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IRISH BISHOPS IN LAST-DITCH STAND AGAINST BIRTH CONTROL

The Roman Catholic hierarchy in Ireland have instructed priests to state clearly and unequivocally that contraception is wrong. This direction came in the fourth and final part of a pastoral letter in which the bishops recommended the use of "natural" methods of birth control because, they say, these are based on God's design for the cycle of reproduction. Thousands of women of child-bearing age will not share the celibate bishops' confidence in such methods. There have already been demonstrations by Irish women against the Republic's laws relating to contraception and abortion.

The bishops declared that an understanding of responsible parenthood should be seen as "the attitude of generosity, readiness for sacrifice, prayerfulness and trust in Providence". If these clerics had any experience of parenthood they would know that it often entails sacrifice and even hardship. For while the Great Designer arranges the material comforts of priests and bishops, he tends to forget that children of large families are often underfed, poorly clad and deprived of educational and other advantages.

Speaking at a news conference, Bishop Casey said that most Irish Catholics will accept the advice contained in the pastoral. But despite the bishop's assurance and Cardinal Conway's claim that the reaction to it had been "extremely welcoming and on positive", this latest attack on contraception and on smaller, planned families will be recognised as another despairing gesture by the Irish leaders of what Dr Noel Browne, Eire's former Minister of Health, has described as "the most obscurantist, conservative political machine in the history of man".

Two decades ago it would have been unnecessary to remind Irish priests and their parishioners that contraception is wrong in the eyes of Holy Mother Church. But there are now strong indications that during the last quarter of the present century the

nearest thing to a miracle we are ever likely to see will take place—the Catholic bishops will lose their grip on the traditionally obedient and conforming Irish flock, particularly in the sphere of family and personal relationships. Even the most intransigent diehards are beginning to fear that the Church has entered its decline in Ireland and all over the world. With its great financial resources the Roman Catholic Church is by no means a spent force. Its leaders are highly skilful and unscrupulous men who will, when expedient, resort to deception, intrigue, manipulation and political blackmail. A large section of the laity are ready to play their part by pressurising and campaigning to impose Catholic teaching on the whole community. But the possibility of transforming Ireland into a model Catholic state is becoming increasingly remote.

Losing Their Grip

Many factors have contributed to the Irish people's more enlightened attitudes, particularly with regard to sexual activities and responsibilities. The death of the clerical dictator, Archbishop John McQuaid, removed the most formidable obstacle of this century to social progress in Ireland. Archbishop McQuaid's antediluvian views were meekly accepted by state leaders, officials and every politician who did not wish to lose his seat at the next election.

The Church has successfully resisted the dissemination of knowledge by controlling the education system and by imposition of censorship of books and British newspapers and journals which carry articles or advertisements about family planning. But the introduction of television was a serious setback, for while it is comparatively easy to have books removed from library shelves or to organise a boycott of a bookseller who will not desist from displaying offending titles, it is extremely difficult to control discussion in television programmes or to

(Continued overleaf)

prevent new ideas and concepts being introduced into Irish homes through the media.

Organisations which give practical contraceptive advice and assistance have done more to improve the quality of family life during the last 50 years than the Roman Church has during its entire existence. That is a lesson which has been learnt by thousands of Irish people who have emigrated to Britain and now have the number of children they really want and can support in comfort. Every year thousands of couples visit Ireland accompanied by a small, well-nourished and well-clothed family. There can be no doubt that they in turn influence their relatives and friends who have remained at home. It is now only a matter of time before the movement which has started to reform Ireland's family planning laws becomes a force that even the Catholic hierarchy cannot hold back.

EXORCISM MEETING

The General Synod of the Church of England, which is due to meet at Church House, Westminster, at the beginning of July, is to discuss the recent public statement by 65 theologians on the Church's attitude to exorcism. The National Secular Society will make its contribution to the debate by organising a public meeting at nearby Caxton Hall when the subject will be "Why Exorcism Bedevils the Bishops".

Eric Maple, who will be one of the speakers, probably knows more about demonology than does the entire Anglican hierarchy. He broadcasts regularly, and is the author of *The Domain of Devils* and *The Dark World of Witches*. Mr Maple spent his early years in that strange Essex marshland district near Southend that is still known as the witch country, and is one of the few people who have undertaken field research in the folklore of witchcraft. Barbara Smoker, President of the NSS, and Jim Herrick, a regular contributor to the columns of *The Freethinker*, will also be speaking.

This should be an interesting meeting, and *Freethinker* readers in the London area are urged to make their way to Caxton Hall by train, bus, car or broomstick on Thursday, 3 July, at 7.45 pm.

We regret that circumstances have forced us to increase the retail price of "The Freethinker" to 10p, with immediate effect. There will be no increase in charges to readers who receive their copy by postal subscription.

Members of an obscure Christian sect in Lapland are smashing people's television sets in order to save their souls. They regard watching television as sinful.

"BABIES FOR BURNING" —NO WRIT

It is now well over three months since solicitors acting for Michael Litchfield and Susan Kentish authors of *Babies for Burning*, the book which was used extensively by campaigners for James White's Abortion (Amendment) Bill, complained that their clients had been libelled in a review which was published in the January *Freethinker*. No writ has been issued at the time of going to press.

Serpentine Press, which published *Babies for Burning*, has been put into the hands of a receiver. Three writs have been taken out against the firm, and one of them (from the British Pregnancy Advisory Service) is being actively pursued. Alan Learmouth, founder and owner of Serpentine Press, is reported as saying: "If we were to lose any legal case, we would go bankrupt".

The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys announced last month that there was a 10 per cent reduction in the number of abortions carried out during the first quarter of this year compared to that for the same period in 1974.

THE OXFORD MARTYRS, 1975

"No one in court questioned that the motives were sincere. The prosecution no less than the defence emphasised that the two had taken the utmost care to make sure that there were no humans or animals nearby to be endangered by their acts".

Brigid Brophy, The Freethinker, May 1975

PHILIP NATAL enquires:

If I thought that secularism was an evil force, tried and failed to get Parliament to declare its propagation illegal, and subsequently caused £57,604 worth of damage by setting alight property belonging to secularist organisations, would Brigid Brophy defend me?

BRIGID BROPHY replies:

If secularists were running, for profit, an industry that supplied experimenters with non-secularists as material; if secularist experimenters, with the consent and in some cases under the compulsion of Parliament, tested shampoos on living non-secularist eyes and force-fed weedkillers to non-secularists to see how long it would take for 50 per cent of them to die; if Parliament accepted all this as "secular necessity" but did not invest a penny of public money or set up a single government agency in order to seek out non-cruel methods of achieving equally good results—then I should indeed defend Philip Natal and applaud (as I do in Goodman and Lee) his self-restraint and humanity in taking care to damage only things, not sentient beings.

The claim that Christianity is the gospel of love is unjustified. In fact, the belief in Jesus, the God who became man to redeem the world, has created barriers and dissension between those who believe, and the majority who reject the doctrine.

Seen from outside, Christianity's claim to be "the gospel of love" is faintly ironic. Without doubt the Nazarene's teaching enjoining us to love one another was a big step forward from the Old Testament idea of a God whose main attributes seem to be anger and a desire to punish. Nevertheless, as his modern followers are quick to remind us, Christ taught that love of God must come first, or so it would seem from the gospel record. Love of neighbour, though important, is secondary.

But, as the "Good Book" admits, "no man has seen God". And how can we love what we do not know? The Christian, particularly if he is of the fundamentalist variety, will seek to answer this objection in two ways. He will say firstly that God reveals himself through the Bible. This of course is an immediately questionable proposition, since most of the world religions claim that their great books present the most authoritative and accurate picture of the power behind the universe. The impartial observer might be excused for concluding that, being human verbal concoctions, all probably fall some way short of describing the true essence of the ultimate reality—if there is an ultimate reality.

Let us, however, follow through the Christian claim that the Bible shows us God. With the best will in the world it seems impossible to obtain any clear view of the being we are supposed to adore. The main difficulty stems from the adoption by the early Christian Church of the various Jewish books now to be found in the Old Testament. As we have said, these frequently depict a god of wrath and judgment whom one might well fear, but hardly love. If the New Testament provides a very different and undoubtedly improved model, which are we to accept? Not that the new version is easy to comprehend, with its complicated doctrine of the Trinity, and not infrequent throw-backs to the old hell-fire preachings.

The Christian's second answer to the "no man has seen God" point is quite simply that in one sense this is not true. According to the teachings, God revealed himself to man in the person of his son, Jesus Christ. However unlikely it might seem that the "lord of all creation" should in some way materialise into human form and emerge on our

tiny planet, just this has been and is still accepted by millions of sincere believers. Modern Christian apologist theologians tend to retreat from this position, taking the more moderate (though strictly heretical) line that Jesus was a deeply spiritual man, whose example we should emulate, but that he neither claimed to be nor was in fact God, "the second person of the Trinity". If this is the right view, to "love Jesus" is to indulge in hero worship, and not to address ourselves to the ultimate ground of our being.

Is it possible to evaluate the historical Jesus after such a long lapse of time? The attempt has been made often enough, with differing results. Fairly obviously, the early Church made a careful selection of the available written and oral material to produce what we now know as the New Testament—the four Gospels, Acts of the Apostles and Epistles. Modern scholarship suggests that some of the material cannot be accepted as authentic, having been introduced at a late stage to corroborate and add to the existing writings. With these reservations, Jesus still seems to come through as a real person (though this view is not universally held), but certainly not as some sort of divine hero.

Unfulfilled Prophecy

The role of a Messiah who would save the Jewish people was one any "inspired" religious leader of the time might easily have accepted, since the emergence of such a figure had long been forecast in the sacred books. Very possibly Jesus, who may have claimed this title, was only one of a small number of wandering preachers who at different times saw themselves as fulfilling this position. One might surmise that they too, following tradition, saw their mission as primarily to save the Jews, and possibly also in terms of a violent death, resurrection and early return as ruler of the world. Leaving aside the dubious resurrection claim, the incontrovertible error of the "imminent second coming" promise is surely sufficient to demonstrate the less-than-divine wisdom of the Nazarene prophet. His special emphasis on the salvation of the Jewish tribe likewise hardly suggests concern for humanity as a whole.

How, then, does one explain the foundation and continuation through 2,000 years of a religion based on the worship of the Jesus-figure? The same question might be asked with regard to Gotama the Buddha. In a world of much suffering, loneliness and fear, in which man struggles on as best he can without final answers to fundamental questions, it is hardly surprising that he should in desperation make into gods wise men who have managed to

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Magnum Mysterium: The Case of Religious Humanism

CHRISTOPHER MOREY

Secularists have been traditionally a thorn in the flesh of those humanists who prefer to make contact with "radical" Christians rather than campaign against religious superstition and privilege. Some of them now describe themselves as religious humanists, and their eagerness to find common ground with Christians is matched only by their zeal in disparaging those who argue that militant opposition to religion is a positive and unique feature of organised humanism in Britain today.

One of the perennial debates within the humanist movement is whether it is desirable or profitable vigorously to oppose the Churches and their gods, or whether an alliance with those Christians thought to be more in sympathy with humanist ideas might prove useful, indeed, might provide the way ahead, a new Reformation, giving the spiritual impetus so thought to be lacking at the present time. Recent contributors to this debate have included Julia Pelling in a letter to *The Freethinker* (April) criticising the "sledgehammer" tactics of the National Secular Society, and Sir Richard Acland, who describing himself as a radical Christian contributed an article "Religious Humanists" to the *New Humanist* (May). It is this article and its subject—every freethinker's choice example of an oxymoron—which is considered here.

Sir Richard begins by pointing out that both the religious and humanist camps are divided into what he calls orthodox wings, and what he might call enlightened wings. He appeals to these latter groups to reject their "orthodox" bedfellows and by accepting a series of capily qualified statements reach the situation where all good men and true fall in together behind the cause of . . . what? It would appear to be true religion, since this is the position on which Sir Richard makes his stand, and to which he claims orthodox religion is so harmful. Of course, given Sir Richard's gambit of labelling "non-orthodox" humanists as religious humanists, it does make it much easier for him to stress the common ground, and gloss over the differences between humanists and religionists. It would have been a harder task for him, had the labels been not ones that permit the perverse usage "religious humanist", but "humanists" and "goddists", which make clear the fundamental difference between the two groups.

What Sir Richard does is to take some of the ambiguous utterances of what might be called the

sentimental wing of humanism, to read into them everything he can, and then push them one step further to be able to proclaim, "QED". He begins by citing those humanists who get hung up on that *sine qua non* of incomprehension—the mystery. Now, even the orthodox humanist believes that "at the heart of life there is a mystery". By this he means that he does not know all there is to know about life. But he utterly rejects the Christian position of "On your knees! A Mystery!" With Shelley the freethinker declares, "All that we have a right to infer from our ignorance of the cause of any event is that we do not know it".

"A Mystery"

Sir Richard compounds the Mystery by assuming that most of his religious humanists would agree that "in some strange way the whole of life on earth is bound together into an organic unity". Now again, the "orthodox" humanist would agree that all living (and non-living) things exist in a complex web of inter-relationships, which, if it is considered a unity, could appropriately be described as an organic unity. Doubts arise at this point, however, for as Sir Richard admits, he does not imagine that any humanist would accept that this happens because of a Creator Spirit. (If he knew the movement better, he might not be so sure.) But he does suppose that they would accept that "the whole process of evolution depends on there having been some strange kind of life-and-consciousness potentiality implanted into the very stuff of which atoms are made". Well, the scientific rationalist, as Sir Richard dubs the "orthodox" humanist, is bound to accept that "the very stuff of which atoms are made" does have what might be called a life-and-consciousness potentiality, since he can see around him atoms arranged in such a way as to give rise to both life and consciousness. He may choose not to quibble about the continual use of the word "strange", or the use of the hyphenated phrase "life-and-consciousness potentiality" (in preference to a potentiality for life and consciousness), although both usages thereby acquire added significance. But he is bound to question the assumption behind the statement that "evolution depends . . ." and the passive "implanted", which implies implantation, if not by a Creator, at least by (or shall we say, in some strange way, through) that nebulous but happily more amenable non-entity, the Creator Spirit.

It is at this stage that Sir Richard passes to the ridiculous. "I believe these religious humanists", he writes, "would also accept the proposition that in

some way or other, out of the depths, there comes to each one of us an invitation or a challenge or a call to co-operate in some sublime purpose". Well may Sir Richard add, "Only dimly foreseen", for while no nonsense can be considered beyond those who call themselves religious humanists, a call is an uttered cry. This might be uttered by a god (Sir Richard's position), if such existed, but if applied to a call coming from "their own humanity or perhaps [yet again] mysteriously from humanity as a whole", it is only a metaphor, and as such cannot be equated with Sir Richard's supernaturalist position.

At this point in the argument Sir Richard brings together all his assertions so far, and states he cannot conceive of any observation that would enable us to determine that any of his assertions were false. One might ask Sir Richard since when have unfalsifiable statements been, in any way, mysterious or otherwise, true. Perhaps the editor should run a competition for the most ingenious and amusing unfalsifiable statement. I have my own unfalsifiable cosmology, but will spare the blushes of more tender readers. Sir Richard then comes very close to raising that inveterate canard that Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle has some bearing on the existence of God. Scientists may or may not know what an electron *is*, but such definite phenomena have been demonstrated that *all* are agreed that the concept of an electron is a useful one. No such agreement exists about the activities of any god, even among those inclined to accept such a supernatural agent. Sir Richard follows Tillich and the rest by fumblingly speaking "of the depths of your life, of the source of your being, or your ultimate concern".

The Divisions Remain

Sir Richard admits that there still remain divisions between his religious humanists and radical Christians. In particular, they will differ over the position of Jesus and the nature of God. In the case of Jesus, he invites radical Christians "to be reticent in their public claims for Jesus". Unfortunately, like the state, Jesus stubbornly refuses to wither away. Is Sir Richard suggesting that a "religious" consensus can be erected on the diametrically opposed views that belief depends on a uniquely and cosmologically significant individual, and that there is a real possibility that this individual never existed? (The same issue of *New Humanist* as contained the Acland article also contained one by G. A. Wells.)

Clearly, there is an intellectual chasm separating religionists and humanists. Some on both sides teeter on the brink of the chasm, hankering after the best of both worlds. Vainly they stretch out their arms to join in some "greater purpose". But when it comes to the crunch, the humanist's view is based on the here and now, and is firmly rooted

in a realistic empiricism. Immediately the religionist admits the transcendental, and starts talking about inherent cosmic purposes, he places himself on a very slippery slope. He has no way of demonstrating why one should accept his slightly irrational view and reject those more viciously irrational. All that he can say is that his religion is nice rather than nasty, when compared, say, with that of the diabolical exorcists. Sir Richard accedes to an Absolute, and such humanistic relativities are irrelevant in the face of That.

Confidence Trick

Sir Richard criticises radical Christians for being unwilling to "upset the organist". But how willing is he to repudiate those who grovel before his God, mumbling superstitious incantations. Indeed, how often does he do this—twice every Sunday? As he himself points out, even men like John Robinson are unwilling to take this step, choosing preferment in a medieval Church. The telling fact that should be a warning to anyone contemplating jumping on the religious-humanist bandwagon is stated unequivocally in Sir Richard's last paragraph:

On all this I believe that radical Christians and religious Humanists are agreed. We might work on our agreement and fight against orthodoxy. Orthodox Humanists regard our basic agreement as a set of utterances of no literal significance to those who make them. Orthodox Christians, strangely enough, may agree with us in essence; but they are expressing this essence in such out-of-date language as to make it repulsive and irrelevant to millions of people.

In other words, Sir Richard's cause is, if at all, only incidentally humanistic. His cause is that of true religion and the true God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Is it surprising, then, that secular humanists, to say the least, lack enthusiasm when faced with the blandishments of "radical Christians"? They know that if they were to temporise in the way Sir Richard suggests, the confidence trick that organised religion plays on the population (taxpayers, ratepayers, television viewers, radio listeners, schoolchildren and the rest) would continue absolutely unabated. The National Secular Society has vigorously opposed this for over 100 years. Long may it continue to do so.

Despite appeals from Sir Cyril Black and the secretary of the Temperance Council of Christian Churches shareholders of the Gateway Building Society have voted to let their directors abandon the rule that the majority of them be teetotal. The shareholders felt that the rule, which has existed in one form or another for 120, would inhibit them in recruiting other directors. The GBS came into existence following a merger of the Temperance Building Society with the Bedfordshire Building Society.

The Statistician and the Cardinal

BARBARA SMOKER

"The Catholic folklore that 'once a Catholic, always a Catholic', that Catholics seldom totally abandoned their religious identity even if they ceased going to mass and did not carry out their Easter Duties, was substantially true of England and Wales in the late 1950s; it had altogether ceased to be true by the early 1970s". A statement by the National Secular Society, perhaps? No; a quotation from the sensational six-page article by Catholic statistician A. E. C. W. Spencer, published two months ago in the Jesuit periodical, "The Month". Naturally enough, it caused something of a furore. But no one seems to have bothered much about a rather strangely worded footnote in it which prompted the President of the NSS (herself a Catholic till the age of 26) to speculate here on what lies behind the publication of these ecclesiastical secrets.

It is rare indeed for an article in a religious periodical to attract the volume of comment in the media that has been accorded the article on the decline of Catholicism in England and Wales that appeared in the second of two special issues of *The Month* (March and April) marking the tenth anniversary of that watershed in RC history, the Second Vatican Council.

The article, entitled "Demography of Catholicism", was written by a controversial Catholic layman, Anthony Spencer, now a university lecturer in sociology, but, until its demise (never satisfactorily explained) in 1964, head of the Newman Demographic Survey (the then official statistical service of the RC Church in this country). The periodical that published the article is the organ in Britain of the perennially controversial Society of Jesus. But the article was just one of a dozen specially commissioned features looking at the various changes that have been taking place in the RC Church in England and Wales in recent years. How was it, then, that the media unanimously and unerringly picked on this one article as revealing ominous cracks in the edifice against which the gates of hell were never to prevail? I cannot imagine all the editors and news programme researchers giving assiduous attention to every issue of this somewhat intellectual Jesuit publication. I suspect, therefore, that its editorial board issued a press release, drawing particular attention to the sensational significance of this article. But why?

It hardly seems consistent with the ostensible reason for publishing the article: to enable the Church authorities to recognise the crisis facing them so that they can do something about it. (What they could possibly do anyway is another matter.) Was it perhaps an attempt on the part of the

Jesuits, in their traditional gadfly role, to force the Cardinal and the bishops in England and Wales to catch up with the hierarchy in most other European countries in trying to come to terms with the twentieth century? Or was it no more than the desire of every journalist to exploit a scoop to the full in the interests of publicity and circulation? And why did the *Catholic Herald*, while reporting very fully Spencer's main conclusions, refrain so carefully from commenting on them in any way?

The article itself raises many more questions, both as to background information on some of the facts and figures presented (for the article is merely an abbreviated version of a Pastoral Research Centre Report, "Demographic Change within the Catholic Community of England and Wales 1958-1973", which remains unpublished and presumably still on the secret list) and as to the undoubted political struggle that preceded its publication. But the answers are so far unobtainable—though the article does provide a few clues. In particular, a small-print footnote, which reads "I am extremely grateful to the Catholic Education Council for supplying these and other Catholic statistics used in this paper, and to Cardinal Heenan for relaxing earlier bans on publication". (The italics are mine.)

Thanking an authority figure for allowing one to say something is hardly an affirmation of the human dignity, the brotherhood of man, and the equality before the Lord to which Christianity pays lip-service. Nor does it seem quite in accord with the new image of post-conciliar Catholicism. Rather, it takes us back to ancient oriental potentates and medieval Christendom; and forward too, to 1984. Totalitarianism, whether secular or ecclesiastical, dies hard.

Defying the Cardinal?

One suspects, however, that this is precisely the message that Spencer *meant* his footnote to convey—his apparent meekness being in fact satirical. But if so, why did he not simply defy Heenan's ban? Perhaps this is in fact what he has done—the Cardinal's alleged blessing being no more than forced capitulation to avoid open defiance. But we can only speculate.

In all the press comment I have seen on the article, however, I have seen no reference to this significant footnote nor any speculation as to what lies behind the lifting of the ban. A phone call to the Catholic Information Office revealed only that their spokesman was not privy to any of the pre-publication conflict; for the casualness of his reply—to the effect that the statistical facts were better out than in and could only benefit the Church by enabling it to take appropriate action—was patently

genuine. This spokesman (a youngish priest) also apparently accepted the facts and figures set out by Spencer and Spencer's interpretation of them.

A Divided Church

However, this view is by no means generally held by his fellow-religionists in this country. The RC bishops seem to be almost universally sceptical about the validity of Spencer's conclusions, while the rest of the clergy, the religious, and the laity, seem to be divided down the middle. On the face of it, this almost looks like Cabinet solidarity within a divided Party. But it could be simply a matter of age. After all, Catholic bishops are not consecrated before middle age, while the rank-and-file priests are of every age from the mid-twenties. And my own (admittedly very limited) observation suggests that most of the Catholics who accept Spencer's findings are below the age of 50, while most of those who pour scorn on those findings are older.

This is hardly surprising, since it is too disturbing in the latter half of life to admit, even to oneself (perhaps least of all to oneself), that one's life has been dedicated to a false prophecy: for Christianity as a whole, and Catholicism in particular, shares with Marxism a faith in the historical imperative, based on prophecies in the New Testament or the Communist Manifesto as the case may be. So the older Catholics are clinging first to the notorious ambiguity of statistics and secondly to the contention, as in every former Church crisis, that any decline is but local and temporary.

The basic facts, however, are incontrovertible, and the Cardinal and his bishops are whistling (a Gregorian chant) in the dark.

BARBARA SMOKER

HUMANISM

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Brazil, the world's largest Catholic country, will not have divorce for at least another two years. The Congress has rejected a constitutional amendment to legalise divorce, and the Bill's sponsor will have to wait another two years before making another attempt. Although there was a majority of 77 in favour of the Bill it required a two-thirds majority for acceptance. But more than 60 members either abstained or were absent.

CHURCHES PUT MAMMON BEFORE COMMUNITY

The Churches are uniting in vigorous opposition to the Government's Community Land Bill. While claiming not to challenge the basic principle of the proposed legislation, they are asking that its principles should be vitiated where the law would apply to them. The Churches Main Committee (i.e. Pressure-Group-in-Chief-to-the-Government) have made strong representations to the Prime Minister, and the Anglican bishops are threatening to further their sectional interests in the matter by moving amendments in the House of Lords.

Freethinkers should welcome the Government's measure, and press that its full rigour should be applied most justly in the case of the Churches. What would happen is that instead of being able to sell the land to the highest bidder, or indulge in speculative development themselves, redundant churches would be sold to local authorities at current-use value. One instance quoted gave a redundant church a current-use value of £4,300, which would seem most reasonable for the socially worthless use that had been made of the (probably strategically placed) site for so long. If the Churches accept the justice of the legislation in general (that the community should reap the profit of *its* decision that development should take place) they should apologise to the community that it will in no way be able to recoup the wasted investment it had made in the site over the years in rate and tax relief.

Instead, the Churches arrogantly claim special treatment, saying their speculation is solely for the public good, and that they should continue to be allowed to pursue their sordid activities at public expense. They even have the impertinence to suggest that they should be exempted, since if they are not the state will incur further expense in having itself to pay for additional schools, community centres and homes. As readers of this journal know well, the state already pays most of the costs of Church schools. Surely, it is far better for the state to pay for these directly, rather than indirectly and at the same time furthering sectarian superstition? It is to be hoped that on this issue the Government will at last resist the Churches' claim to a specially privileged role in a pluralist secular society.

Peter Schaffer's play "Equus", which has been voted the best play of the year by the New York Drama Critics' Circle, has been censored in South Africa. The key scene involves nudity and the company has been ordered to play it covered. Theatregoers under the age of 18 have been banned from seeing the play.

THE PROBLEM OF MUSLIM BURIALS

A request that part of Gunnersbury Cemetery in West London should be set aside for Muslim burials has been made to the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea who have deferred making a decision on the matter. Discussions are to take place with the Greater London Council and the London Boroughs Association on the question of providing cemeteries for immigrant groups in the Greater London area.

Difficulties over Muslim burials have arisen in other parts of the country, particularly in Blackburn where local gravediggers stopped work in protest against the burial of bodies wrapped only in shrouds. Blackburn Muslims have been burying their dead in this manner for many years and the gravediggers' action may have been the result of agitation by the local National Front group. Medical opinion confirms that the burial of uncoffined bodies does not constitute a health hazard. It appears also that many Muslims are willing to use coffins but prefer their customary practice which is, of course, far less expensive.

Muslim graves have to be aligned towards Mecca. This could cause serious difficulties in cemeteries consisting of neat rows of graves the occupants of which, when alive, either did not expect to hear any last trumpet or were confident that the sound would penetrate, irrespective of the position of their earthly resting place.

It has been suggested that many problems could be prevented or easily resolved if local authorities agreed to set apart a section of the cemetery for Muslim graves. But it must be remembered that Muslims are dogmatically opposed to the deconsecration of ground, and before any piece of land is given over to Muslim burials it must be clearly understood that at some future date the land may be required for secular purposes.

The Muslims, unlike many other immigrant groups, are strictly opposed to cremation. But so was the Roman Catholic Church 20 years ago, and it is very likely that second and third generation Muslims will opt for the crematorium rather than for the cemetery. Although there will be many difficulties because of the immigrants' different customs and traditions there is no reason why these should not be overcome if goodwill and reason prevail. Unfortunately, there are groups within the host community which are all too ready to exploit racial and cultural differences. And the intransigent attitude of Muslim religious leaders on a whole range of social questions is a formidable barrier to integration and good community relations.

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NEWS

UNBALANCED WITNESSES

Jehovah's Witnesses are more likely to become patients at a psychiatric hospital than the rest of the population, according to a study which was published last month. Dr John Spencer, writing in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, reported that during the period from January 1971 to December 1973 there were 7,546 admissions as in-patients to Western Australia psychiatric hospitals. Of these, 50 were active members of the sect; 22 being schizophrenic, 17 paranoid schizophrenic, ten neurotic and one alcoholic. The normal rate for admissions with schizophrenia was .61 per thousand people, but 1.83 per thousand for Jehovah's Witnesses, and the chances of being admitted with neurosis were double for sect members.

Dr Spencer says he would prefer to wait for further studies to be made before deciding if the sect attracts the unbalanced, and what part, if any, membership plays in bringing about a mental breakdown. He adds that possibly both these factors operate together.

The Jehovah's Witness sect was established in Britain in 1900, and they claim a membership of 75,000, in this country.

CHRISTIAN LOVE— ULSTER STYLE

Ulster Protestants are a particularly odious example of the born-again fundamentalist, and their reputation for sheer nastiness was reinforced once again last month. Their victims were the parents of five-year-old Michelle Hare who vanished from the shore at Bangor, a County Down seaside resort. While frogmen, boat crews and police combined in a sweeping search along the coast the child's parents were bombarded with abusive calls and letters. Some of the letters were accompanied by religious texts, and one writer informed the parents: "You are getting what you deserve for enjoying yourselves on the Sabbath".

Lisbon newspapers, commenting on the recent influx of visitors to Fatima for the 58th anniversary of our lady's first "apparition" there, recalled that the shrine was constructed during the Salazar regime, and described it as a centre of superstition.

AND NOTES

SPECULATORS

Last year *The Freethinker* reported a debate in the House of Lords during which the Church of England was criticised for the way in which it disposed of redundant Church schools to the detriment of the local communities. It is now reported in the Bournemouth *Evening Echo* (16 May) that Fordingbridge Parish Council have had to abandon plans for taking over a disused Church primary school to establish a community centre. The terms being demanded were unacceptable to the Council. The Church authorities asked an annual rental of £4000, subject to review after three years. They offered the building on a lease of seven years, and the lease was to be terminable at any time should planning permission be given for the site.

It is also reported that the Government recently acquired from the Church Commissioners 190,000 square feet of modern office space in a new development in Westminster. "Once again", wrote one financial commentator, "the Government would seem to have come up trumps as the most hopeful client in sight for the larger speculative ventures".

GERMANS RESIGN FROM CHURCHES TO SAVE TAX

The West German tax authorities deduct between 8 and 10 per cent of a citizen's income for the churches, and in 1974 the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches netted £1,300 million in this way. But in future they will be badly hit by the decision of a record number of West Germans to resign from their churches, and queues of people have formed outside register offices to opt out of the tax. Those who do so will not be able to have church weddings, christenings or funerals. It is known for certain that 200,000 Protestants have cancelled their membership and an estimated 65,000 have left the Roman Catholic Church.

The tax, first imposed in 1918, has assured the churches of a good income, but has been strongly criticised by Left-wing politicians in recent years. Some of the money is used to pay the clergy who receive about £90 a week; plus a free house.

*Without Demons There Can Be No God—
Without God There Can be No Bishops*

Public Meeting

to coincide with C of E General Synod

Why Exorcism Bedevils The Bishops

ERIC MAPLE

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Organised by the National Secular Society
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A new museum of the history of atheism which is to be opened soon in the old cathedral of St Sophia, Polotsk, will be the fourth such museum in the Soviet Union. The director has explained in an interview that the exhibits were designed to convince the visitor that God did not create man but that man created God.

Freethinker Fund

There was a sharp decline in donations to the Fund during May when we received only £26. One reader sent £2 in appreciation of our stand against the Abortion Bill and for free speech and discussion. During the last decade many other journals which advocated freedom of expression and social progress have disappeared because of economic difficulties. We hope that *Freethinker* readers will help to bridge the gap between income and expenditure, and thus enable Britain's oldest freethought journal to continue the struggle against superstition and irrationalism.

The following readers sent donations during May: Anonymous, £1; S. Axenfield, £1.50; S. Clowes, £1.06; T. V. Eberhard, £3.60; R. C. Edmunds, 60p; E. J. Hughes, £1; J. K. Hawkins, £10; T. Mullins, 40p; C. Matheson, £2; C. Marcus, £2; M. O'Brien, 34p; R. Reader, 30p; J. C. Rapley, 60p; M. V. Stuart, £1.60. Total £26.

BOOKS

CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM AND COOPERATION IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND by Philip N. Backstrom. Croom Helm, £5.95.

Freethinkers need not concern themselves that this is a vindication of what Marx called "the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat". Christian Socialism indeed does not figure largely in this book—or if it does then Professor Backstrom has confused the issue by using the term.

The subject is the evolution of the Co-operative Movement from the Rochdale Pioneers (1844) until the end of the century. The main theme is the struggle between the "individualists" who looked forward to the transformation of capitalist society into a commonwealth of co-operative producer associations, and those "federalists" who looked only to a union of consumer associations under the aegis of the mighty Co-operative Wholesale Society. In other words, should co-operation lead to socialism or to working-class capitalism?

The ideal of co-operative socialism was the dream of Edward Vansittart Neale, a wealthy and educated gentleman lawyer around whose long life (1810-92) this book is arranged. Neale was one of that group who, along with J. M. Ludlow, Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley, fell under the spell of F. D. Maurice's Christianity in the late 1840s. These were the original Christian Socialists, and by 1854 their early efforts had failed and they had ceased to exist as a coherent group.

Yet Neale persisted, aided and abetted by Hughes and Ludlow, together with Lloyd Jones (an Owenite turned Christian Socialist) and, later, Edward Owen Greening. When the men of Rochdale and Manchester were losing sight of the socialist vision, these Christian Socialists held on and fought, unsuccessfully, to the bitter end. There is no doubt where Professor Backstrom's sympathies lie: he is with Neale all the way and this book gives a very convincing and sympathetic picture of him. Some co-operators however, recalling what the local "co-op" shop and the "divi" meant in the days before the recent massive upheavals in the movement, may feel that there was a kind of idealism and working-class community consciousness among those hardened northern working men which Professor Backstrom (an American) has missed.

The further question remains: were Neale and his friends *Christian Socialists*, in view of their close collaboration with that respectable infidel G. J. Holyoake? Holyoake's daughter once remarked of her father, "He did not quite realise that it was their religion which turned Kingsley and other Christian Socialists to the work of raising the condition of the workers, and they adopted the

FREETHINKER

co-operative method to do it." No doubt this was true of the Christian Socialists of 1848-54, and probably true of Ludlow and Hughes all along, but perhaps with Neale co-operation became an end in itself. Professor Backstrom is unfortunately not very explicit on this point, and perhaps Holyoake as the crucial litmus should have been pursued a little further. If Holyoake was central to the later struggle for true producers' co-operation (as Backstrom implies and as Holyoake certainly thought he was) then Christianity cannot have had much to do with it. But if Holyoake was peripheral (as I am sometimes inclined to suspect), then a case might be made out that there is a continuing *Christian Socialist* tradition within the Co-operative Movement, as the title of this book implies. At times Professor Backstrom appears to be riding both horses at once.

Nevertheless this is an interesting and well written book, and is commended to those interested in the Co-operative Movement and in the ways in which idealism can be eroded by the forces of bureaucracy and self-interest.

EDWARD ROYLE

EDUCATION AND DRUG DEPENDENCE. Methuen Educational, £1.80 and 90p.

This report was prepared by a Social Morality Council study group under the chairmanship of H. J. Blackham, and is "meant as a basis for public discussion". The study group took its terms of reference to be "inquiry into ways in which schools can help young people to distinguish one drug from another, to make a discriminating use of whatever drugs are beneficial, and to decide for themselves on the moral limits of dependence". It excludes from consideration medically prescribed drugs, which involves some evasion of one of the traditional ways of becoming dependent on drugs; but it includes, and indeed emphasises, the drugs most widely used in our society—tobacco and alcohol. The general approach is rational and realistic: "Young people today need to be helped to find their way about in our drug culture, not merely to be warned off a drug sub-culture to which they may be attracted." And the basic attitude is liberal and even libertarian: "The purpose of drug education in a word is to enable people to make up their own minds on the basis of adequate information."

REVIEWS

But, however good its intentions, the report is paralysed by the present drug laws. The study group remarks that free inquiry into the effect of such drugs as cannabis and LSD is impossible, and it retreats from any clear position about the use of illegal drugs. This is particularly serious when the report moves from abstract discussion of education to concrete advice about school, and turns from scientific to what is in fact political consideration of any illegal drug. We are told that "its use on school premises cannot be tolerated", but that "this does not mean that culprits should simply be handed over to the police"; we are told that advice on "drugs will obviously be more effective the less it appears to be backed by threats", but that it should be made clear "that the law must be complied with, that no school or other public authority can indulge private views on the matter and connive at forbidden practices"; we are told that if culprits using illegal drugs are caught "they have to be dealt with" and that "this lies in the hands of the school authorities in the first place", but that "we cannot tell them what to do".

This miserable failure of nerve affects the whole discussion of illegal drugs, and, since the particular issue of illegal drugs is central to the general issue of drug use, it vitiates the whole report. The study group do admit considerable uneasiness about the legal situation as the weak link in the various social controls over drug use, but there is a total abdication of responsibility at the end of a description of the present laws: "This is not the place to discuss the 'British System', its successes and its failures." If this is not the place, what the hell is? No contribution to the controversy can be taken seriously without such a discussion.

Given this fundamental weakness, what the report says about tobacco and alcohol—the main socially acceptable and medically harmful drugs in this country—and about what is being done and should be done for education in drug use and abuse is sensible enough. And one point is refreshingly provocative: "The lesson of it all is plain to see: the experience of education, and of society itself, is too shallow and too utilitarian to touch young people at the core. The very existence of a drug problem warns us of how hungry we have left the young for something of enduring value in their lives." There is more to be said on this subject than can be said here, but at least that is saying something.

The most curious part of the report is a paper

by Simon Tugwell, a Dominican Friar, on "Some Religious Aspects of the Drug Scene". This is in fact an orthodox religious attack on the unorthodox religious use of drugs, concluding that there is a danger that "drug dependence can be replaced by a kind of addictive spirituality which, in the long run, may be just as pernicious". Looking back at the past 2,000 years, we can see that he is right, though not quite in the way he means. But this kind of thing surely has no place in what is meant to be a serious discussion of a serious problem by serious people.

JEAN RAISON

THE JESUS SCROLL by Donovan Joyce. Sphere Books Limited, 45p.

This book of 1973, now published in paperback, is yet another attempt to make Jesus into a political activist, and, like other popular "reconstructions" of the facts underlying the gospels, chooses its premises to fit its thesis. First, it is alleged that Jesus was originally regarded as purely human and only later elevated to a supernatural personage. This is the usual error of those who ignore the evidence of the first century epistles and take the gospels as their starting point. If even the gospels represent Jesus as supernatural, this, says Joyce, is because the original versions (including the "eyewitness report" of John) were destroyed in the fourth century and replaced with versions which made him divine. Even more arbitrary is Joyce's insistence that the Messiah was not expected to be a descendant of David, but as Hasmonean, of the line of Judas Maccabaeus.

By the first century BC, the old "Davidic dream was gone for ever" (p. 63). One wonders why it is nevertheless so strongly represented in the Psalms of the Pharisees, the Qumran scrolls and the New Testament.) Jesus, accordingly, was a Hasmonean as was also his "cousin", John the Baptist. Herod's slaughter of the Innocents was not an attempt on Jesus' life, but was aimed at the baby Baptist, the senior of the two Hasmoneans, and potentially, therefore, King of Israel and rival to Herod. But the child escaped and was sent for safety—to Qumran. (Evidence: John was "in the desert"—Luke 1:80—until he began to preach publicly.) On emerging, John baptised; baptism is a sacrament, and, in the first century "sacrament" meant "soldier's oath of loyalty". So John "might have been forming the nucleus of an army" to put himself as Messiah on the throne (p. 79). Jesus long thought that John had perished as a baby, and that he himself was the rightful Hasmonean claimant. So when he heard of John's activities, he went to investigate. His "temptation" in the wilderness

immediately afterwards was a withdrawal "to consider his position", i.e. whether to support John's claim or bid for the throne himself. In the upshot, the two men had "a blazing quarrel", and "each went his own way" (p. 84).

At the wedding feast at Cana (mentioned only in the fourth gospel) the bride was Mary Magdalene and the bridegroom Jesus. (Evidence: "his mother was there"—John 2:2—and this means she was there as hostess.) It was a big occasion, "the wedding of Jesus the groom and heir to the Hasmonean throne"; the whole clan attended, and hence the huge quantity of the wine Jesus supplied. Jesus' father goes unmentioned because the narrative, as we have it, is a "whitewash". Joyce's purpose in thus "proving" that Jesus was married is to interpret "Jesus Barabbas" (i.e. Jesus son of the father) of Matthew 27:16 as Jesus' son. This lad was captured by the Romans during the temple cleansing, which was "Jesus' bid to capture Jerusalem and restore the Hasmonean throne" p. 102). The Romans offered to set the son free if Jesus agreed to be crucified in his stead, and at the Last Supper Jesus announced his acquiescence in this plan, and sent Judas to the Romans—not as traitor but as intermediary. The company at table thought up a method of enabling him to survive crucifixion. Accordingly, he was given a drug when on the cross, so that the executioners thought he was dead and allowed Joseph of Arimathea (another Hasmonean) to take him down and place him in a cool tomb. The young men in white discovered there on Easter morning were Essene doctors, hidden to resuscitate him; for shining white was "the normal non-working habit of the Essenes" (p. 144). The patient recovered and spent the next 30 years in hiding at Qumran, from where he probably "watched in cynical silence as a man named Saul slowly but surely turned his miraculous escape from the Cross into the Resurrection" (p. 146). When Qumran was destroyed in AD 68, Jesus transferred to Masada, where he died (at the age of 80) with the rest of the garrison when it fell to the Romans in AD 73. Hours before his death he wrote some of his biography on to a scroll which was shown to Mr Joyce in the gentlemen's lavatory at Tel Aviv airport and has since disappeared.

Mr Joyce offers this "astonishing" tale with great confidence. He gives "conclusive evidence" (p. 130), "beyond reasonable doubt" (p. 136). His inferences are "inescapable", "unerring", "certain", and "no other interpretation is possible". This from a writer who confuses the Apocrypha of the Old Testament with that of the New (p. 33), makes a Seleucid Syrian ruler of the second century BC the king of "the Assyrians", and antedates by 200 years Sossianus Hierocles' statement that Jesus was a leader of a large robber band!

G. A. WELLS

THEATRE

NO MAN'S LAND by Harold Pinter, The National Theatre at the Old Vic Theatre, London

Pinter-land is somewhat better charted than it was when he jolted the preconceptions of theatregoers in the early 1960s. The audience can now recognise some familiar landmarks: the rivalries and power-struggles expressed in terms of objects and territory; the intrusive figure coming in as a catalyst, triangular relationships, the shiftless quality of truth and memory; and even if the terrain remains shadowy and murky, that too is now an expectation. Yet, if we have a sense of familiarity in this major new play by Pinter, we also are caught in the hypnotic spell of a dramatist whose use of language is masterly and dramatic instinct is unerring.

The battleground has changed from the shabby tenement crammed with junk of his famous play *The Caretaker* to an elegant Hampstead house, heavily and exactly furnished, with each chair and the laden drinks table becoming precise focii of interest. Into the room comes Spooner, invited out of the night from Hampstead Heath and Jack Straw's pub by the solidly drunken Hirst. John Gielgud, as Spooner, caught in a crumpled suit, gives an outstanding performance as a literary dervish bolstering his self-esteem with a web of second-hand literary phrases, which he has made his own property. His bouncy, tentative, tread suggests an assertive uneasiness and a drooping cigarette can express affected pose or unacknowledged defeat. It emerges that Hirst, his host, is a successful man of letters at the centre of a three-man household, where the other two men act out varying roles of servant, domestic, secretary and possessors. Ralph Richardson's performance, as Hirst, provides an astonishingly measured counterpart to Gielgud, with its range from iron silence, to well-met blimpish clubman, revealing in alcoholic stupor ("the malt that wounds") glimpses of a private sadness and despair which, when touched, is quickly covered up. It is a partnership of great acting.

Spooner mentions that they have been talking about strength before their entrance and the play clearly becomes a show of strength in which Spooner struggles to gain a foothold in the room and in the private land of Hirst's mind. When he first sits down there is a smile of triumph. At times he seems almost to succeed, despite the complication of the two henchmen who have a vested interest in the outcome of the struggle; but eventually it seems that he only has to be given time to defeat himself, ensnaring himself in his own verbal trap and fantasies.

Language is the main weapon and each character seems defined by his individual relation to language.

OBITUARY

COLIN GREAVES

Colin Greaves, head caretaker at London's Conway Hall and an employee of South Place Ethical Society for 25 years, died in Stoke Mandeville Hospital on 11 May, after having sustained multiple injuries in an accident at the hall. He fell from a ladder whilst adjusting stage curtains.

Mr Greaves, who was 67, served SPES with great loyalty and devotion throughout the years. Conway Hall is used by a wide range of organisations and the work of its full-time staff is extremely demanding. But he was always obliging and helpful, and will be greatly missed. Mr Greaves' death, particularly in such tragic circumstances, has greatly saddened the large number of people with whom he came into contact.

Christians in Sacramento, California, led by the Reverend James Wilkins of the Landmark Baptist Tabernacle, are photographed as they enter bookshops where so-called pornographic literature is sold.

A Christian View of Love

rise above the common level. He can then hope that by placating the god, flattering him with worship, he may receive comfort and special favours. Despite his hell-fire preachings and apparent delusions of grandeur, Jesus was on the whole a good man whose ethical teaching (much of it inherited from the late Jewish tradition) had much to commend it. Paul and the other early Christians deified him. For sound psychological and ecclesiastical reasons the myth of the divine hero has been maintained ever since, though it now begins to lose much of its impetus in today's better educated and less superstitious society.

So the injunction to love God, primarily in the anthropomorphic Christ form, seems not only unjustified but indeed meaningless. It serves only to separate the world into those who believe and those who reject the doctrine. An artificial barrier is formed between man and man, giving rise to religious wars and persecution, and between man and woman, making it impossible for them to relate to each other in a loving way. Thus we come to the ultimate irony of the "gospel of love". Natural human warmth and affection is wasted in worshipping human images of God. Such love as is left over is given first and foremost to others of like persuasion. With luck, the majority of mankind comes a poor third. There is some truth in the saying that "Christianity is a wolf called Dogma in the sheep's clothing of Love". The compassionate man does well to remain outside the fold.

Spooner has an endless resource of literary quips and echoes to play with, echoing Prufrock for example in "I have known all this before . . ." and speaks with the loquacity of a man who knows that in the end he will not be heard. Hirst's language is at first monosyllabic, confident that his presence will be felt without speech. All the characters use language and their various versions of the past (it seems that Spooner and Hirst knew each other at Oxford before the war) in a quite distinctive way—but none of them for the straightforward communication of facts. Foster, one of the housekeepers, claims that "Normally I keep quiet", but he too is betrayed into language. Michael Feast, in this role, gives a remarkable performance of a man for whom there is a dislocation between what he says and what he is. Terrence Rigby, as Briggs, the other henchman, provides a powerful brooding performance as a man for whom language is a luxury, but he too in his account of how he met Foster, gives a line of patter that suggests that he knows how to use language and how one is used by it. All the characters interweave with fascinating complexity in Peter Hall's unobtrusively authoritative production.

No account of the play could adequately convey the brilliant variations of rhythm, the subtle comedy and the tension and atmosphere; but they would be enjoyed by anyone visiting the play. The real mystery is in the fact that no man can ever be totally known. Hirst speaks of the "places in my soul where no man has or ever can trespass". This is the "no man's land . . . which does not change or move . . . it remains for ever icy and silent", for there is a private inviolable territory of the mind where all trespassers will be prosecuted. It is Pinter's superb skill to delineate the language and silence around that no man's land, in such a way as to give an enthralling and thought-provoking play.

JIM HERRICK

Phyllis Graham

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Judaism, Christianity and Sexual Taboos

S. Levin argues that John Lauritsen's article, "Religious Roots of the Taboo on Homosexuality," which was published in the February issue, misinterprets the Hebrew Bible. In an rejoinder, John Lauritsen defends his premise and castigates both the Judiac and Christian attitudes to human sexuality.

S. LEVIN

John Lauritsen's assessment of the sexual ethic in the Hebrew Bible (also called an Old Testament, a tendentious term on a par with "Judeo-Christian") is so one-sided that a correction is required. He considers it self-evident that the Greek attitude towards the human body and towards sex, especially the tolerance of homosexuality, was superior. It is not so self-evident, as a few examples will illustrate. Greeks tolerated prostitution; Hebrews forbade it as degrading. Greeks tolerated the castration associated with the cult of the Asiatic god Attis; Hebrews forbade this mutilation. Greeks tolerated the celibacy of various cults which find their expression in Paul's pathological anti-sexism; the Hebrew Bible regarded celibacy as unnatural and the celibate Essenes—also contributing their influence to Christianity—were peripheral to normative Judaism. Greek unclothedness of the genitals had its corollary in a lack of sensitivity to human modesty; the Hebrew Bible understood modesty. (Even the most primitive tribes wear genital coverings.)

This does not excuse the barbarous sentences of death which the Hebrew Bible metes out for homosexuality and adultery. Yet even here much may be said in honour of the post-biblical Jews who found ways of circumventing such barbarous commandments so that at the time of the Second Temple (Herod; Jesus) talmudic quibbling—the rigid legalisms so beloved of Christian critics of Judaism—had made the execution of such laws impossible just as they had found ways to stop capital punishment and make the institution of slavery unworkable. And this happened some 2,000 years ago.

It is not correct to interpret Hebrew Bible accent on modesty as "The Jews pioneered in branding the body as shameful", nor are most of Lauritsen's other comments of this kind correctly assessed. Adam was given a mate. A woman was entitled to conjugal rights (Exodus 21:10). It was good to enjoy marriage (Jeremiah 29:6, Proverbs 18:22, 31:10) and have pleasure in a wife (Ecclesiastes 9:9). Hebrew has no word for

bachelor. The Song of Songs is an erotic love poem. A recently married man was entitled to deferment of army service in order to enjoy his wife (Deuteronomy 24:5). The beauty of the matriarchs is described. Is there anything more tender than the description of Jacob's love for Rachel?

Lauritsen is also wrong in parcelling Judaism up with Christianity into a "Judeo-Christian" tradition so that, by implication, Judaism becomes responsible for Christianity's love-sex-marriage attitudes. This term Judeo-Christian is used only by Christians who like to think of their religion as a legitimate continuation and completion of Judaism. Thinking Jews never use this expression not only because we deny Christianity's claims but because, to the contrary, Judaism and Christianity are antithetical in just about everything, particularly in relation to sexual ethics.

JOHN LAURITSEN

Though S. Levin and the Hebrew Bible may understand modesty, I felt obliged to consult the Oxford Dictionary, which gave three main definitions for the word. The first emphasised "moderation; freedom from excess . . ."; the second " . . . having a moderate opinion of oneself . . . freedom from presumption, ostentation, arrogance, or impudence"; and the third, "womanly propriety . . . sense of shame proceeding from instinctive (*sic*) aversion to impure or coarse suggestions".

Using the third definition, which links the word, "modesty", to peculiar notions about the shamefulness of the human body and sensuality, I don't doubt that the ancient Hebrews "understood modesty" a lot better than the ancient Greeks. However, under the first two definitions, the Greeks were far ahead: their philosophy of moderation—the golden mean—contrasted sharply with that of the Hebrews, whose obsessions and frenzied excesses are garishly depicted on every page of the Hebrew Bible. Given a choice between the Greeks and the Hebrews, I'd unhesitatingly pick the Greeks.

But this gets away from the main issue: the taboo on homosexuality. When Mr Levin says, "It is not so self-evident [that the Greeks'] tolerance of homosexuality was superior" (superior, presumably, to the condemnation of homosexuality), he implies there is something intrinsically wrong with homosexuality, though he doesn't say what is wrong, nor does he produce any evidence in support of his belief. There is, to my knowledge, no such evidence. I continue to maintain that, in historical-

(Continued on back page)

PUBLICATIONS

The Jesus Hoax, Phyllis Graham, (hard cover) £3.95, (breakaway edition) £2.25, (24p). **Honest to Man**, Margaret Knight, £3.75, (18p). **Cults of Unreason**, Christopher Evans, 75p, (11p). **Humanism**, Barbara Smoker, 40p, (8p). **The Longford Threat to Freedom**, Brigid Brophy, 10p, (6p). **The Right to Die**, Charles Wilshaw, 25p, (8p). **An Introduction to Secular Humanism**, Kit Mouat, 45p, (6p). **What Humanism is About**, Kit Mouat, 53p, (17p). **From Jewish Messianism to the Christian Church**, Prosper Alfaric, 3p, (6p). **The Dead Sea Scrolls**, John Allegro, 55p, (11p). **Did Jesus Christ Exist**, Chapman Cohen, 5p, (6p). **Morality Without God**, Chapman Cohen, 5p, (6p). **Woman and Christianity**, Chapman Cohen, 5p, (6p). **Materialism Restated**, Chapman Cohen, 50p, (15p). **Thomas Paine**, Chapman Cohen, 15p, (6p). **Religious Roots of the Taboo on Homosexuality**, John Lauritsen, 20p, (8p). **The Absurdities of Christian Science**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **The Jesuits: Religious Rogues**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **Christianity and Slavery**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **Phallic Elements in Religion**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **Did Jesus ever Live?**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **Pagan Christs**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **The Fraud of Spiritualism**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **Legends of Saints and Martyrs**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **Morals in Ancient Babylon**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **Life and Morals in Greece and Rome**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **How Christianity Triumphed**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **Revolt Against Religion**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **Psychology of Religion**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **The Sources of Christian Morality**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **How Man Made God**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **The Futility of Belief in God**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **The Horrors of the Inquisition**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **The Moorish Civilisation in Spain**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **The Degradation of Women**, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (6p). **RI and Surveys**, Maurice Hill, 5p, (6p). **The Cost of Church Schools**, David Tribe, 20p, (6p). **Religion and Ethics in Schools**, David Tribe, 8p, (6p). **The Case Against Church Schools**, Patricia Knight, 20p, (6p). **The Little Red Schoolbook**, S. Jansen, 30p, (10p). **Why I am Not a Christian**, Bertrand Russell, £1, (13p). **On Education**, Bertrand Russell, 65p, (13p). **Education and the Social Order**, Bertrand Russell, 75p, (11p). **Unpopular Essays**, Bertrand Russell, 45p, (11p). **Roads to Freedom**, Bertrand Russell, 60p, (11p). **Practice and Theory of Bolshevism**, Bertrand Russell, 30p, (11p). **Principles and Social Reconstruction**, Bertrand Russell, 75p, (13p). **Mysticism and Logic**, Bertrand Russell, 50p, (13p). **Marriage and Morals**, Bertrand Russell, 55p, (11p). **Legitimacy versus Industrialism**, Bertrand Russell, 50p, (11p). **In Praise of Idleness**, Bertrand Russell, 70p, (11p). **Authority and the Individual**, Bertrand Russell, 60p, (11p). **Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare**, Bertrand Russell, 40p, (11p). **The Conquest of Happiness**, Bertrand Russell, £1, (11p). **Impact of Science on Society**, Bertrand Russell, 60p, (11p). **Political Ideals**, Bertrand Russell, 50p, (11p). **Bertrand Russell's Best**, Robert E. Enger, 55p, (11p). **Bertrand Russell: a Life**, Herbert Gottchalk, 25p, (11p). **Bertrand Russell: the Passionate Sceptic**, Allan Wood, 50p, (13p). **The Origins of Christianity**, G. A. Wells, 20p, (6p). **The Jesus of the Early Christians**, G. A. Wells, £2.95, (24p). **Broadcasting**, Brainwashing, Conditioning, David Tribe, 25p, (6p). **Nucleoethics: Ethics in Modern Society**, David Tribe, 90p, (17p). **Questions**

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EVENTS

Brentwood Humanist Society. Old House Arts Centre, Main Road, Brentwood. Thursday, 26 June, 8 p.m. Kenneth Furness: "Humanism—National and International". Thursday, 10th July, 8 p.m. Derek Mackay (Independent Adoption Society).

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Brunswick House, 11 Brunswick Square, Hove. Sunday, 6 July, 5.30 p.m. Professor G. A. Wells: "Did Jesus Exist?"

Havering Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, Havering. Tuesday, 15 July, 8 p.m. Julia Pelling and Ron Manton review Lyall Watson's "Super Nature". Tuesday, 15 July, 8 p.m. Kenneth Furness: "Humanism and the BHA".

Humanist Housing Association. Rose Bush Court, 35 Parkhill Road, London NW3. Saturday, 5 July, 10.30 a.m. until noon. Bring and Buy Sale.

Humanist Holidays. Hon. Secretary: Mrs M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey; telephone 01-642 8796. Details of holidays at Isle of Man (9-23 August) sent on request.

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.)

London, Victoria Embankment (opposite Charing Cross Station), Saturday, 21 June, 2 pm. Demonstration in Defence of the 1967 Abortion Act. Rally at Speakers' Corner, 4 pm.

National Secular Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Friday, 27 June, 6.30 p.m. Refreshments; 7 p.m. Annual General Meeting. Members only. 1975 membership card must be presented.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday morning meetings, 11 a.m. 29 June, Peter Cadogan: "The Sacred and the Profane". 6 July, Dr. John Lewis: "The Basis of the Moral Law—Religious, Philosophical, Class or What?" 13 July, Roger Woddis: "Fools are my Theme! (Byron) Satire in a Sick Society".

Waltham Forest Humanist Group. Wood Street Library, Forest Road, Walthamstow, Tuesday, 24 June, 7.45 p.m. Ros Kane: "Radical Alternatives to Prison" (amended date).

anthropological perspective, homosexuality must be considered a valid component of the healthy human animal; that there is nothing inherent in our species that restricts sensual and affectionate relations to only the opposite sex; and that it is not therefore homosexuality, but rather its condemnation, which needs to be explained.

For these reasons, I consider the term, "taboo", appropriate to the proscribing of homosexual behaviour. The absurdity of employing the phrase, "tolerance of homosexuality", to describe the fact that the Greeks did not observe the Jewish (or also Zoroastrian) taboo on homosexuality, is immediately apparent when one considers an analogous Jewish taboo—would one say that the English people now "tolerate" the eating of pork? I shouldn't want to saddle the Jews with the sins of the Christians, but I don't see what's wrong with using the term, "Judeo-Christianity", especially in the context of sexual morality, where the two cults share in common a morbid sexual outlook and the persecution of homosexuals.

Judaism and Christianity are certainly *not* "antithetical in just about everything", for the antithesis to both of them is science. It's a matter of time, and Judaism and Christianity shall end up together on the trash heap of history. The sooner the better.

G. A. WELLS

Did Jesus Exist?

£5.80 plus 20p postage

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