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VIOLENCE IN BIBLE COMIC ATTACKED BY FESTIVAL OF LIGHT

Raymond Johnston, Director of the Nationwide Festival of Light, has complained about the publication of a comic strip version of bible stories. "Samson the Mighty" is one of two comics published by the Bible Society and Mr Johnston especially objects to a picture of Samson showing one empty burned-out eye socket while a red-hot stake is being plunged into the other. The Bible Society say they have had no other complaints and do not intend to alter the publication.

Samson the Mighty is one of two comic strips in what is planned as a series of bible stories. The other one available so far is stories which Jesus told, given the title *Surprising Stories* (!). The comics are based on strips drawn by a 70-year-old French priest, Fr Pierre Thivollier, and have been given a text from the *Good News Bible* translation.

The book aims to reach teenagers who never read anything but comics, but is also said to be suitable for eight- to nine-year-olds. A spokeswoman from the Bible Society said they hoped to get the gospel message across to youngsters who were not academic and came from a background without a Christian education. Fifty thousand copies of the comic have been printed and it will cost 45p.

Mr Johnston, who is a subscriber to the Bible Society and has recently published a book about the family in society, said: "The putting out of Samson's eyes is depicted with a horrifying explicitness which is totally unnecessary." The NFOL aims to purvey a Christian message and to clean up Britain from immorality and unbelief. It has consistently argued in favour of censorship, but never (so far as we know) previously sought curtailment of depiction of biblical incidents. Mr Johnston has suggested that the comic could break the law and contravene the 1955 Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publi-

cations) Act which was designed to suppress horror comics.

Freethinkers will not be surprised to learn that depiction of bible stories could come into the category of horror comics. As far back as 1888 G. W. Foote, the founder of *The Freethinker*, in his introduction to *The Bible Handbook* referred to the Bible's "self-contradictions, its immoralities, its indecencies and its brutalities".

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, has called the NFOL's complaint hypocritical. She said that while she does not herself like the vivid presentation of violent incidents to youngsters, "It is hypocritical to pretend that the book on which you claim to base your faith does not contain much violence and unpleasantness." She said: "You can't have it both ways. If you want to preach the Bible it's dishonest to expurgate the bits you don't like."

The Bible Society admitted that the Bible contained violence and said it could not be just ignored. They felt readers would not be disturbed by the picture of Samson. A spokeswoman pointed out that there were benefits in telling the tale of Samson to children: "It shows what violence happens when people turn away from God". (When will the comic strip version of hell-fire and brimstone appear?)

Freethinkers have for nearly two centuries stressed the unsuitability of the Bible as a basis for civilisation. The history of those who have rejected the Christian faith, from Voltaire and Thomas Paine onwards, shows that frequently a close study of the Bible itself has led to an abhorrence of the Christian religion. It is a fact that the Bible, amidst material that is of fascination to students of history, literature and legend, there is much that is nasty

(continued over)

and brutish.

Those who manage to convince themselves that the Bible is the word of God have to face up to the atrocities and obscenities which it includes. *The Bible Handbook*, listing biblical absurdities, is still one of the National Secular Society's best sellers. The brutalities of the Old Testament are legion. They include—God's plan to drown all the creatures in the world, except for Noah's family and selected animal samples; divine incitement to human sacrifice; plagues of frogs, lice, flies and so on inflicted on the Egyptian people (apparently after God had hardened Pharaoh's heart to make sure that this havoc could be wrought); and holy massacres on a scale which would make the barbaric assault on human rights of the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran seem trifling. If future comic strips include pictures of God sending fiery serpents among the people (Numbers xxi 5, 6) children may be given nightmares by reading the Bible Society's publications.

It is fascinating to speculate on the course of history if Christians had not chosen to include the Old Testament among their divine works. But it is

not just the Old Testament that includes horrors. The New Testament version of gentle Jesus meek and mild sometimes given to children is very partial. Jesus gives instruction to hate one's father, mother, wife, children, and brethren and sister to potential followers (Luke xiv. 26). Perhaps this should be the text for the Nationwide Festival of Light, with its emphasis on Christian family life. Jesus also put forward the obnoxious suggestion of idealised cannibalism at the last supper (a suggestion which churches remind their followers about at every communion service).

If Mr Johnston really believes the Bible is divinely inspired, he has a lot to swallow. And he is in something of a dilemma if he wishes to protect children from violence and teach them the Christian faith from the Bible. Perhaps his next step in protecting children from ugly sights should be to launch a campaign to ban public representation of crucifixion (often with hands nailed to a cross and blood dripping from a crown of thorns). Freethinkers, if they were not so committed to freedom of expression, might even support such a campaign.

Materialism and Evolution: A Reply

HARE KRISHNA DAS

A report in the July "Freethinker" attempted to give an account of the arguments in a public debate between Hare Krishna Das and Barbara Smoker. Hare Krishna Das felt that his arguments were not adequately covered and here expounds his views on materialism and evolution. He emphasises that he enjoys discussion of arguments and is willing to continue to do so with anyone.

It is interesting to see how the validity or logic of philosophical arguments is sometimes not perceived, due to the inability of the other party to sincerely examine the nature of the argument. This was also pointed out by Bertrand Russell, who said that in order to understand certain philosophical points one must be able to enter into the thought patterns of the propounder of these points, and then either accept or reject them on the basis of logic. I certainly agree with Mr Herrick, that intellectual victory does not depend on vocal power, but on the validity of observations and the logic derived thereof. In this light I would like to present some of the arguments of Vedic theism, which were in my opinion not fully covered by Mr Herrick's account of the debate.

Vedic theism does not believe in Cartesian dualism, since such absolute separation between matter and

spirit is unrealistic. No substance can be absolutely different from another substance, since this would not allow any interaction between them. Hydrogen is definitely different from oxygen in many ways, but at the same time they can interact through chemical reactions. Although matter and spirit are both different, at the same time they are both real substances and are capable of interacting. Spirit should not be thought of as some weird invisible mystical energy, but as possessing the same substantial nature as material atoms. Even matter, e.g. in the form of electricity, may appear mysterious due to its subtle nature, and scientists will readily admit that they cannot fully comprehend the nature of electricity. Spirit is far more subtle than even electricity and sub-atomic particles and its subtle nature will not easily allow empirical investigation. The point is that all the qualities found in material compounds such as colour, touch, smell, form, are also present within the atomic elements in the periodic table. The apparent creation of new qualities within molecules and compounds are simply the result of the limitation of our sense organs. When hydrogen and oxygen, both gases, combine to form a liquid, the only real difference that has occurred is a higher density of atoms, resulting in a higher degree of contact be-

(continued on page 143)

Non-Religious Funeral Ceremonies

Although many secular humanists are aware of the possibility of holding a non-religious funeral ceremony, many are unclear how to go about this. Non-religious people who have never become committed to a humanist outlook often feel it would be hypocritical to hold a religious ceremony and yet—unaware of any alternative—at a time of emotional vulnerability accept the line of least resistance and uneasily allow the rota priest to conduct a routine ceremony. Some important aspects of arranging a funeral ceremony are explained here.

The National Secular Society can usually help with providing an officiant for a secular funeral ceremony when requested. (Other humanist organisations are also able to help.) If you wish to arrange a non-religious funeral ceremony for a close relative or friend, or indeed if there is a need to make it clear to your own relatives and friends that that is your wish when your life comes to its natural end, the following information may be of use.

The chief benefit is that for a non-believer it involves no dishonesty or sham. A funeral is for the benefit of the living, the mourners, not the dead individual to whom it will no longer be of significance. But it is the memory and outlook of the dead person that will be commemorated at a secular funeral, and where that person was known to have had no religious views, or to have held strongly non-religious convictions, relatives and friends will wish to honour and respect that part of the individual's outlook. To go through the routine of a religious ritual in memory of a non-believer is a hypocrisy which ill befits an occasion marking the end of a completed life.

Many strong non-believers fear that words which could have had no meaning to them will be mumbled over their coffin, and it is a comfort to them in their later years to know that this need not happen. In a secular age, many who have never consciously adopted a humanist position, but have never actively participated in a religion, feel uneasy at the prospect of a religious ceremony, and it can be an agreeable surprise to find that there is a dignified alternative.

The second considerable advantage of a non-religious funeral is its flexibility. It can be tailor-made to suit the wishes of the deceased and the mourners. The formality or informality, the extent to which quotations or music are used, the style in which the life and character of the deceased are delineated—all can vary according to the particular occasion. There is a general pattern which is often followed (which will be described) but there can also be great variety according to the wishes of

those involved. Any officiant would discuss in some detail with the family of the deceased the kind of approach which is wanted.

A non-religious funeral, whatever the style, would be an acceptable ceremony if attended (as is likely) by a mixture of believers and non-believers. Nothing would be said that would offend the views of those mourners who are religious, although it might be stated that the dead person had belonged to secularist groups or held firmly to a non-religious position. In fact, officiants frequently find that committed religious attenders come up afterwards and comment that they would not have believed that a non-religious ceremony could have been so dignified or moving.

Is it necessary to hold a funeral ceremony at all?

No. It is not common knowledge, but there is no obligation to hold any ceremony. Undertakers may be asked to remove the body for cremation without any ceremony, the only legal necessity being certification of death and proper disposal of the body. In some cases people wish to leave their body for medical research. They should then write for further details to Her Majesty's Inspector of Anatomy, Room 721, Department of Health and Social Security, Russell Square House, 14 Russell Square, London WC1.

However, it is worth bearing in mind the psychological value of holding a funeral ceremony, even of the simplest kind. It is an occasion on which those deeply grieved may share their feelings, and sharing of feelings can be of great relief especially at times of emotional shock. It is also sometimes an opportunity for acquaintances and colleagues who will feel a gap in their lives, great or small, to measure and come to terms with their feelings about loss and death in relation to someone they respected. Above all, it is an occasion when the finality of death has to be faced — an important part of mourning, and, according to psychologists, a necessary process in eventually re-establishing and continuing life after bereavement.

An alternative to a funeral ceremony, which is sometimes favoured, is a memorial meeting at which relatives and friends meet in a public hall or private home and, perhaps led by someone experienced in speaking in public, proffer recollections, tributes, and those small memories which can be so significant. (In Holland it is a common practice for members at a funeral to stand and say something about the deceased as they knew him or her.)

What arrangements are made for a non-religious funeral ceremony?

If you are clear this is what you want after your death make sure that one or two relatives or close

friends know. It is not enough to write it into your will, which may not be read until after the funeral has been arranged.

When arranging a non-religious funeral contact an officiant as soon as possible so that there is adequate time to work out all the details. Every effort will be made by the National Secular Society (or other humanist organisations) to find an officiant, but this is not invariably possible (and can be more difficult in areas distant from the main cities). In this case (and also sometimes by preference) an acquaintance can often be persuaded to undertake the ceremony. He or she would be likely to have had a little experience of speaking in public and should perhaps not be someone too deeply involved in the emotional grief of the bereavement. The NSS is pleased to offer advice to someone performing a funeral for the first time.

The officiant will liaise with the undertakers and the crematorium (most people who want a non-religious ceremony prefer cremation, but burial is a possibility). He or she will check that the crematorium know that the services of a priest are not required, that any religious symbols are removed or covered, and organise music, which may be played by an organist or on tape according to the provisions of the crematorium. The officiant will also discuss in detail with relatives the approach to the ceremony and the outline of the deceased's life.

Usually officiants will request a fee equivalent to that of a visiting priest and travelling expenses, but in some cases they will prefer to offer their services free and indicate that a donation would be appreciated.

What form will the ceremony take?

As has already been said, there is room for great variety and flexibility. In some cases there will be no more than a biographical picture of the dead person, a few quotations, a short period of silence and the committal. In other cases there will be arrangements for readings and music. The officiant will do his best to be sensitive to the wishes of all involved.

A common pattern is for a short meditation reflecting upon matters such as the brevity of life, the organic natural pattern which includes death, the fact that the memory of a loved one has not been lost. Then there may be a few quotations, perhaps from humanist writers such as Bertrand Russell or Lucretius. The main part will be a biographical portrait which tries to give a picture of the whole life, it need not be an eulogy, and is an attempt to give a rounded picture, difficulties and triumphs, pleasures and disappointments. Sometimes the aspirations and ideals of the person may be mentioned as an example to those who remain alive. After the committal the officiant often says something to the effect, "Now we return to live our own lives fully as he/she would have wished" and music, not necessarily

mournful, can be played while those present leave. Simplicity will be the keynote, and anything pompous or morbid will be avoided.

A passage appropriate to some funerals comes from Bertrand Russell's *Man on Himself*; a tape-recording of him reading the passage himself was played at the chief memorial meeting after his own death:

"An individual human existence should be like a river — small at first, narrowly confined within its banks, and rushing passionately past boulders and over water-falls.

"Gradually the river grows wider, the banks recede, the waters flow more quietly, and, in the end, without any visible break, they become merged in the sea, and painlessly lose their individual being.

"The man or woman who, in old age, can see his or her life in this way, will not suffer from the fear of death, since the things they care for will continue.

"And if, with the decay of vitality, weariness increases, the thought of rest will not be unwelcome."

Another quotation, which beautifully sums up the secularist attitude to life and death comes from the epitaph which Epicureans inscribed, more than 2,000 years ago, on many graves throughout the Roman Empire: "I WAS NOT — I HAVE BEEN — I AM NOT — I DO NOT MIND".

Further reading: "Humanist Funeral Ceremonies" published by the British Humanist Association.

OBITUARY

NELL MacQUEEN

Nell MacQueen, a longstanding freethinker, died on 17 July at the age of 70. She had, in the past, taken an active part in the old Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society. A private cremation without ceremony took place.

Suggestions from Christians (and some humanists) that religious education is now broadminded, liberal and unobjectionable are not borne out by the statements of Mr Ernie Shields, President of the Catholic Teachers' Federation. He said at a discussion about religious education that "we would all recognise that while varying opinions have been held, all have a common objective—the development of our children into fully integrated Christians". He also said that "the eternal truths of our faith" should not be allowed to be blown hither and thither in a way that prevented them from being firmly grasped by the children.

Freedom comes from human beings, rather than from laws and institutions.—Clarence Darrow.

Religion and Humanism—A Debate

A correspondence about humanism and religion has arisen in the columns of "The Freethinker" as a result of a report (April, 1979) of the impending legal battles of South Place Ethical Society, in which the extent to which SPES is a religious body is to be put to the test. Peter Cadogan argues that man is essentially religious—while others argue that a non-deistic concept of religion does not make sense. Here Peter Cadogan, General Secretary of South Place Ethical Society, and Nicolas Walter, Editor of "New Humanist", expound opposing views.

Dogs are interesting and Nicolas Walter (Letters, July) could be right. It may be that religion in embryo is apparent among dogs and also among whales and dolphins, i.e. among creatures that are naturally affectionate and capable of showing affection to those not of their own species. I wouldn't want to argue about that.

Can we, however, clear up the differences between the three uses, at least, of the word 'religion'? In my submission they are as follows:

1. Religion in the primordial sense as it emerges with *homo sapiens* over millions of years. Our only way of examining this problem is to study the cultures of hunter-gatherers before they were invaded by people like us. A standard work on this subject was written eighty years ago by Spencer and Gillen, dealing mainly with the Arunta tribe of Central Australia. Emile Durkheim then wrote a major work analysing the religious content of this and other studies.

I have been through both these substantial books and have also read Ernst Cassirer's wider philosophic study of the same subject. The conclusion seems plain enough. *Homo sapiens*, in his original hunter-gatherer state, established a coherent picture of his own world through a totemic system and its associate taboos. All things, animate and inanimate, have "in-dwelling spirits" that govern their motivation and roles. They are then correlated by myths and propitiated and appealed to by ritualised worship and sacrifice, i.e. by the giving of gifts.

Such people live their lives essentially in the spirit world and the material world is an expression of the spirit and not otherwise of any great consequence. This would seem to explain millions of years without material progress. There was no dualism of mind and matter. This primordial foundation appears to be common to all religions everywhere with vast variations of myth and detail.

2. Came civilisation based on agriculture, life in towns, division of labour, the professional military

and a hierarchy of priests. Society was divided for the first time into two classes, the privileged and the exploited, and the function of the army and church was to sustain that contradiction in face of endemic revolt from the enlightened and the under-dog.

It has been within the last few thousand years that the religions we now have, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaeo-Christianity and the Muslim faith were articulated. They have also been, on this view, transitional expressions of that divided society we call civilisation. They are all in trouble now and destined, substantially, to pass away. Their creative parts will survive.

3. Today, we are well into Religion Stage Three. The centralised, authoritarian, priestly religions are disintegrating from within. Even the Ayatollah is finding himself in trouble, as the Popes have done since Vatican II. As we lurch out of class society with its military foundations and male chauvinism, so religion escapes from the hands of the priests and its principal exponents become the prophets, artists and philosophers — my list in this country includes Thomas More, Shakespeare, Bacon, Swift, Paine, Blake, Godwin, Shelley, Conway, Morris, Geddes, Shaw and Lawrence.

The religious part of man is his spiritual aspect, his concern with the qualities and experiences of truth, love, goodness and beauty, and their social complements, justice, freedom and peace. It has no necessary connection with the supernatural.

An American professor, Don Marietta, has recently been studying the situation in England and, in an article for the *New Humanist*, writes as follows: "even though they are subject to misunderstanding, and we must make ourselves clear in the use of them, certain terms with a religious tone to them may be our best way to speak of our place in the world."

Amen!

PETER CADOGAN



Peter Cadogan's trick of pretending that man is by nature a religious animal, and that humanism must therefore be religious, cannot be sustained by any amount of philological or anthropological presti-

gitation.

We can make whatever individual interpretations we want of the word *religion*, but the ordinary meaning for people who use words to clarify rather than

confuse ideas is that given by the two main definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

Recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny, and as being entitled to obedience, reverence, and worship; the general mental and moral attitude resulting from this belief, with reference to its effect upon the individual or the community; personal or general acceptance of this feeling as a standard of spiritual and practical life.

Action or conduct indicating a belief in, reverence for, and desire to please, a divine ruling power; the exercise or practice of rights and observances implying this.

Using this as a practical test, we may reclaim half of Cadogan's new, improved list of gurus, since Paine, Godwin, Shelley, Morris, Geddes, and Shaw all rejected religion in the ordinary sense; so did Lawrence, but Cadogan is welcome to think with his blood if mental jogging appeals to him. We may identify religion with man's "spiritual aspect" though this doesn't really mean anything. But we shall not identify religion with "the qualities and experiences of truth, love, goodness and beauty, and their social complements, justice, freedom and peace"; religion has no necessary or sufficient connection with any of these things, and it is precisely in pursuit of them that people reject religion.

We can make whatever individual speculations we want about the origin and function of religion, but neither conjectural evidence about prehistoric society nor comparative evidence about primitive society is relevant to modern civilised society — except that all the kinds of religion revealed by such evidence have an essential connection with superstitious, supernatural, spiritualist ideas. The evidence is notoriously unreliable, and the works mentioned by Cadogan were severely criticised for half a century and are now completely superseded.

Politely ignoring Cadogan's mythical account of the past, present and future of mankind, we may emphasise two significant facts. One is that most people have always practised religion in the ordinary sense—together with many other unpleasant things we are trying to grow out of. The other is that in all societies at all periods some people have probably rejected religion in private, even if they conformed for the sake of a quiet life (or life itself); that two and a half millennia ago some people began to reject religion in public, in China and India, Greece and Rome; and that during the past half-millennium more and more people all over the world have not only rejected religion but have developed a non-religious system of belief and behaviour now known as humanism.

A less significant fact is that some people who reject traditional religion turn to a secular religion such as fascism or communism, and that others get stuck in an intermediate stage known as "rational religion" or "the religion of humanity" or "ethical

religion" or "religious humanism". Cadogan has tried both kinds of substitute religion, and he has the right to do so, but not to tell us that we should do so; on the contrary, we have the right to say that, far from being solutions to the problem, they are part of the problem and make it more difficult to solve.

Religion is a matter of irrational faith rather than "showing affection", and of meaning rather than "tone". (Incidentally, Don Marietta's article, which is in the next issue of the *New Humanism*, also says that "use of such terms, however, is not our only way to say these things.") The question whether humanism without faith in or worship of anything beyond ourselves can accurately or usefully be called religious cannot be answered by juggling with the word *religion*.
NICOLAS WALTER

WORLDWIDE

IRAN

Executions for crimes against God continue in Iran. The Ayatollah Khomeini has now said that music is the opium of youth and its broadcasting should be eliminated. He declared: "One of the things that still drugs the brain of youth is music." A 30-day ban on music was started to coincide with Moslem holy month of Ramadam.

INDIA

A six-month-old girl was sacrificed to propitiate the fertility gods according to a report from Delhi. A number of families said they received anonymous letters indicating that a human sacrifice was required before the almighty would bring a baby to the letter-writer. These were thought to be a hoax until they were linked with a baby's body which was later found in a pond.

Sacrifice of human lives is still quite common in rural India. According to a recent survey nearly a hundred people are sacrificed every year to propitiate the gods.

TOP ATHEISTS

One of Britain's top public schools, with a high intellectual reputation and not a few Bishops among its former pupils, has surveyed the beliefs of its pupils today. According to Winchester college magazine only 25 per cent of the boys said they believed in God and approved of Christianity.

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JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

In August 1978 Charles Oxley published his Declaration of Support for blasphemy law which was endorsed by "180 men and women of distinction, learning and experience", including Arthur Askey, Dickie Henderson, the Very Rev Lord MacLeod and other comics. I was informed at the time by a fellow-infidet that I had been taken to task in the Declaration over my anti-Christian goings-on, and in particular for publishing "A Statement Against Blasphemy Law". Much flattered, I procured a copy of Mr Oxley's *magnum opus* which now reposes in my collection of barmy religious tracts.

In addition to his publishing interests, Mr Oxley is chairman of the Campaign for Law and Order, having little sympathy either with law-breakers or those whom he charitably describes as "crackpot criminologists and soft-headed sociologists". He is opposed to abortion, and like so many anti-abortionists is also an advocate of the death penalty, the abolition of which he claims was "a backward step". He recently told the *British Weekly and Christian World*: "The sanctity of human life demands the death penalty. I believe that is the true interpretation of the Christian faith as set out in the Bible". Dismissing the danger of executing an innocent person as being "infinitesimal", Oxley added with chilling callousness: "There are going to be mistakes in law anyway wherever you have got human decisions".

Charles Oxley has laboured long and strenuously for the Lord. He is Principal of Scarisbrick Hall School, an educational establishment at Ormskirk, Lancashire, whose function is "to provide boys and girls with a sound education which is based on the Evangelical Christian faith". It was from this institution of learning and enlightenment that in 1975 a group of 23 male pupils — spontaneously, no doubt — issued a report based on a television viewing marathon. They watched programmes on both channels from 5.45 pm until close-down in order to list the naughty bits. It was reported that during the period under review the industrious young smut-hunters bagged 207 swear words, 87 blasphemies and 115 vulgarities. These interesting statistics include Prince Charles's reply when asked what it was like in Alaska. Ask a silly question . . . "Bloody cold!". declared his Royal Highness, which princely pronouncement was dutifully noted by the unctuous products of a sound education based on the Evangelical Christian faith.

Of course Mr Oxley is himself something of a television buff. In an interview published in the

Liverpool Daily Post last November he castigated Jasper Carrot, the popular if oddly-named comedian, for making "vulgar jokes about Jesus Christ in a television programme". He added with unconscious irony: "I know lots of people who are funnier than Carrot when they are being normal".

But I digress: whatever role, if any, Principal Oxley played in his pupils' goggle-box project, publication of the Declaration of Support for blasphemy law was the outcome of his personal endeavours. However, having since been dogged by tribulations he may now wish that the wretched document had never seen the light of day, or even wonder if the Lord has forsaken him on "life's wild restless sea". For rather than confounding the blasphemers, it was the cause of much merriment, particularly when it landed its Evangelical Christian betterger in the mulligatawny.

"Jottings" readers will recall that last December I reported on Mr Oxley's publishing venture which had turned out to be something of a debacle on at least three counts. First, although clearly a propaganda exercise, the Declaration was virtually ignored by both the secular and religious Press. Secondly, many of the 180 celebrities who appended their names to it are of such lowly status in public life that one feared Mr Oxley had got splinters under his fingernails through scrabbling around the bottom of the barrel in order to find sponsors. Thirdly, and more seriously, Mr Oxley had become so frenzied in his denunciation of the Lord's enemies that he overstepped the mark and made a serious allegation against Denis Lemon, the Editor of *Gay News*.

Mr Lemon was a defendant in the 1977 Old Bailey blasphemy trial, initiated by Mary Whitehouse following the publication in *Gay News* of James Kirkup's poem, "The Love That Dares to Speak its Name". He had been found guilty, therefore it was a serious matter to be accused with others of having, as Mr Oxley put it, "deliberately re-published the article, knowing it to be a blasphemous libel, as a challenge to the whole judicial system, in the hope that by defying the law, they will succeed in destroying it".

Freethinkers who are involved in the rough-and-tumble of religious controversy are a fairly hard-boiled lot, well able to take criticism by Christian opponents in their stride. Indeed it is by no means unusual for combatants to be publicly hurling brickbats at each other and yet privately be the best of friends. Nevertheless we must face the fact that there are some very nasty creepy-crawlies in the Evangelical Christian woodshed; for Charles Oxley to accuse Denis Lemon of deliberately repeating an offence of which the latter had recently been found guilty at the Old Bailey (and with an appeal to the House of Lords pending), was spiteful, vindictive and characteristic of a malevolent, religious zealot.

(continued on back page)

POISONING THE MIND

All advertisements should be legal, decent, honest and truthful—unless they are produced by religiously-motivated groups, in which case they can flout the last two provisos of the British Code of Advertising Practice with impunity.

Barry Duke noticed an advertisement placed in Oxford Circus underground station by the Nationwide Festival of Light. It read: "Pornography Poisons the Mind". Barry Duke lodged a complaint with the Advertising Standards Authority against an ad which he considered stated something which could not be considered either honest or truthful.

He also applied to London Transport to get permission to put up an equally absurd advertisement stating "Pornography Stimulates the Mind", or alternatively one proclaiming "Religion Poisons the Mind". (Suggestions for other such ads would be welcome. How about "Pornography Reaches Parts Other Literature Does Not Touch" for a start?) London Transport rejected both proposed advertisements and the Advertising Standards Authority turned down his complaint.

The Advertising Standards Authority rejected the complaint because a section of their code allows for expression of *opinion* in matters of politics and religion. It states: "Provided always that the advertiser concerned is named . . . the code imposes no restrictions, in regard either to expressions of opinion or assertions of fact, upon claims in advertisements concerned with matters of political, religious, social or aesthetic controversy."

The reason London Transport gave for rejecting the suggestion of alternative posters such as "Pornography Stimulates the Mind" was that they contravened the rule which states "Advertisements should contain nothing which is likely in the light of generally prevailing standards of decency to cause grave or widespread offence". In particular the second one ("Religion Poisons the Mind") broke London Transport's rule which prevents reference to "religious or sacred subjects in a manner which might give offence, or seek to use sites as a medium for religious controversy".

Perhaps more people should make it clear to London Transport that they find religious or moralistic advertisements offensive by writing to London Transport complaining about the NFOL's untruthful ad.

A short discussion about the ad on Radio Capital's programme "Open Line" was initiated by a phone call from Barry Duke. The programme presenter, Adrian Love, emphasised that the ad stated an opinion as a fact, which was dishonest.

So it is seen that crude untruths are acceptable to London Transport and the Advertising Standards Authority if they emanate from the likes of the NFOL — a body not renowned for its honesty or objectivity — but opposition views are not. Once

NEWS

again we see simple bias in favour of religious bodies, no matter how cranky or dangerous, and discrimination against non-religious, rational people in this country.

ILLEGITIMACY REPORT

The status of illegitimacy should be abolished suggests a working party of the Law Commission in a new report.* The National Secular Society passed a motion at its AGM a year-and-a-half ago urging that the status of illegitimacy should be abolished. The wheels of legal reform creep forward with agonising slowness, but this report is a welcome step in the right direction.

A controversial aspect of the proposals could be the principle that no attempt should be made to exclude any class of father from parental rights. Feminists and single mothers may feel that some fathers have totally forfeited any parental rights by their lack of responsibility and interest in their children.

The outstanding benefit of the report is that so thoughtful an examination of the subject will help to reduce the stigma attached to illegitimacy. The main legal benefit of the proposals would be to give children born out of wedlock the same legal rights (e.g. of inheritance) as natural children. The concept of "presumption of paternity" is introduced and could lead to the idea of the "accepted" child rather than the "legitimate" child. The report also raises the question of whether children conceived as a result of artificial insemination should automatically become legal children of the mother's husband regardless of the existence of a donor. (The report is intended as a document for public discussion and the Law Commission are inviting views on it.)

Illegitimacy was mentioned in a debate in the House of Lords last month. The Marriage (Enabling) Bill was narrowly defeated by 56 votes against to 50 in favour. One of the effects of the Bill would have been to abolish the stigma of illegitimacy from the children of marriages between categories of relatives now forbidden to marry. The Bill would have abolished legal restraints on marriage between any man or woman and his or her relatives by affinity—in other words solely by marital tie and not by blood. Baroness Wootton defended the Bill on the grounds that it would legitimise *de facto* marriages at present forbidden by law, and end human misery for the small number of couples in this position.

AND NOTES

Opponents of the Bill were mainly clerical. The Bishops of Guildford placed the weight of Christian opinion against the Bill, and irrelevant old clichés about biblical norms and preserving the Christian family were wheeled out. The Archbishop of Canterbury attended the debate without speaking, but voted against the Bill.

Reporting the debate in the *Church Times* (22 June, 1979), Mr Johnston, Director of the Nationwide Festival of Light, praised Christians who had opposed the Bill in a debate which he described as a clash between the Church of England and the humanist lobby. Mr Johnston commented: "Christian tradition and social wisdom" are against the Bill, thus once again demonstrating that in the newspeak of the NFOL for "light" read "darkness".

* *Family Law and Illegitimacy, Working Paper No 74, The Law Commission. Published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, £2.75.*

BUM BOUNCING

Doubts have been cast on the claims of the Transcendental Meditation movement to teach its members to levitate. Some students who have left the movement say no one has even learnt to "fly" and that attempts to do so have given people severe mental and physical problems.

One critic said: "It's just bouncing around on your bum." Another ex-student, a London barrister who had been involved in TM for five years and became a TM teacher, describes the Sidhis or techniques to induce "flying": "It was repulsive. You saw people leaping around the room like frogs, shaking, screaming, babbling."

Another former student, Brian Souter, has claimed that his health suffered as a result of trying to learn the Sidhis or "flying" techniques. It is reported that he went on two eight-week courses costing more than £2,000. He said: "They claimed it would stabilise my life, but I'm under a doctor and psychologist and taking anti-depressants."

The technique of meditating 20 minutes twice a day has been acclaimed as beneficial by scientists and doctors—but perhaps no more so than any other method of relaxation. But there has been much criticism of the TM movement for introducing levitation into its programme. The TM movement last year bought the famous stately home of Mentmore Towers for a reported £250,000. The British headquarters of the Maharishi's so-called world government of the age of enlightenment is centred

at Mentmore Towers.

Levitation lessons seem to be floating the TM movement's bank balance off the ground—even if bums refuse to defy gravity.

The following statement has been sent to "The Freethinker" by Mr Charles Oxley:

"In a declaration published by me last summer concerning the Old Bailey trial against Denis Lemon and 'Gay News' on a charge of blasphemous libel, I referred to the fact that the poem the subject of the trial had been re-published subsequent to the trial and implied that Mr Denis Lemon may have been connected with such republication. I now accept that such allegation is entirely without foundation. I apologise unreservedly to Mr Lemon for any embarrassment he may have been caused."

See *Jottings* p.135.

The August issue of "The Freethinker" reported in "News and Notes" an article by Paul Johnson in the "New Statesman" defending Christianity and attacking atheism. It was stated that a reply by Nicolas Walter, Editor of the "New Humanist", had not been published, but his article "A Vindication of Disbelief" was subsequently printed in the "New Statesman" of 10 August.

ANNUAL REUNION SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Guest speaker: JAMES HEMMING

Representatives from National Secular Society, British Humanist Association, Rationalist Press Association, Progressive League.

All welcome

Tea provided

3 p.m. Sunday, 30th September

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1

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BOOKS

DUTIFUL DAUGHTERS edited by Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham. Penguin, £1.50.
WORDS AND WOMEN by Casey Miller and Kate Swift. Penguin, £1.25.

Jung is supposed to have congratulated Joyce on Molly Bloom's soliloquy in *Ulysses*; it gave him a new insight into feminine psychology, he said. I have sometimes wondered what made either of them so sure they knew what they were talking about. Molly Bloom and her famous femininity are, after all, the invention of a man's imagination. Joyce had the empathy of a great artist, but his achievement was based on his observations as an outsider. *Dutiful Daughters* is the real thing. In it fourteen women of varying ages and experiences talk about their lives. The women are all personal friends and acquaintances of the two editors, Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham, whom they met through the Women's Movement. McCrindle and Rowbotham do not claim that the fourteen are representative of anything, and there is a certain similarity among their fascinating life stories, simply because they are all British women (mainly working class) of this century. Some came from Socialist families and were politically aware from an early age, but most of the older women recount their appalling ignorance about sexual matters.

The women's descriptions of their lives are transcripts of tape recordings, and the unmistakable quality of speech comes through the written words. The repetitions and characteristic turns of phrase make you hear the women as though they were speaking to you over the back fence or in some cosy corner at A Woman's Place. Home life before marriage was usually a stultifying experience, and some of the women married frankly to get away from their dreadful families. Among many of the women education was a brief process, an interlude between childhood and going to work. Some were good at their studies but had to leave school and go to work at a pathetically early age for wages that were counted in shillings rather than pounds. There was no question of developing any latent talents or of going on to higher education. How many *Mozarts assassinated* must have passed from cursory schooling to the textile mills and below stairs!

Peggy Wood says of her generation's lack of sexual experience that her children "think we were so deprived we must have been—you know, absolutely holding on to the furniture—to keep from going mad". Marriage and pregnancies had been thought inevitable by the older women, and the younger ones, in spite of their wider choices, had all married and had children. Married or unmarried, many of the women feared pregnancy. If they were married it meant pain and another mouth to feed; if they were unmarried at the time it meant a scandal, family rows, and a hasty marriage. Two of the

FREETHINKER

women mention suicide as an alternative to pregnancy. (That should convince anyone who still thinks contraception and abortion are minor medical services.) Annie Williams, however, enjoyed it. "Douglas was marvellous. Oh, he always loved me to distraction when I was pregnant, he would have eaten things out of my shoes, absolutely marvellous when I was pregnant, he loved it".

Men are bound to learn something from *Dutiful Daughters*. The men who figure in the women's autobiographies are sometimes thoughtful and sensitive people, but are very often insecure and callous, ruined as human beings by a system which encourages them in a kind of polarised masculinity.

It has taken the Women's Liberation Movement to point out the long-standing absurdities of some English language usages regarding sex and gender. Casey Miller and Kate Swift are not professional linguists, but they have tackled some thorny problems of the English language in *Words and Women*.

Why should an indefinite antecedent always take a masculine pronoun? Why is the human race described as "Man"? Inevitably, as with any issue in the Women's Movement, a good many people will trivialise it. "What's all the fuss about? Everyone knows that *Man* means woman too. Masculine pronouns have been used when personal gender is unknown or to designate mixed gender groups since at least the time of classical Latin. It's just a convention; it doesn't *mean* anything." As Thomas Paine said, "A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of being right".

When children first learn of animals and mixed groups of people "if in doubt, it's male", it is bound to make a different impression on girls than on boys. "For a boy, internalising the generic interpretation of masculine pronouns is part of a continuum. He becomes aware that a symbol which applies to him is reflected throughout the animate world; a link is strengthened between his own sense of being and all other living things. For a young girl, no such continuum exists". She learns that she is not representative, an anomaly. The race is male.

There is a good deal of evidence that when *man* is used generically most children and adults interpret it to mean "male persons". "Man the tool maker" is imagined to be a male human being wielding his hammer. Erich Fromm seems not to have noticed the trap of ambiguity when he describes "man's vital interests" as "life, food, access to females, etc." Miller and Swift point out the absurdity of saying "man, being a mammal, breast-feeds his young". But yet, if man embraces woman and man can be a

REVIEWS

tool-maker, why can't man breast feed his young? *Man* is logically either the whole category or one half of the category; we really cannot have it both ways.

We English speakers must have lived with these ambiguities all these years because men found them quite natural (to be a man in one sense and a man in the other sense coincided) and women found them just another put-down like so many others.

Examples of sexist language are anywhere you care to look. They flourish where people are represented by abstractions. In this country we have "the man on the Clapham omnibus" as well as "the man in the street". The only time the public is female is when it is buying groceries. Then it is "the housewife".

Miller and Swift also take theological language apart and expose the deep dye of sexism inherent in ideas of "God the Father". Their discussion of obscenity shows with painful clarity the accumulated male image of women: the extraordinary objectification and alienation of fellow (basically rather similar) humans.

If anyone can still be wondering in 1979 what the Women's Liberation Movement is about and why so many women still feel strongly about injustices even with more or less equal pay, *Words and Women* is as good a place as any to start. It is a consciousness-raising experience even for those who already have a certain awareness.

SARAH LAWSON

TROUBLE WITH THE LAW, the Release Bust Book. Pluto Press, £1.25 (paperback).

If British police chiefs are to be believed, no-one ever gets arrested unless they deliberately set out to break the laws of the land. "And if you keep off the streets of London," is the smug advice of Sir David McNee, "you won't have the Special Patrol Group to worry about."

That remark was recently reported in the *Guardian*, which, a few days later, carried a letter from a Manchester reader who wrote: "Up to now my understanding of the law has been that, on or off the streets, a citizen who behaves himself has only criminals to worry about. . ."

Trouble with the Law, which to my mind ought to be published in pocket diary size and kept about one's person at all times, sets out to show that the above correspondent's notion—one shared by millions of people—is a touchingly naive one.

For every day, people who keep their noses clean to the point of fetishism find themselves in trouble with the law.

In such instances, being an upright, law-abiding citizen can be positively disadvantageous. For people in this category invariably have no knowledge in regard to their rights, and remain at the mercy of the police until the matter is resolved to the satisfaction of the arresting officers, or until a solicitor is brought in.

Release, an organisation originally set up in 1967 in response to the large number of people arrested for drug use, claims that anyone can unwittingly fall foul of the law, and because of this they felt there was a definite need for an easily understood handbook showing how to avoid landmines in the law, and what steps to take should you get "busted".

Trouble with the Law fulfils that need admirably. In its introduction, the authors state that "this book is for anyone who has never had dealings with the law—and for those with limited experience".

"You don't," they stress, "have to embark on a life of crime to need this information."

In ensuing chapters, the book deals with general problems of routine encounters in the streets between police and individuals, or political activists; the ways in which the police can enter your home; what one can generally expect to happen at a police station; what happens in court, and how to represent yourself if you so wish; and an explanation of the function of lawyers, etc.

A copy of *Trouble with the Law* could get you out of more scrapes than an American Express Card. If you must go out on the streets, don't leave home without a copy.

BARRY DUKE

SEXUAL EXPERIENCE BETWEEN MEN AND BOYS by Parker Rossman. Temple Smith, £6.95.

Dr Rossman, an American clergyman, presents his survey of pederasty, which he defines as sexual involvement by a male over eighteen (the pederast) with a younger male between twelve and sixteen. No term of art is suggested for the latter. Some might term him the pederast's victim, but Rossman shows that if anything he is society's victim. The book records the views of many pederasts, and of rather fewer boys. Let us begin with the pederasts.

The most distinguished of them, a Nobel prizewinner, is André Gide. His first sexual experience with another person occurred in North Africa when he was 23. A boy whose bare knees were enchanting carried Gide's rug to the beach, spread it out, and threw himself upon it with a laugh, raising his arms in clear invitation.

"I sat watching him, wondering what this charming youngster would do next, my heart pounding at the realization that he and I had the same desires. When disappointment clouded his face, and he stood pouting, I seized his hand to tumble him back on to the rug, whereupon he threw off his clothes that were fastened with no more than a string. The touch of his naked body pressed against me was as exhilarating as the

lovely splendour of the sunlight on the sand.” One suspects it was rather more exhilarating even than that. Gide, who believed that we crush the human spirit by failing to allow each child to follow the call of his own senses, explains that death would find him in a state of ecstasy:

“ . . . for the green and blue water of the river at the end of life has been known by me from the beginning; and the boy who waits there to guide me has eyes as blue as a sea of ice, skin like lilies, hair as a cloud coloured by the sun at dawn. He is mysterious, waiting there, sketching his dreams in the sand. Is he the angel I have sought through life’s voyage? Or is he the child I was, born of two stars?”

It seems from the evidence of this book that the latter description is likely to be the correct one.

The other pederasts cited by Dr Rossman are mostly anonymous. One after another they rhapsodise on the nature of the attraction. “It is the rhythm of bare legs that is so erotic, so irresistible to me.” “His skin was blond and downy, and with his snub nose and saucy face at fifteen he looked like a fawn.” “His body was over-powering because of what it drew out of me from when I was his age.” “I have a good marriage, but these inclinations continue to pop up once in a while, especially when I meet the kind of lovely, well-bred younger kid I slept with when I was seventeen. My spine still tingles to remember the magic of that experience.” “I confess my idea of heaven is an eternity of soaping off boys in a warm shower.” “Girls are like sunshine that warms my days, whereas a boy to me is like an occasional bolt of lightning—illuminating my sky for a delightful moment and then gone forever.”

The pederast sees his addiction as natural. “Why should society blame me or punish me for having a nature and overpowering desire which developed so young?” It is good for the boy. “I think pederasty is a good thing, that such affection can spring up between man and boy to stir affectionate friendship wherein each can find exaltation, protection and challenge.” The boy enjoys it. “Do I seduce kids? Never! I have to fight them off.” It may save the boy from delinquency induced by sex-starvation. “Kids love sex and become joyous when they are sexually happy. I’m not just rationalising when I say that 90 per cent of the trouble we have with teenagers is the result of sexual frustrations.”

The boys see pederasty from a different standpoint. For some it is exciting. “The first time I went with a man my spine prickled and my hair nearly stood on end. It was like swinging out from a cliff on a rope and looking down at the rocks in the sea.” It is a bargaining counter. “When I was fourteen my eighteen-year-old friend got a car and he wouldn’t let me drive it until—well, I guess you could say I was really seduced by the car!” There is titillation in being treated as a love-object by an adult, who in normal situations is dominant. “When I first met

Joe, even though I was thirteen and he was twenty-six, he treated me like an equal, like an adult. I thought to myself, I’d do anything to have a friend like that.” Usually boys begin with their contemporaries. “It seemed wrong to fantasize about girls, who were supposed to be kept pure, so we made up jokes and imagined sex play with boys. Soon we were ready to try things we had joked about. My chum and I decided that there was nothing wrong with masturbation, that it was more fun with someone else, and that it was unhealthy and selfish for me to make love to myself.” Boys rarely do things with men that they have not already done with each other.

Although Dr Rossman tells us that his survey is not intended as a defence of man-boy sexual involvements, he gives no proof that they are harmful. There is evidence to suggest that one man in eight has pederastic inclinations. These, says Rossman, may be intended by nature to stimulate men to carry out their function of tutoring adolescent boys in sex. A society which denies coitus with females to developing boys should not be surprised at their fantasies and substitute experiences. Unable to make sense of adult attitudes to his rising sexuality, the boy becomes restless and rebellious. Often he is compulsively fascinated by sex, since society has made it a problem for him. It should be no problem. Subject to the freedom of others, he should be able to act out what he thinks right, expressing his sexual emotions as his heart and body tell him to do. As it is, he may well become society’s victim, first as a pederast’s boy and later as a pederast himself. “I am sure,” says one of them, “I would not be a pederast today if society had permitted me to follow my natural inclinations when I was a young teenager.”

FRANCIS BENNION

THEATRE

THE WHITE GUARD by Mikhail Bulgakov. Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych.

After this play, believe me, nearly everything else is just toothpaste. Russian down to its snowy boot-tips, of course, and all the more wonderful for it. We laugh when we feel like crying, and cry at its funniest jokes. And, at the end of it all, we applaud till our palms hurt, and may even get to our feet before the house lights come up again.

Bulgakov was a White Russian from the Ukraine, and his play is set in and around Kiev during the final stages of the first war. The Germans are in retreat from the Ukrainian nationalists; the Bolsheviks hover nearby. Though history records the inevitable outcome, we are hurled into anticipation of which force will outlast the longest. And if the tumult approaches absurdity, we are poised on its knife edge, tickled as we bleed.

The White Guard came from the high bourgeoisie, loyal to the old regime and determined against nat-

ionalist and communist forces alike. What they lacked in military strength, they made up for in sheer enthusiasm, and the action is infused with great lashings of verve and Slavic magnetism that sustain it for three hours plus.

The Turbin family, representatives of this class, engage our central interest. Alexei, the eldest, is a colonel in the artillery; his brother, Nikolka, is a young officer cadet. Their sister, Yeliena, married to a colonel on the general staff, but attracted to a belicose opera singer who is also *aide de camp* to the Hetman (the puppet ruler), is the uniting spirit of both the family circle and the White Guard's thrust, a sort of young Mother Russia who symbolises imperial indomitability. When her husband turns tail and heads for Berlin, Yeliena transforms the flat into a way station for those still loyal to the old cause. Though the bastions around them are falling, their unity is unbroken: there is much laughter as they sit round the family board, and many toasts are drunk. As in Chekhov, this is more a salute to the absurdity of political upheaval than a sign of materialist decadence.

Yet a major strength of the play is that Bulgakov can vary both mood and pace with a startling contrast in emphasis. The scene shifts from the exclusive harmony of the Turbin household to the fleeting disorder of the Hetman's headquarters as the leader beats his retreat. Thereafter we are placed in a temporary billet of the nationalist forces, and watch horrified as a Jewish immigrant is taunted and brutally gunned down, while, around him, Ukrainian soldiers muddle through telephoned instructions and finish off the last of their rations. As the play gains momentum, the action expands to inculcate an entire society. Where Chekhov conveys this with mosaic subtlety, Bulgakov depicts it with the force of a northern wind storm. Once the storm subsides, a tentative calm returns. The family celebrate Yeliena's imminent second marriage. Life begins again, a second storm is brooding, and as the family prepare to meet the challenge of the revolution in full thrust, one feels their spirit can only invigorate the new regime. This is a play in which life never flickers, even though death and destruction cut across its path.

The production is the RSC at its most lavish, replete with four sets and a cast list to keep Equity officials happy for months. The staging is expert, the lighting evocative, and the acting is out of the West End.

Juliet Stevenson, as Yeliena, pivots our attention as she does that of the actors. We believe in the charm she exudes for everyone else simply because we are charmed. As Shervinsky, her lover, Michael Pennington complements their scenes together perfectly and commands the stage on his own. His timing is exquisite, and when he begins to tell one of his fantastic anecdotes, he needs only a gesture to convey pomposity and so raise a laugh. Yet it is a testa-

ment to the strength of the acting that it achieves the balance of being ensemble while allowing each member to stand out. Richard Griffiths, the country cousin come to Kiev to study, is as engaging as Bunter, yet profoundly romantic as only a Russian can be. Mention of these three should not overshadow the performances of the other principles, and audiences will go on enjoying them long after leaving the theatre.

One gathers that Stalin enforced extensive revision of the play to conform with communist thinking. But little anyone could do would ever damage its steel-like structure. Kick at it, and you break your toe; try to sink it, and you go under instead. This play is a veritable winner, a masterpiece.

JAMES MACDONALD

CINEMA

THE CHINA SYNDROME directed by James Bridges. Leicester Square Theatre, London, prior to general release.

Karen Silkwood, a 28-year-old employee at the Kerr-McGee nuclear plant in Oklahoma, set off to meet a reporter, carrying documentary proof of her employers' laxness in matters of safety. She was killed before she could reach her destination. It was subsequently discovered that someone had deliberately contaminated her flat. Jane Fonda had to abandon her plan to make a film of the affair, as the Silkwood family were in the process of suing Kerr-McGee. So Fonda decided to collaborate with producer Michael Douglas and writer-director James Bridges on a film that would highlight the way media bosses, prompted by political and economic forces, try to gag or ignore nuclear critics.

The end product is *The China Syndrome*, so-called because a ball of molten uranium could, if the cooling devices in a nuclear plant failed, drop through the earth to China — in actual fact it would, of course, merely devastate a large area around the plant itself. Jane Fonda plays Kimberly Wells, a brittle, sunnier counterpart to our television presenter Sue Lawley. She presents TV items about singing telegrams and zoo-tigers' birthdays. Her charm, red hair and bright, synthetic "news" earn her a coveted place in the viewers' ratings. She is being shown round Ventana nuclear power station with freelance cameraman Richard (Michael Douglas) when a "routine scam" occurs and is contained — by a hair's breadth. The plant authorities make reassuring noises about the accident, unaware that Richard has filmed the control-room panic. His triumph is short-lived, though. The smuggled film is consigned, unviewed, to the vaults, and Kimberley is told by her boss not to worry her "pretty little head" about the matter. So token woman dispenses token news, and the public stays happy, uninformed and unquestioning.

Jack Godell (Jack Lemmon), a dedicated shift

supervisor at Ventana, risks his job to tell Kimberley of his doubts about the plant's safety. A chain of negligence and deceit comes to light. The big cinematic guns are wheeled out: the goodies battle to have the plant closed pending an unbiased investigation; the baddies pursue them with murderous intent; there are car chases, suspenseful races against time, murder, a near disaster. When I saw *The China Syndrome* the audience applauded at the end and gladly accepted the anti-nuclear leaflets handed out at the exits.

Jane Fonda and her team realised that a detailed examination of the nuclear problem would only draw the converted to the film. To capture a far wider public, they have come up with a film that is powerful and shocking, thanks largely to skilful editing and strongly emotional performances from Fonda and Lemmon. Perhaps they went too far in aiming for popularity. Perhaps. The dialogue between Richard and the studio bosses overlooks the question of *how* most effectively to substantiate and follow up the incriminating film. Richard pushes instead the "if-we-don't-get-this-piece-of-hard-news-on-the-air-quick-some-other-station-sure-will" argument. ("Investigative journalism" is a rather inflated description of what Richard and his like are about.) But then this is probably an accurate portrayal of an American TV station.

The film's final scene is a glossy TV ad for those microwave ovens that can give you high-speed hot food and, if their maintenance is neglected, cancer. Nuclear protesters are shown earlier in the film, sounding off about cancer risks, and probably getting nowhere with their protest. I wish that the film had not culminated in the shooting of Godell. Karen Silkwood's enemies were subtler, and nastier, than that. It also lets audiences, especially those in less trigger-happy countries, off the hook, by being too deeply rooted in the American movie tradition. It Couldn't Happen Here. The gunmen upstage the real villain of the piece: the death that seeps out of our rivers, our skies and our safe, safe power stations.

VERA LUSTIG

LETTERS

Within the space available you reported reasonably accurately my remarks on euthanasia at the Annual Dinner; but the drift of what I was trying to say was not in the direction in which Nicholas Reed of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society was having me say it ("The Freethinker", June). With respect to Peggy Lejeune and Mrs. Gladys Withers (Letters, July) much of what they say has already been said a long time ago by myself among others. But having immersed myself in the subject, sometimes very deeply and over a long period, I am of the belief that it still needs some thought, and hoped that my credentials were good enough not to have my opinions instantly attacked as if I had turned heretic and was subverting the movement!

Firstly I should say that though there are obstacles in the way of changing the law they are not necessarily Christian ones; in fact, a past Chairman of the VES

was a parson — the Rev Downing. As far as I know, only one Christian sect has come out against euthanasia, but their activists do not necessarily represent the tacit sentiments of the majority; and furthermore I think that their opposition in this and other cases may be promoted by a feeling that they need to establish new kinds of sectarian differentiation now that the doctrine of transubstantiation is not so easily believed. So it was that last time I had the honour of addressing the Annual Dinner I expressed the hope that a belief in the rightness of euthanasia would not become a touchstone of atheism, and I still so hope. If it is right it will be accepted through weight of argument.

Secondly, even if the law were changed the kind of document which the VES in their humanity and forethought provide is not an instruction, and could not, as I see it, be more than a guide to a doctor — and then only as to a patient's wishes when he signed it. If, as it seems, Mrs. Withers wants access to a "legal right" to be killed, at what stage in her decline and on who's opinion is a court to convict a doctor for non-compliance? I find that a difficult question, because allowing or causing unnecessary suffering to a human while under medical care is not thought of as an offence.

I hope attitudes will change. That might be helped by a change in the law; or it might be better if a change in the law, if it were to take place at all, were to follow a change in attitudes. It appears that opinion has moved a long way in the past decade; yet nowhere is it of course more important that it should continue to move than in our hospitals themselves. In this regard I do not mind if, to quote Nicholas Reed, "all hospices are heavily imbued with Christian (mainly Catholic) ideals and staff" if they can transmit their zealousness in the care of the dying to all who might be concerned. I know that the hospices are mainly rich, but the rich have often pioneered improvements which have then become available to the less well-off. Money can also buy luxury; but it is not at all necessary to a better understanding of the problems of the aged and the dying.

Euthanasia is already practised, without a change in the law, by the best in the medical profession, in the knowledge that giving it (allowing or encouraging death to occur) can be one manifestation of caring. Changing the law will not necessarily ensure that the dying are better looked after than they already can be nowadays, and I cannot help thinking that preoccupation with the narrow question of legalising euthanasia distracts attention from the wider issue that it is encouraging improvement in the manner in which the dying are looked after that we should be applying ourselves to.

LORD RAGLAN

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

In reply to Francis Bennion's letter ("The Freethinker", July) criticising Harry H. Pearce's article "What Is Secularism?", I would state that science is an alternative to religion. After all religion is an attempt by man to comprehend the world he finds himself in and until science comes up with solutions the gods reign supreme.

In Norse mythology we have the idea of thunder and lightning being caused by Thor's hammer, but when impudent men have the cheek to conduct a scientific inquiry and discover electricity in defiance of the deities, the power of the gods is further diminished.

Scientific solutions to man's problems negate the ideas of the world's religions because they work. Science deals with measurement and quantifying and therefore can be demonstrated. Religious concepts cannot be demonstrated by definition since they are concerned with the spiritual and supernatural. In this sense science is an alternative to religion and, after

all, is not religion an attempt to give answers to all the phenomena in the universe?

Finally, I would like to know what Francis Bennion means by the "essential nature of man". It is the nature of man to be altruistic, likewise to be selfish. It is the nature of man to be religious, also to be atheistic. It is the nature of man to follow Arsenal, and the nature of man to follow Spurs. I await an explanation of "the essential nature of man".

KEN WRIGHT

MOON LANDING

It is now ten years since the first landing on the moon. To many it was the non-event of the decade; however as with Kennedy's assassination, ask anyone old enough where they were when Neil Armstrong took his "one small step" and they can usually tell you.

This single event summarised the sixties. The Cold War, the Cuba Crisis and Vietnam emphasised a break with past certainties and a future where survival is the only virtue. But for a moment the breathless stampede to nowhere was halted by a single image.

Across the world people saw their planet as a small blue sphere against an immense blackness. Like Galileo the world faced facts that confronted its religious, moral and political dogma: "You could hide the earth behind your thumb", James Lovell has observed, "and then you realise that all you know, all your life and your knowledge is really behind your thumb, and that you're really just an insignificant part of this great universe."

Apollo ended the fact of our isolation, but not the delusion. We still hanker after certainties whether we place our faith in God or Man. We fail to realise that all our pleasant religious, moral and other irrational imperatives contradict our ability to understand the facts and to face them honestly. We have lost the intellectual challenge for mental growth that Apollo stimulated, instead we cocoon ourselves in fantasies that compromise our future. Where a belief no longer relates those who hold it to the facts of their situation they can either adapt or die. Beliefs are not immutable any more than man himself, history is full of examples. If for no other reason than this salutary lesson Apollo was money well spent.

JOHN SUTCLIFFE

PAPAL POPULARITY

In the July "Freethinker" reference was made to the popularity of the Pope in Poland. I wonder how many humanists could attract such an audience? The Catholic Church has millions of adherents and thousands of full-time workers. How many people would give up everything they have for the sake of humanism? Will the human race choose what is rational and good? Consider the small number of paid-up members of the humanist organisations and the limited circulation of humanist papers and how the humanist voice is ignored by the media.

Is the humanist movement failing and can the rational ever hope to defeat the irrational?

JOHN WATSON

LOURDES

I was interested in Jottings ("The Freethinker", July) referring to the spring in the grotto at Lourdes.

Surely it must be recognised by now that the "miraculous" cures are due either to some element in the famed water which relieves or partly cures certain specific conditions such as rheumatic or arthritic cases (as in spa treatment), or to auto-suggestion or imagination as in the case of superstitious or neurotic subjects.

An untold number of Catholic legends have been conclusively exploded. Typical of this is the devotion to St Philomena over many centuries. It was recently conclusively proven that the saint never existed.

In these days of widespread education it is really pathetic that people should accept such myths and also the appalling waste of money which could alleviate suffering of all kinds.

The only true example of common sense was the bishop who promptly flew to London for hospital treatment after suffering a stroke. The "miracle" spring must have positively bubbled with horror at such a scandal.

Miss M. PEACOCK

(Hare Krishna Das)

tween the nerve endings of the observer and the hydrogen and oxygen atoms, which are now combined in a more rigid bond, called H₂O. In other words, if one had the possession of such a fine sense of touch that one were able to perceive every individual atom, the difference between a gas, liquid or solid would be purely quantitative and not qualitative.

Consciousness

A quantitative increase is only able to repeat the qualities of the object to which the increase is related, but is not able to change them. All manifestations of apparent new qualities in material compounds are related to the imperfection of the sense organs. Consciousness is not found in any of the atomic elements in the periodic table, and must therefore be the property of either a not yet discovered material element, or must belong to a non-atomic or non-material element. In either case, one cannot deny the existence of an intrinsically conscious element or energy. Nor could one say that consciousness is an apparent new quality in a compound, similar to the type of qualities described above as related to incomplete perception, since every appearance is subjective and presupposes the existence of consciousness. A cause may never depend on its effect for existence.

Regarding evolution, conditions might have been different billions of years ago, nonetheless the atomic elements and sub-atomic particles were the same as the ones we are dealing with now. According to scientists, there were only sub-atomic particles in the primordial substance of the universe and these formed atoms of light atomic weight in due course of time. But the fundamental laws of nature related to the intrinsic qualities and behaviour of sub-atomic, atomic and molecular particles were already there. The law of entropy, one of the most fundamental laws, states that any system of particles or components has the tendency to attain its most probable state. This probable state is never more complex than the sum-total of information found within the components. Random movement and chance may temporarily increase complexity and information

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(Hare Krishna Das)

content, but such increase will soon be lost, since random vectors per definition lack consistency. Gradual evolution through natural selection, producing a consistent increase in complexity in organism, is therefore logically and scientifically inadmissible. Slight variation within species, e.g. changes in colour, does not require an increase in complexity, and is therefore no proof for evolution. Organisms also possess a degree of flexibility which allows them to adapt to the environment. An athlete may develop his muscles through exercise or a rabbit may climb a tree, forced by circumstances, but either case is an example of the flexibility of organisms and has nothing to do with an increase of complexity within the DNA code of the cell, required for real evolution. According to Professor de Beer, a well-known biologist, the very function of DNA is to preserve the basic features of all species, and not to change them.

Many more arguments could be presented, but unfortunately due to lack of space, I have to restrict myself to the aforementioned points. However, anyone who wishes to correspond with me regarding these points is most welcome.

The address is: Hari Krishna Das, Church Farm House, Aldenham, Watford WD2 8AP, Hertfordshire.

Many a sober Christian would rather admit that a wafer is God than that God is a cruel and capricious tyrant.—Edward Gibbon (1737-1794)

(Jottings)

It would be interesting to know if all the signatories to the Declaration were shown in advance the offensive and untruthful section on Denis Lemon. If they were, and signed it none the less, it raises serious doubts regarding their "learning and experience". If not, and they signed in ignorance of its full content, it is a telling commentary on Charles Oxley's ethical standards.

It is true that as a direct result of the *Gay News* trial "The Love That Dares to Speak its Name" has been re-published, widely distributed and read in public. It will continue to be. Those who are con-

cerned with freedom of publication will not be stymied by Christian informers and their friends in the judicature. But it would have been exceedingly foolish for Denis Lemon to become involved in such activities — and the Editor of *Gay News* is nobody's fool. His solicitors took action and Mr Oxley will have to pay all the legal charges incurred.

Mr Oxley had been rather free with his accusations, but decidedly tardy when it came to making amends. He was firmly hooked, but wriggled like a delirious conger eel to avoid the embarrassment of admitting that he had published a falsehood. His efforts have been in vain and he has now apologised to Denis Lemon, admitting that the allegation was "entirely without foundation".

There are two biblical quotations on the front cover of the Declaration of Support for blasphemy law, and should Charles Oxley decide to bring out a new edition (with the slur on Denis Lemon omitted) he may consider adding a third. Ever ready to be helpful in these matters, permit me to suggest Exodus 20—16: *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. Meetings on the second Thursday of the month, 8 pm. 8a Grand Parade, Castle-reagh. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co. Antrim. Telephone Whiteabbey 66752.

Brighton Humanist Group: Terry Mullins, Secretary of the NSS: "What is the Difference?" Sunday, 7 October, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Speaker: Jim Huggon. Thursday, 27 September, 7.45 pm. 21 Brightling Road, SE4.

London Secular Group (outdoor meetings). Thursdays, 12.30 pm at Tower Hill; Sundays, 2-5 pm at Marble Arch. ("The Freethinker" and other literature on sale.)

Merseyside Humanist Group. Discussion: "What do we still have to do to reach an open society?" Monday, 17 September, 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

Humanist Holidays. Christmas trip to Malta fully booked. Easter 1980: Isle of Wight. Details from Mrs Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12 0NA. Telephone: 01-673 6234.

THE FREETHINKER

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