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CATHOLIC GROUP SAID TO BE SECRETIVE AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY DAMAGING

It is alleged that the Catholic society, Opus Dei, is secretive, power-seeking, psychologically dangerous, and exercises commercial and political influence. In "The Times" of 12 January a full page article by Clifford Longley (former Religious Affairs correspondent and himself a Catholic) and Dan van der Vat gave a "Profile" of the organisation. Much information was claimed to be based on details given by a member who made detailed notes before leaving the Opus Dei.

The *Times* report gives alarming details of the way in which a branch of the Catholic Church operates. There is evidence that this secretive group is seeking to increase its influence and has found greater favour with Pope John Paul II than with the two previous popes. When even Catholics criticise their own murkier parts, it is surely time for wider public concern at some Catholic activities. The not dissimilar practices of groups such as the Unification Church (Moonies) have led to questions in Parliament; but with the Catholic Church, which boasts over 70 members of the House of Lords and many MPs there is not likely to be any such clamour.

The worst aspects of Opus Dei appear to be its secrecy and its potential damage to young people. The Opus Dei claim that they are quite open about their aims and do not withhold information. But their telephone number is not in the London telephone directory, and when finally contacted their spokesman was very reluctant to talk on the phone. He arranged an interview for a *Freethinker* representative, which was cancelled at the last minute. He said that non-believers were entitled to attend meditation-type meetings and become residents at student hostels. However, he said that the group's journal, *Cronica*, was not available to the public.

According to *The Times* article membership of

Opus Dei is by invitation only and should not be disclosed even to close relatives. To be fair, this did not deter some members from openly writing to *The Times* disputing the report and praising the group's charitable activities. "One of its principal attractions is the carefully fostered feeling of belonging to a chosen elite," is a comment in *The Times* article. Even the Catholic weekly, *The Universe*, not noted for its liberal stance, said that "It is almost as though the organisation wishes to foster a quasi-masonic air of elitism made more enticing to potential members by an air of mystery. That kind of air is unhealthy." The editorial added ". . . it is frequently true that those who appear to be hiding something have something to hide."

The alleged psychological damage comes from the severe regime of the society and its emphasis on self-mortification. In the words of the "whistle-blowing" former member, Dr John Roche, of Linacre College, Oxford, there are unhappy consequences for some members: "Personal identity suffers a severe battering; some are reduced to shadows of their former selves, others become severely disturbed." He also demanded that Opus Dei be "thoroughly and exhaustively investigated by the Church".

Instruments of Self-Mortification

In halls of residence a quasi-monastic regime is imposed on young numeraries—as one level of member are called. They are apparently expected to wear the *Cilis*, "a strip of metal rather like chain mail with the points of the links bent inwards, for two hours a day, usually around the top of one thigh so it (and the resulting contusions) cannot be seen". *The Times* piece also alleges that a "whip with five or six thongs" is used by numeraries on their own

1881

CENTENARY YEAR

1981

buttocks while praying. *The Times* contains drawings of these medieval-looking instruments of self-mortification.

The Opus Dei deny many of the allegations. But the strict regime was also reported in a letter from a former student who resided at an Opus Dei hall of residence. Mr Barber (*The Times*, 17 January) said "The most dangerous aspect of the work of Opus Dei is its insidious nature." He also described the absurd lengths taken to prevent males from coming into contact with female kitchen staff: "A small hatch was cut into the wall at a level of two feet so that if one wanted to see a female one would have to contort oneself in a quite ridiculous manner."

Women are separated into a distinct section in Opus Dei and marriage is not highly regarded.

Self-mortification was given much emphasis by the organisation's founder, Monsignor Escriva. A section of his book of meditations is devoted to "Mortification" and contains phrases such as "Where there is no mortification there is no virtue" and "Let us bless pain! Love pain! Sanctify pain! Glorify pain!" Masochism may be acceptable amongst consenting adults in private, but it surely should not be acceptable from a public proselytising body. It is, however, unlikely to be condemned by a Church which places a masochistic crucifixion at the centre of its faith.

Opus Dei was founded in 1928 by Monsignor Escriva, a Spanish priest, who had studied law and theology and worked in country parishes and poor districts of Madrid. It aimed to be a Secular Institute fostering perfection among all people, especially professionals. As the name "God's Work" indicates, there is an emphasis on using one's work to promote "God's purpose". The group aims to recruit professionals of high calibre. Although it is a lay organisation *The Times* article suggests that it is dominated by priests. From Spain it spread around the world, now having a reported 75,000 members. It was given a Decree of Final Approval from the Holy See in 1950.

Opus Dei has always been controversial in Catholic circles, especially in Spain, where it was closely associated with Franco's regime. After the liberalisation following the death of Franco, much was written in the Spanish press about Opus Dei. During this period Spanish bishops attempted to disassociate themselves from the former regime and conflict in the Vatican was caused by this. Pope Paul VI is thought not to have favoured Opus Dei.

Reports have indicated that John Paul II is much more well-disposed towards Escriva. It is said that he was seen praying at Escriva's grave at the time of his election to the papacy. Moves to make Escriva a saint are thought to be sympathetically regarded by John Paul II, and this is an example of Opus Dei's potential increased influence. There have been

reports that Opus Dei are attempting to obtain control of the Vatican radio, at present run by the Jesuits.

The tortuous machinations of Vatican politics are not of crucial concern to freethinkers. But any struggle for greater power by an organisation with a reactionary political background, is likely to be very important in the future of a papacy which combines up-to-the-minute trendy public images with traditional theology.

The Times article reports that Opus Dei has gained influence in Latin America. It is thought to have a close association with Archbishop Trujillo, president of the Latin American Conference of Bishops.

Spain is where Opus Dei achieved its greatest economic and political influence. During the late sixties, towards the close of Franco's reign, the Minister of Economic Planning, the Minister of Industry later Foreign Minister, and the Minister of Commerce later of Finance, were all members of Opus Dei. *The Times* article writes of Opus Dei's influence in Spain: "It was not done by Opus Dei as such but by three of its members whose presence in the government nonetheless brought OD influence in Spanish politics to its peak in the period 1969-73."

Octopus Dei

The Times article continued with comment on financial influence: "If the fresh air of post-Franco democracy in Spain has blown away OD's influence at the political summit, though not at still significant lower levels of the state apparatus, its connexions with big business are very large and continue to grow." The large conglomerate RUMASA, a holding company with more than 300 subsidiaries, including 21 banks and 13 of Spain's largest firms, is often called "Octopus Dei" in Spain. Its shares are not quoted and its profits not disclosed. (A bottle of sherry bought at Augustus Barnet, suggests *The Times* article, might contribute minutely to Opus Dei's coffers, since it owns the firm and deals in sherry.)

Opus Dei was established in Britain in the early 1950s. It was registered as a charity in 1964. Its main funds are deposited in the Netherhall Education Association (registered as a charity) with fixed assets in 1978 of £1.85 million, mostly in property.

The society aims to recruit young people. It has been vigorously opposed in Oxford, where students have been warned of the methods of Opus Dei by Catholic clergy. It has found that the older the members are when they join the more likely they are individuals at younger than student age.

A letter to *The Times* (16 January) from Father

(continued on page 20)

Astrology and Gauquelin

DR JEREMY CHERFAS

Astrology has become one of the most popular "pseudo-sciences" of our times, which, like many superstitions, is half-believed by an enormous number of people. Here Dr Jeremy Chérfas, a member of the British Committee for the Scientific Investigation of the Paranormal, examines a new version of a book on astrology by Gauquelin,* well-known for his research on the subject.

On 16 April 1968 the magazine-reading public of France was offered, absolutely free, an "ultra-personal horoscope". Many took advantage of the generous offer and sent the required details to Astral Electronics. In exchange the company sent each, as promised, a 10-page document in which there was a psychological profile and an annual rhythm that charted the good and bad periods of each year. In addition the company included a little questionnaire—to help it assess the accuracy of its horoscopes—and a stamped addressed envelope to return it. Of those who returned the questionnaire, 94 per cent had recognised themselves clearly in the psychological portrait, 90 per cent said that this opinion was shared by family and friends, and 80 per cent felt that the annual rhythm painted a true picture of the cycle they each experienced.

Good evidence that astrology is a true science, no? Well, no. You see, each of the seekers had received the same horoscope. It wasn't a fake document though, full of "you are generally calm but sometimes edgy" phrases, it was a genuine horoscope prepared by one of France's premier computer astrologers for a birth in Auxerre at 3 am on 17 January 1897. At that moment was born the baby who grew up to become Dr Marcel Petiot—France's Dr Crippen, known as *Petiot le diabolique*—who boasted at his trial that he had murdered 63 fugitives from Nazi France, dissolving their bodies in quicklime and keeping their savings and belongings. This was the man whose psychological profile the punters were so eager to claim as their own; it didn't fit its owner very well either.

The author of that study, one of the classics in the history of astrology, was Michel Gauquelin, psychologist and director of the Laboratory for the Study of the Relations between Cosmic Rhythms and Psychophysiology. Gauquelin is currently the darling of some of today's astrologers as a result of his later researches but he started off, as he puts it, "to confront the fundamental problem, the problem that

truly puts astrology into question: Is it an illusion or a scientific reality?" This book, originally published in French in 1969, recounts for a lay audience his investigations of that problem and concludes, with astrological historian Bouché-Leclercq, that "astrology is a faith that speaks the language of science, and a science that can only find the justification of its principles in faith". In other words, whatever else astrology may be, it is not science.

This little book, which is grossly overpriced because it will sadly not sell anything like the quantities that even the worst astrology books manage, sets out Gauquelin's views on the nature and history of astrology, the psychology of the client, and a lot more besides. He says in his introduction that although the book was written more than a decade ago nothing in the interim has prompted him to change the text; what he said then still stands, perhaps even stronger with subsequent investigations.

Hokum

He provides sufficient information to confound the novice astrologer—if only information were all that was needed—and his chapter on Nostradamus is an excellent review of the hokum that surrounds this sixteenth century con-man. If I have any complaint it is that, perhaps unsurprisingly, Gauquelin is excessively chauvinistic and his tight focus on things French can be a little wearing. But this is a small point. The first seven of the eight chapters are, then, an ample demonstration that astrology has nothing of substance on which to build its claims, only the endless gullibility of the client and, in committed astrologers, a capacity for self-delusion that is nothing short of staggering. In the final chapter Gauquelin gives a very brief summary of his more positive results.

Astrologers, in addition to the position of the planets and Sun in relation to the constellations of the zodiac, are also interested in the position of the planets in the sky at the moment of birth. Just as the Sun appears to rise and set every day so too each of the planets also appears to circle the Earth. The astrologer divides that circle into twelve houses, each of which has control over some sphere of life; a planet then exerts its influence on the sphere of life controlled by the house that it occupies at the moment of birth. Astrologers are by no means agreed as to how the sky should be divided into houses, or which house controls which part of life, but under one scheme, for example, Mars in the first house (just below the Eastern horizon) would produce an aggressive individual with a muscular body, while if it were in the eighth house it would predict a violent

* *Dreams and Illusions of Astrology* by Michel Gauquelin. Glover & Blair, £9.95.

death, perhaps in war.

Gauquelin investigated this aspect of astrology in the only way possible, empirically. After an astonishing effort he discovered that there was a definite link between the planets and particular professions based on just two houses, the ninth and the twelfth (just past the zenith and just above the eastern horizon). Soldiers had Jupiter and Mars in the key sectors, scientists Mars and Saturn, actors Jupiter, and so on. Further work with Hans and Sybille Eysenck (which should sound a warning bell) revealed ostensible connections between the planetary positions and components of personality.

Although Gauquelin's findings are not predicted by classical astrology that has not prevented the astrologers claspng him to their collective bosom. And it has created a problem for other sceptics, whose countries did not follow the Napoleonic edict to record time of birth. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the American Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal has failed to replicate Gauquelin's strongest effect, that linking sports champions and Mars. The Committee's attempt has descended to petty wrangling

(Opus Dei)

H. S. Thwaites, a chaplain to overseas students in London, defends OD and its influence over the young. He wrote that the criticism of OD was reminiscent of attacks on the Jesuits in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, attacks which "did not recognise that the Church Militant needed a new sort of militia. And it could be the same today. It would seem that many of our young people, reared in a permissive society, feel the need of the direction and discipline that Opus Dei apparently offers."

The secrecy of Opus Dei has included attempts to control what is written about them. A famous example of censorship took place in Spain in 1979. A Catholic priest, who edits an important Catholic journal *Vida Nueva*, received documents which enabled him to produce an 8-page pullout section on Opus Dei. After the journal had gone to press he received a visit from two men who said they were from the secretariat of the Opus Dei in Spain. They tried to persuade him to withdraw the article, but he refused. Shortly afterwards the publishing company ordered him to withdraw the article, and under heavy pressure he did so. But the attempted secrecy misfired, when a statement was included saying that the section was torn out of the magazine, and much scandal and publicity about OD resulted.

There is no doubt more to be found out about Opus Dei's activities in England and abroad. There is evidence that the sect is a public menace. It is the unacceptable face of Catholicism. (Is there an acceptable face, some readers will immediately ask.) Any doubts which leading Catholics have about the organisation will no doubt be investigated behind

about whose champions are more eminent, medical practices, and other arcane matters and status of the Mars effect is, at the moment, undecided.

In truth, I don't know what to make of Gauquelin's results on the influence of planetary houses. This is not the place for an extended discussion, which I feel would lead to the conclusion that the effects do not exist.

In *Dreams and Illusions of Astrology* Gauquelin is careful to single out the profit motive as an important part of the modern astrologer's make-up. In the Dr Petiot experiment he scrupulously ensured that his punters paid nothing except one stamp; I suspect they would have been even more enthusiastic if they had had to fork out 120 francs, which is what Gauquelin paid for Petiot's horoscope. What worries me is that his own more recent books are of exactly the sort of pop "know thyself" psychology that is so successful today, and those books are based on a foundation that is every bit as suspect as mainstream astrology's. *Dreams and Illusions* is interesting because it reveals Gauquelin's attitude before he became, however unwillingly, part of astrology's fabric.

closed doors. The prestige which Christianity, unfortunately, still retains in this country will no doubt prevent the kind of public inquiry or questions in Parliament which has been raised by the activities of groups such as the Scientologists or Moonies.

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Who is the Enemy?

PETER CADOGAN

Peter Cadogan, General Secretary of South Place Ethical Society, argues that humanism should avoid attacking the dogmas of past periods and concentrate upon the dogmas of today—which he sees as the politico-religious ideologies such as marxism and fascism. He also puts forward the view that while Christianity is an expendable faith, there are other more universal aspects of religion which retain their meaning, in particular a sense of the sacred and a sense of belonging. He is writing in his personal capacity.

Who or what is the main enemy? Given that we are after freedom, justice, truth, peace and the rest, who or what is getting in the way? Freethought in the nineteenth century found the main enemy in Christianity and its church, with all the superstitions, dogmas, authoritarian relationships and gross social prejudices that went with them. There was a jungle in the way of freedom and a way had to be cut through it. Although Nietzsche declared God dead in the early 1870s he, God, certainly would not lie down. His demise was postponed in this country until 1960 when the publishers of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* were acquitted in the High Court. Christianity had always been based (and I am dealing here with its mainstream only) on the fear of the body—thus the Virgin Mary, the celibacy of priests, the notion of sin (essentially sexual), the vicarious cannibalism of the Mass, sado-masochistic interest in crucifixion, asceticism, flagellation, martyrdom and the mortification of the flesh. D. H. Lawrence killed them off by teaching the glory of the body and mind—body unity. Salvationist, auto-crucifying Christianity will never be restored. Other elements in Christianity—Platonist, Stoic, apocalyptic and occult—will recover, and for good or for ill are now recovering. We need to re-assess them separately for whatever they are worth, but that is not my problem here.¹

Today it is still true that dogmas and dictators remain the main enemies. But what and who are they? They have changed their spots. They used to be clerico-religious and now they are politico-religious. Instead of theology we have ideology. Instead of priests we have politicians—Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev, Mussolini, Hitler, Mao and Maggie Thatcher—they all have doctrines in the name of which they command and enforce obedience. They are the twentieth century enemy of all free thought. First Marxism, Fascism, Nazism, Maoism and now an up-dated Utilitarianism that offers us money as God and our deliverance through its manipulation. The totalitarians of our time are the real enemy and Christians are their victims as much as sceptics. We can therefore look for friends and allies among

what is left of the Churches in non-Christian Britain. This is a complete turn-around and if we don't make it we shall be left by the sidelines as history moves past us.

I submit that to tackle Marxism and monetarism and their consequences, i.e. Soviet and bureaucratic-multinational ideology and power, are the main tasks for today. At the same time, however, freethinking humanist opinion is not directly concerned with politics and economics as such — we face those things wearing other hats — the issue for us is rather exposing dogmas, attacking the arbitrary and discovering/inventing creative alternatives.

Exposing Dogmas

The central dogma of Marx, for example, is that history is an account of class struggles that will culminate in the dictatorship of the proletariat. Round this is built the Party-as-Church. The historical truth is that the history of class alliances parallels the history of class struggles and at critical moments is more important. Cromwell's New Model Army was a class alliance and so was the Royalist Army. The struggle for the Reform Bill of 1832 was led by a "Political Union of the Middle and Working Classes". And since the "working class" is not one class but a complex of classes (consider the millions of workers who vote Tory) the notion of its dictatorship is nonsense. SOLIDARITY, in Poland, is now a ten-million strong class alliance of workers, farmers, professionals and the Catholic Church, and this is the source of its strength. Marx was just wrong. I first saw the light in this matter in 1959 when, as a Marxist I asked myself the question: "What is the class identity of the Aldermarston March?" I was actually on the march at the time and looked at it closely and, lo and behold, it had no "class identity"! It was clearly made of *all* classes! I then departed from the marxist fold.

Mrs Thatcher's dogma about money is based largely on her assumption that she is able to control its supply. But as Lord Kaldor pointed out in *The Times* recently, four-fifths of the money-supply is in the hands of the private banks. It is not the Mint or Government Departments that are in control and the money is not "printed"; the banks enter it in their ledgers, as credit to their customers, and that is it. There is nothing the Government can do about it.

However, Mr Brezhnev is not going to accept SOLIDARITY and Mrs Thatcher is not going to accept her powerlessness. They are both prepared to drive us over the brink in defence of their dogmas. Brezhnev, more autocratic and powerful than any

Czar, will invade Poland to impose his will and turn the clock back, lest his whole empire collapse under him. Mrs Thatcher will, likewise, drive us inexorably to political and financial breakdown. She has fixed the date herself—November 1981—that is the date, two years from the inception of her policies, that has been determined as the take-off point for recovery. By that time we are supposed to have hit bottom and started rising. According to the Department of Applied Economics at Cambridge we shall not hit bottom and rise, we shall hit bottom and go through.

Already Mrs T. is leaning heavily on her last resort, the Army. The Army is currently (at the time of writing) keeping the Prison Service going and our 42 prisons have passed out of Government control; it is standing by with Green Goddesses in case it has to maintain the Fire Service and 45,000 Reserves have been ordered to collect new uniforms. What if, one day, the Army decides it is not in business to strike-break? Then Mrs T. will have nothing left and we shall face constitutional dilemma unprecedented for 300 years.²

I am writing this article to make one essential point. Attacking dogmas and arbitrariness is central to what we are about. But it is a dogma to assume that the dogmas of yesterday are the dogmas of today, and that the enemies of yesterday are the enemies of today. Things have changed immensely in the last hundred years, partly because of the success of people like ourselves. It is a poor compliment to them if we can do no better than fight their battles all over again. They have put us in a strong position to face a different future. We shall only be able to face it if we can first identify it, thus the foregoing.

I get a little tired of having to explain the difference between Christianity and religion. Christianity is an expendable faith limited in space and time (less than 2,000 years and mostly in Europe), projecting a supernatural God from the image of an earth-bound Emperor, the first as divine mandate for the second. With the collapse of empires and the rise of scholarship, God departs. But Christianity has also been a vast cultural amalgam from which the enduring parts (music, theatre, rites of passage, architecture and literature) have been long breaking free, establishing an autonomous identity. One has to distinguish between the lasting and the ephemeral, the supernatural, the sacred and the profane. The sorting-out process began with the Renaissance and suffered partial set-back at the Reformation. Now we are at it again and this time we can aspire to get it right. (We are going to have a spot of bother with the Evangelical revival. We have seen something of its influence behind Reagan in the US, but it has no comparable strength in this country. There is no need for a sledge-hammer to

crack what's left of the nut of salvationist Christianity.)

Religion or the religious is something else. It is not limited in time or space in the sense that it seems to be as old as *homo sapiens* at least, and to be universal throughout all lands everywhere—see all the anthropological evidence from *The Golden Bough* onwards. It appears to have started through the sense that all things, animate and inanimate, have in-dwelling spirits. These spirits are held to be more real and more important than their external, physically apparent forms. Life is to be understood as a complex of inter-relationships between spirits and if anything goes wrong or might go wrong (sickness, disaster, etc) then remedy lies through rituals and sacrifices offered to the relevant spirits. It is from this consideration of the deeper nature of things that art and science take off from religion. I won't go on with the familiar story. Every change in the political history of a people is duly reflected in a religious change. Layers of experience are superimposed on each other. Countless pagan-religious ideas and rituals end up incorporated in Christianity.

Pluralist Humanism

To ignore or put down a *sympathetic* albeit critical study of religious phenomena is just to neglect a century of great scholarship and depress one's own level of understanding. But the critical question then comes up—given that Christianity is over, what then? This is the difficult area. My own conclusion is quite well known by now—it is that when all the superstition and imperial nonsense have been cleared away two essential religious features remain endemic and therefore important to us. The first is our sense of the sacred and the mysterious and the second is our sense of belonging. On these grounds our greatest scientists, men like Einstein and Julian Huxley, have regarded themselves as deeply religious. This is religious humanism. To some people these observations mean nothing. So be it! There is no need for us to conduct a war against each other. We can discuss and even enjoy our differences, a good argument is good for one's mettle; what has to go is pretence, saying one thing and believing another. What has to go, too, is any claim to exclusive wisdom. Different ideas and temperaments can co-exist quite happily in parallel, but there is bound to be trouble if we get crossed lines. There is plenty of room for religious and non-religious humanists both separately and together in a movement that has a pluralist organisation. No monoliths for us!

1. See *Christianity—Four Religions in One* — 'Ethical Record', Nov/Dec 1980.
2. See my *Direct Democracy* (1975).

Euthanasia, the Courts and the Police

Nicholas Reed, general secretary of Exit, has been accused of aiding and abetting suicide. Mr Mark Lyons, a member of Exit, is in gaol, having been refused bail, after being charged on 15 accounts including one labelled as murder. Much publicity has been given to this serious case for Exit, the voluntary euthanasia society, while the cases have been pending many months.

Mr Mark Lyons is a 69-year-old member of Exit, himself in ill health, who is said to have counselled individuals terminally ill and in dire straits. He was questioned last July in connection with the death of Mrs Hetty Crystal as reported in *The Freethinker* (August 1980). Reporting restrictions were lifted at the magistrates' court in Hendon on 24 November, and the prosecution case was publicised. According to the prosecution, Mr Lyons kept a detailed diary and documents about his activities, including a description of trying to kill someone with a mixture of drugs and putting a polythene bag over the head. Mr. Reed is alleged to have introduced people to potential victims for the purpose of aiding and abetting their suicide.

The prosecution said that "Certain of the persons in the conspiracy charges are people who would consider themselves fortunate to be alive today, persons who might otherwise have been cajoled into a premature suicide." Casting about for a motive the prosecution first tried to establish financial motive, and when that proved obviously false, assumed no other motive than sadistic pleasure. Compassion and altruism are apparently not in their vocabulary. Prosecution alleged that Mr Lyons' conduct "seems to have been motivated by the pleasure he derived in assisting the end of life". Such prosecution allegations, deeply damaging to Mr Lyons' character and reported widely in the media, have been put without any opportunity to explain Mr Lyons' motives in terms of merciful killing.

Mr Lyons has been refused bail on the grounds that he might commit "more crimes" or suicide, despite the fact that while on bail from July to November he did neither and has said he wishes to live to see the law on voluntary euthanasia changed. It is one of the indignities of our system of criminal justice that a person may endure many months' imprisonment before trial without being proven guilty. Mr Lyons is in a prison cell alone, without special diet required by his medical conditions, and for a period lacked underwear for suspicion that he might have torn it up and hung himself. For a while, in his absence, he ran the risk of eviction from his bed-sitting room.

The case was adjourned on 5 January and it is reported that full committal proceedings will take

place on 14 April. Outside the court on 5 January supporters of Exit demonstrated their good wishes for Nicholas Reed and Mr Lyons. Supporters came from regional branches of Exit as far afield as Tyne-side and Dorset and also included Sheila Wright, MP for Hansworth, Birmingham.

Mr Reed has pointed out that "If we were in Scotland these charges could not be brought, as there is no law against assisting suicide in Scotland."

The Exit publication of a booklet giving details of means of self-deliverance has gone ahead in Scotland. A similar booklet has been held up in England by a High Court injunction brought by one of the society's longstanding members, Dr Gordon Scott, who is opposed to publication. In order to eliminate one of the grounds for the injunction, a special general meeting of Exit is being called to change the constitution of the society in order to allow the publication of the booklet.

The publicity relating to the booklet and to the charges of murder and aiding suicide has raised much public discussion of voluntary euthanasia. Mr Reed has said of the charges against himself and Mr Lyons: "This will be distressing for all concerned, but, perhaps, acting as a test case, it will highlight the need to change the law."

The case has highlighted the extent to which emphasis on areas of crime can be changed by police activity. The Suicide Act has been in existence since 1961, and rarely used. The prosecution indicates an increased interest in this matter on the part of the police.

OBITUARY

MRS A. COLEMAN

Mrs Alice Coleman, of Hove, Sussex, died last month at the age of 77. She was one of a large London family. There was a humanist committal ceremony at the Woodvale Crematorium, Brighton.

MR H. L. MANN

Herbert Lucian Mann, who died recently in Hastings, was aged 76. He was a lover of the countryside and had wide musical interests. There was a humanist committal ceremony at Hastings Crematorium.

MRS J. E. SOLOMONS

Mrs Jessie Emelia Solomons, who has died at the age of 68, was a well known resident of Hove, Sussex, where she had a shop for over 20 years. Her death was a sad blow to her family to whom she was very close. There was a humanist committal ceremony at the Downs Crematorium, Brighton.

BLASPHEMY CASE CONTINUES

The European Human Rights Commission has given the British Government until March 5 to answer an allegation that the courts had created a new law to punish the homosexual newspaper, *Gay News*, and its editor, Dennis Lemmon, for publishing James Kirkup's poem "The Love that Dares to Speak its Name". The poem was found to be blasphemous, and Mr Lemmon was convicted and fined.

After the conviction was upheld following an appeal to the House of Lords, Mr Lemmon announced his intention to take the appeal further—to the European Court of Human Rights, which has now asked the British Government to explain whether the courts had invented a new version of the ancient blasphemy law in order to gain a conviction against *Gay News* in 1977.

Mr Lemmon is claiming that "strict liability" was applied to his case, despite all the precedents. This meant he could be convicted even though he had no intention to ridicule the Christian religion, because his intention became irrelevant. It is the same branch of the law which makes contempt of court in newspaper articles a crime, even though the author had no intention of upsetting the course of justice.

Lawyers for Mr Lemmon, who fell victim to a private prosecution by Mary Whitehouse under what was previously regarded an obsolete law, are claiming that the court's rulings breached a string of human rights enshrined in the Human Rights Convention. These included the violation of his right to free expression because the ban was not originally "prescribed by law". It was not in order to protect morals, but merely to protect members of the public from feeling outrage, and it was not a ban "necessary in a democratic society" to serve some pressing social need.

Ironically, they are also claiming that their right to freedom of religion had been violated because they "wished to bring the community of homosexuals closer to an understanding and appreciation of Christian love". They also claim that their right to a fair trial was breached because they had no way of knowing that blasphemy was still regarded as a crime.

The Commission has to decide whether the case should be made admissible for it to hear.

CATHOLICS AND MOONIES

Catholics in England are much more likely to be drawn into the Moonie sect than atheists or agnostics, according to a three-year study of Unification Church members in Britain and America by Eileen Barker. In an article she wrote for *Clergy Review*, Miss Barker revealed that "one fifth of members were brought up as Catholics, a quarter as Non-Conformists, 40 per cent as Anglicans and four per

NEWS

cent as agnostics or atheists (compared, respectively, with roughly 12 per cent, 10 per cent, 65 per cent and eight per cent in the population as a whole)."

In another recently-published guide, Catholics were found to be more likely to experience alcohol dependence than Methodists. The findings are contained in a counsellors' guide on problem drinking published by the National Council on Alcoholism.

Meanwhile the Unification Church in England is bringing a libel case against the *Daily Mail* which is proving to be one of the longest cases in British libel history. The Church is suing over a *Mail* article published in May, 1978, which alleged that the Moonies broke up happy families and brainwashed converts.

The nominal plaintiff, Mr Dennis Orme, was ordered by the judge to raise £175,000 in cash or guarantees in case it lost the action. This caused delay and was deemed necessary by the judge since Mr Orme had "not a penny piece to his name and no assets" and the Unification Church if the case were lost would be perfectly willing to let Mr Orme go bankrupt and let the defendants whistle loud and long for their costs".

The jury have been warned that the trial might continue until Easter or beyond.

SUNDAY ADVANTAGES

A boom in Seventh Day Adventism has occurred in the sleepy Sussex town of Haywards Heath—but Mammon rather than God appears to be behind the sudden increase in the numbers of people claiming to be members of this sect, an evangelic movement which daily expects the second advent of Christ. And no-one seems to be more surprised by the increase in their ranks than the elders of the church themselves.

The interest in Adventism was noted after 14 of the 64 traders at the recently-opened Sunday market signed affidavits claiming to be members of the church. If the statements are true—and the local council suspects they are not—the traders would have every right to sell what they like on a Sunday under the 1950 Shops Act.

Their suspicions were first aroused when the traders were warned that in order to comply with Britain's eccentric shop laws they would have to satisfy the council that they were either Jewish or Adventists. A flood of affidavits subsequently arrived at the council offices, claiming one or other of the faiths. "We took them at their face value to begin with," a council spokesman said, "but then we

S AND NOTES

started getting complaints and we had to investigate whether these people really were what they claimed."

A quick check through the register of the 14,000 British Adventists failed to come up with most of the names submitted by the council. Now the church has agreed to set up a three-man tribunal to investigate how many of those claiming to be Adventists are genuine. If any of those investigated are found to partake of drink or tobacco or any other "injurious substances" they will be deemed frauds.

Meanwhile, it has been reported that a Home Office review of the anomalies of Sunday trading laws is not expected to support a radical reform of the law in the near future, despite pressure from MPs. However, a Private Members Bill dealing with some of the anomalies relating to Sunday trading is being presented by Sir Anthony Meyer, MP for Flint West. It will be given its second reading on 20 February.

CREMATION SERVICE

A useful new service for the dead is about to be introduced by the Cremation Society of Great Britain. The society is to open a register of last requests in which members can lodge precise details of what they want done with their earthly remains. On payment of £10, any of the society's 8,000 members will be able to join the register and have their final instructions kept in a safe place at the society's Maidstone headquarters.

All they need to do is leave a note for the next of kin saying "Ring the Cremation Society now for full details". The £10 will be refunded to the deceased's estate after departure. Kenneth Prevette, the society's general secretary, said: "Anyone who has ever acted as an executor, and has been forced to take instant decisions without really knowing the deceased's wishes will appreciate the value of such a register."

VOTE FOR MANKIND

A startling but highly welcome development has occurred in the pages of the prestigious Scottish newspaper, *The Scotsman*. For within the space of three days, what appears to be the paper's "God-spot" (it's entitled "My God, my God . . . out there") has been written in one instance by an atheist, and in another by someone who comes over as strongly agnostic.

The first article, entitled "The Search for Har-

mony", was by Dr James Hemming, of the BHA, and the second, by Stanley Eveling, a senior lecturer in philosophy at the University of Edinburgh and a well-known dramatist, was headed with the thoroughly humanist sentiment "I Vote for Mankind".

WHOSE GOD?

America's new President, Ronald Reagan, said in his inaugural address: "I am told that tens of thousands of prayer meetings are being held on this day, and for that I am deeply grateful. We are a nation under God, and I believe God intended us to be free. It would be fitting and good if each inaugural day should be a day of prayer."

At the time that he spoke, hostages, held in Iran for 444 days, were at Terhan airport on the point of release. Their outrageous incarceration was sustained by the prayers of the Ayatollah and the mullahs. to the Islamic God.

To quote: "God knows which God is the God God recognises." (Phyllis McGinley)

Freethinker Fund

In the centenary year, we are especially anxious to build up substantial funds to pay for increased publicity, the special issue and other items. We have always relied upon the generosity of supporters, both in contributions to the fund and in unpaid work and writing, and we are confident that this will continue. The debate between freethought and the churches has always been between the paid and the unpaid—as well as between the enlightened and the unenlightened! We thank those who have contributed to the excellent total at the beginning of the year, and hope that your generosity will be sustained.

B. Able, £7; W. Aikenhead, £1.25; R. Aldridge, £7; J. L. Allison, £2; B. S. Bailey, £7.70; C. J. Bason, £2; D. Behr, £2.60; Belfast Humanist Group, £2; W. J. Bickle, £2; S. Birkin, £1; S. Bonow, £7; P. W. Brook, £20; P. Brown, £1; B. J. Buckingham, £3; D. C. and F. Campbell, £10; N. L. Child, £7; P. Crommelin, £5; M. Davies, £5; A. F. Dawn, £1; E. C. Eagle, £5; In Memory of L. Ebury, £10; N. Ferguson, 50p; G. Fledderman, £2; R. Franklin, £7; P. Forrest, £5.60; D. Fyfe, £1; J. Galliano, £1; E. A. C. Goodman, £2; L. Hanger, £1; V. Harvey, £2; E. M. Hay, £3; E. V. Hillman, £2; J. Holland, £2; E. C. Hughes, £2.25; A. G. Jowett, £2; M. Lonsdale, £5; K. K. Moore, £1; T. Morrison, £2; F. J. Muskett, £3; E. A. Napper, £3; H. G. Price, £1; M. S. Quoistiaux, £2; N. Reed, £2; B. J. Reid, £2; J. E. Rupp, £7; A. Smith, £1; S. Smith, £2; G. Spiers, £1; C. Wilshaw, £2; F. J. Woolley, £1; D. Wright (Ilford), £4; D. Wright (Ipswich), £2.

Total for the period 15/12/80 to 19/1/81: £176.90.

BOOKS

GEORGE ORWELL: A LIFE by Bernard Crick. Secker & Warburg, £10

Eric Blair, who adopted the pen-name of George Orwell, was born on 25 June 1903 in India. His father was a not particularly successful official in the Opium Department of the Government of India. His mother, Ida, who was half French, was more lively, unconventional, widely read and in every way more interesting than her husband. At the age of eight, in accordance with the practice of his class (which he called "the lower-upper-middle"), he was sent away to school, to a preparatory school, called St Cyprian's, near Eastbourne. His not very pleasant experiences there are described in an essay with the ironic title, "Such, Such Were the Joys". He won a scholarship to Eton and entered the college in August 1917. He did not follow the usual path to one of the older universities but, after a period at a crammer's, he joined the Indian Civil Service and took an appointment as an Assistant Superintendent of Police in Burma. By no means over-enthusiastic about imperialism, he resigned and returned to England in 1927. From then on he became a writer.

Before the outbreak of war in 1939, he established a reputation as a novelist of promise and a lively writer on social and political themes in such books as *Down and Out in Paris and London*, *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia*; the last is an account of his experiences in Spain, where he fought on the Republican side and was wounded, physically by a bullet in the throat and much more deeply, spiritually by his disillusion with the part played by Soviet Russia. During the war of 1939, he became more widely known as an essayist and journalist through his writings in *Horizon* and *Tribune* and as a producer of broadcast talks to India for the BBC. In 1945, he achieved fame with the publication of *Animal Farm*, a Swiftian satire, at the same time light and profound, amusing and penetrating. This was followed in 1949 by *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a terrifying view of a possible totalitarian society of the future. In 1950 he died, having struggled against tuberculosis for many years, certainly since 1938, when a lesion on one of his lungs began serious haemorrhages. If Orwell had died five years earlier, that is before the publication of his last two novels, he would probably be remembered today as a minor novelist and a controversial journalist on literary and political subjects. As it is, he has been described as "the finest political writer in English since Swift", "a great essayist", "a writer of historical stature on English national character", "a political thinker of genuine stature" and "a world figure, a name to set argument going wherever books are read".

These descriptions are all taken from the introduction to a biography of Orwell by Professor Ber-

FREETHINKER

nard Crick of Birkbeck College, University of London. In his will, Orwell requested that no biography be written but several books about him have already appeared in the thirty years since his death and not all of them have been remarkable for either accuracy or completeness. In 1972, Orwell's widow, Sonia, who, it is sad to record, has died since the biography was published, granted Bernard Crick unrestricted access to all her late husband's papers. The biography is a most important book, very thorough and careful and clearly the product of much research and industry. (There are a few tiresome misprints and a bad mistake on the last page when a line from Louis MacNeice is attributed to W. H. Auden.) It seems that everyone who knew Orwell has been consulted and no scrap of paper by or about him has been left unread. In future, anyone who wishes to study Orwell seriously must come to this book.

As not infrequently happens with biographies, however, the interpretation presents greater difficulty than do the facts. Bernard Crick is a professor of politics and his interest in Orwell and his writings is mainly political—but so was Orwell's own interest. Perhaps it is for this reason that, valuable and impressive as the book is, it has something vaguely unsatisfying about it. A political writer is always working against a changing background. His biographer, therefore, must concern himself with man and background and the reader will expect a picture of a man set against that changing background. Yet Crick's view of the problem of writing biography is that "none of us can enter into another person's mind; to believe so is fiction". He is sceptical of what he calls "much of the fine writing, balanced appraisal and psychological insight that is the hall-mark of the English tradition of biography" and he concentrates, therefore, on an "external" method by observing carefully what Orwell did and said and, of course, most important, wrote. It is an admirable method for telling the reader all about the subject and the word "about" is crucial; it leaves a vague picture of the man himself.

We nevertheless learn much of what Orwell was and the forces that made him. Crick looks closely at Orwell's schooldays and is inclined to dismiss the suggestion (first made by Anthony West) that the horrors of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can be traced directly to his memories of cruelty at St Cyprian's on the ground that, in West's words, "only the existence of a hidden wound can account for such a remorseless pessimism". Orwell does not seem to have been a pessimist. For all his adult life, he was a Socialist. At Eton, where a tutor said that he was

REVIEWS

"always a bit of a slacker and a dodger", he does not seem to have formed clear political views. He did say, many years later, that "at the age of seventeen or eighteen, I was both a snob and a revolutionary. I was against all authority", but Crick is throughout very cautious about accepting anything which casts the illumination of hindsight on earlier events or attitudes. Yet, it was the revolutionary in Orwell that went to live with the lowest of the low in Paris and London, to risk his health to see how miners lived in Wigan and to risk his life for a cause in which he believed in Spain. It was also the revolutionary who showed social eccentricities, such as the famous drinking of tea from the saucer, both because he believed the workers did it and because he knew the middle-class looked down on it.

The very important thing emphasised by Crick about Orwell's politics is that the last two novels were not written as anti-Left propaganda, welcome as they may have been to many of the Right. *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were his warnings to the Left of what could result if authoritarianism were to gain a hold, whether it came from Left or Right. In 1944, reviewing two books, one by Professor Hayek and the other by Konni Zilliacus, he found that, taken together, they gave him grounds for dismay: only catastrophe could come from the extremes of Right and Left "unless a planned economy can be somehow combined with the freedom of the intellect, which can only happen if the concept of right and wrong is restored to politics". It was this belief that made Orwell call himself "a democratic Socialist".

Orwell could be a difficult person. He attacked Tories and the Tory philosophy without mercy but he could be even more savage to friends and allies on his own side. He expected Tories who believed in position and money to be unscrupulous; he expected, or wanted, Socialists to have higher things in mind than mere success. Some of his best political writing is to be found in a short book published in 1941, *The Lion and the Unicorn* which has, as subtitle, "Socialism and the English Genius". (It is surprising to learn from Crick that Orwell did not want this to be reprinted in a collected edition of his works.) It is a lively and well-written study of British society as it was developing during the war. Orwell believed that the war had to be fought and won but he was deeply concerned about the values for which Britain was fighting and the kind of world that there would be after the war. Changes would be needed in Britain. He wanted all major industry to be publicly owned, taxation and education to be reformed on equalitarian lines and India to be

granted dominion status. His aim was "a Socialist democracy". He recognised the difficulties. "It will not be doctrinaire, nor even logical. It will abolish the House of Lords, but quite probably will not abolish the Monarchy." Orwell's un-doctrinaire and illogical or inconsistent attitudes were shown in other ways. Thus, while without formal religious beliefs, he surprised his many freethinking and secular-minded friends by expressing the wish to be buried (not cremated) according to the rites of the Church of England.

Orwell was a patriot but not a blind or a bigoted one. He loved the freedom and the lack of uniformity or regimentation in England but he longed to combine these virtues with greater real freedom for large sections of the population. The rare combination of the political revolutionary and one who desired to keep as much as possible of the British tradition gave Orwell his special quality. He was firm in assertion but genuinely democratic in controversy, seeking always to convince by force of argument and persuasion. There was one more, immensely important element in his writing. It was his regard for clear and honest thinking and the prose that reflected it. Some of his best essays are on the need for clear writing in which to express clear thought. It is for this concern with clear and effective writing that he can be spoken of with Swift. *Animal Farm* stands beside *Gulliver's Travels* for its style as well as for its content and, if not all of his work can justify Professor Crick's description of him as "the finest political writer in English since Swift", he was undoubtedly little behind the leading modern writers in that field, Morris, Shaw and Tawney. It is certain that anyone who reads this biography will be inspired to return to the books of Orwell himself.

T. F. EVANS

DEBTS OF HONOUR by Michael Foot. Davis-Poynter Ltd, £9.50

The difference between Margaret Thatcher and Michael Foot is, I suspect, best to be measured in the size and content of their bookshelves. Although there is no logic in it I would rather be governed by one who is inspired by the words of Hazlitt which have become engraved on his heart than by one who has to refer to a cue card before reciting doggerel attributed to St Francis of Assisi. What indeed could be more apposite than Michael Foot's own declamation that books are weapons in the cause of freedom and his summary of the tragedy that afflicts most of our leading politicians today: "Men of power have no time to read: yet the men who do not read are unfit for power".

In *Debts of Honour* Michael Foot pays homage to the memory of fourteen creditors who have enriched his life and widened his vision. Sand-

wicked in between Hazlitt, who sought truth and sometimes found beauty, and Swift, a Godly Tory, not verminous though possibly syphilitic, of whom Macaulay said he had "a heart burning with hatred against the whole human race, a mind richly stored with images from the dunghill and the lazar house" are Isaac Foot, Disraeli, Beaverbrook, Bonar Thompson, Bertrand Russell, Brailsford, Ignazio Silone, Vicky, Randolph Churchill, Paine, Defoe and perhaps most surprisingly of all Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, a Whig who became the richest person in England through the patronage of the Crown, marriage to a Churchill and a sensitivity that could not conceal avarice beyond the dreams of all the Scrooges of all the Ages. The Duchess appears somewhat guiltily as the only woman creditor.

The book and its characters are full of surprising syntheses, paradoxes, oxymorons and a dialectic which combine to express something of the enigma that is Michael Foot himself.

Disraeli, a Tory Prime Minister more lacking in Tory ideals than any other, despised by his colleagues for being an adventurer, whose corpse was fit only for a common grave, is here revered as a radical, revolutionary even, and a feminist who was also a comic genius.

Lord Beaverbrook, the old man who lied daily to the people in the post-war years, is remembered with the affection of a loving son and innocents like myself who first discovered politics (as a small boy) through reading every word printed in the *Daily Express* because there were no books and no other papers around are berated, albeit ever so gently, for not paying due respect to the emotional radicalism of "the Beaver".

Randolph Churchill, a journalist who wanted to close down *Private Eye* by vindictively suing it and who hardly started life with every handicap known to man is described as a friend and enemy worth having, to be admired for his super courage.

Daniel Defoe, perhaps the slimiest and certainly the most treacherous journalist, is said to merit our sympathies for a life-time spent bottling up the feminist truths contained in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*.

What can one say of these judgements? Are they the verdicts of a magnanimous man: the prejudices of one who instinctively sympathises with the problems faced by men of power and men of affairs: insights that other men of scholarship have not seen: or poetic interpretations drawn from grains of truth which yet contain the seeds of their own myths?

Certainly Michael Foot is a man who falls in love and like any true lover sometimes does so heedlessly. For him love is nothing if it is not constant. Like Piaf he has no regrets. Because he so rarely suffers the agonies of parting he has no need for them. Instead he springs to the defence of his creditors with all the grace and power of the tigris

caught in slow motion. The effect is devastating, the results not necessarily true.

Here, in one important respect, Michael Foot behaves very differently from his spiritual mentor Hazlitt. Hazlitt took his politics everywhere with him allowing them to disrupt even personal relationships. He would have lacerated Indira Ghandi, even had he been her friend, when she defamed the democratic principle and however close he might have been to Jim Callaghan would have scorned that avuncular hypocrisy with which as Prime Minister he insulted a nation. And he would have done it publicly. Michael will never do it, even in private: rather he will write an appraisal where truth is softened because it is seen through loving eyes. The possession of an excess of true love is more likely to bring about his downfall than any of the political causes which he so resplendently champions.

Equally Hazlitt would have found himself unable to accept that the views of a character in a novel written by a person of affairs could normally be taken as evidence that the author shared those views. Most likely he would have adopted the contrary interpretation that the author had wanted to deceive people into thinking that that was the case — especially if the author concerned had been Disraeli.

Perhaps it does not matter that Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, is described by Michael Foot as being "devastatingly beautiful" at sixty-three when, whether by the standards of the time in which she lived or the standards of today, the description would not be apt at any time that she lived from the cradle to the grave: but it is important to our understanding of history and literature to know whether Swift was more a revolutionary than a melancholic nationalist. Michael Foot's conclusion on this latter point may be the right one but the evidence, though elegantly and challengingly presented, hardly takes the breath away.

In the midst of all this argumentative stuff is an assessment of the work and spirit of Bertrand Russell. Only those lacking in a true understanding of man's nature will disagree with a single word of what Michael Foot says about them. It is the masterpiece of this bounteous book, written by one of the rarest of the species of the generations—a good and estimable politician. At the end of the book one can almost hear Michael Foot reciting Russell's last autobiographical words "These things I believe, and the world, for all its terrors, has left me unshaken".

BRIAN SEDGEMORE

TAKING LEAVE OF GOD by Don Cupitt. SCM Press. £4.95.

"There is no God, and Don Cupitt is his prophet. Yet he" (Cupitt, that is; not God) "remains by profession a Christian clergyman-don." Intrigued by this

Sunday Times billing, I invested a near-fiver to see if the Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, had anything significant to say to an atheist who finds religious concepts a stumbling-block rather than an aid to self-awareness: I was duly disappointed.

Like so many Christians, orthodox and otherwise, he's a true disciple of Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty ("When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less")—and even bearing in mind that religious terminology is mostly incomprehensible because it's undefinable, Cupitt is woolly with words as an old sheep. Indeed, he takes quite diabolical liberties with the language as well as with the Christian faith. (He does not, apparently, believe in life after death—a *sine qua non* for Christians, I should have thought.)

Maintaining that God does not exist but that it is spiritually desirable to re-invent him as a "unifying symbol that eloquently personifies and represents to us everything that spirituality requires of us", he has a high old time lambasting atheists, sceptics (whose "highest priority is maintaining their own peace of mind") and fuddy-duddy literalist Christians who quaintly believe that God is an objective entity and the Bible is His Word (however perversely they choose to interpret it). Oddly, he dubs the latter "intellectualists": I had hitherto thought they were among the most irrational and unintellectual members of the human race. That they are the ominously up-and-coming faction amongst present-day worshipping circles is one of those inconvenient facts which Cupitt glosses over. Nor is he troubled, apparently, by the appalling record of believers as a social force; "By their fruits ye shall know them" is not a text he lingers over save to assert (without adducing supportive evidence) that a religious dimension is needed to bring out "the best" in people.

What this "religious dimension" consists of for Cupitt is the use of Christian symbolism (Christian doctrine being, he concedes, mere mythology) to channel one's spiritual impulses and moral concepts into their highest, because most disinterested, forms. This bizarre notion of the allegedly utilitarian function of worship blithely ignores the plain facts that Christianity (whether perceived as factual, fictional or symbolic) is now encrusted with the barnacles of two thousand years' moral obtuseness which has all too often degenerated into bigotry, fanaticism and bestial persecution by God's followers; that the bestial physical concepts it employs remain incredible, whether taken literally by the naive or viewed symbolically by the sophisticated; that its morality commits the prime error of making the idealised Best the enemy of the attainable Good; and that the Christian psychology which asserts that human beings are born "sinners" who require supernatural "redemption" flies in the face of common sense and embodies a radical misconception of the real nature of evil.

Surely, if humanists are mistaken and reason and intelligence are indeed gifts of God, He gave them to be used to their uttermost — not suspended in infantile awe on the threshold of religious "mysterics". And this is certainly the case if there is no God. Yet, with Pascal, Don Cupitt says that if (as he thinks) there is no God, it is still best for us to behave as if there was, and to be credulous. What it all boils down to is that his trendy but uncomprehending chatter about "autonomy" and "self-realisation" is mere lip-service to values that are essentially humanist, not religious; with all his desire to steal a humanist's clothes. Cupitt is just another typical clergyman bent on treating everybody else as children and telling them what's best for them as well as for himself.

If he had read George H. Smith's brilliant dissection of the vacuousness of religious concepts in *Atheism: The Case Against God*, Cupitt might have had second thoughts about the appropriateness (indeed, the honesty) of saying: "There isn't any God, but he's still a useful symbol". As it is, his thesis boils down to:

"I am the Dean of Emmanuel College
I need no creed and preach no knowledge."
ANTONY GREY

THEATRE

PASSION PLAY by Peter Nichols. Aldwych

"Human questions demand human answers," says the protagonist in Peter Nichols' new play on the theme of adultery in a marriage. The dilemma confronting the couple, though moral, is no longer a religious one. This is the point of the remark and the key to the whole play. It is a modern morality play, without religious figures to serve as signposts.

Yes, James does work at retouching religious paintings, and yes, Eleanor sings the Matthew Passion at the Festival Hall. But they are both atheists and realise full well that religion is of no use to them at all in coming to terms with what is, after all, the human crisis of two people depending solely on each other through a quarter century of married life.

There is some superb religious imagery reinforcing the secular context. James refers to the painting of Christ in his workroom as "the old Eunuch", implying that Jesus was certainly no fit person to advise on extra-marital activity—or indeed on married love either. The couple's two children have grown and gone away. If James and Eleanor still participate in sex together, it is for the sheer pleasure of each other's company. And they do enjoy themselves. The first scene ends with him trying to take her on the steps leading up to their bedroom.

The call of the wild comes from Kate, a friend of theirs and mistress to a late distinguished col-

league. She woos and wins James, against his better judgement, and then tries to remain on good terms with them both. Mr Nichols thus enters into forays of Lesbianism, troilism and group sex, but his main thrust remains on the couple themselves and their mid-life crisis.

For this he gives each an *alter ego*, representing the private self. So in the scene where James intends to confront Eleanor with the news of his indiscretion, "Jim" is there beside him, advising him to lie. At the same time, "Nell", Eleanor's other self, accompanies her. As soon as these personae enter the action, the play takes off and becomes more than another journey down the well-trodden path of bourgeois infidelity, providing countless permutations of comic intrigue.

How the author integrates this double vision of the characters into his anti-religious scheme is not exactly clear, but a vital clue may be in the title. James and Eleanor, for all their goodwill, singularly lack passion, and this is what their *alter egos* possess in abundance. It is Jim, not James, who leaps for joy at the prospect of having "a sandwich" of both women; Nell, not Eleanor who, besotted with drink, collapses to the floor in a heap and later takes an overdose. The unbuttoning of the upper-middles is achieved without a trace of maudlin melodrama, and the interplay between the four is executed with faultless precision.

Benjamin Whitrow, Anton Rogers, Billie Whitelaw and Eileen Atkins are splendid in the central performances, each complementing the others, and adding to the dimension of the drama. It is quite ingenious the way in which Mr Nichols has the *alter egos* shift from making asides to assuming the centre of the action as gradually the social sides of their characters begin to disintegrate. At this point the attack on religious dominance of human institutions is fully rounded.

"I never believed in God," Eleanor confesses at last, "I just liked the gatherings." And James describes these gatherings as "pagan orgies without the sex". Doubtless this reliance on such an unhealthy congregation has brought them to this impasse. The play is finally an exposé of the failure of marriage based on traditional, Christian values, brought off with comic invention and flair.

JAMES MacDONALD

LETTERS

EUTHANASIA FOR RE?

Your December editorial on the Religious Education Council was informed, judicious, and persuasive, unlike Bill McIlroy's "nasty comments", which, if not "well and truly up the creek", were barking up the wrong tree.

The BHA declined at first to join the group which eventually formed the REC. It seemed to be their affair, not ours. However, a main issue was, in view of the Act, how open could RE be, and what influence upon

that could a concerted body of RE teachers exert? At the time, it seemed probable that liberal minds and policies would prevail, and that these might be reinforced by pressure if BHA representatives were present and active. On the whole, this has been justified. It is not quite true that RE teaching simply reflects the prevailing outside climate. Teaching is in the hands of teachers, as political policy is in the hands of ministers, and the subject Associations do have influence. There are two principles not for compromise, and some political latitude:

- (1) what happens in schools can be justified only on educational grounds; no indoctrination;
- (2) moral education is independent of RE; and the relations between them can be clearly stated.

Unless both these principles are accepted and observed in good faith, there cannot be any co-operation of humanists with others on the REC. This is understood.

The public hemisphere of morality, social morality, has to be independent of ultimate beliefs, as Hobbes made clear at the time of the civil war, for it has to regulate the living together of people whose beliefs differ, but of whom fellow-feeling, good faith, and public spirit are demanded by all, if there is not to be the "war of every man, against every man". The private hemisphere of morality, in which one chooses the virtues, values, ideals, beliefs by which to govern one's life, is not the same for all, and does involve religion and its alternatives. Educational help is needed here too, if the young are to know what alternatives for them there are; and that is what humanists are doing in this "galère". That is why Harry Stopes-Rob wants "stances for living" to replace "RE", and keeps nagging. Many RE teachers who don't like the phrase concede the point: they must, if made to in consistency. (When the Social Morality Council's working party first discussed these things with secretaries of the education sectors of the churches, they said: "We don't mind a humanist as Head of an RE Department, if he is professionally qualified. That is the measure of the justification of humanist participation in the REC.") This is, at least in terms of present political realities, what is stated in your editorial: "Religion should be taught as part of the study of all beliefs and not beliefs as part of religion".

For such reasons, although I do not dissent from the quotation from Bertrand Russell at the bottom of the page, I think that the present line of the BHA is more realistic than the argument of your editorial. I am frightened by the religious and superstitious tendencies rampant in parts of the USA. All who are helping young people to think rationally about religion and its alternatives should be reinforced, and pressed and encouraged to be fully consistent with their commitment.

H. J. BLACKHAM

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The polarisation on Religious Education reflected in The Freethinker as between Bill McIlroy (Jottings, December) and the letters from James Hemming and John White (January) seems unnecessarily extreme, especially as we are all aiming at much the same educational result.

I understand, and have some sympathy with, the British Humanist Association's preference for RE that is "objective, fair and balanced" rather than no RE at all. After all, there certainly ought to be some allocated place on the school timetable for "genuine education about religion, philosophy and morals". And even if we could eliminate the first constituent of that trio and concentrate on the remainder, it might not be altogether desirable, since it would mean young people going out into the world with no knowledge of religious beliefs or mythology, and thus not only

deficient in an area of knowledge that underlies the understanding of a great deal of history, art, sociology, and psychology, but also lacking in immunity against religion, and so all the more likely to fall prey to the emotive appeal of the first religious cult they come across.

In principle, therefore, I favour the BHA approach. In practice, however, I am opposed to it.

"genuine education about religion, philosophy and morals", why not recruit teachers qualified in philosophy (endorsed by the BHA) for the recruitment and training over the next few years of thousands of extra teachers specialising in RE. If their brief is to be

In particular, I am opposed to the REC demand for philosophy rather than theology? How can a radical change be expected if the new wine of a broader syllabus is to be left in the old bottles of RE departments, manned by the same teachers, many of whom specialised in theology and most of whom are committed Christians (often with missionary inclinations), and augmented by new teachers, similarly self-selected and similarly trained in the same old colleges with the same, or largely the same, faculty?

Even if the BHA principles of objectivity, fairness and balance were genuinely adopted by the Ministry of Education (and what a big "if" that is!), the outcome would still depend on the satisfactory injection of those principles into the new syllabuses of each individual local education authority—and then would depend in turn on the calibre, commitment, and training of the teacher in the classroom. And we should not overlook the danger of a return to fundamentalist, evangelical religion, already rife in the USA.

The National Secular Society has consistently favoured the phasing out of RE and the phasing in of such courses as social studies, where the ethical component of the present RE lessons would find a more appropriate context. The BHA has, in the past, accused the NSS of being over-optimistic in supposing that RE could be phased out in the foreseeable future. But here it is phasing itself out, more rapidly than we ever hoped!

According to the BHA itself (as a signatory to the REC report), RE is dying on its feet. And instead of welcoming its demise, the BHA has deplored it. Instead of hailing the collapse of RE as an opportunity for the introduction of new, relevant subjects into the school curriculum as an alternative to RE, the BHA has joined in the REC demand for more RE, albeit of a comparatively progressive kind with a (hopefully) broader base.

If the BHA spokesmen really think that the new RE will turn out to be anything like the thing that they, as well as the NSS, would want in our schools, then it is the BHA that is being over-optimistic.

BARBARA SMOKER

It is amazing that John White, chairman of the British Humanist Association Education Committee, should react so hysterically to my "Jottings" item (December 1980) which he has interpreted as a personal attack (Letters, January). It was nothing of the kind; indeed I was quite unaware that he is one of the BHA representatives on the Religious Education Council of England and Wales.

My inverted commas were fully justified when using the term "liberal" in reference to the Religious Education Council, membership of which "is confined to corporate bodies which have a national interest in the teaching of Religious Education in schools, colleges and universities." The corporate bodies at present in membership of the REC include such champions of liberalism as the Association for Religious Education, the Association of Christian Teachers, the British Council

of Churches Education Department, the Catholic Education Council, the Catholic Teachers' Federation, the Christian Education Movement, the Church of England Board of Education, the Council of Churches for Wales, the Free Church Federal Council, the Islamic Cultural Centre, the Muslim Educational Trust, the National Society for Promoting Religious Education and the Welsh Christian Teachers' Association.

John White is miffed by my claim that the BHA representatives are "outnumbered and outwitted" in such company. He can hardly deny that they are overwhelmingly outnumbered. And only the immodest or the unrealistic will fail to recognise that such an assembly of dedicated and experienced proponents of religious education and of Church and Mosque schools are able to run rings around their humanist colleagues.

In the public mind at least, humanists have endorsed a document advocating that at least 5 per cent but preferably 7.5 per cent of school time is given over to religious education; the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act should be more rigorously implemented; and that resources should be made available to train 500 RE teachers every year during the next decade.

It is significant that virtually every religious newspaper and journal reported that the REC delegation to the Minister of State for Education included a prominent member of the British Humanist Association, and named the BHA alone as one of the Council's affiliated organisations. Religionists realise the value of humanist membership of organisations like the Religious Education Council where they are a permanent minority. They can be automatically out-voted on matters of importance, while their participation gives a spurious appearance of breadth and unity to the pronouncements of what is, at the end of the day, another religious pressure group.

WILLIAM McILROY

PS.—If the Humanist Teachers Association was not "killed off" it was certainly allowed to die through neglect. The Association's forthright and militant opposition to school religion was something of an embarrassment to the BHA. With it disbanded, the BHA Education Committee has been able to pronounce on educational matters, and work with groups like the Religious Education Council, without fear of opposition from another organisation with the word "Humanist" in its name.

MAGIC AND THE "PARANORMAL"

A few years ago I reviewed Colin Wilson's "Men of Mystery" at length in *The Freethinker* and thought I had demolished its extravagant claims for the paranormal powers of its subjects.

Now Phillip Campbell reviews a serious scientific enquiry, "Science and the Supernatural," in your January issue with scepticism not about the paranormal, but about conclusions of the scientific author!

However, as he brings up the matter of Uri Geller, and appears to think his trick of bending spoons phenomenal, may I point out that in my chapter on the poet Swinburne (an atheist) in my book, "Artists and Writers in Revolt: The Pre-Raphaelites" (1976), I quote from a letter Swinburne wrote to William Rossetti in which he blithely recalled "bending double one fork in an energetic mood at dinner."

It is therefore obvious that Geller's spoon-bending feat is not unique, although he had the astuteness, unlike the amused and undisturbed Swinburne, to see its possibilities for making money.

Professionals who belong to the Magic Circle keep their secrets but have never claimed supernatural powers: and they perform far more dazzling and apparently inexplicable feats than spoon-bending. Un-

fortunately the modern world, in its drift back to occultism, is becoming less rational even than the eighteenth century.

Thomas Paine in "The Age of Reason" (1793), described a most convincing "ghost" performance on the Paris stage, but neither he nor anyone else—including the presenters—pretended it was anything but a skilful stage illusion. As he pointed out, the long tradition of such "magical" tricks stretches back to Moses and can explain some of the apparent "miracles" of Christ.

The revival of spiritualism in the late nineteenth century, with its use of long-known magicians' tricks such as levitation, provided in a sense a crude human reassurance against Darwinism: the spiritualists and their mediums merely "played the market," but with less honesty than the members of the Magic Circle.

Alchemy vanished with the founding of the Royal Society. If some things remain unexplained, it is either because of the skill of the executant or because, in matters without obvious human agency, we have not yet penetrated all the scientific secrets of the very complex material world.

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

(Philip Campbell says in his review that his "view of the paranormal is extremely sceptical". Ed.)

HUMANIST SOCIALISM

At the 1979 NSS AGM, it was proposed that a Secular Party be set up, since Governments of neither major Party had advanced towards a secular British State. This motion was rejected because it was felt that a Secular Party would merely draw votes and support away from the Labour Party, which was the more likely to advance towards a secular society.

At the 1980 AGM, Antony Flew, in proposing that the Society confine itself to the advancement of secularism strictly defined, made an extraordinary splenetic outburst, alleging that the Society had been taken over by socialist thugs.

The positions taken by the 1979 AGM and Prof. Flew, both contained a grain of truth. Since 1700, Humanism in the broad sense has always tended to be politically "left-wing" or "progressive". I believe that the time has come to set up an association for ethical, humanist, rationalist and secularist socialists. Socialism can be adequately defined by Clause IV(4) of the Labour Party constitution.

I would be prepared to act as a postbox for anyone interested in setting up such an organisation, particularly candidates for a steering committee; please get in touch with me at 41a Chesham Road, Amersham, Bucks (Tel. 6103).

C. D. J. MILLS

(The motion proposing a Secular Party be set up fell because it was thought more practical to try to advance secularist aims through all existing parties. Ed.)

THE FREETHINKER

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EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. Discussion: Survival in a world of change. 12 February. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co. Antrim. Tel: White-abbey 66752.

Berkshire Humanists. Mr Ian Brook: Proportional Representation. Friday, 13 February, 8 pm. Friends' Meeting House, Northfield End, Henley-on-Thames.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Professor James Sanger: Genetic Engineering. Sunday, 1 March, 5.30 pm. Queen's Head, Queen's Road, Brighton. (Junction Road entrance opposite Brighton Station.)

Havering and District Humanist Society. Julia Pelling leads discussion on activities of the British Humanist Association. Tuesday, 17 February, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road).

Harrow Humanist Society. Nicolas Walter: Religious Education Today. Wednesday, 11 February, 8 pm. Gayton Road Library, Harrow.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Sid Goldstein: The Common Market Swindle. Thursday, 26 February, 7.45 pm. Davenport Hall, Davenport Road, Catford SE6.

London Secular Group. (Outdoor meetings). Thursday, 12.30 pm at Tower Hill; Sunday, 2-5 pm at Marble Arch. (The Freethinker and other literature on sale.)

Merseyside Humanist Group. AGM followed by discussion on private health and education. Monday, 16 February, 7.15 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

Sutton Humanist Group. Barbara Smoker: The Pope in Perspective. Wednesday, 11 February, 8 pm. Friends' Meeting House, 10 Cedar Road, Sutton.

Tyneside Humanist Group. F. R. Griffin: Who's afraid of leisure? Wednesday, 25 February, 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House, 1 Archbold Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Alwyn Jones: The Future—Order or Chaos? Friday, 27 February, 7.30 pm. Friends Meeting House, Page Street, Swansea.

Worthing Humanist Group. Stuart Hood: How Broadcasting is Controlled. Sunday, 22 February, 5.30 pm. Worthing Trades Council Club, 15 Broadwater Road.

Open University Humanist Society. AGM Saturday, 21 February, 2-5 pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London W1.

Gay Humanist Group. G. N. Deodhekar: Indian Rationalism. Friday, 13 March, 7.30 pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London W1.