so in the sure expectation that it will be related to other facts—and conclusions invited. If other related facts had been included in the submission, contrary conclusions might be expected, as he well knows. Insofar as a fact is offered as being "true in itself" without relevant context of phenomena and cause and effect it is indeed a lie.

The use of the words "socialist" and "left" shows the careless disregard of those brain-washed by the Right. Humanists clearly need political education (de-brainwashing) if they are not to be as intellectually futile as the rest of mankind. The charge that Leftists do not advertise alleged outrages by Leftish regimes, or denounce them is one which emanates from a corrupt Press. Since they are well-advertised by the dominant Right, why should the Left devote its meagre resources to helping them? In fact, the Left is so fragmented, and itself confused by propaganda, that rival factions do join the chorus. Even Khrushchev denounced Stalinism, as many groups still do.

The key to it all is that the Right has dominated for centuries, and its ascendancy will ensure continuity of the basic class-conflict; while the Left in general aspires to change, which will end such a social structure and so remove the inherent evil. Thus, no objective person could equate the one with the other or make moral judgement without recognition of purpose. The record of failure by Left reformers has been due to the power of reaction to corrupt and confuse, the technique of "divide and rule".

WALTER CONNOLLY.

Freethinker material?

Freethinker readers will note that Judex required approximately 230 words to try to explain away this one example, cited in my July letter, concerning his indiscriminate use of quotations. Judex has had to admit that he selected the quotation from the translator's (not Althusser's) glossary of terms; he had nonetheless assured us in his April letter that they were "the words of Louis Althusser". I shudder to think how much Letters space would be expended on Judex-type explanations if many of his other suspicious quotations were to be queried. I for one, however, have no intention of involving myself further in any such project.

Moreover, it was stated in the N.S.S. bulletin for August that "there will have to be a significant increase in the circulation if *The Freethinker* is to survive". . . . To foster such an increase I would suggest that *The Freethinker* will have to maintain a highly relevant range of accurately written and informative topics: Judex-ism, in my view, is not at all in this category of *Freethinker* material.

I also cannot reply to I. S. Low on things which I "didn't say". I emphatically reject his accusation of an "attack on freedom of speech". If other *Freethinker* readers do not object to I. S. Low's habitual letter on world government then who am I to object to its frequency—let him go to it; though in my part of the world (Scotland) the subject is, for the present, totally irrelevant. By the 21st century I would think that certain aspects of the subject may be nearer practical possibility. This will obviously depend upon the independent nations agreeing to those areas and forms of government where it would be desirable to have certain things arranged on a world scale; a means to prevent wars would be an obvious one. In the meantime my nation (Scotland) has no means whatsoever of agreeing to anything on an international scale for the simple reason that it lacks, as yet, that which is enjoyed by almost every other nation—namely political independence. Mr. Low's accusation of "narrow nationalism" is amusing; he obviously hasn't met many Scots. For generations Scots have been trained to be cosmopolitans—our much vaunted Scottish(?) education system has guaranteed it. Our central problem at present is to encourage internationalism and a prerequisite for that is independent nation status for Scotland and the right to full membership of the United Nations; this elementary right we hope to have shortly!

R. MULLHOLLAND.

The honesty of enlightened clergymen

The conscientious clergyman nowadays has matured into real manhood. To his audience he says: "It is useless now to love God, because He is dead; the imaginary deity of tradition in the clergy's mind has been explained away by the science of Man. Therefore, instead, love your fellowmen as much as you love yourself and your family. Nature has always been the creator of its parts, because nature is always evolving on account of its inherent dynamism. Only men and their science can help us. We churchmen do not rely on prayers when we are sick. We consult doctors of medicine to get well. Men are dutybound to love one another, because only humans can really help fellow humans in this world".

In contrast to the above, sad to say, the clergymen who insist that God is alive are the "retarded boys" of religion; they have not matured intellectually and morally. And yet, incredible as it may seem, there seems to be some unholy wisdom in their immaturity. . . . they think a "living God" attracts more dollars than a "dead God"; they think a dozen suckers are born every minute. The praying of believers is indeed the preying of dollar-happy clergymen on their followers. In the realm of nature, some lives live on other lives! This condition gave birth to Humanism, Rationalism, Freethought and Atheism. The goodness in Man has to correct anomalies in fair human living.

GONZALO QUIOGUE.

Malfew Seklew Calso

I am collecting biographical material regarding Malfew Seklew Calso (known as Wilkes Barre) who was active in the freethought movement during the 1890s and early 1900s. If any reader of *The Freethinker* has any information about him I would be glad to hear from them.

S. E. PARKER.

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—2 p.m. at Tower Hill; *Sundays*, 3—7 p.m. at Marble Arch. (*The Freethinker* and other literature on sale.)

Falmouth Humanist Group (affiliated to the National Secular Society) welcomes visitors to Cornwall. Particulars of meetings, etc., from the Secretary, 30 Melville Road, Falmouth, Cornwall. Telephone. Falmouth 313863.

Humanist Holidays. 18-20 October. Weekend at Brighton hotel with visit to Lewes where Thomas Paine lived. Cost £7, inclusive of breakfast and one main meal on each of the two days. 1975. Comments are invited on proposal for two-week event in the Isle of Man next year.

Hon. Secretary: Mrs. M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey (telephone 01-642-8796).

Depressives Anonymous. A rally will be held at the church of St. Mary-le-Bow, Cheapside, London EC2 on Saturday 28 September at 2.30 p.m. with a view to set up such an organization. Mover: Miss Nemone Lethbridge, 50a Masson Avenue, Ruislip, Middlesex.

EVENTS

Brentwood Humanist Society, Old House Arts Centre, Shenfield Road, Brentwood. Thursday 26 September, 8 p.m.: CAROL PEDLEY, "Women's Rights in Law". Thursday 10 October, 8 p.m.: A Speaker from Brentwood Health Council, "Preventive Medicine in the Community".

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Imperial Centre Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Sunday 6 October, 5.30 p.m.; Professor HYMAN LEVY, "Do the laws of Nature Really Exist?"

Croydon Humanist Society, The Central Library, Katherine Street, Croydon. Wednesday 16 October, 8 p.m. William McIlroy: "Humanism in the 'Seventies'".

Harrow Humanist Society, The Library, Gayton Road, Harrow-on-the-Hill (near station). Wednesday 9th October, 8 p.m.: PETER CADOGAN, "Religious Humanism".

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8. Sunday 6 October, 7.30 p.m.: NAIL SAMHIRY, "Problems of Social Change in the Arab World".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday 29 September, 3 p.m.: Annual Reunion—Guest of Honour, PETER DRAPER. Sunday 6 October, 11 a.m.: T. F. EVANS: "Shaw's Religion". Tuesday 8 October, 7 p.m.: STAN and MARGARET CHISMAN, "Success and Failure in Human Problem Solving". Sunday 13 October, 11 a.m.: Dr. COLIN HAMER, "Ethical Feeling"; 3 p.m.: PETER CADOGAN, "International Humanism—Report of the Amsterdam IHEU Conference".

Voluntary Euthanasia Society, Tudor Room, Caxton Hall, London SW1. Saturday 26 October, 2.30 p.m.: Annual General Meeting—Speaker, Dr. D. H. CLARK. Tea during the interval.

Worthing Humanist Group, The Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing, Sunday 29 September, 5.30 p.m.: WILLIAM McILROY, "Humanism in the 'Seventies'".

PUBLICATIONS

TITLE	AUTHOR	Price	Post
The Jesus Hoax (Hard cover) (Breakaway edition)	Phyllis Graham	£3.95	22½p
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The Longford Threat to Freedom Religious Education in State Schools	Brigid Brophy	10p	3½p
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