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SURVEYS SHOW NO UNDERSTANDING OF AND SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIANITY

A survey of Catholics shows that many of them no longer accept traditional Catholic doctrine. Teaching about artificial birth control and marriage is rejected by substantial sections of adherents to the Catholic Church. One in five in the survey do not even consider abortion wrong and as many as 21 per cent thought the termination of life should be permitted in the case of a painful, incurable disease where the patient wished it.

The survey is said to be the largest ever conducted of Catholic belief, has taken two years to compile, and there is no previous comparable poll by which changes of belief may be measured. The survey was conducted by the University of Surrey, Gallup Polls having prepared with field work; it covered 1,023 Catholics in 105 places in England and Wales.

Anyone who said they were baptised in the Church was included and by this definition a national Catholic population of 11 per cent is suggested. Catholic commentators have emphasised that the poll will have included a considerable number of lapsed members — perhaps as justification for the ignorance and lack of support for Church dogma.

About half those questioned said they had never heard of the Vatican Council, which set in motion wide changes in Catholic liturgy and thought fifteen years ago. Approximately 14 per cent doubted the existence of heaven, life after death, and the devil; 25 per cent did not believe in hell; and 20 per cent of all those interviewed and 50 per cent of the youngest age group did not believe that bread and wine changed into the body of Christ at the consecration.

The Pope (who re-affirmed the existence of hell recently) will have a hard time convincing his flock of his hard-line views on marital relationships. Nearly half thought that pre-marital sex was not wrong and a majority thought that the church is too hard on

divorced Catholics and priests who leave the ministry to marry. 75 per cent thought artificial birth control was not wrong for married couples. One third rejected papal infallibility.

Marriages to non-Catholics are increasing and the survey points to a numerical decline as a result of fewer children being brought up in the faith. The survey ends: "The Catholic community may find itself shrinking in size and changing in its age and class composition, as Methodism appears to have done."

Commenting on the survey in a pastoral letter, Archbishop Murphy of Cardiff says, "The survey is the perfect proof of original sin". He wrote of freedom of conscience as something which is strangling Catholicism and blames the existence of abortion on "an exaggerated idea of freedom and independence".

In a complicated metaphor he compared the human conscience to a compass needle which should point to the Magisterium. "It is just a delicate needle which if exposed to the philosophy of a secular humanist world will oscillate and vacillate and box the compass." But before secular humanists take the credit for encouraging deviation from Catholic truth, note that he adds, "And don't let us put all the blame on the secular humanist world. We have a fifth column within—the human will." It is characteristic that the archbishop muddles human conscience with religion rather than seeing it related to unbringing, a concern for society, and assessment of cause and effect.

Youngsters' Views

Another report relating to Catholicism arising from the Westminster archdiocese's recent questioning of over 2,000 young fifth and sixth formers gives encouragement to humanists. "The over-

whelming majority (of young people) revealed an almost total lack of understanding of the Person of Christ, and his message and his Church: there is a repeated cry that Mass in the parish is boring and there is an indifference to doctrines and moral teachings of the Church." According to the report most young people have aims based on "sound humanist values which have only an accidental relationship to Christian teaching". Such values include happiness, a family and security.

Religion Now

More generally, a poll conducted at the end of last year showed that 13 per cent of those interviewed would describe themselves as atheist or agnostic. The survey was conducted especially for *Now* magazine by Marplan. It indicated a wide allegiance to vague religious beliefs. 16 per cent of all adults claim to go to church weekly, 23 per cent every month and 30 per cent every three months. However, Fr Gaskell told *Now* that "if 16 per cent of my parish went to church, St Alban's, Holborn, my church would not be big enough for them" and suggested that people could not admit that they did not go to church.

The survey indicates widespread belief in God (73 per cent of all adults), after life (53 per cent), and 96 per cent said they were Christians. On the other hand 52 per cent thought that the church is complacent, old-fashioned and out of touch and 89 per cent thought that just as many good people do not go to church as do.

Roy Saich, Secretary of the Warwickshire Humanist Group wrote in the group's newsletter:

"It is unwise to take all the results of such polls at their face value as so much depends on the wordings of the questions asked and their context. This poll found that a total of 13 per cent of those replying could describe themselves as atheist or agnostic. Many people would not know the correct meanings of these words however and may have hesitated to accept the label atheist, particularly because of its perjorative connotations. It is unlikely that many will have been deterred for that reason from describing themselves as Christians although even fewer will have known what that term implied. This is clear from the answers to other questions given by people describing themselves as Christians but who apparently rejected much, if not all, of the Creed and other Christian tenets.

"A further difficulty with such polls is the gratuitous comments and values expressed by journalists, which professional pollsters would avoid after elementary training, but which journalists add, without thought, into texts purporting to show the results of such polls.

"The report in *Now* contained the classic comment 'No fewer than 76 per cent of Britons claim to be Christians and 82 per cent in all to have a

religious belief. These remarkable statistics, deeply unexpected in the age of child pornography, drug-taking and commercialism, emerge from a Marplan survey. . .'. It is clearly the opinion of the reporters that if you have no religious belief you obviously support child-pornography, drug-taking and commercialism.

"No attempt was made apparently to ask people if they were humanists or to find out if they subscribed to humanist values."

Among this welter of facts and figures there is no clear indication that the decline of the churches which has taken place steadily throughout the century is likely to be halted. (Minor statistical ups and downs have caused some clerics to herald a new religious revival for decades, see p40.) What is clear is that secular humanist values, once the preserve of a few thoughtful individuals, have permeated society and pervade even the churches to such an extent that their survival depends upon adaptation to more humanist views. But it is arguable whether we live in a better world—which must prevent complacency and give secularists much food for thought.

OPUS DEI

The semi-secret Roman Catholic organisation Opus Dei (God's Work) is attempting to increase its power under the papacy of John Paul II, who is known to have sympathies towards the group. Opus Dei is trying to obtain new statutes which would allow members independence from the control of local bishops. It is reported that the organisation is also hoping to capture control of Vatican Radio, which has been run by the Jesuits since the war.

Opus Dei was founded in 1928 by Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, a Spanish priest. The object of the organisation is to turn all its members—priest, celibate lay people, and married Catholics—into "a leaven of fervent Christian life in every environment". Marriage was not looked upon favourably by Escriva and married people never rise high in Opus Dei.

The founder's view of war is highly controversial and provides justification for a holy crusade. He said: "War has supernatural uses . . . but we have in the end to love it as the religious man loves his disciplines."

One of Pope John Paul II's first acts as Pope was to pray at the tomb of Escriva, whom he regards as a saint. He was a frequent visitor to Opus Dei's headquarters in Rome while he was Archbishop of Cracow.

A leading Catholic moderate has been reported as saying: "Opus Dei goes in for a retrograde form of theology which could be a disaster for the Church. I don't like its secrecy or its use of corporal punishment."

The Superfluity of Immortalism

DAVID BERMAN

In his article "The Poverty of Mortalism" ("The Freethinker", January, 1980), David Berman examined ideas of mortalism—the denial of the belief in immortality. Here he demonstrates the inconsistencies of some of the arguments used to justify immortalism—that is the belief in an afterlife.

It is surely ironic that Marx should represent Henry Dodwell as a deistical destroyer of theological bars, since Dodwell was a religious reactionary and fundamentalist. Although I concluded "The Poverty of Mortalism" on this note, my aim here is not to criticise Marx's judgement but to develop it sympathetically. For it can lead us, I believe, to insights into the history and nature of the Christian belief in immortality.

In his *Epistolary Discourse* (1706) Dodwell denied the doctrine of natural immortality of the soul, i.e., that the soul was immortal by virtue of its nature (its supposed immateriality or indivisibility) and that this could be known by reason alone. The actual effect of Dodwell's *Discourse* was probably to undermine belief in an after-life; but that was by no means his intention. He wished to defend the Scriptural and early Christian conception of immortality against what he saw as the usurping philosophical or Platonic conception. More generally, he wished to make reason and rational theology subservient to faith and revealed religion. He is like a critic of capitalism who aims at the re-establishment of feudal economics.

Now such a reactionary critic can often, ironically, be both acute and successful. He may see the essential weaknesses of the position that supplanted his own, and he may do much to destroy it. I think Marx may well have seen this; he certainly recognised the contribution of "reactionary socialism". Thus in the *Communist Manifesto* iii he mentions certain early nineteenth century French and English aristocrats who wrote pamphlets against the dominant bourgeois society; the feudal socialism of these aristocrats was, he maintains,

"half lamentation, half lampoon; half echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeois to the very heart's core; but always ludicrous in its effect, through total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history."

Whether Marx has accurately described the reactionary socialism of the 1830s I do not know. But it is clear to me that he has keenly characterised the reactionary immortalism (as we might call it) of Dodwell, whose critique of the orthodox view of

immortality is very much a ludicrous half-echo of the past, half-menace of the future, which did strike the orthodoxy to the very heart's core, as we can see from the numerous bitter replies to Dodwell, and also from the portion of Archbishop King's letter which I quoted in "The Poverty of Mortalism".

The significance of reactionaries in historical progress is, I think, generally underestimated or ignored. Historians are apt to overestimate the importance and efficacy of the progressives—those of tomorrow who do supplant those of today. But those of yesterday, who have been supplanted, are also hostile to those of today; and they are likely to know their supplanters' weak points. To apply this to our specific case, I shall try to show that Dodwell and his fellow reactionary immortalists — such as Henry Layton and William Coward—revealed substantial conflicts in the orthodox conception of immortality (conflicts which are as relevant now as they were in the eighteenth century).

Reactionary Immortalists

The reactionary, or feudal, immortalists vigorously defended the Scriptural idea of immortality. They accepted that because of the fall of Adam, mankind had been cursed by death; but that Jesus Christ had redeemed man by his self-sacrifice and resurrection: Christ abolished death, and brought immortality to life through the Gospel (II Tim. 1.10), an immortality that will commence with the resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgement, when all will be allotted their eternal rewards or eternal punishments.

Now the orthodox also subscribed to this; otherwise they could hardly be Christians. What they added to it was the philosophical idea of immortality: that man had a naturally immortal soul, which was thought to be incorruptible (for instance) because it was indivisible and immaterial. There were compelling motives for this philosophical addition. In the Age of Reason it seemed essential that such a fundamental article of religion should be demonstrable. The fact that it could be known by reason also meant that it was accessible to all nations, before and after Christ. If this were not so, then God's justice seemed to be called into question. Moreover, belief in immortality was thought to be a prerequisite of orderly society, hence it must have been available before its publication in the Gospel. Finally (as King observed) belief in the Scriptures is not strong enough to generate belief in immortality. Rather, it is a prior (reasonable) belief in immortality which generates belief in the Scriptures and its eschatology.

Hence it may seem that the two sorts of immortality nicely complement each other: the one tells us *that* we are immortal, the other *what* this immor-

tality involves. However, it is here that the reactionary immortalists come in.

1. First of all they point out that the Scriptural idea of immortality is of the whole living man or woman; it is of an animated, material being, living forever. Whereas, the soul which is naturally immortal cannot be a living, material human being; it is an immaterial, indivisible substance—a thinking being, existing eternally. And as the latter idea of immortality is inconceivable *with* a living body, so the former is unimaginable *without* one. For unlike an immaterial substance, a living body naturally changes, grows old, decays and dies. But without a living body how can the damned experience the infernal heat and other physical torments promised in the Scriptures?

2. If we are naturally immortal, then what need is there of a resurrection at all? In order to be resurrected from the dead, one must first have been dead; but according to the natural immortality theory, we *cannot* really die. But if we *cannot* die, then the Scriptural promises that we shall rise from the dead, and that Christ has abolished death, are idle and empty.

3. If we are naturally immortal, then after death—which is only the separation of our alleged immortal soul from our mortal body—our souls will go to heaven, hell or (perhaps) purgatory. But that means that all souls who die before the Day of Judgement have already been pre-judged, thereby making a farce of the Last Judgement.

4. The conjunction of the Scriptural and philosophical conceptions of immortality also leads to absurdities, such as the following. If the souls of men go to heaven or hell after death, then plainly the soul of the first murderer, Cain, went to hell after he died. Hence Cain's soul has been in hell some 6,000 years. But suppose that some other man murders his brother and dies this year. He will receive 6,000 years less punishment than Cain, although, by hypothesis, he committed exactly the same crime. This casts doubt on God's justice.

5. There were millions of people born before Christ, who could not have come in contact with the Gospel; hence they could have no claim to heavenly rewards. Therefore, through no fault of their own, they must go to hell. The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory takes some of the edge off this difficulty, but (a) this doctrine is said by Protestants to be utterly un-Scriptural, and (b) even granting the doctrine, God's justice is still called into question: for why should so many virtuous heathen and unbaptised infants be given less of a chance to earn everlasting bliss than others, who just happen to be born in a certain place at a certain time?

It was in this way that Dodwell, and his fellow reactionary immortalists, destroyed — in spite of themselves — important theological bars. They showed that the two conceptions which constitute the orthodox Christian conception of immortality are incompatible; yet, as Dodwell's critics cogently argued, Christianity requires both sorts of immortality.

Money Matters at Conway Hall

BARBARA SMOKER

When a kindred organisation is in difficulties, we cannot remain unconcerned, nor can we give them unequivocal support if doubtful about the rightness of their cause. Here the President of the National Secular Society, who is also a long-standing member of South Place Ethical Society and currently a member of its General Committee, explains what has been happening at Conway Hall, the press reports and television interviews having left it unexplained.

Conway Hall Humanist Centre, built by South Place Ethical Society in 1929, and by far the most valuable material asset in the humanist movement in this country, has, paradoxically, brought grave financial difficulties on the collective heads of its owners.

They have had a High Court case pending for the past eleven years (yes, really!), concerned with their trust deed of 1825 and with the question of charity status; and their legal advisers' fees have already reached five figures—before they have even

got into court. (The hearing is now in the lists for June this year.) But that is not all. The expenses of running a large building in London, with adequate staff, heating bills, and heavy rates, have risen more steeply than the prevailing hire charges for halls and meeting rooms. Add to this the fact that membership subscriptions do not cover the cost of the monthly journal, and the result is an annual deficit that cannot continue indefinitely. The crunch has now come.

The local authority (the London Borough of Camden), though recognising the importance to the locality of the Hall remaining operational, is precluded from remitting any part of the rates unless and until SPES regains its charity status. A way round this, however, is to pay back a proportion of the rates in the form of a direct grant. Accordingly, the Grants Committee considered an application from the Society for a grant of £4,350. This would have gone through on the nod but for one sticking point: whereas Camden Council itself operates a total ban on letting any of its meeting rooms or halls to the National Front, the NF frequently

holds meetings at Conway Hall. Logically enough, some councillors objected to the anomaly of making a grant that would indirectly subsidise a body they themselves had banned on ethical social grounds from Council premises.

Peter Cadogan, General Secretary of SPES, issued a press release (without any reference to the Society's General Committee) that took an absolutist line on freedom of speech and assembly, effectively closing the door to any reconsideration of lettings policy or practice.

He certainly has a valid argument when he says that false ideas shrivel in the fresh air of free speech and thrive when driven underground. But it should be borne in mind that the National Front does not itself respect the principle of free speech, and anyone presuming to voice a contrary opinion at one of their so-called public meetings is soon shown the door, with considerable physical violence. Not only are National Front meetings at Conway Hall conducted on this basis, but the emotive racist speeches result in considerable recruitment at those meetings and substantial cash collections for their cause. One advantage to them of holding their meetings in Conway Hall is that it lends them respectability. Is this the sort of use for which the Hall was built?

If there is a social responsibility to provide facilities for the free expression of every opinion, however anti-social, such a responsibility would rest more with public authorities, such as Camden Council, than with private societies with a contrary viewpoint. Would Mr. Cadogan let the NF use his own lounge?

Principles Not Absolute

As a freethinker and secular humanist, I regard freedom of speech and assembly as a highly important ethical social principle; but I do not accept the notion of an absolute principle, which is a religious concept. The whole business of ethics is concerned with one important principle coming into conflict with another, and in the present instance one freedom has to be weighed against another: freedom of speech against freedom from incitement to hatred.

The very name "ethical society" is a reminder of the original objective of working out guidelines for a non-absolutist, situational morality. A rigid application of abstract principles without regard to its probable effect in the particular situation is thus contrary to the whole SPES tradition.

As it happens, the Society's current practice of letting to all-comers is based on a decision passed at a general meeting by a simple majority only, though it apparently required a two-thirds majority to overthrow an existing standing order (that "Accommodation shall not be made available . . . for purposes contrary to the aims and objects of

the Society") which should have been on the table but was not.

Invited to present his case in a ten-minute speech to the Camden Grants Committee, Mr. Cadogan pursued the same absolutist line as in his press release, with the result that the Grants Committee was split and the decision then left to the Camden General Council, whom he was given leave to address for five minutes. At the preceding meeting of the SPES General Committee, I requested that a few seconds of his five minutes be used for an admission that there was a division of opinion within the Society on the matter and that it was open to further discussion. This, however, the General Secretary refused to do (so much for free speech!), and his address in the Council Chamber gave no indication of any division of opinion. I therefore made a direct personal approach to one of the councillors prior to the debate on the SPES grant, and acquainted him with the facts. He told me that there was no chance of the vote going in favour of the grant in view of Mr Cadogan's intransigence, as there was a clear majority against it (in the event it was defeated by 30 votes to 13), but that if South Place were to change its letting policy regarding the NF and then reapply for the grant, it would certainly get it.

In deciding between two conflicting ethical principles, financial considerations are not supposed to carry weight, but it cannot be denied that a financial threat to the continued operation of the Hall must constitute one of the relevant criteria in this case. Even without this, however, and even though many of the secularist members of the Society have dropped out in recent years, the Cadogan faction would never command two-thirds of the vote, either on the Society's General Committee or at its AGM. So I prophesy with confidence the early reinstatement of the restricted lettings policy.

But Peter Cadogan does not take kindly to democratic procedures when they go against him. During his ten years as General Secretary of SPES he has taken over executive powers that were formerly shared among the various officers of the Society, manifesting in microcosm a blueprint for dictatorship. At the same time, he has become more and more religious in his outlook, and has pushed the Society in the same direction. Funny how dictators and religion so often go together.

James Anderton, Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, is continuing his role as an outstandingly awful public relations officer for Christianity. He is quoted in the "Radio Times" (23-29 February) as saying "I believe that policing is very much the sort of thing that Christ Himself was doing when he was alive".

Abortion—An Intense Debate

During the run-up to the parliamentary debate of Mr Corrie's Bill aimed at restricting the working of the 1967 Abortion Act, there was intense on both sides and, after two Friday debates in public discussion of the issue. Feelings ran high the House of Commons, at the time of going to press it is yet to be seen whether Corrie's Bill will be talked out or whether a compromise Bill will be passed.

Mr Corrie's Bill to amend the 1967 Abortion Act aims to reduce the upper limit at which abortion is permitted from 28 to 20 weeks. One of the other main effects of his proposals would be to make the grounds for abortion more rigorous by changing the wording of the Act so that the risk of injury to mental or physical health has to be "serious" and "substantially" greater than if the pregnancy were terminated. A further measure would curtail the work of abortion charities by breaking all links between pregnancy counselling and the people who perform abortions.

Many sections of the community have opposed Mr Corrie's Bill. The medical profession, upon whom rests the responsibility of carrying out the abortions, have strongly defended the existing Act. The British Medical Association and the Royal College of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians both issued statements opposing Corrie's Bill. This is all the more striking since the profession opposed the Act in 1967 and has therefore seen a strong shift of opinion.

The public as a whole also appears to accept the workings of the present Act. As always, campaigners have found conflicting opinion polls, but a Gallup Poll published in *Woman's Own* magazine showed 77 per cent in favour of no change in the regulations. 81 per cent of women questioned felt the question of abortion should be left to them in consultation with their doctors. It was interesting that 80 per cent of the women said they would go ahead in other ways to end their pregnancy even if the regulations were changed: clearly the public appreciates that the law cannot prevent abortion, only make it illegal, unsafe or expensive.

Vigorous parliamentary lobbying took place by organisations supporting and opposing Corrie's Bill in the weeks preceding the third reading in the Commons. Opposing Corrie were the National Union of Students, various women's organisations, humanist organisations such as the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society, and especially the organisations specifically favouring legalisation of abortion like the Abortion Law Reform Association and the National Abortion Campaign. Supporting Corrie were the Society for the

Protection of the Unborn Child, LIFE, religious organisations, particularly the Catholic Church, seven of whose bishops issued a public statement opposing all abortion, and the *Times*.

On 6 February, two days before the Bill was to be discussed by Parliament, an estimated 20,000 demonstrated outside the House of Commons, lobbied MPs and attended a rally at Westminster Central Hall. At the rally Mr David Steel, leader of the Liberal Party and responsible for introducing the 1967 Act, said that a vociferous campaigning minority was seeking to deny the availability of safe legal abortions to those women who, however regrettably, need it. He said that no one was forced to obtain or participate in an abortion where it was against their conscience and asked where had the anti-abortion campaign been in "the dark days of butchery, death and desperately costly abortions" before 1967. Mr Tony Benn and Miss Jo Richardson were two other MPs who addressed the rally.

Dr John Marks, who represented the BMA, said that doctors opposed Corrie's Bill because they had seen death from septicaemia come to an end since 1967 and they feared the vagueness of the wording of the (Amendment) Bill. Mrs Diane Munday, of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, said that the Bill would destroy abortion clinics.

Upper Time Limit

When the Bill was first debated on 8 February argument centred round the upper time limit. Proposals for 22 weeks, 24 weeks and 27 weeks were put forward. The government has so far remained neutral towards the Bill, but Dr Vaughan, the Minister of Health, argued for a 24-week limit.

Strength of feeling was seen by the protests inside and outside the Commons. Several women were removed from the public gallery when there were cries of "Women's rights" and "Women won't obey your Bill".

The parliamentary debate continued on 15 February and there was a vote in favour of a 24-week upper time limit. Mr Corrie had compromised so far as to urge the House to support a limit of 22 weeks, and he expressed himself as deeply disappointed after the vote for 24 weeks. He said of his opponents: "I am very down hearted about the whole business. They were not out to amend the Bill. They were out to kill it." (An attitude which some people would say sums up his own approach to the 1967 Abortion Act.)

Further amendments and discussions will take place on 29 February. This is an interim report and it is premature to talk with certainty of defeat for Corrie, of success for his opponents, or indeed of compromise—about which there has been much

report.

Mr Corrie seems to be reluctant to accept much compromise—maybe conscious that a Bill with minor amendments would make it very difficult to introduce further restrictions to the conditions for abortion for many years. The opponents of the Bill would probably be able to talk it out, unless the government gives it extra time. Mr St John Stevas, a well-known Catholic who voted against the 24-week time limit, is Leader of the House and in an influential position to give Corrie extra parliamentary time: but will he be sensitive to accusations of bias?

Whatever the outcome, it is likely to be conclusive for a long time. There is evidence that many people are now tired of the debate, which has been forced above all by Catholics. At the end of the debate on 8 February, Mr Leo Abse claimed: "This House is weary of abortion debates". Yet it is a matter of crucial importance to many women, and is a significant indication of the extent to which the changed political climate of the eighties may reverse the reforms of the sixties.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL DINNER

Guest Speakers:

MICHAEL FOOT

JIM HERRICK

NICOLAS WALTER

THE GUNNER (Near Cannon St. Station)

SATURDAY 29 MARCH 1980, 6.30 pm

Cost £7.50

Further details from National Secular Society,
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

PUBLIC MEETING

TO COMMEMORATE BRADLAUGH'S
FIRST ELECTION TO THE COMMONS
APRIL 1880

Speakers:

CHRIS PRICE, MP

Dr EDWARD ROYLE

NICOLAS WALTER

APRIL 3 1980. 7 pm

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square,
London WC1.

PUBLIC MEETING

CENSORSHIP IN THE MEDIA

Speakers:

STUART HOOD

PHILLIP HODSON (Editor of "Forum")

In the chair: Barbara Smoker

APRIL 17 1980 7 pm

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square,
London WC1

PAINÉ REMEMBERED

A birthday dinner was held by the Thomas Paine Society in the Library of Conway Hall on February 2, 1980. The guest of honour was Audrey Williamson, author of *Thomas Paine*, and the President of the Society, Michael Foot, was present.

In proposing a toast to Thomas Paine, Christopher Brunel pointed out that radicals in the early nineteenth century had always celebrated his birthday, 29 January. Thomas Paine was, he said, a man of principle, well ahead of his time, who had pioneered the idea of welfare which developed into a welfare tradition pursued by Beveridge and Bevan—a tradition under threat from the government of Mrs Thatcher.

Michael Foot, after praising Audrey Williamson's work on Paine's life, said that it was appropriate to gather at Conway Hall since Moncure Conway had been Paine's greatest biographer. Paine had been claimed by America and France, but he was essentially part of the English radical tradition. He had helped to shape the English language by writing about politics in a way that could be understood immediately. He described Paine as the greatest Englishman of the eighteenth century, who had understood England better than anyone else and who had also helped France and America by explaining those countries to their people.

Michael Foot referred to the conclusion of Conway's *Autobiography*, which reads: "Implore Peace, O my reader, from whom I now part. Implore peace not of deified thunderclouds but of every man, woman, child thou shalt meet. Do not merely offer the prayer, 'Give peace in our time', but do thy part to answer it! Then at least, though the world be at strife, there shall be peace in thee." This remained a relevant summons today, said Foot.

Audrey Williamson echoed Foot's praise of Paine's power of writing, stressing his fluency and imagery as well as his clarity. Paine belonged to his time, to the future and to the past. She referred to Paine's rehabilitation by Leslie Stephen as well as Conway and traced his importance to the labour movement. The *Rights of Man* gives an extremely up to date outlook on social security. Paine had defended a liberal revolution in defending the early part of the French revolution. That revolution had been vilified as Paine had been, and it was forgotten that the terror came at a late stage under external pressure, just as it was forgotten that Paine had defended the life of Louis XVI, urging that he be exiled to America, where he could learn democratic principles. Audrey Williamson also referred to recent research she had undertaken into Paine's bridge designs.

For further information about the Thomas Paine Society write to the Secretary, R. Morrell, 43 Eugene Gardens, Nottingham, NG2 3LF.

SUPPORT FOR SAKHAROV

Russia's leading dissident, Dr. Andrei Sakharov, who was recently forced into internal exile by Soviet authorities, has been sent a letter of support by the Warwickshire Humanist Group.

The letter, which was translated into Russian, was despatched by the Group's secretary, Roy Saich. The letter read:

"We were so distressed to hear of your brutal eviction without notice from your Moscow home and of your forced exile in Gorky that we had to write to express our solidarity and our sympathy.

"Many of your articles and views have been published in this country and we know of the harassment to which not only you personally but members of your family have been subjected.

"Our thoughts are with you, particularly at this time, and we hope that even in Gorky you will be able to continue your important work for human rights and return to Moscow in the near future.

"In case you are able to read English, we are enclosing some copies of the newsletter which our group issues to its members. Like you we are liberal humanists—our group is affiliated to the British Humanist Association and through them to the International Humanist and Ethical Union which has consultative status with UNESCO.

"Humanists everywhere admire and support the valiant stand you and your group are making, and if there is any way we can help, we will be only too pleased to do so."

It is not yet known whether Dr. Sakharov received the letter.

ANGLICANS PREDICT A REVIVAL

The 1980s could be a year of religious revival, according to the recently published Church of England Yearbook.

The optimistic message it contains is based on statistics which indicate that more people are being baptised and confirmed; the number of faithful attending holy communion is increasing; contributions are going up; and the queue of prospective clergymen is the longest for a decade.

The Guardian quoted one authoritative observer of the established church as saying that the latest numerical analysis could be the start of a new beginning. "We had reached the demoralising depths. Now we are rising again," he said.

Commenting on the choice of Bishop Robert Runcie of St. Albans to succeed Dr. Coggan as Archbishop of Canterbury, the anonymous writer of the preface to the Yearbook said it was as

NEWS

though Kennedy was preparing to succeed Eisenhower. One generation was succeeding another, he said.

TROUBLE BREWING AT MENTMORE

The "World Government of the Age of Enlightenment" looks as if it may be heading for a head-on clash with residents of the village of Mentmore, Bucks, as a result of its plan to wreak further damage on Mentmore Towers, the former stately home of the Earl of Rosebery which was sold last year to the disciples of the Indian Guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, after being stripped of its art treasures.

The new owners, it seems, want to tear up the lawns and surround the Jacobean-style mansion with 750 flatlets to accommodate students of transcendental meditation.

The plan has incensed the 70 people who live in the village of Mentmore, just outside the gates of the estate. They have been uneasy about the followers of the Maharishi since his so-called World Government of the Age of Enlightenment bought the mansion for £200,000.

Village blacksmith Roger Mildred was reported as saying: "They are going to swamp us by increasing the population here ten-fold. Another villager, Diane Payne, had the opportunity of telling the Maharishi's "Minister of Information", Peter Warburton: "If all these people come here it will no longer be our village. It will be your village. We do not want to meditate, thank you, we just want to keep our quiet life here."

She seized the opportunity to sound off at a meeting in Mentmore Towers Grand Hall after the Maharishi's group had invited villagers in so that they could explain the building proposals. But the villagers were unimpressed and the meeting ended in uproar with the Guru's spokesmen, including Tom Aisbitt, "Minister for the Capital", being shouted down.

They showed no sign of succumbing to what one villager described as "the cult's very hypnotic technique". Charles Barker, an advertising director, said that all the members of the Aylesbury Vale District Council had been visited by the "spooky" members of the sect.

"They have a very hypnotic technique. They look you straight in the eyes and speak very softly and after an hour or two with them you end up feeling they have a point after all. Mr. Barker suggested

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that this technique may have been used upon the Council so that they could get planning permission for their building scheme.

"MOONIE" INQUIRY URGED

While on the subject of lunatic sects, it is worth reminding readers that members of the Unification Church—the Moonies—are as active as ever in Britain, although their techniques in persuading members of the public to part with their cash have changed somewhat.

Nowadays, you're likely to be approached by someone who attempts to attach a sticker, bearing some or other peculiar symbol, on your lapel. This action is followed up by an appeal for cash. When one acquaintance asked what the money was for, the reply was: "For the hungry people in Soho."

Meanwhile, separate calls for an inquiry into the activities of the Unification Church, founded by the hysterically anti-communist Korean, Sun Myung Moon, have been made by Mind, the leading British mental health charity, and the retiring Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Coggan.

Dr. Coggan's warning about the Unification Church, said to have sixty centres in Britain, was contained in a TV documentary investigation into the activities of the Moonies.

Dr. Coggan was worried about the church because "it is not a Christian organisation and has nothing to do with the ecumenical movement." Mind has much more sensible misgivings about the sect. It was concerned about how the church sometimes appealed to the emotionally disturbed and the severely mentally ill.

The documentary included the case of Kevin Fisher, who joined the sect on a student trip to America two years ago. His mother, Margaret Fisher of Morley, near Leeds, went twice to America to persuade him unsuccessfully to return. Last Christmas she fell into a deep coma, but although her son was told the sound of his voice might save her, he refused to return. Mrs. Fisher died last month, and her husband said he wants nothing more to do with his son.

The documentary prompted a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* from a father who had a similar experience. "My son Paul visited San Francisco and was abducted by the Unification Church six months before the completion of his PhD at University College of North Wales, Bangor, and despite every effort by myself and his professor, he was not allowed to return to complete his studies . . ."

wrote Mr. J. R. Stuart-Kregor.

He added: "A formal investigation into the insidious activities of the Unification Church is urgently required, since it is well-documented in the United States that prolonged exposure to the indoctrination techniques result in permanent brain damage.

"I would earnestly implore every person who has had one of their family involved with the 'Moonies' to contact their Member of Parliament with a request to urge a Parliamentary inquiry into the activities of this cult."

'PAY OR PRAY' SCHEME FOR CATHEDRALS

Britain's cathedrals and churches might soon require special "police" to separate millions of tourists from the tiny numbers of genuine worshippers if the churches yield to the increasing pressure to introduce admission charges during the tourist season to meet soaring maintenance costs.

Entry charges could solve most financial problems quickly, but there has been a reluctance so far to charge for fear of discriminating against worshippers. But this year the 900-year-old Lincoln Cathedral has decided to follow the example of Salisbury Cathedral this summer in introducing a tourist fee of 60p, which should raise the extra £100,000 needed for urgent repairs.

The cathedral will continue to ensure that worshippers are not hindered. Free admission is guaranteed at all times, but how it intends distinguishing between, say, the regular worshipper, and a tourist/worshipper is not known.

What is known is that tourists are a pretty tight-fisted bunch when it comes to historic places of worship. They only give, on average, a voluntary contribution of between one and three pence.

REAGAN REGRETS

Ronald Reagan, a leading contender for the Republican nomination in the American presidential election, has indicated his opposition to the use of tax funds for abortion. He is being supported by the National Right to Life Committee and the Life Amendment Political Action Committee. Mr Reagan voted for a bill liberalising abortion in 1967, but has since changed his views. An anti-abortion campaigner, Dr J. C. Willke, has said that Reagan has "long since felt this as one of the biggest mistakes of his career".

A "Dial-a-Prayer" service has been in existence in Manhattan for years. Now there is a new message available from "Dial-an-Atheist": "Atheists are people who think, who reason, who unshackle themselves from the myths and hostilities of organised religion".

BOOKS

THE ILLUSTRATED ORIGIN OF SPECIES by Charles Darwin, abridged and introduced by R. E. Leakey. Faber, £8.75.

It is doubtful whether any book caused so much heated controversy in Victorian England as Darwin's *Origin of Species*. It is perhaps understandable that Darwin himself was reluctant to publish when we hear of the Christian backlash to his publication. Fortunately there were those who understood Darwin's theory and were prepared to stand their ground and disseminate in public his evolutionary theory. In particular, T. H. Huxley, in a famous debate in Oxford, defeated Bishop "Soapy Sam" Wilberforce.

Of course in our day and age Darwin's views on the evolution of species by the process of natural selection have become accepted worldwide and are hardly controversial. However, it is my opinion that a restatement of Darwin's theory is called for in the light of further evidence that has been accumulated in the past century and also a demonstration of how evolution is compatible with breakthroughs that have been made in the comparatively new science of genetics.

Richard Leakey has aided the reader considerably by his own introduction to Darwin's original work. Much of the introduction is concerned with the discoveries made in genetics since Darwin's day and especially Gregor Mendel's discovery of particulate inheritance which illustrates how some characters are dominant and others recessive in offspring of any two varieties.

Another vital breakthrough has been the discovery of DNA as recently as 1953. Leakey gives a comprehensive diagram of the complex DNA molecule and shows its importance in conveying genetic material and the mechanics of this operation. Leakey also mentions in support of evolution the pepper moth which appears to confirm Darwin's ideas. Briefly, this species of moth found in the north of England has in the past two hundred years changed its wing colour from a silvery-grey to black to camouflage itself against its increasingly grimy and industrialised environment.

As regards the text of the book, again Leakey has done much invaluable work in making Darwin's writing more "readable" by eliminating some of the original turgid Victorian literary style as well as some sections which have a tendency to be tautological. Illustrations should always enhance and qualify material in the text and here we have a good example of this. It is interesting to compare Darwin's original illustrations with Leakey's additions which demonstrate at a brief glance how Darwin's evolutionary theory is itself subject to evolution in the light of new material and fresh evidence.

FREETHINKER

The cornerstone of Darwin's theory rests on the idea of natural selection, which to use Darwin's words was the survival of the fittest. This concept is explained in detail in Chapter Four and it was this idea more than any other that was responsible for the heated controversy which ensued following the publication in 1859 and the challenge to the existing idea of the immutability of species. As Leakey says, this book "began a revolution not only in the biological sciences, but in Western man's philosophical and moral conception of himself. It caused an uproar in Victorian society: copies were burned and the author denounced from the pulpit. It split the scientific community."

Like many other important scientific discoveries the principle of natural selection is apparently so obvious that we are amazed that no one ever fathomed it out centuries before. Darwin affirms that the species best adapted to its environment will be the one that is able to survive in the existing conditions and flourish. Any slight change in the environment, be it climatic, man-made or other will cause the species in that environment to make a corresponding change by an evolutionary process to meet the new conditions. Any species which cannot adapt or fails to evolve at a rate corresponding to the changed conditions of life will tend to become extinct.

We can observe a tendency in Britain for the native red squirrel to be superseded by the North American grey, as it seems that the grey is able to adapt to an urban environment, whereas the red appears unable to do so and is thus forced into remote rural areas. It is common in London to see grey squirrels being fed by hand, but I have never heard of this happening with a red. Other examples of this mentioned are the now extinct Tasmanian tiger and the disappearance of the dinosaurs, although it is still a mystery why the dinosaurs vanished in such a comparatively short time. (In terms of evolution a million years is a drop in the ocean—as is shown in the diagram inside the front cover.) A recent theory suggests that due to a large satellite coming into collision with the earth enough dust was circulating in the atmosphere to shut out light from the sun causing a shortage of food supply on earth. Thus the theory holds that the larger species became extinct and the smaller, including the primitive ancestors of man, were able to adapt to the new conditions and survive.

Recent geological experiments from samples in the earth's crust have supported this view from the high proportion of dust particles found, though, as Darwin himself was very careful to stress, the

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geological record is very imperfect. The circumstances in which fossils can be formed are not that common as any geologist knows. In some rock formations none are found at all, yet on the other hand on the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset there is an abundance of fossils.

Darwin's theory of evolution is not to be thought of as absolute in its interpretation of nature. Since Darwin's time several modifications have been made to his original ideas and Leakey shows in the text where these extensions of the theory have occurred. It is rather sad to hear of evangelical groups in the 1980s, particularly in the United States, pushing pamphlets asserting that the biblical creationist conception is still valid and that evolution cannot explain the development of species. In this area Leakey's book could serve a valuable purpose in the classroom. By all means tell children of the creationist point of view and then explain the evolutionary conception of nature by the use of this work, where the illustrations would be particularly helpful.

In conjunction with David Attenborough's publication *Life on Earth* this book could do much for young people who wish to understand the complexity of the development of life on this planet.

KEN WRIGHT

JOHN WESLEY by Stanley Ayling. Collins £7.50.

Stanley Ayling has written an interesting and scholarly account of a very remarkable man—remarkable both for his long-term influence and for his complex character. His father was a country parson, but his mother, the daughter of a dissenting minister who on her own initiative converted to Anglicanism at the age of 13, was the stronger influence, conducting her household and large family on the strictest puritan lines.

In the religious atmosphere of Wesley's youth, Hell was always just around the corner—literal, hot and the destination of most people. Wesley revolted against the Calvinism of so much Protestant thinking in his day, and one element in his campaigning was the insistence that God's grace was available to all who would accept it. In an early letter to his mother he writes: "If it was inevitably decreed that a vast majority of the world were only born to eternal death . . . is this consistent with either the divine justice or mercy?" He sounds almost modern when he reproaches the Calvinists: "You represent God as worse than the Devil." And to characterise God thus was blasphemous. "It is less absurd to deny the very being of God than to make

him an 'almighty tyrant' . . . who consigned unborn souls to hell." Wesley even went as far as to say that a virtuous God-fearing man might be "accepted of God even if he had never heard of Christ."

But John Wesley's liberalism on the subject of Hell was rather limited. An awful lot of people would end up there—a Catholic's chances of escape were slim—and a lifetime's effort was required to ensure one's own safety and to assist other people to the same good fortune. In his youth Wesley was very much concerned with his own soul; later, feeling assured that he himself was saved, he took his responsibilities to others very seriously. When told that he ought not to preach in any parish without an invitation from the local vicar, he replied that it was his duty to save souls wherever possible: "Were I to allow any soul to drop into the pit whom I might have saved from everlasting burnings. I am not satisfied God would accept my plea: 'Lord, he was not in my parish.'"

This is a fine sentiment as far as it goes, but one is left wondering how Wesley's god can be excused for allowing the damnation of a soul which could have been saved had an effective preacher happened along. Wesley had not advanced far enough from the Calvinists he so justly condemned. So long as God is pictured as the creator of "everlasting burnings" no reduction in the numbers consigned to it—even if far more drastic than Wesley had dared hope for—would prevent him being an "almighty tyrant."

Wesley was no democrat, either in the running of his own organisation or in his politics. However, this should not be held too much against him—his was not an age in which democracy seemed an obvious good. On the great social evils of his day he was outspoken. No condemnation of slavery and the slave trade could have been stronger than his. He described the trade as "the execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature," and American slavery as "the vilest that ever saw the sun." Freethinkers tend to underestimate the contribution of Christians to the anti-slavery movement just as Christians do that of deists and freethinkers. Christians may fairly claim Wesley as being more fairly representative than bishops appointed by the Crown.

Wesley was also well aware of the plight of the poor, which he blamed on the luxury of the rich, and he proposed various remedies to the Government. It is hard to disentangle how much of his objection to extravagant display was that it revealed an over-attachment to the things of this world and how much was that it wasted resources which could have relieved suffering. After visiting the poor and sick of South London he wrote: "Such scenes who could see unmoved? . . . If you saw these things with your own eyes, could you lay out money on ornament or superfluities?" He also strongly condemned the press-gang system.

He was credited with, and claimed, the gift of healing, and he wrote popular pamphlets on health care, which given the medical ideas of the times probably contained much of value. His views on education were much less sensible, however, and one can only pity the small group of children who were sent to be made good Methodists in the school he founded. There were no holidays so that the children could not be corrupted by the outside world, and the hours of study must have seemed endless. But considering the brutality prevalent in public schools at the time, Wesley's establishment must have seemed a haven of peace and decency.

At times his attitudes are harsh, as when he reproached parents—he never became one—over excessive grief at the loss of a child. But he was basically a kind and generous man. Single-minded adherence to the furtherance of a cause seldom brings out the softer virtues, and people who think that they have the answer to all the world's problems are notoriously difficult to get on with; sacrificing themselves without stint, they will naturally sacrifice others with as little compunction—a trait shared by many political activists today.

Wesley never saw himself as the founder of a church, and all his life clung to his status as an Anglican clergyman. He intended merely to set up a society of particularly dedicated church members—as much a part of the Church of England as its religious orders are part of the Roman Catholic Church. However, such practices as lay and open-air preaching were bound to cause friction and a decisive break came soon after his death.

Stanley Ayling can be congratulated on a book which illuminates the fascinating character of a man whose unshakeable courage, tireless energy and great powers of organisation have left their mark on the modern world.

MARGARET McILROY

FEEDBACK

James Lawler replies to some criticisms of his book "IQ, Heritability and Racism" (Lawrence & Wishart), which was reviewed by C. Findlay in "The Freethinker", December 1979.

In the first place, Mr Findlay disagrees with an underlying assumption of the entire work, namely that IQ tests (and related notions) have major negative policy implications. Mr Findlay distinguishes sharply between the position a teacher holds as to the cause of differences in relative performances and the pedagogical approaches a teacher may adopt. It is quite possible, he points out, for a teacher to believe that a child's slowness to learn is genetically caused and at the same time to provide that child with the utmost respect and the best possible learning conditions.

To clarify this point, a distinction should be made between quantitative differences and differences in kind. People who love animals do not expect the same behaviour of cats as of dogs, nor do they expect animals to have the possibilities of development of children. This is because they believe these differences in kind to be biologically caused. If this is the kind of difference the teacher has in mind, then a teacher who has a class of "slow learners", and who believes that the cause of this slowness is biological, will not believe that the children will be capable of going very far. This teacher will not approach the children in the same way as the teacher who believes that the "slowness" (frustration, apathy, bewilderment?) is due to environmental causes. However, I should point out that the negative policy implications of IQ tests or the theory of biological determination of abilities is a general assumption of my book, and not a point which I attempt to prove or illustrate in detail.

Mr Findlay draws a second sharp distinction between intelligence, on the one hand, and scientific theory or knowledge, on the other. While admitting the difficulties in identifying the first, he nevertheless is of the opinion that intelligence, as "an ability to solve problems in a computer-like fashion", has probably not changed on the average since the start of recorded history. He charges that by connecting the concept of intelligence with scientific theory and knowledge, I deviously "run away from the issue".

To stay with Mr Findlay's model, I would note that the computer only solves problems in connection with the programmes which have been drawn up for it. There is ambiguity here regarding the term "capacity". In one sense the computer hardware is the "basic" capacity to solve problems. But in another sense, it is the variable—and for highly developed computers, perhaps infinitely variable and progressively more advanced—programmes which give this first level capacity its real operational capacity, its capacity in the second sense. Moreover the capacity of the computer in the first sense is intimately connected with its capacity in the second sense. The best computer is the one that can use the most advanced programmes, to solve the most complicated problems.

Of course, even if we come to the point of developing a system of computers which will be able to solve all programmatic needs for the foreseeable future, there will still inevitably be different degrees of efficiency which can be detected—using fine measuring devices—between one such computer and another. We could establish what I call a relative comparison of computer efficiency by measuring differences in computer performances in relation to some average performance. (This is the way IQ tests measure the performances of children.) However, the fact that all the computers would be capable

of handling all foreseeable programmes would be the main thing, in relation to which variations in speed of computing on the basis of any particular programme would in general be relatively trivial.

We can apply this analogy to the human brain, seeing it as a highly developed computer, which, unlike the generations preceding it, is capable of operating with all foreseeable programmes. If this is true of the human brain, if its basic structure is relatively the same, on the average, throughout recorded history, then, although we can admit differences connected with it as "hardware", we can see no limit to its ability to operate on the basis of any foreseeable programme (or scientific theory, techniques, etc.). Consequently, the concept of a biologically fixed ceiling to "intelligence" (the operating computer which *includes* the programme) is meaningless.

What we find, in fact, are not these relatively unimportant differences among children and adults that might conceivably have something to do with inevitable differences in brains, but significant differences *in the programmes* (level of mathematics, sciences, history, etc.) which they are supposed to be able to use or create. The biological determinist is not arguing for the truism that people's brains, like their faces, must be different, and such differences must somehow affect differences in functioning. He or she is arguing that the differences are differences in kind, comparable to differences between primitive and sophisticated computers. People of the more primitive types are said to be inherently incapable of assimilating mental abilities or skills ("programmes") which are of great importance in contemporary society.

Mr Findlay asserts that "there is obviously a fixed upper limit to the physical or mental performance of every individual, but there is virtually no limit to how much new knowledge or how many new skills anyone can acquire, however slow he or she may be in acquiring them". By "fixed upper limit" he appears to mean only differences in relative speed of development or performance, for in the next part of the statement he denies any fixed upper limit. This denial strikes at the main hereditarian thesis, and has profound policy implications in a society in which, as a matter of fact, the "upper limits" in the acquisition of knowledge and skills (connected with the "programmes" made available in universities, for example) are quite restricted for the majority of the population.

If Mr Findlay would agree to something like "there are obviously differences in individual performances related to biological differences, but there is virtually no limit to how much new knowledge or how many new skills anyone can acquire, however slow he or she may be in acquiring them," then there would be no significant difference between us on this issue.

JAMES LAWLER

THEATRE

THE GREEKS. Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych.

"Why do we hate? What is the cause of evil?" Such are the big questions which this epic drama asks, as the chorus rather too constantly remind us. Despite the attempt to scale these philosophic heights, it is the narrative thrust of *The Greeks* that most strongly impressed me.

John Barton has laboured with the Herculean task of welding together ten Greek plays into a coherent story of the House of Atreus. The effect was bound to be uneven since the contents vary from versions of the greatest plays of Euripides to composite Greek texts and John Barton's straightforward adaptation of a section of Homer. There are high points in a long tale: the opening *Iphigenia in Aulis*, in which Agamemnon agonises over the sacrifice of his daughter before setting sail for war against the Trojans; the anguish of Hecuba, the Queen of Troy, become a slave after defeat; the devious welcome Clytemnestra gives to her husband Agamemnon, a conquering hero about to be slaughtered by his wife; the rage of Electra at her mother's murder of her father; the suffering of Orestes tortured by the furies of his conscience at killing his mother; a reconciling recognition of brother and sister as Orestes meets Iphigenia at Tauris. Put like that it sounds like an unendurable orgy of blood-lust, war and vengeance, but spread over three evenings (or one day if you have the stamina) and almost nine hours there is time to assimilate the horror which is interspersed with reflection, gentleness and humour.

The clarity of the narrative drive is very impressive, and not merely because it enables an audience with little classical education to disentangle the family relations of the House of Atreus, but because it allows a sweep of time to put into perspective a whole epoch of war and murder. There is a development from the hope before the Trojan war, through the petty quarrels and heroic deeds of which it consists, to an ironic hindsight suggesting that it was all for nothing (since the gods had sneakily transferred Helen from Troy to Egypt). Much of the irony of Greek tragedy depends on knowing the story, on being aware for example that a brother and sister who do not recognise each other are about to be reunited, and Barton's skilful story-telling allows the pleasures of such anticipation while retaining a forward momentum.

The chorus discreetly fill in the background for the audience—particularly in the complex matter of who sired whom. They were a little too prone to interject phrases like "How does the story go?" and "Once upon a time", and the prologue, presenting

various possible creation myths, had a mood reminiscent of rhapsodical schoolgirls on a hot summer afternoon, which fortunately did not return. The chorus of women were elsewhere very effective in providing comment, offering consolation to the protagonists and creating atmosphere as with the clanking chains of the enslaved Trojan women. The quick, staccato cross-fire of short lines, though a far cry from Greek choral conventions, usually provided a satisfactory dramatic solution to the use of a chorus on the stage in the twentieth century.

The chorus often spoke for women. In the prologue they asked Artemis to give them the courage to be themselves as women and during *Andromache*, which especially displayed the various ways women reacted to their mistreatment by men, they wondered whether women suffer more than men but also experience more happiness.

There are some marvellous roles for women which are superbly acted. Janet Suzman, taking two of the best parts as Helen and Clytemnestra, did not miss her opportunities. As Clytemnestra she displayed controlled viciousness as she prepared to murder and human sorrow as she told her daughter, Electra, how she regretted her personality was as it was. As Helen, Janet Suzman was a delightfully uncontrite coquette, to whom the lure of Aphrodite was irresistible in whatever form it came. Electra was played with lynx-like fury by Lynn Dearth, oozing obsession and self-hatred. Billie Whitelaw was a powerful *Andromache* and also a calm Athene offering balance between good and evil at the end. (*The Greeks* does much to redress the imbalance between men and women which there has traditionally been on stage.)

The gods intervene directly in the third part and there is a strong change of mood. High tragedy gives way to comedy and moments of pantomime. The variety of moods enriched the experience of watching *The Greeks* and only occasionally seemed misjudged as with the sudden appearance of Orestes and Electra as gun-swinging terrorists—though that provided appropriate smoke and flashes for Apollo's entrance. When Apollo, one of the gods whose intervention had been so often queried, actually appeared, he was a golden cynic, who came nowhere near explaining why the gods allow pain and suffering. Euripides was probably fairly cynical about the action of the gods: *The Greeks* remains neutral over whether there is divine control or intervention, or whether the gods are merely made by man in his own image. A secular audience will have been conscious of the strength of the argument that if the gods do exist, they must be capricious indeed to allow, even to initiate, great suffering.

Athene at the end offers a rather tame philosophy of balance and stoicism: on the one hand there is suffering, on the other hand there is goodness. Then the chorus, in the Greek folk style which is charac-

teristic of much of the production, dance joyfully in a healing, ripeness-is-all, finale. I am not easily touched by country-dance images of togetherness, but I did find after the marathon range of *The Greeks* the concluding dramatic joviality was a warming occurrence which balanced the preceding blood and fury. Nevertheless, the final plea "Let us cry sorrow, sorrow, but let the good prevail" cannot be sustained with any confidence as the awful narrative is recalled after leaving the theatre.

JIM HERRICK

LETTERS

WAR'S CAUSES

Mr Samuel Beer ("The Freethinker" January) after commenting on the irrationality of war, says "I doubt whether national sovereignty can explain this lunacy". But he gives no reason for this opinion except a vague statement about Lord Chalfont. I think national sovereignty does explain it. The reason Luns, Pym, etc, press missiles on other countries is that they hope fear of their retaliation will frighten Russia into not dropping H-bombs on themselves.

Mr Beer suggests the following reasons for the "irrationality":

1. Sheer lack of imagination. But he can only give an imaginary person as an example! Sir Anthony Eden had been through the Second World War and therefore must have known that bombing Egypt in 1956 would cause misery. If people can't see that their actions will cause destruction and suffering then we need something to stop them—like World Government.

2. "They have always done it." According to this argument everyone should be still carrying out human sacrifices and living in caves.

3. "War means work—this was Hitler's solution to the unemployment problem." President Truman started the Cold War when there was full employment and President Nasser started the six day war in 1967 when there was a labour shortage in Egypt. Hitler of course made war to make Germany powerful and self-sufficient—i.e. for national sovereignty reasons.

4. "Technical virtuosity which drives one scientist to outdo the next in producing horrors." And the only example Mr Beer mentions is a scientist who didn't produce a horror!

"War is a human custom . . . and it is time man gave it up," says Mr Beer. I'm afraid I think this is superficial and it could be an excuse for not attempting to tackle the problems of national sovereignty. If a determined attempt had been made to get world government, starting about 1920, we might be on the way out from our troubles now.

I. S. LOW

I think that the notion to set up a Secular party put at the Annual General Meeting of the National Secular Society (see "The Freethinker", January 1980, p.8) was a most pertinent recognition of the political influence of the papist camp, especially through bodies such as the World Council of Churches.

It has long been recognised by secularists and indeed evangelical churches, such as those comprising the Protestant Alliance, that the entire set of RC organisations has one primary aim, namely to win power for the Vatican by placing its adherents in positions of influence. To this end these organisations seek influence in any social or political grouping that exists anywhere, right-wing or left-wing, provided that it is not specifically anti-Catholic.

Papists have no difficulty in carrying dual-standards,

having as their example the Jesuit practice of "equivocation"—a science of speaking the truth only to oneself, whilst simultaneously lying to others! The Chambers English Dictionary gives as one definition of a Jesuit: "a crafty or insidious person, an intriguer, a prevaricator. . ." and it is common practice for RCs to form secret groups within any secular organisation to which they belong.

For these reasons it is a pity that R. W. Aldridge's motion was lost at the AGM. What harm could a separate political wing have done to the NSS? Perhaps Mr Aldridge was seeking to sound a much-needed note of alarm at the growing influence of Romanism in our daily lives. Perhaps like-minded secularists would still form a group to monitor the progress of politico-papism without offending the NSS.

I would like to hear from anyone who would like to set up a corresponding group on these lines.

D. REDHEAD,
75, Briar Lea, Bournmoor,
Houghton-le- Spring, Tyne & Wear.

The most powerful irrational belief in the world is secular not religious though the two are often linked. Nationalism is the "one true faith" that unites men in a common enmity with God, whether Yahweh, Jehovah, Allah or Dialectic Materialism forever "on their side". Russell described nationalism as a tribal sentiment towards one's geographical location, a moral imperative for autonomy that if successful leads automatically to war and imperialism. Nationalism is a naive assumption we can no longer afford. Nuclear weapons keep a balance of terror but it is nationalism which maintains the terror and the need for these weapons.

Economic nationalism produces the rich few states who try to dominate one another's markets to maintain their domestic profit and full employment. Within a national economy competition between the monopolies of organised capital and labour create the spiral of price inflation. The rich nations can only trade with one another for only they can afford to buy what they are each desperately trying to sell. Meanwhile the Third World is unable to join the economic scramble. The aid given them can have no fundamental effect, competition demands that the rich nations cannot compromise their own national interests.

The new computer technology compounds the problem. Reinvestment in automation is reducing the work force. As the worker is also the principle consumer, the market is further narrowed with potentially disastrous consequences. Markets are thus finite and cannot grow indefinitely and their contraction only increases the terror and the risk of nuclear war.

This poses an immediate challenge to freethought. The real problem is obscured so long as we accept the validity of beliefs that prevent a mature assessment of the facts. The problem is no longer how to preserve past values or tribal loyalties but whether our current beliefs are adequate to our future survival.

The specialised knowledge of science tends to isolate itself to an elite few while it affects everyone. In the ancient world all benefitted from the Graeco-Roman civilisation yet for every Cicero or Livy there were thousands who remained superstitious and ignorant, the same is true of our civilisation. In the event the Roman world succumbed to the Christian dark age and if an automated society were to create a rich middle class bored with empty lives, intellectuals afraid of their loneliness, and millions who possess neither wealth nor educated talent they will turn to some form of religion. Unless science and freethought meet the challenge of a new dark age of universal ignorance the only end is annihilation.

JOHN SUTCLIFFE

SECULAR NIGHTINGALES

I read with consternation bordering on alarm that something which appeared under my name in "The Freethinker" inspired one reader, Frank Maitland, to suggest that "we should try to introduce community singing into our meetings and also have special song sessions." (Letters, February).

I would fervently support Mr Maitland's suggestion if there was the slightest hope that a sing-song at meetings would be a deterrent to long-winded and boring speakers. Sadly I must conclude that it would not—they are made of sterner stuff. The whole exercise would be embarrassing and musically awful.

Mr Maitland is only partly correct when he asserts that "there is a great appeal in music and singing together is a joy, a stimulation and a friendly activity." Allow me to make two comments on that statement. First, although there is indeed a great appeal in music to many people, there are great numbers to whom it does not appeal at all. Secondly, singing together is not always a joy. I am passionately fond of music, but on some occasions have had to listen to singing which, rather than causing me to be joyful, almost stimulated me into unfriendly activity.

Before I am given a severe mauling by pastoral, positive and religious humanists on account of the foregoing, let me applaud the musical and artistic achievements of the secularist and ethical wings of the humanist movement, often of a very high standard over many years. At a personal level I would add that this was one of the most satisfying aspects of my work as full-time secretary of the National Secular Society.

A feathered nightingale singing in Berkeley Square may be charming and stimulating; secularist nightingales singing in Red Lion Square are quite another matter.

WILLIAM McILROY

CONDEMNED

May I make it clear that "the woman" ("The Freethinker", February 1980, p24) did not, as Mark Shivas said, condemn "out of hand without ever seeing it" the series called Cassanova which he produced.

MARY WHITEHOUSE
National Viewers and Listeners Association

Gay Humanist Group's President

MAUREEN DUFFY

will speak on "Separate Development—Out of the Closet into the Ghetto?".

17 March, 7.30 pm, at Conway Hall, Library

All humanists welcome

PRAY-BY

A motorist was fined £5 for stopping his car on the grass verge of a motor-way so that he could kneel and pray. Mr Said Rahman admitted stopping his car on the hard shoulder for reasons other than an emergency.

The next headmaster of the famous public school Eton said that chapel was necessary to assert the "voice of Christian decency" in an age when there were so many atheists "shouting from the other side".

Freethinker Fund

An excellent total this month. We thank readers, who are making an important contribution to financing *The Freethinker*, for their generous donations.

A Ashton, 50p; P. Barbour, £7; E. Barnes, £1; A. Bayne, £4; I. Bertin, £2; B. J. Buckingham, £1; S. Clowes, £5; A. R. Cook, £3; W. Donovan, £1; E. C. Eagle, £2; D. Fyfe, 50p; W. Grainger, £1.60; E. Greaves, £5; O. Grubiak, £2; E. Haslam, 60p; J. Holland, £2.60; F. Howard, £6; E. J. Hughes, £3.60; D. Jeeps, £2; F. W. Jones, £2; M. Lonsdale, £5; H. Madoc-Jones, £1; R. Marks, £2; S. Mogyey, £1; C. Morey, £6; M. P. Neilson, £3; M. O'Brien, £1; A. Oldham, £7; K. Pariente, £20; V. S. Petherton, £2; M. Russell, £1; D. Shoesmith, £1; M. Tolfree, £1; N. Toon, £1; J. Vallance, £7; A. A. Van-Montagu, £2; A. Vogel, £2; A. Williams, £3; E. I. Willis, £3; C. Wilshaw, £2; D. Wood, £2; A. Woodford, £2.50; D. Wright (Ipswich), £2; D. Wright (Ilford), £3; I. Young, £1; Anon, £21; Anon, £20; Anon, £5. Total for the period 22nd January to 19th February: £180.65.

The Pope wants to make marriage annulments more difficult. He told the Vatican judges not to give people seeking marriage annulments the benefit of the doubt. He said: "It is not lawful for any judge to grant an annulment of marriage if he has not first become morally certain that such nullity exists."

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. Dr J. A. D. Kennedy: Recent Developments in Family Law in Northern Ireland. Thursday, 13 March, 8 pm. 8a Grand Parade, Castle-reagh Road, Belfast. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co Antrim. Tel: White-abbey 66752.

Berkshire Humanists. Roger Halsall: Humanist Good News. Friday, 14 March, 8 pm. Friends Meeting House, Church Street, Reading.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Beatrice Clark: Louise Michel—Passionate Humanist. Sunday, 13 April, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Harrow Humanist Society. Professor Bernard Crick: Political Literacy in Schools and the Media. Tuesday, 11 March, 8 pm. Gayton Road Library, Nr. Harrow on the Hill Station.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Walter Southgate: Cockney Life in the 1890s. Tuesday, 18 March, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre, (Junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road).

Lewisham Humanist Group. Rita Craft: Community Health Councils. Thursday, 27 March, 7.45 pm. Lee Centre, 1 Aislibie Road, Lee.

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. Doreen Parkes: Blood Sports. Monday, 17 March, 7.45 pm. 46, Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 9 March, Dr Harry Stopes-Roe: Why Be Good? 16 March, Peter Cadogan: Burying Bentham. 23 March, Dr Henryk Skolimowski: Science and Mysticism Revisited. 30 March, Dr James Hemming: The Meaning of "Spiritual." Sunday Forums, 3 pm. 9 March, Northern Ireland—Do We Care? 23 March, Land Use for the Next Decade. Tuesday Discussions, 7 pm. Theme: The Creed I Left Behind Me. 4 March Protestant—Betty Beer and Edwina Palmer. 11 March, Barbara Smoker—Catholic. 18 March, Marc Berg—Jewish. 25 March, Muslim—Ali Hassan.

Sutton Humanist Group. Carol Boddy: Detention Centres for Young Offenders. Wednesday, 12 March, 7.30 pm. Friends Meeting House, Cedar Road, Sutton.

Tyneside Humanist Society. John Gibson: Trends on the Radical Left. Wednesday, 26 March, 7.30 pm. Friends Meeting House, 1 Archbold Terrace, Newcastle 2.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Group Forum: The position of paraplegics and the N.H.S. Friday, March 14, 7.30 pm. Dr John Durant: Science and Human Values. Friday, 28 March, 7.30 pm. S.C.V.S. Meeting Room, 4 Gloucester Place, Swansea.

Worthing Humanist Group. Philip Lewtas: My Life in Music. Sunday, 30 March, 5.30 pm. Adult Education Centre, Union Place, Worthing.

Humanist Holidays. Summer 1980. Port Erin, Isle of Man. 30 August to 13 September. £40 per week including VAT and service. £5 deposit. Contact Mrs Beer, 58, Weir Road, London SW12. Tel: 01-673 6234.

THE FREETHINKER

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