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THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE GOD'S BUSINESS

The British première of the American film "Marjoe" took place recently at the Screen Cinema, Islington Green, London. This film is a devastating exposé of the business side of evangelism in the United States, and it highlights with vivid detail the tricks and manipulations of Marjoe Gortner, a self-aware con-man out to use the gospel message to fatten his bank balance. Romaine Hart, a director of the Screen, told "The Freethinker" that business had been very good during the run of the film. Audiences were interested and surprised by the extent of the religious racket, and she was "deeply shocked and sickened by the hypocrisy".

Jim Herrick writes: Imagine a boy Shirley Temple, a cute little prodigy of a showman, with curly blond hair, eye-catching gestures and photogenic eyes and you will have a picture of the earliest stages in the making of *Marjoe*. This is not a talent-spotting contest at Butlins nor a child model being groomed for a TV advertisement, but the first steps of a fourth generation evangelist preacher in the United States. His name is a combination of Mary and Joseph, and at an early age he acquired the hybrid characteristics of showman and con-man; his gestures were taught, his words learnt and his moves among his audience carefully calculated to obtain cash. (He even had special pockets sewn into his clothes for this purpose.) After being trained and having developed from infant wonder to teenage breadwinner, he left his father's business to think things out for himself. Later he decided to return to the work for which he was best qualified, and worked the evangelical circuits for all they were worth—which must have been a great deal given his outstanding show business qualities.

This film is both a fascinating documentary exposé of the "religion business" in America and a remarkable exercise in screen autobiography. Marjoe Gortner decided to film his life as an evangelist, bringing out to the full the unscrupulous tech-

niques he and others used. Although he presents himself as an amoral and unprincipled young man, he says he came to feel dissatisfaction with his way of life and has clearly found in film acting a less deceptive field for his star quality and exhibitionist needs. I was not totally convinced by his penance or regret for rooking the reverent rabble. It came a little too carefully processed in scenic images of trendy angst and self-discovery, and a little too hot after shots of his gleaming grin while counting money and his sybaritic pleasure while wallowing in a water bed. But someone with his upbringing would hardly have been likely to have emerged as a particularly straightforward individual. The childhood methods of persuasion which his parents used to help him memorise his lines were even less pleasant than the techniques of evangelist showmen. These methods included temporary smothering and being held under a water tap (nothing which left a physical mark).

Value for Money

Many of the scenes of the evangelical performances were astonishingly memorable. Up go the marquees and mikes, out come the wallets and cheque books. To be fair, Marjoe seemed to give better value for money than most; he had not studied Mick Jagger's pelvic thrust for nothing, and he really worked himself into a pitch of emotional excitement:

Marjoe—"Will you answer some questions about Jesus? Let's practice the answers first. After me . . . all together . . . yes . . . He . . . can!"

Audience—"Yes . . . He . . . can."

Marjoe—"Nah . . . you can do better than that; YES . . . HE . . . CAN!"

Audience—"Yes . . . He . . . can!"

Marjoe—"Can Jesus save sinners?"

Audience—"Yes . . . He . . . Can!" (With great enthusiasm.)

Marjoe—"Can Jesus save drug addicts?"

Getting It Wrong About School Religion

Woman, a weekly journal published by IPC Magazines, has a column headed "Getting Things Right", but the answer given to a reader's query in the 20 September issue was far from right. A correspondent wrote: "My daughter has just started at a new school this term. As we are atheists we would rather she didn't attend morning prayers at the school assembly or religious education lessons. What are our rights here?" The following answer was given: "You don't actually have a legal right to withdraw your child from these. It's up to your child's head teacher to decide. Most are reasonable but don't forget that the school is under no obligation to provide an alternative for your daughter".

If the writer had taken the trouble to check the 1944 Education Act it is unlikely that such a misleading reply would have been published. For the Act states clearly: "If the parent of any pupil in attendance at any county school or any voluntary school requests that he be wholly or partly excused from attendance at religious worship in the school, or from attendance at religious instruction in the school, or from attendance at both religious worship and religious instruction in the school, then, until the request is withdrawn, the pupil shall be excused from such attendance accordingly."

No Alternative to Indoctrination

It is true that alternative activities are seldom arranged for children who have been withdrawn from RE lessons or assembly. The 1944 Act was drawn up at a time when Christian cunning and arrogance was even more outrageous than it is today. It was intended that only the more persistent parents (and teachers) would be able to exer-

cise their rights under the "conscience clause". Secularists have campaigned unremittingly against the religious provisions of the 1944 Act, but seldom advocate the withdrawal of a child from religious lessons and assembly. They believe that it may be harmful for a child to be made to feel "different", and there is always the suspicion that he may be victimised by other pupils or even by bigoted teachers. Nevertheless it is important that parents should be aware of their legal rights in this matter.

THE FREETHINKER

BOUND VOLUME 1974

EDITED BY CHRISTOPHER MOREY

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The text of the Passion play, which is performed every ten years in the Bavarian village of Oberammergau, is to be revised. After the 1970 season ended, the Mayor rejected allegations by Jewish organisations that the play, written over a century ago by a Benedictine priest, was anti-semitic. But civic leaders have decided to commission a new version of the play which is seen by hundreds of thousands of visitors.

No Business Like God's Business

Audience—"Yes . . . He . . . can!" (With great excitement.)

Marjoe—"Can Jesus save homosexuals?"

Audience—"Yes . . . He . . . can!" (Rapturously.)

To save the gullible from being gulled did not seem within His capacity on such occasions, however.

Marjoe could skilfully manipulate people towards pentecostal experiences. He describes how easy it is, when they all come forward and you clap hands on one of them, who then falls to the ground in an ecstatic faint, and before you know where you are the floor is littered with bodies quivering and gibbering with the holy ghost. It was noticeable that most of those so "blessed" were middle-aged women, and cloths were at the ready to cover their naked legs,

so that modesty be preserved. There were moments when I felt that the worshippers had been "sent" quite as harmlessly as any rock concert audience and were being unfairly mocked by the camera. Indeed I question the ethics of using people unknowingly on a film. But this is a problem of all documentaries, and to have shown the drab context of the daily lives of those who seek this kind of escape it would have been necessary to have made another film.

The film received a round of applause—unusual for a cinema performance—and from any point of view must be regarded as a document of quite extraordinary interest. How widely the film will be shown is yet to be seen. but *Freethinker* readers should be sure to watch out for it. And it is to be hoped that cinema managers will take note of what the film so clearly demonstrates: "There's no business like God's business".

The recent attempt by the Bishop of London-derry to be the first Roman Catholic to preach from the pulpit of St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, since the Reformation, ended in a brawl. Protestant zealots demonstrated outside the Cathedral before the service, and when the bishop tried to speak he was greeted with jeers, slow handclaps and shouts of "No Popery", "Remember John Knox" and "Remember Jenny Geddes". The traditional hatred between Roman Catholic and Protestant followers of the alleged Prince of Peace still flourishes in Scotland, even in our ecumenical times.

Ghosts stalk the streets of Edinburgh, that historic stronghold of Calvinism. Jenny Geddes, for those who may not know, was a serving girl who hurled a stool at the clergyman who tried to read Archbishop Laud's prayer book, which was considered too popish, at St Giles in 1637. What led to the Scottish Reformation which even today can stir such passions?

Basically, the Catholic Church in Scotland was too rich and corrupt. It was the biggest landowner in the country, and the lives of the clergy were far from holy. Ribald songs were made up about them: *The Bishop would not take a wife, The Abbot not pursue one, Thinking it was a lustier life, Each day to have a new one.*

At the Battle of Flodden in 1513 large numbers of the Scottish nobility were killed, and the clergy had to take their place in the government of Scotland. They got the blame if anything went wrong. And things did go wrong; like, for instance, the disgraceful defeat of a Scottish army at Solway Moss in 1542.

Lord Eustace Percy, in a study of John Knox, says that the town of St Andrews was the centre of the reforming movement. There are two possibilities to support this contention, neither of which excludes the other. Andrew Lang, in his book *St Andrews*, refers to a mysterious group of people called Culdees. They were hermits who supported the old Celtic Church. Their name means "Companions of God"—*Cele De*. The Celtic Church was opposed to Rome on many questions, and Lang mentions many conflicts between the Culdees and the clergy during the period 908 to 1144 AD. The Culdees disappeared in the fourteenth century, but their influence may have lingered. One of the leading reformers was called Kirkcaldy of Grange, which could be a corruption of Kirk Culdee.

The other possibility was the establishment of a university at St Andrews. It was founded partly to combat the new heretical teachings of the Lollards and others like them. In order to understand these

ideas the scholars had to study them, and some of them were converted in the process. As anti-Catholic feeling grew, the Church killed many of the rebels, and thus increased the bitterness. In particular there was much indignation over the burning of a young man called Patrick Hamilton. Due to the inefficiency of the executioner this lad suffered burning for six hours before he died. It was said that "the reek of Master Hamilton infected all it blew upon".

The international situation played an important part in this drama. France and England were in conflict. France represented the Catholic Counter-Reformation, and England (after Henry VIII's reign) the Protestant cause. Scotland became a pawn in the struggle, with France and England trying to get control. At first the French had the most success. The Regent of Scotland was Mary of Guise, widow of James V and mother of Mary, Queen of Scots, and closely connected with the fanatically Catholic Guise brothers. Large numbers of French soldiers were quartered in Scotland, and their behaviour caused much resentment.

It was in this atmosphere that a Protestant party, led by the Earl of Arran, arose among the Scottish nobles. They favoured friendship with England, and doubtless tried to exploit the anti-Catholic feeling to win support. On the other hand, the trump card of the Catholic Church in Scotland was the deep-rooted hatred of England, the "auld enemy". Eventually the Catholics realised that some kind of reform was necessary and the authorities tried to curb the abuses. But they were too late and in 1560, after bitter fighting, the Roman Catholic Church was overthrown in Scotland.

Knox and the Reformation

Many people regard John Knox as the creator of the Scottish Reformation, but I feel that this is a mistake. During the period when the reformers were advancing Knox was out of the country, and he expressed surprise at the progress that had been made when he paid a brief visit to Scotland in 1555. Knox may not have initiated the Scottish Reformation, but when it took place it was he who decided the future course of action. No one else seems to have thought out in detail what were to be the doctrines or organisational structure of the new Church. In that sense, Knox can certainly be called the Father of the Scottish Reformation.

This proposition may be regarded as too simplistic, particularly by those who claim that Calvinist Protestantism arose because it suited the economic interests of the merchant class. But a study of the history of the Scottish Reformation reveals that

(Continued on page 156)

Max Stirner—The Unique One

by GEOFFREY WEBSTER

Max Stirner was a German philosopher whose work is now little known outside anarchist circles. But when his only book was published in 1844 it raised a storm of controversy. Stirner's critics were not confined to the conservative elements in a society which was being shaken by the questioning and rejection of previously accepted standards.

In the 1840s, a time when radical thinkers in Germany were criticising the religious, economic and political foundations of European society, an obscure schoolmaster with the pseudonym "Max Stirner" ("Max Forehead") published a book, the title of which is usually translated as *The Ego and His Own*, but which literally means something like *The Unique One and His Property*.

This long-neglected figure, advocating the most extreme moral and existential position, is of particular interest to freethinkers. For this article I must acknowledge my debt to *The Nihilistic Egoist*, by R. W. K. Paterson, a very illuminating and objective study of Stirnerism, published in 1971.

Stirner, prior to the publication of his iconoclastic and totally uncompromising book, used to associate with some of the most illustrious and progressive intellectuals of his day—men like Engels, Hess, Bauer and Feuerbach: men who were busily demolishing every kind of slavish, uncritical adherence to accepted beliefs, whether in the field of religion, philosophy, politics or morality. Stirner would participate in their meetings; more specifically, he would listen to the others speaking, and occasionally contribute a remark if he felt so inclined. He seems to have been a courteous but uncommunicative person, and he must have appeared to his contemporaries as just an amiable fellow who listened respectfully to their words of wisdom. They were soon to be disabused of these ideas.

In November 1844, Stirner's book was published in Leipzig. Almost immediately, the mild little girls-school teacher found himself embroiled in a tremendous, merciless controversy, because (apart from, as they felt, betraying the ideas of his former companions) he had certainly "out-radicalled" the radicals in the pages of his explosive masterpiece. After a while, however, the furor died down, and Stirner was to die in obscurity some years later, as a result of receiving a poisonous bite in the neck from an insect.

Stirner, who is aptly characterised by Paterson as a "nihilistic egoist", rejected every idea of authority, whether religious, ethical or social. He suggested, very clearly and persuasively, that the most

immediate reality for each and every one of us is our utterly unique personal identity, and that abstract notions such as Humanity, Duty, Freedom, Truth, only make the concrete individual forget who he is (i.e., they alienate him from himself, from his self-possession and self-confidence). We have no rights except those we appropriate (whether by force or cunning); we have no obligations to other people or even to ourselves. The egoist does not deify himself, does not make his egoism into some kind of absolute principle or categorical imperative.

Since life is intrinsically meaningless, Stirner says that the most realistic, appropriate response is to regard everything in the world (other folk included) as so much temptingly available raw material to be used, manipulated, exploited to one's unique personal advantage. I can become irresponsible, inconsistent, amoral, cynical, predatory, as I please—"humanity" is only a name given to the horde of humanity beings—millions of individual men who can be treated as merely exploitable objects by the calculating, self-sufficient egoist. All ideals—whether relating to mankind in general or myself in particular—are empty, pompous fictions, and a man who has an unquestioning respect for "human rights" or who devotes himself to some moral or political cause, is (apart from being a dupe) just as much a "religious" man as is a god-worshipper! Why? Surely atheists have repudiated religion in all its forms? No—because nothing has unconditional worth, beauty or dignity; things and causes possess values insofar only as I choose to invest them with those values. So, Stirner says: "true morality and true piety are never to be wholly separated, for even the atheistic moralists are in reality worshipping Goodness, Truth and Virtue as their gods".

Uniqueness of Man

It is clear that Stirner, in denying that values exist independently of the formulating individual consciousness, is a radical nominalist—ideals are merely names, though folk overlook this fact and treat them as sacred and objectively real. Thus, the moment you subordinate yourself to ideals (of whatever kind), you thereby deny and abandon your own incomparable identity—which cannot be defined in human terms, social terms, economic-political terms, because it is unique, indefinable. Belonging to any group means you are only recognised in your limited capacity as a functioning member of that group, not as and for yourself. We may possess recognisable physical, emotional and intellectual attributes, but we are not these attributes; we merely own or use them. Thus, if you say you know me, because I am a man, a free-

thinker, a Caucasian, you only know some of my attributes; you cannot know *me*. To know me, you would have to *be me*.

Even allowing for the fact that not every egoist might be totally ruthless, the universal adoption of Stirnerism would probably represent the rapid disintegration of human society. However, since many philosophical pessimists conclude that life is a basically burdensome, disadvantageous affair, a sardonic individual might comment that the collapse of global civilisation and the eventual extinction of mankind might not be such a disastrous thing to contemplate! But the point is, Stirner uncompromisingly exposed the essentially religious mentality and commitment of many freethinkers, inasmuch as to hold anything sacred (even, in the final analysis, oneself) is to "worship" that thing, and thus sacrifice oneself to it. "Humanity" is the most conspicuous example, since humanists are, by definition and inclination, concerned with improving the human condition—making human "potential" actual and engaging in philanthropic activities on behalf of the underprivileged. This attitude is abhorrent to the conscious egoist. To him, men are no more deserving of unconditional respect than "God".

The Futility of Life

Since he categorically denies he has any absolute obligations to himself, it is hardly likely the Stirnerite will acknowledge any indebtedness to society. He is, therefore, a person who chooses to operate in a moral, political and existential vacuum; a person who realises the basic futility and aimlessness of life, but who nevertheless continues to live, taking advantage of opportunities for enjoyment and satisfaction, conveniently and contemptuously discarding any ideas of self-restraint imposed upon him by others. "I am the Unique One", says Stirner; and he implies that this is not some nebulous notion of "freedom" or "personal integrity" that is worth striving for, but "self-possession". He admits no loyalty to anyone, whether wife, children, associates, or—going to the opposite extreme—humanity itself. He is bound by nothing, determined only by his own whims and fancies—mercurial, arbitrary, perpetually eluding definition and "labelling". He is the "Creative Nothingness"; he is the proprietor of his desires, thoughts and activities; he is not "equal" to others, because each man is essentially so totally different from all others that instituting a comparison would be entirely unproductive. In the end, therefore, even opposition is transcended, because the conscious egoist realises that the only "relationship" between him and the rest of the universe is complete "severance". Each being is so distinctive, so solitary, so incommensurable, that their encounters with each other are just superficial engagements. Crowds of instinctively egoistic people try (clumsily, unskillfully) to exploit each other, and when the conscious egoist arrives

on the battlefield he takes a look at his vulnerable companions and smilingly exploits them as he thinks fit or enjoyable, leaving without so much as a "by your leave"—unless politeness gives a boost to his conquest!

Stirner is not just advocating a defiant but nonetheless socially respectable "individualism". On the contrary, he plainly teaches nothing less than the total rejection of all ideas of being a social animal, of having obligations to others, much less the fashionable idea that one has some kind of existential or evolutionary "duty" to improve, perfect or "realise" oneself.

Disturbing Logic

He stands on the earth unblinkingly, seeing the chaos and purposelessness of life, and coolly decides (while, and if, he elects to live) that he will have no other goal or motivation than his own self-interest, however he may idiosyncratically define it. He may, if it gives him pleasure, be compassionate; he may work; he may even conform, in the most scrupulous, admirable manner, to general social requirements. But appearances are deceptive: he may just as suddenly become callous, anti-social and actually criminal. He has no crusading urge to change society, because he sees no reason why he should cast himself under the remorseless wheels of that juggernaut, "society".

He sees that all governments care nothing for the concrete individual and are simply totalitarian, for all their protestations to the contrary. But his opposition to the principle of government (whether it be capitalist, communist or fascist) does not lead him to embrace the cause of the anarchist—he recognises that an anarchist (or libertarian) society would try to pressurise him into desirable forms of behaviour by disapproval and ostracism, which are also forms of tyranny and compulsion. He is the archetypal apolitical animal. Since his entry into this world was involuntary, he regards himself as entitled (through his audacity and ruthlessness) to take, consume, control whatever he wants.

To conclude: the Stirnerite is, above all, capricious. He does not treat his own egoism as "sacred". This presumably means that to meet such an egoist would be to meet someone totally unpredictable and utterly treacherous. Yet this is indeed the sinister figure that emerges from the pages of Stirner, to challenge us with his disturbing logic.

Christopher Evans

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Sterilisation: Medical and Moral Aspects

DAVID STARK MURRAY

Although we would never advocate human sterilisation, in normal circumstances, without the consent of the individual concerned, there may be medical or social circumstances to justify it—and involuntary sterilisation is no doubt quite common, though rarely publicised. However, three recent cases of this kind that arose in Sheffield attracted the attention of the press and were made the subject of an hysterical and sentimental outcry—though no one has denied that at least one of the three girls was at considerable risk of conceiving, with a high probability of transmitting her defective genes, and was manifestly unsuitable for the parental role. One of the leading Roman Catholic newspapers in this country carried an article by Norman St John-Stevas commenting on the moral aspects of sterilisation from a Catholic (albeit progressive Catholic) viewpoint, but his attempts to synthesise obsolete ecclesiastical dogma with a modern outlook inevitably result in “double-think”. Dr Stark Murray (a freethinker and a doctor of medicine) here replies to St John-Stevas from a secularist standpoint.

In the *Catholic Herald* for 25 July, 1975, Norman St John-Stevas, MP, gave his views on the present discussion of the alleged sterilisation of three girls under 16 years of age. The heading “Sterilisation: A Moral and Legal Problem” was presumably added editorially, for the writer did not use the word “moral” in the text, although he did “judge such an operation is against the law”. But “the law” in many instances accepts that, in the case of minors like these girls, the guardians (parents or legal) can and must make decisions that would rightly belong to an adult individual; and the courts have to over-ride even that in cases where parents have refused to permit an essential blood transfusion for a baby.

As the technicians in our society have learned more and more wonderful things they can do with human tissues, the available procedures now have to be looked at from three aspects—medical, personal and societal. The medical profession neglects its duty to society when it does not give openly every detail of knowledge of a subject or procedure so as to make the medical position clear. Society may hold up medical advance if it does not consider such matters without false moralising.

The strangest thing, however, about this redoubtable Catholic is that he is so under the influence of modern society that, even when he quotes St Thomas Aquinas, he does so to show that Catholics need

no longer adhere to the original strict rule to allow nothing—except the celibacy of the clergy—to interfere with the process of procreation. Mr St John-Stevas today suggests that “for example, if a married couple are likely to transmit defective genes, have they not an adequate ground for having themselves sterilised?” Still more surprisingly, especially if one assumes he is now expressing the true Catholic doctrine of today, he declares “Once the exception has been admitted, the sacrosanctity of the physical act has been destroyed and the absolute prohibition is left without any basis at all.”

He concludes “that sterilisation without the consent of the person sterilised is always wrong but that in the case of a true consent and a voluntary sterilisation there may be grave reasons which justify the operation.” No one has seriously suggested that sterilisation *should* be a compulsory procedure, and medically it would be exceedingly difficult, provided both contraception and abortion are freely available, ever to justify this. As a method of removing a defective gene from the world, a selective programme of sterilisation could never be wholly effective, anyway.

In most cases, the individual who carries a defective gene should be fully advised of the risks to any progeny, together with the most suitable methods of avoiding pregnancy. In cases of low-grade mentality, however, contraceptive decisions, like decisions in many other medical and social areas, cannot always be left to the individual concerned.

Travesty of Freedom

Another curious example of muddled thinking in the article by St John-Stevas is that, having admitted there could be valid reasons for recommending and, with consent, carrying out sterilisation, he says the reasons “must be grave to justify such an interference with human freedom”. Surely, however, there has been no greater interference with human freedom than Catholic insistence on the right of a Pope to issue an edict, binding not only on his co-religionists but also on others over whom they are able to exercise political control, banning all contraception and all induced abortion, as well as sterilisation. It is a travesty of freedom in this important aspect of life unless the individuals concerned—and especially the woman—can have complete freedom, without dogma and threats of punishment after life, to decide all matters relating to procreation for themselves.

(Continued on page 158)

The Tomb of St Peter

R. J. CONDON

Professor Enrico Josi, who has died aged 90, was one of the team that discovered the tomb of St Peter beneath the altar of St Peter's Basilica in Rome, according to "The Universe" of 12 September. Or perhaps they didn't, since the usually credulous "Universe" says the sepulchre is "accepted in Rome" as the Apostle's tomb. Such caution is commendable, for so far as a negative proposition can be proved it is certain that Peter, the alleged first Pope and Bishop of Rome for 25 years, was never in Rome at any time.

Acts seems to have been written with the idea of bringing the two sides together by minimising the differences between them. Peter, the Judaiser, is ordered by God to eat ritually unclean food, while Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, is represented as an orthodox adherent of the Jerusalem or Judaising Church. Otherwise there is, with one important exception, no difference between them. What Peter does in the first part of Acts, Paul does in the second part. They even make the same speeches. The astonishing thing is that it is Paul and not Peter who gets to Rome. Again it does not matter that Acts is largely fiction. Its silence on the matter is the strongest possible evidence that Peter's presence in Rome was not Church doctrine in those early years.

A Carrier of Keys

It is quite likely that Peter never existed at all. He is usually pictured carrying two keys, in token of his power to bind and loose in heaven and on earth (Matthew 16:19). There were several key-carrying pagan gods, and Peter's character is an amalgamation of traits from each of them. In Greek mythology Proteus, whose name is a form of Peter, has the mercurial, equivocating character so noticeable in the Apostle. He carries keys, and like Peter walks on the sea.

The Roman equivalent of Proteus is Janus. Like Peter, Janus is a leader of a group of 12. He carries keys because, as Ovid says, he has power to bind or loose all things in heaven and earth. He is literally two-faced, Peter figuratively so. The earliest "Peter" of all is the Petra of ancient Egypt, who opens the doors of heaven and earth (with keys?) in the Book of the Dead (chapter 68). We might also mention Petraeus the Fisherman, disciple of the crucified Prometheus, who, as Peter was later to do, urges his master to make his peace with authority, and then turns and flees.

The Legend of Peter

The legend of Peter as the first Pope began to take shape in the late second century, born of Rome's determination, as the Church of the Imperial capital, to assert its supremacy over all other churches. Peter, the rock on which the Church was to have been founded, had to be brought to Rome at all costs.

The bones unearthed by Professor Josi, being directly under the altar of St Peter's are very probably those of an early Bishop of Rome. According to Irenaeus, the first Bishop was Linus, traditionally buried in or near the Apostle's tomb. Perhaps the bones are his; they are certainly not Peter's.

Peter shares with Jesus and the rest of the Apostles the distinction of being utterly unknown to first century writers. The earliest mention of his sojourn in Rome is by Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, about AD 170. Eusebius (fourth century) is the first to place it at 25 years. According to Catholic legend, Peter went to Rome in pursuit of a devil in the form of an evil magician, Simon Magus, whom he destroyed in a spectacular contest. Justin Martyr, writing in Rome around AD 150, has much to say about Simon Magus, but knows nothing of Peter being there.

If secular history is silent as to Peter's presence in Rome, sacred history is equally so. He is said to have been there at the same time as Paul. The Pauline Epistles, however, make no reference to this matter. Only Galatians, of those written from Rome, mentions Peter at all, and then in terms which make it clear that his presence in the Eternal City was the last thing in the author's mind. Whether or not the Epistles are genuine, if it had been believed at the time of writing that Peter was Bishop of Rome they could not have ignored the fact.

Perhaps the most telling argument against Peter's Roman episcopacy is the Acts of the Apostles. This purports to be an account of the first 30 years or so of the Church. It covers almost the whole of the period (AD 40 to 65) during which Peter is reckoned to have been in Rome. Such statements in Acts as are historically reliable have been taken from the eighteenth book of The Antiquities of the Jews, by Josephus. Allowing time for that work to circulate, Acts cannot have been written much before the early years of the second century, about the time we first hear of Christianity. The Church was then already split into two hostile camps. The eponymic Petrine faction backed the Apostle of the Circumcision, while the more practical followers of Paul realised that strict adherence to the Jewish law would be more likely to repel than gain converts.

MOVE OVER, DR GOEBBELS

"We are sure that almost everyone in the Church knows that intolerance has no place in Christianity."
—From a joint statement by Dr Edward Daly, Bishop of Londonderry, and the Reverend Gillesbuig Macmillan, Minister of St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, after members of the Scottish Protestant Society prevented the bishop from preaching in the Cathedral.

We sympathize with Dr. Daly who was howled down from the pulpit of St. Giles' Cathedral last month by a mob of his fellow-Christians, and it is gratifying to note that he was none the worse for the experience. In any age of Protestant faith he could have come to a sticky end (just as in an age of Catholic faith anyone who had dared to raise his voice against an ignorant parish priest, never mind the bishop, would have risked life and limb for doing so). Now, thanks to the advance of scientific truth, and the humanizing influence of scepticism, Christians are no longer able to commit murder over theological absurdities. In these ecumenical times the arch-enemies of two decades ago now join forces only to murder truth.

If the Bishop of Londonderry and the Reverend Macmillan are correct, and almost everyone in the Church believes that intolerance has no place in Christianity, their statement is nothing more than evidence of the monumental ignorance of Church people. Certainly they *claim* that Christianity is not intolerant, just as they claim that it is the true source of morality, human emancipation and social progress. Christians trumpet the praises of their particular variety of religious superstition with an enthusiasm and zest normally associated with the manufacturers of patent medicines. But Christianity, like all other forms of dope, is far less beneficial than its promoters claim.

The history of Christianity is a chronicle of intolerance and suppression. The teachings of Jesus and Paul, both of whom were intolerant fanatics, became the credo of an institution which no power could oppose for many centuries. The rise of the Christian Church led to the Crusades, religious wars which devastated parts of Europe and decimated the population, the Inquisition and persecution of the Jews. The Roman Catholic Church has a longer history and a more despicable record than the "separated brethren". But the Protestant Church had nothing to learn from Rome when it came to intolerance and the harassment of critics and non-conformists.

Martin Luther, a hero of the Orange clique that disrupted the Edinburgh service, was venomously anti-Jewish, and his fulminations against the Jews

have inspired anti-semites until our own times. When, in 1941, the German Evangelical Church issued a declaration of support for Hitler and the Nazi regime, Martin Luther was quoted to substantiate the charge that "Jews are the enemy of Germany and the world . . ." Julius Streicher, the most fanatical Jew-hater in the Nazi hierarchy, also referred to Luther's strictures against the Jews in his defence at his trial at Nuremberg.

Dr. Daly is an Irish bishop and the Christian Churches of that country are notorious for their intolerance. In the Republic, the Roman Catholic Church has been largely responsible for the censorship of books, films and plays. Celibate bishops and priests have led the opposition to the introduction of contraception. The Church has resisted adamantly any moves to end the religious segregation of children in schools.

The record of the Protestant Church is little better; social reforms have had to be imposed on Ulster in the teeth of religious opposition. Clergymen of all denominations have been the most fervent supporters of the Orange Order, and parade openly at the Order's festivals of hate and intolerance.

After many centuries of power and wealth the Churches are at last beginning to lose their grip. This is a fact of history that all the contrived expressions of unity and goodwill cannot conceal. It is also a fact of history that Christian teachings and beliefs have exercised a disastrous influence on humanity, having created hatred, divisiveness and intolerance.

NEWS

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AND NOTES

FATIMA FOLLY

The nonsense which Christians write in the correspondence columns of the religious press is a source of constant joy and wonderment to non-Christian readers. But for sheer stupidity and silliness the palm must surely go to those Roman Catholics who have been writing to their newspapers in order to stimulate interest in the latest Fatima crusade.

Many *Freethinker* readers will not be familiar with the legend, but it is alleged that in 1917 an apparition of "Our Lady" appeared to three peasant children from the village of Fatima, in Portugal. She revealed to them an horrendous vision of hell, and informed the children that those unfortunates down below were suffering eternal torment because no one had prayed or made sacrifice for them. She then announced that there will not be peace in the world, until the Bolshies have been converted and Russia has been consecrated to her "Immaculate Heart".

The consecration must be performed by the Pope with all the bishops in attendance, and although consecrations did take place in 1942 and 1952 they did not produce results. Now another Fatima crusade has been launched and the pious twits are pressuring Pope Paul VI to arrange yet another consecration. The poor man is overwhelmed with serious problems now facing the Roman Catholic Church, and is probably wishing that those snotty-nosed kids and their wretched village had never been heard of by the world at large.

A letter from one Francis W. Johnston, an indefatigable Fatima crusader, which appeared in the *Catholic Herald*, so exasperated Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society and a Catholic until the age of 26, that she put pen to paper and wrote a letter to the editor. The letter was published in the *Herald* under the heading "Atheist's View", and the text appears below.

"As an atheist, I generally read the religious press without feeling impelled to answer everything that seems to me absurd. But there are degrees of absurdity, and the Fatima crusade must be top of the pops.

"Leaving aside the gullibility which established the Fatima legend in the first place, I understand from Mr Johnston's letter that he is campaigning for a mass petition to the Pope to gather together

all the bishops in the world in order to consecrate Russia to 'the Immaculate Heart of Mary' and thus, according to the Fatima prophecy, bring about the immediate 'conversion' of Russia, and consequently world peace.

"First, since the consent of the Russian people to the proposed consecration is not a prerequisite to fulfilment of the prophecy, the usual Catholic insistence on 'free will' goes out of the window. Therefore, if the omnipotent God wishes Russia to be 'converted', why cannot the overnight miracle take place without the episcopal pantomime?

"Secondly, the similarity of the terms of the prophecy with the Protestant legend of Joanna Southcott's Box (the opening of which likewise requires the presence of 'all the bishops') indicates a common fantasy among illiterate girls to get 'all the bishops' to do their bidding—which is always safely impossible of fulfilment to the complete satisfaction of their followers, since at any one time there are bound to be one or two bishops in bed with the 'flu.

"Thirdly, there is in any case a smaller proportion of practising Christians in Britain today than in Russia.

"Fourthly, even if every Russian citizen were to become a rabid Christian overnight, how would that promote 'world peace?' More likely it would create, internally, a Slavonic Ireland (the hardly figureful Irish having the highest church attendance figures in the whole of Europe) and, externally, a nuclear holy crusade".

Barbara Smoker was not the only correspondent who poured scorn on the farrago of nonsense about the conversion of Russia. Mary W. Wheeldon, a Catholic who believes that "Our Lady did in fact appear to the three children at Fatima in 1917", pointed out that it was not Russia who started the Second World War—a war in which millions died, including large numbers of Our Lady's own race. Mrs Wheeldon continued: "Why would Our Lady say that the conversion of the Russians was needed for peace in the world? In the light of the CIA activities throughout the world in support of 'Capitalism' it is much more likely that Our Lady referred to 'Capitalism' not 'Communism' . . . The racism in the United States by the whites towards their fellow-Christian blacks shows how much their religion really applies in daily life. In South Africa apartheid by the Christian government shows the veneration of religion as practised there.

"Why didn't Our Lady call for the conversion, say, of her own race, or the Arabs, or Hindus, or Protestants or Buddhists? All of them, according to our Catholic religion, are 'heretics' in their particular way".

It is unlikely that Miss Smoker's rationalism or Mrs Wheeldon's bucket of cold holy water will deter the Fatima cultists. For there is no fool like a pious fool.

BOOKS

WILLIAM MORRIS by Jack Lindsay. Constable, £7.50.

Of all the artists and writers who contributed to the Pre-Raphaelite movement, William Morris remains the most contemporary and relevant. More even than Swinburne, whose poetry (unjustly) is little remembered although it was the first to break fiercely the Victorian moral fetters, Morris' revolutionary work in design, battle against erosions of art and the environment, and inexhaustible lecturing in the cause of working man's socialism, can all be seen as a continuing part of our attitudes today. Like Swinburne, with whom he had little in common, and Marx, with whom he had a good deal, Morris came to reject religion as an opium of the people, diverting them from a very necessary improvement of their lot here and now on earth. Religion was the weapon of capitalism in his day. The Industrial Revolution, still capable of romantic hopes in the previous century, had enveloped the land in smoke and slum and led to an exploitation of the worker as little more than a robot, performing meaningless motions at a machine.

The Pre-Raphaelite revolt at the end of the 1840s had begun as an artistic revolt, bringing a new transparency and brilliancy of colour, and a cult of nature, into the drab and dark portraiture of the stultifying Royal Academy scene. It was not, however, static, but continually developing. Each new recruit brought in a new creative impulse, until it ranged from painting to poetry, from textile, carpet and wallpaper design to Icelandic saga, from stained-glass windows to the exquisite book productions of the Kelmscott Press, from fantastic romance of the future to Marxist socialism.

Morris' versatile genius and inexhaustible vitality were responsible for a great deal of this; and John Ruskin, the critic who had first encouraged the movement, had his own share in the socialist vision, which by-passed Rossetti (the prophet of "Art for Art's Sake") but enormously influenced Morris. But Ruskin, like Carlyle, was a limited socialist: Christian in morality, paternalistic in attitude. For Morris, they were initial inspirations only. A rich man by birth, knowing little of the Chartists and nothing of Thomas Paine, he had a total feeling of identity with all men and no sense of class. For him it was a sudden leap from Ruskinian socialism to Karl Marx. For all his feeling for medieval beauty, and the craftsman's needs, he was a hard-headed revolutionist in politics, and he remained so to the end.

For Morris there was no compromise; and when working men and socialists began to aim to move into Parliament he could not follow. The whole system, he believed, must be changed, "till people can at last rub out from their dictionaries altogether

FREETHINKER

these dreadful words rich and poor". Yet he aroused extraordinary devotion; there was something child-like in his personality, as Yeats noticed, in spite of his violent sudden rages that were, according to Shaw, epileptic in character, and followed by sunny calm. His influence on Shaw can be seen in many of Shaw's works (even Hesion, in *Heartbreak House*, saying her hair is so strong that her children could swing on it, is an echo of Morris, whose children did just that on his own curly mop).

Jack Lindsay's is the third major biography of Morris in the last 20 years. Like E. P. Thompson (*William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, 1955) he is highly sympathetic to Morris' socialism and indeed expands on his Marxist principles and political activities at great length. He claims, moreover, against some evidence of Morris' socialist friends, that Morris fully developed and understood Marxist theory. It is a very necessary part of the whole picture, but I find the book less understanding of the Pre-Raphaelite scene than Philip Henderson's superbly illustrated biography of 1967. The entanglement of the friends' lives and work included Rossetti's love for Morris' wife Janey, model to them both, and Morris' situation became a tragic one even though quite clearly he believed in the freedom of the individual within marriage. The stresses, strains and gay fellowship of the Pre-Raphaelites do not emerge with much vivacity in this book; Mr Lindsay is grossly unfair to Lizzie Siddal, whom he amazingly describes as "coarse", and to some extent to Rossetti's complex personality. (He is wrong, as Morris was jealously wrong, about Rossetti's essential humility; no artist was more aware of his own technical defects.) Nor, I think, is he fully justified in assuming Morris' love for Georgiana Burne-Jones: he certainly very much underrates his deep and passionately loyal friendship for her husband, of which the young Shaw himself was fully aware. He does not note Morris' influence on Shaw's work, or Shaw's idolization of Morris in spite of their socialistic differences; nor does he mention Shaw's long letter to Morris when touring Italy with the Art Workers Guild.

Henderson's was a warmer evocation of the whole Pre-Raphaelite movement and the varied characters within it, but Lindsay's is a long and most valuable contribution to Morris literature, by far the most detailed on the political side. It studies Morris' writing and does not, as so often, distort his attitude to the uses of machinery in manufac-

REVIEWS

ture, quoting Morris' own words, which in fact echo Ruskin: "As to the machines, the reasonable thing to say of them is that they are like fire, bad masters, good servants." His aim was the raising of the quality of life in all directions, in art, environment and economics, envisaging "an Art made by the people and for the people as a joy to the maker and the user".

It is a merit of Lindsay's book that he shows Morris in moments of disillusionment, his vast strength and optimism sagging under the realisation that many workers themselves had no urge to change their lot, or widen their artistic comprehension. "It is sad", wrote Ned Burne-Jones, "to see his enormous vitality diminishing". Morris, in fact, was dying; his last lecture was to the Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising. What would he have thought of our concrete jungles and modern advertising media?

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

DID JESUS EXIST?, by G. A. Wells. Elek/Pemberton £5.80.

The quest for an historical personage to equate with the mythical saviour-god Jesus seems to have become something of a perennial intellectual pursuit in certain academic circles. As one for whom the question was settled long ago by comparison with other messianic cults, and particularly by the works of Robertson, Moncure Conway, Massey and others in this field, I still find this preoccupation extremely fascinating.

In his new book, which is in effect a sequel to his *Jesus of the Early Christians*, Professor Wells retraces many familiar paths with scholarly precision, yet still succeeds in making fresh discoveries. The section devoted to critical examination of the gospels and the epistles of Paul as source material for the existence of Jesus are painstakingly detailed (with excellent notes at the end of each chapter) yet are surprisingly clear and lucid. Any doubting freethinker who still has an hankering after a real Jesus, either as a political rebel (a concept Professor Wells effectively demolishes in chapter seven) or as a "good" man, will find nothing to support these ideas in the vague and mutually contradicting figure portrayed by the alleged authors of the New Testament books.

It is only when Wells gives dates for the writing of the gospels and epistles that I find myself a little unhappy. Like others, he quotes extensively from Mark, Matthew, etc., ascribing dates of the late first and early second centuries. But is this connection necessarily valid? Has Professor Wells fallen into the error of Christian apologists that the earliest version of Mark we possess is identical with the one written by someone between 70 and 135 AD? (p.84). All that we have are copies of copies, and sometimes copies of translations of copies. Every Christian document that we possess was not written until Christianity had established itself as a going concern, and moreover, written by monks who had a vested interest in "proving" that the gospels were a contemporary record of a living person. In a very real sense the oldest records of Christianity are the undeniably original "Logia" contained in the Oxyrhynchus papyri, the Gospel of Thomas, (discovered in 1945), and the Dead Sea Scrolls, none of which are of any help in a Jesus manhunt. One cannot escape the feeling that this would be to accept at face value the tradition that the original compilers of the books of the New Testament, whoever they were, wrote exactly what we find in carefully edited and vetted versions written some centuries later by believers in an already established institution.

The author is on firmer ground when he demolishes the validity of the "evidence" of Jewish and Roman writers. That the famous passage in Josephus is an interpolation has long been accepted even by many Christians, but the accounts by Tacitus and those in the Talmud are subjected to scrutiny and shown to be equally unreliable. On the other hand, the silence of contemporary pagan writers who had much to say on other matters, but completely ignore such world-shattering events as the life and achievements of this miracle-worker (to say nothing of the crucifixion and resurrection), is often attributed by Christians to their opponents' inability to deny the truth of the new religion. On this, Wells aptly says: *Today Christianity has been so important for so long that one is apt to assume that it must have appeared important to educated pagans who lived AD 50-150; and that if they fail to discuss Jesus' historicity or the pretensions of his worshippers, their silence must be attributed to their consciousness that they were unable to deny the truth of the Christian case. In fact, however, there is no reason why the pagan writers of this period should have thought Christianity any more important than other enthusiastic religions of the Empire . . . Because Christianity so long remained insignificant, except among the lower classes, its major pagan critics—Lucian (d. ca. 200), Celsus, Porphyry (d. 303) and the Emperor Julian (d. 363)—all wrote long after the gospels had become established, and gathered from these gospels that Jesus was a teacher and wonder-worker of a kind per-*

fectly familiar to them. As they could thus assign him to a familiar category, they had no reason to doubt his historicity. Porphyry seems to have been close to the standpoint of those modern writers who hold that, although Jesus existed, we can know nothing of him; from the contradictions between the gospel passion narratives he infers that the evangelists are in general unreliable, and he calls them 'inventors, not narrators' of events". (p.15.)

One of the best chapters in the book deals with Jesus the political rebel, and effectively exposes the fallacies of that viewpoint. As Wells points out, this theory was put forward largely by Christian writers to explain the crucifixion and the non-return of Jesus to inaugurate the millennium. There was no leadership of a revolt of Jews against Roman rule, and as he concludes (p.176): "So instead of the Pauline co-agent of all creation, or the liberal who 'went about doing good', we now have the radical patriot who staged his 'demo.'" Truly, Jesus has become all things to all believers.

How then does the myth come to be accepted by so many people as a factual record of historical events? This has long been a problem and fresh light is shed in the final chapters. To a large extent irrational beliefs arise from man's capacity for keeping his thinking in watertight compartments; he will solve practical problems of living without any tendency to romanticise them, because experience can correct belief. Yet when the belief concerns a remote past or a future existence, with no guide-lines, we find another set of ideas not subject to modification by experience, but which give comfort and satisfy emotional needs.

A well-written fully documented book, with copious notes and references, *Did Jesus Exist?*, although primarily intended for the scholar and student, can nevertheless be enthusiastically recommended to the ordinary reader, and is a must for every secularist, anxious to acquire further insight into the myth-making capacities of the human mind.

JAMES M. ALEXANDER

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OBITUARIES

J. W. KNOWLES

John William Knowles, who has died at the age of 69, was a staunch supporter of *The Freethinker* for many years. There was a secular committal ceremony at the City of London Crematorium on 9 September.

H. E. FOLLETT

Herbert Edwin Follett, a freethinker and reader of this journal all his adult life, died recently after a long illness. He was 71. There was a secular committal ceremony at the Breakspear Crematorium, Ruislip, on 16 September.

MRS J. E. LEVENSON

Julia Emma Levenson, who died recently at the age of 89, was a woman of great courage and resourcefulness. During the Second World War she was in Amsterdam and helped to arrange the escape of Jews and victims of Nazi oppression. She is survived by her husband and two sons. Friends and members of the family attended the secular committal ceremony at Manor Park Crematorium, London on 17 September.

MRS M. KEW

The sudden death of Marjorie Kew at her home in London deeply saddened her many friends in the humanist movement. She had been actively involved in the work of humanist organisations since 1938 and at the time of her death was chairman of Humanist Holidays and a committee member of the Humanist Housing Association and Central London Humanist Group. Mrs Kew had been a widow for several years.

H. J. Blackham conducted the secular committal ceremony at Golders Green Crematorium at which representatives of all branches of the movement were represented.

The Scottish Reformation

none of Knox's supporters were merchants; all were nobles or clerics. I have found only one reference to the merchant class in the politics of this period. And that was when some of them tried to rescue Mary, Queen of Scots—the focus of Catholic hopes in Scotland—after her defeat at Carberry Hill.

The Scottish Reformation can hardly give much encouragement to those who believe in organised religion. The overthrown Church was corrupt; the victorious Church was intolerant.

A Critical Note on Christian Art

PAUL VON BLUM

Much of the major art of European culture is Christian in content. Freethinkers appreciate the beauty of works by Leonardo de Vinci or Michaelangelo as much as anyone, whether their subjects be "The Last Supper" or "Madonna and Child". Paul Von Blum, a lecturer at Berkeley, California, discusses rationalist attitudes towards Christian art.

Christian art has been traditionally viewed by art historians and others as among the finest products of human imagination and creative expression. Indeed, the Christian tradition in the visual arts has been properly regarded as a major contribution to Western culture. Undeniably, many of the great masters of art have devoted substantial attention to topics of vital Christian importance. The very eminence of these artists, however, makes it enormously difficult to criticise the whole concept of Christian art.

A critical perspective on that strain of art implies both a general objection to Christianity *per se* and the elevation of content as a paramount priority of artistic criticism. It is surely unnecessary here to reiterate the traditional critiques of Christianity. The writings of such diverse men of letters as Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Russell and Mencken have revealed the many facets of Christian irrationality. Although these views remain highly controversial, it is neither original nor idiosyncratic to conclude that Christianity is intellectually absurd, psychologically infantile and politically irresponsible.

What is startling, however, is that large numbers of people who share that viewpoint are nevertheless highly sympathetic to Christian art. What is so evident an intellectual contradiction appears in certain instances to be accepted with almost casual indifference. Presumably, the entire consideration of artistic content is ignored, and the aesthetic judgment and emotional satisfaction are predicated on formal criteria alone. It would be ludicrous, of course, to suggest that the artistic products of such masters as Michaelangelo, Rubens, Rembrandt, and scores of other luminaries were defective in form and structure. The contrary is so obviously true that it is frivolous to criticise the finest Christian art on these and related grounds.

The issue, however, is whether artistic form should be separated from artistic content. If such a separation is an intellectually legitimate exercise, it is perfectly reasonable, if not compelling, to retain a considerable sympathy for Christian art even

in the absence of a concomitant sympathy for Christian doctrine and practice. That separation, however, is highly dubious, for it avoids a primary purpose of artistic expression: the communication of thoughts, ideas, sentiments and feelings.

Christian artists throughout the ages have had specific objectives and intentions as they created their murals, paintings, graphic work and sculpture. Few were interested solely in abstract problems of line, form and colour. Rather, they sought to express in artistic form their sincerely held beliefs about various aspects of religious consciousness. For most, their art was deliberately rhetorical. The best among them performed this role with consummate skill and with extraordinary passion. To ignore so central a thrust of Christian art is both an injustice to the artists themselves and a deplorable exercise in intellectual fragmentation.

Universal Issues

The artificial separation of form from content had regrettable consequences beyond the realm of traditional religious art. The example of Goya's justly famous masterpiece *Third of May, 1808* sheds additional light on the controversy under discussion. In that work, the artist used the background of the Napoleonic occupation of Spain in order to comment in paint about such universal issues as war, suffering and responsibility for human atrocities. Goya's fervent humanism, expressed with requisite technical skill, has properly made this one of the greatest works of art in Western history. Curiously, however, some art historians and critics ignore the obvious social commentary of the painting and confine their analysis to matters of form and structure. The effect is to negate the more significant communicative function of this powerful work of art.

The absurdity of that result is rivalled by a similar consideration of paintings of Adam and Eve or the resurrection of Christ. Regardless of how superbly constructed or artistically advanced such works might be, their content cannot be ignored with impunity. A major difference between the *Third of May* and thousands of Christian works is that the former is rational and the latter are not. To refuse to make this kind of judgment as somehow beyond the province of artistic criticism is only a rationalization of intellectual irresponsibility. It is surely no more inappropriate to criticise some Christian art on the grounds of its irrationality than it is to criticise most socialist realist art on the grounds of its banality. Intellectual rigour requires that both these judgments be made.

American Scientists Speak Out Against "Astrological Charlatans"

Eighteen Nobel Prizewinners are among the 186 American scientists who have issued a statement "to caution the public against the unquestioning acceptance of the predictions and advice given privately and publicly by astrologers". Those individuals who continue to have faith in astrology do so in spite of the fact that there is no verifiable scientific basis for their belief.

The astronomers, astrophysicists and scientists in other fields who have signed the statement say that in ancient times people believed in the predictions and advice of astrologers because astrology was part and parcel of their magical world view. They looked upon celestial objects as abodes or omens of the gods, and thus intimately connected with events here on earth; they had no concept of the vast distances from the earth to the planets and stars. Now that these distances can and have been calculated, we can see how infinitesimally small are the gravitational and other effects produced by the distant planets and the far more distant stars. It

is simply a mistake to imagine that the forces exerted by stars and planets at the moment of birth can in any way shape our futures. Neither is it true that the position of distant heavenly bodies make certain days or periods more favourable to particular kinds of action, or that the sign under which one was born determines one's compatibility or incompatibility with other people.

Why do people believe in astrology? In these uncertain times many long for the comfort of having guidance in making decisions. They would like to believe in a destiny predetermined by astral forces beyond their control. However, we must all face the world, and we must realise that our futures lie in ourselves, and not in the stars. We would imagine, in this day of widespread enlightenment and education, that it would be unnecessary to debunk beliefs based on magic and superstition. Yet acceptance of astrology pervades modern society.

Challenge the Charlatans

The scientists say they are particularly disturbed "by the continued uncritical dissemination of astrological charts, forecasts and horoscopes by the media and by otherwise reputable newspapers, magazines and book publishers. This can only contribute to the growth of irrationalism and obscurantism. We believe that the time has come to challenge directly and forcefully the pretentious claims of astrological charlatans".

Professor B. J. Bok, a former president of the American Astronomical Society, has criticised his colleagues for refusing to speak out on this issue. He says: "Twice I suggested to my friends on the Council of the American Astronomical Society that the Council issue a statement pointing out that there is no scientific foundation for astrological beliefs. Both times I was turned down, the principal argument being that it is below the dignity of a professional society to recognise that astrological beliefs are prevalent today. To me it seems socially and morally inexcusable for the Society not to have taken a firm stand. Astronomers as a group have obviously not provided the guidance that the public sorely needs."

Sterilisation: Medical and Moral Aspects

Society has steadily shifted its grounds in these matters, and the medical profession has had to change its views to keep in line. Millions of men have in recent years, been sterilised voluntarily, and millions of women have also been sterilised—some voluntarily, but many on the decision of the surgeon who has removed womb and ovaries because he found something he thought would be harmful if left in place. How many times this has happened to a woman under an anaesthetic, and thus unable to give her consent, no one can count.

Of course, medical men must be in a position that enables them to make such decisions. But they should be able to do so on purely medical and scientific grounds. One of the greatest aids to such decision-making in medicine is for the doctor to be free from all economic compulsion—neither having to consider his patient's economic position nor his own. Stories and statistics from the USA suggest that, in that free-enterprise system, many women have been sterilised by the removal of a womb which has then been found to be normal, but which carried a high surgical price tag. It is the ethical pride of a health service free of charge at the time of use, as in Britain, that medical decisions are uninfluenced by money; and in questions of sterilisation we need both that freedom and also freedom from religious dogma based on antique edicts made by ignorant and non-medical celibates.

"Some Essential Information: Facts for Poems", by Oswell Blakeston; Kaleidoscope, 15 Lindfield Gardens, London NW3, price 15p. This is a witty little collection of doomy ideas for poetry, most suitable for the gothique kind, and in themselves making up a long macabre poem.

The "Religion" of Durkheim

NICOLAS WALTER

Religious humanism, that curious contradiction in terms, was once again defended by Peter Cadogan in a letter to the August issue of "The Freethinker". He challenged the contention of Christopher Morey in an earlier article, "Magnum Mysterium: the Case Against Religious Humanism", that "there is an intellectual chasm separating religionists and humanists" and commended Durkheim's ideas of the sacred and profane in society. The woolly hinterland of "mystery" established between the fuzziest edges of humanism and religion needs to be rigorously exposed.

Peter Cadogan says in the course of his continuing argument for religious humanism: "Quite why humanists have ignored Durkheim and Cassirer and others who have changed the face of this subject in our time I don't know." I don't know about Cassirer and the others, but I do know about Durkheim, and I think there is good reason not necessarily to ignore his view of religion but certainly to treat it with some scepticism.

For a start, Durkheim's work on religion was done not "in our time" but in his—that is, during the 30 years before his death in 1917—and a great deal has happened since then. Anyway, his theory of "that division of things into the sacred and the profane that is the foundation of all religions" is only an empirical hypothesis and not a revealed truth. It was strongly attacked at the time and has been strongly attacked ever since by anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and theologians. It was part of a general dichotomy which he postulated between the social and the individual, and also part of a wider dualism which dominated his thought (and which may be seen as a continuation of the dualist tradition in French thought running from Cartesianism in the seventeenth century to Structuralism in the twentieth century).

Durkheim's theory of the sacred meant not that some things really are sacred but that society makes some things sacred: "Sacred things are simply collective ideals which have fixed themselves on material objects . . . They are made up of the ideas and sentiments awakened in us by the spectacle of society, and not of sensations coming from the physical world." This is a polite, obscure way of saying that religion is not factually true but becomes socially true; the sacred is what the dominant class says is sacred. Durkheim supported this theory with masses of evidence about the primitive practices of the Australian aborigines (taken entirely from books—he never went to Australia or spoke to a single aboriginal) in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912). This book,

which has become one of Peter Cadogan's holy scriptures, is certainly an impressive *tour de force*, but it should not be uncritically accepted when it has in fact been subjected to serious criticism ever since it appeared by people who knew far more than Durkheim about Australian aborigines on the one hand and about religious practices on the other. Moreover, his basic theory about the division of the sacred and the profane has been refuted by dozens of examples of systems of belief in which the sacred and the profane are not mutually exclusive (some things are both) or are not universal (some things are neither).

Turning from primitive to modern society, Durkheim said that the "collective representations" which used to take the form of traditional religion should take the form of social morality and almost of state worship under the guidance of professional sociologists. He advanced a collective cult of individualism which was a perfect example of bourgeois ideology, advocated a rational religious sentiment which was at the same time a scientific secularism, and generally attempted to have the best of both worlds in a way which explains why Peter Cadogan likes it so much. But there are two strong objections to the Durkheimian position.

An Opponent of the Church

The first objection is that he didn't believe it himself. He was brought up in the orthodox Jewish community of Alsace-Lorraine (like Marx, he came from a family of rabbis), but at university he abandoned not only Judaism but all religion. He took a completely rationalist approach to all issues and wanted a completely secular society. He saw religion, like socialism, as an expression of emotion rather than as an interpretation of reality. He was a prominent member of the anti-clerical intelligentsia which became so prominent in the French Third Republic, a leading Dreyfusard, a founder of a university society called "Lay Youth" in which he attacked religion and praised science, an advocate of the complete separation of Church and State, a professor who called the Christian Church a "monstrosity", an intellectual who insisted on complete freedom of thought and speech.

In a discussion of philosophical labels Durkheim rejected all but one: "The only one we accept is that of *rationalist*." He argued for the validity of all religions in general but against the validity of any religion in particular, and he allowed no religious feeling in his personal life. When his only son was killed in the First World War, he said in his grief: "Nothing resembling ritual practices has been of use to me or seems effective to me."

(Continued on back page)

The second objection to the Durkheimian position is that there is no reason why we should believe it either. Even if all previous societies have been religious, that doesn't mean we must be; even if all previous societies have set some things apart as sacred, holy, beyond criticism, etc., that doesn't mean we must do so. Surely to a rational person something is sacred not because someone else says it is but because it is so to him (or her); surely religious or irreligious belief is in the end a matter not of social but of individual thought. To paraphrase John Stuart Mill, if all mankind minus one are of one opinion, that doesn't mean mankind is right and the one man is wrong. We should take account of what Durkheim wanted advanced industrial society to be like—and take warning from it. He advocated a technocratic corporate state, based on an authoritarian, hierarchical society, run by an elite of experts and a system of compulsory education. What was to be sacred was humanity in general and the community in particular; in practice Durkheim enthusiastically supported the French effort in the First World War and emotionally attacked "the German mentality". He was what is now known as a social democrat, for whom humanism is a sentimental attachment to the status quo, made more efficient and comfortable but fundamentally unchangeable and beyond criticism.

Humanism Without Religion

If that is what Peter Cadogan really wants, he's welcome to it. For me, if "religion and humanism will eventually turn out to be the same thing", so much the worse for humanism. My humanism is a rationalist, secularist, libertarian belief in the value of human reason in all areas of inquiry, of human life in this world, and of human freedom in a society of equals; it has nothing to do with sacredness and is not itself sacred, it has nothing to do with religion and is not itself religious, and it sets out not to bind people together but to set them free.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Brunswick House, 11 Brunswick Square, Hove. Sunday, 2 November, 5.30 p.m. Norman Garlick: "Bloody Students".

Havering Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, Tuesday, 7 October, 8 p.m. Michael Duane: "The Biological Basis of Love".

Leicester Secular Society. The Secular Hall 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Sunday meetings at 6.30 p.m. 12 October, Eric Lloyd: "Bernard Shaw—Some Plays Analysed". 19 October, Professor G. A. Wells: "Miracles and the Nature of Truth". 26 October, Audrey Williamson: "William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites". 2 November, Richard Clements: "The Changing Face of Europe". 9 November, Ron McLaughlin: "The Campaign for Industrial Democracy".

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, 30 October, 8 p.m. F. H. Amphlett Micklewright: "The Decline of Protestantism—a Fresh Look at Ulster".

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 Young Humanists. 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8. Sunday, 19 October, 7.30 p.m. Father J. C. Neil-Smith: "Exorcism—Evil Forces, Scientific or Spiritual?"

Merseyside Humanist Group. Lecture Room, 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Meetings held on the third Wednesday of the Month, 7.45 p.m.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday meetings at 11 a.m. 12 October, Audrey Williamson: "Thomas Paine and the Age of Reason". 19 October, Harold Blackham: "The Gap Between Theory and Practice". 26 October, David McLellan: "The Humanism of Karl Marx". Tuesday evening discussions at 7 p.m. Theme for October: "Science and Social Responsibility".

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 12 November, 8 p.m. Jim Herrick: "Oriental and Other Cults".

Worthing Humanist Group. Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing. Sunday, 28 September, 5.30 p.m. Pat Sloan: "The Origin of the Idea of God".

THE FREETHINKER

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