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CREATIONISTS BRING THEORY OF EVOLUTION TO COURTS IN CALIFORNIA

A judge in California has ruled that state schools, when teaching evolution, must accommodate the views of those who believe in divine creation. In a trial in Sacramento a leading "creationist" demanded "equal time" for the teaching of Darwinian evolution theories. The case did not become the mammoth tussle between evolutionists and creationists that some observers had expected, concentrating instead upon semantics and constitutional legalities. The most disturbing aspect of the case is not its conclusion with a weak victory for the creationists but the fact that it took place at all. Similar attempts are being made in 26 different American states to enforce equality between Christian myth and modern science in schools.

Mr Kelly Segraves took out an injunction against the Californian Board of Education to force school textbooks to state that divine creation has a scientific basis as valid as evolution. Mr Segraves brought the suit on behalf of his three children and contended that his eldest child had taken home a textbook with a chart depicting man descending from apes. The boy testified that his teacher told him that he had to believe that the theory of evolution was true. Both father and son explained that this conflicted with their religious beliefs as Baptists that God created man as man and placed him on earth. This, it was agreed, conflicted with the First Amendment which reads: "Congress should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". The free exercise of the Segraves's Baptist religion was prohibited, it was claimed, by dogmatic teaching of scientific evolution theories.

Much of the court argument was about the constitutional legalities relating to the First Amendment. A range of scientific and theological witnesses in the

wings were not called by Judge Irving Perluss, who ruled that neither evolution nor creationism were on trial. Echoes of the famous Scopes "monkey trial" in Tennessee in 1925 were therefore rather faint.

The first half of the First Amendment could conflict with the second part, for if the prohibition of "free exercise" of religion is interpreted as meaning the compulsion to teach "religious" concepts in schools that would come perilously close to "establishment of religion". But Judge Perluss walked a tightrope, doing his best not to inflame debate. He judged the existing Californian educational policy that the theory should not be taught dogmatically meant that Mr Segraves's children's right to exercise their religion freely was not threatened. "The court finds the science framework as written, and as qualified by the policy of the board, does provide sufficient accommodation for the views of the plaintiffs," said Mr Perluss. Many witnesses were brought to show that evolution was not taught dogmatically, but only as a theory accepted by most scientists.

Different Use of Words

Teaching of science and all other subjects should be without dogmatism, but Mr Perluss's ruling was a semantic device to dampen controversy not a clarification of the issue. Both sides use words like "theory" and "dogmatic" in quite different ways. To scientists any theory—including Darwinian evolution—is provisional, but it must be confirmed or established by observation or experiment, while to fundamentalists "theory" is any idea put forward, such as the opening of Genesis.

Mr Segraves is not an open-minded enquirer who wants to ensure that schools teach science in an open-ended way. Nor is he an average parent whose

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children happened to leave a textbook open at a chart of evolution. He is director of the San Diego Creation Science Research Centre.

The Creation Science Research Centre has been campaigning for some time to get creationists' views of the origin of man—complete with Adam and Eve—back into the classrooms. When Reagan was Governor of California there were heated debates about the issue, and during his Presidential campaign Reagan expressed sympathy for the creationist view. Creation—Life, the publishing arm of the Creation Institute reported book sales worth \$354,000 in 1979. They do not appear to wish to increase understanding of the evolutionary process by further research, but to propound a view dictated by the tyranny of the Bible. They do not raise money by seeking scientific grants, but by crusading. The Research Centre and other similar bodies share addresses with organisations which appeal for money to ensure that the Scriptures and the Word of the Lord are spread far and wide.

In the *New Scientist* (12 March 1981), Jeremy Cherfas pointed out that when the creationists "challenge school boards they stress the 'theoretical' nature of evolution and make it seem an issue of scientific uncertainty and fair play. And when they talk to naive and gullible politicians they adopt a similar pseudoscientific stance, but throw in for good measure popular feeling (for which read blackmail) and appeals to freedom of speech."

Well-orchestrated Campaign

"I suspect," he continues, "that the Creation Science Research Center is truest to its supporters; the aim of this well-orchestrated, well-financed campaign is to circumvent the constitutionally enshrined separation of State and Religion."

It is frequent to encounter dogmatic and ignorant assertions that Darwinian evolution is "only a theory" and not yet proven. One reason for this (apart from confusion about the use of the word "theory") is that evolution is now a synthetic theory with various strands, which are indiscriminately blurred and confused by critics.¹ The theory covers the chronology of the evolution of life on earth, the development of life from simple to complex organisms, and a theory of the mechanism by which this occurs through natural selection. Each part has been expanded since Darwin's day: it is the nature of scientific research to expand and modify theories—but not, despite popular misconception, to overthrow them. Fossil evidence has enlarged understanding of the chronology of life on earth—though, because of the specific conditions needed for fossil formation, is necessarily incomplete. The mechanism of the evolution from simple to complex species is now being explored in detail in genetics and molecular biology. There is never a last word in science.

But the vast preponderance of scientists working throughout the world accept the validity of evolutionary theory as an explanation of the development of life on earth and it is a theory which is still provoking new research and new insights.

Unfortunately, we live in an anti-science age. Superstition is easier and in some ways more popular than science. Doubts about science rise from the specialisation and complexity of modern science, so that most laymen (including this writer) cannot understand vast areas of modern science. Even scientists do not comprehend the details of each others' specialities. At the time of Darwin the country parson or man of letters could read and understand—and even contribute to—much scientific advance of the time. This is not so today. But that is all the more reason for popularising science in programmes such as David Attenborough's excellent *Life on Earth* (which was criticised in the *Church Times* correspondence columns for not mentioning God) and for teaching the principles of science in schools.

Another cause of disillusion with science is reaction to the results of modern technology. The atomic bombs which might annihilate, the pollution which might irreparably change the ecology, the computerisation which can appear to threaten jobs and dehumanise life, the communications industry which converts ideas and expressions of opinion into a ceaseless instant babble within which thought disappears: all these have led to the dislike of technology. The distaste for technology is seen, for example, in romantic notions of communal rural living. Science as a discipline for research must be distinguished from the way its results are used by humankind. The problem is not science but our misuse of science.

Freethinkers are committed to free inquiry—which is the essence of science. The attitude of the 20,000 people who wrote to the Californian Education Board in support of Mr Segraves's defence of creationism must be countered with teaching of an understanding of scientific principles and firm commitment to free inquiry.

A new book about the biological nature of man² contains two apposite quotations. Paraphrasing F. H. C. Crick is the statement "Exact knowledge is the enemy of controversy". Exact knowledge has been under threat in the court in California. Science itself is neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but without it can human beings hope? Also quoted is the biologist P. B. Medawar, who said: "To deride the hope of progress is the ultimate fatuity, the last word in poverty of spirit and meanness of mind."

1. The Scientific Status of the Theory of Evolution. Colin Hutchinson. *Biologist* (1980) 27 (5).
2. The Science of Human Progress. Robin Holliday. OUP. 1981.

Shutting Your Eyes to the Facts

BARBARA SMOKER

Barbara Smoker's presidential address to the National Secular Society (see January Free-thinker) was vigorously attacked on the front page of the "Church of England Newspaper". In a half-page letter subsequently published in the "Opinion" section, Barbara Smoker replied to the criticism and set out the secularist position. Barbara Smoker wishes to acknowledge her use of ideas from Margaret Knight's pamphlet "Christianity—the Debit Account".

You challenge my statement that "the Christian God causes such social and psychological misery as to make JR look positively benign by comparison". But that can be challenged only by shutting your eyes to the facts.

First, there are the facts of life. If the world was deliberately designed, you have to explain away the deliberate mistakes in the blueprint: the earthquakes, volcanoes, landslides, etc., which believers significantly term "Acts of God". Then the whole of the animal kingdom, if designed, is apparently designed as living food, one species preying on another—and it cannot be denied that at least the higher animals suffer pain and fear. The fundamentalist Christian argument that this is all due to the "sin" of man is hardly fair on the non-human animals!

And is it really fair on human beings? What would we think of a human judge who punished children for crimes committed by their ancestors? Besides, this particular judge, the Christian God, is supposed to have created our species, and every other, with absolute foreknowledge of how everything was going to turn out. So why didn't he scrap the plan at the outset?

Some people have a great deal more suffering in their lives than others, and Christians see this as evidence of a better life hereafter to redress the balance: but how can the existence of an unjust world here be evidence of a just world elsewhere? If both are supposed to have been created by the same designer, is it not more likely that they would share the same defects? If he was capable of making a perfect world, why make this one so badly?

Moreover, this creator is supposed to be all-good and all-loving, as well as all-powerful. But, on the facts of existence, this is impossible. If all-powerful, he is cruel; if all-loving, he must be extremely incompetent.

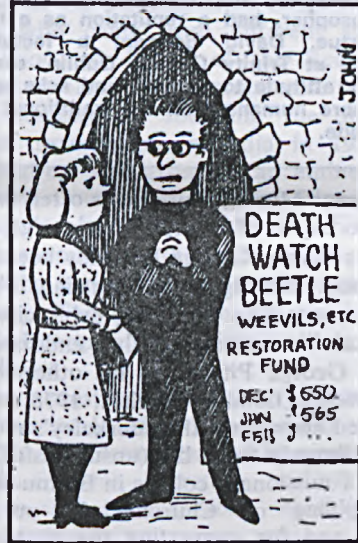
Now let us look at the character of the alleged God incarnate, Jesus, as depicted in your own Bible.

Although the traditional "gentle Jesus" certainly preached loving-kindness and meekness (if, for the sake of argument, we accept the gospels as true), and was affectionate towards his disciples and toler-

ant towards self-confessed sinners, he was a paranoid fanatic, judging by his vindictiveness towards the Pharisees and anyone else who questioned his messianic pretensions. Any hint of criticism or demand for evidence of his claims, and he came out with a torrent of invective.

Worse still: not content with calling his critics by such unpleasant names as "whited sepulchres", he threatened them with eternal torment. Not just hours or days or years of torture, such as a tyrant like Idi Amin might order, but *everlasting* torture, with no remission, no hope, and no second chance. And all for asking for adequate evidence!

This doctrine of eternal punishment (though fortunately played down by most Christians today) has been responsible during the past two millenia for incalculable human misery: childhood terror, lifelong psychological damage, fear of death, and the punitive element in society that underlies our penal laws.



'Yes, our church is very much alive!'

(By permission of Church of England Newspapers)

Christianity's historical record is more atrocious than that of any other religion (including totalitarian ideologies)—and that is saying a lot. The doctrine of hell enabled the Church to argue (logically enough) during the ages of faith that any degree of cruelty towards dissidents was justified if it might save them—or even, through example, others—from damnation. Thus, in the name of "love", millions of "witches", "heretics" "sinners", Jews and other "infidels", were tortured to death in the most horrible ways.

I cannot catalogue all the crimes of Christianity, but I must mention the centuries of bloody "cru-

sades" against Islam, the religious wars between Catholic and Protestant (which killed a higher proportion of the population than all the wars of the present century), and the condonation of the African slave-trade by most Christians, including the whole bench of bishops in the House of Lords (the abolitionists being almost entirely atheistic).

You say that secularists "ignore the great and noble work, the magnificent and uplifting art, achieved in the name of God"—but this is not so. The loudest voices raised in protest against the demolition of redundant churches of architectural merit are often atheist voices. The same architects, artists and musicians who achieved such great works "in the name of God" could (and often did) produce secular work of equal quality—but they had

to earn a living, and the richest employer for many centuries was the Church.

Finally, you advocate, as the basis of an unselfish life, "faith in a living, loving God". But not only is such faith against reason: no one is in fact more self-centred than the person concerned with his or her "salvation" rather than with making this world a better place for everybody in it. Besides, what virtue is there in blind faith?

Unlike Christians, secular humanists see no virtue in faith, obedience, meekness, unworldliness, chastity, or pointless self-denial. The virtues we respect include: a regard for what is true, personal responsibility, tolerance, considerateness, breadth of sympathy, public spirit, co-operative endeavour, and a concern for future generations.

Berkeley, Slavery and Christianity

DAVID BERMAN

Bishop Berkeley, the eighteenth-century cleric and philosopher, had a reputation as a man of great virtue. David Berman, a lecturer in philosophy at Trinity College Dublin, examines Berkeley's attitude to slavery, and asks whether it was more humane than the traditional Christian attitude.

As the emperor Marcus Aurelius is often seen as the closest embodiment of the ideal Stoic sage, so, more recently, has Bishop George Berkeley been regarded as the almost paradigmatic Christian. Alexander Pope's judgement "To Berkeley, ev'ry virtue under heaven" has been repeatedly endorsed, most recently by George Pitcher in his otherwise highly critical *Berkeley* (London: R.K.P., 1978, pp. 252-4). I have argued elsewhere¹ that Berkeley's moral fame was derived largely from his (unsuccessful) attempt to establish a missionary college in Bermuda "for the better supplying of Churches in our foreign plantations, and for converting the savage Americans to Christianity"—as we learn from the subtitle of his *Proposal* (London, 1725). So, in 1776 Joseph Stock, his biographer, asserted that the "benevolent [Bermuda] project . . . alone entitles him to as much honour as all his learned labours have procured for him. . .".

But was the "benevolent project" really so benign? Consider Berkeley's views in the *Proposal* on negro slavery, a subject which he discusses with that of the shortage of clergy in the New World. He writes:

"To this [shortage] may be imputed the small Care that hath been taken to convert the Negroes of our Plantations, who, to the Infamy of England, and Scandal of the World, continue Heathen under Christian Masters, and in Christian Countries. Which could never be, if our Planters were

rightly instructed and made sensible, that they disappointed their own Baptism by denying it to those who belong to them: That it would be of Advantage to their Affairs, to have Slaves who should obey in all Things their Masters according to the Flesh, not with Eye-service as Men-Pleasers, but in Singleness of Heart as fearing God: That Gospel Liberty consists with temporal Servitude; and that their Slaves would only become better Slaves by being Christian."

This is a shocking passage. Berkeley objects to the West Indian planters not because they keep slaves, or even because they mistreat them; his grievance is that they do not baptise them. Moving to a pragmatic criticism and quoting from Ephesians vi.5, he points out that the planters' "slaves would only become better slaves" by becoming Christians — better slaves, not better persons.

Justification for Slavery

The *Proposal* is not the only place in which Berkeley mentions slavery; it is briefly touched upon also in his S.P.G. *Sermon* of 1732, where he again castigates the planters, this time for having "an irrational contempt of the blacks, as creatures of another species, who had no right to be instructed or admitted to the Sacraments. . .". Now some historians—W. E. H. Lecky, for instance²—quote this remark as redounding to Berkeley's credit, and in some respects it does: it shows that he was no racist. But it may also make his endorsement of slavery even more puzzling. Since Berkeley did not hold, as Edward Long and other eighteenth century writers did, that blacks "should be classed with orang-outangs as 'a different species of the same genus,'"³ we may wonder what his justification of slavery was. If blacks do not differ substantially from whites, then what right have whites to enslave them?

Now, although at the time an African was thought liable to be a slave because he was a heathen, this rationale was not open to Berkeley because, as we have seen, he insists that the negroes should be converted and that their conversion will make no difference to their status as slaves. They would, he thinks, only become "better slaves by being Christians". But then, what was Berkeley's justification for slavery? The only answer I can see is that Berkeley, like Boswell, Whitefield and many other good Christians, thought that God and the New Testament (e.g. Luke XVII. 7-10) sanctioned slavery. This interpretation is corroborated by Berkeley's economic tract, *The Querist* (pt 2, Dublin: 1736); in no 388 he concludes his defence of "temporary slavery" with the question: "What the word 'servant' signifies in the New Testament?" The answer is provided by Prof T. E. Jessop in his editorial note to this query: "The Greek term (*doulos*) means 'slave'" (*Works of Berkeley*, vol vi (1953), p 137).

Admirable Views?

Here, as in his theological writings, Berkeley shows himself to be one of the last strong-minded and consistent Christians. But who will find his views on slavery morally admirable? Edwin Gaustad in his recent study of *George Berkeley in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979)! On page 91 he writes:

"While to a later age it may seem no great service to blacks to argue that they could lawfully be both Christians and slaves at the same time, the case is otherwise. For if Christianity were a genuine option, then neither blackness on the one hand nor slavery on the other meant a spiritual inferiority or separation. At an irreducible minimum, this meant that black slaves, too, had souls. That Christianity did not eliminate attitudes of racial inferiority and physical degradation is a circumstance too familiar and depressing to require elaboration. But history, like nature, knows no sudden jumps. Berkeley took a step, however tentative and tiny, when he argued for greater intensity and responsibility in trying to Christianize blacks."

Gaustad assumes the benignity of Berkeley's Christian stand on slavery; his question is: to what extent did it serve the right cause? But suppose that Berkeley had said the opposite of what he did say: that the Gospel was *inconsistent* with slavery. Would that have been a "step" in the *wrong* direction? Hardly. By pointing out that the Bible sanctioned slavery Berkeley could only have strengthened the cause of slavery in this world. That he may have helped the slaves in the next world is possible. But that is not the issue, unless we suppose that the "step" Gaustad has in mind was in spiritual rather

than temporal history. Berkeley's confusion of the spiritual realm with that of the temporal is unacceptable; but even less acceptable is this sort of ideological mystification 250 years later from an historian of his life and thought.

NOTES

- 1 "Berkeley's Philosophical Reception after America", in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (1980), pp 311-320.
- 2 See his *History of England in the 18th century* (London, 1892), vol ii, p 248.
- 3 See R. Coupland's *The British anti-slavery movement* (London, 1964), p 28.

INDIAN RATIONALISTS CELEBRATE JUBILEE

The Golden Jubilee Conference of the Indian Rationalist Association was held in Bombay on the 25th and 26th of December 1980. Mr Justice Jahagirdar of the Bombay High Court welcomed the delegates who came from different states in the Indian Union, on behalf of the Reception Committee and referred to the proud role played by the city of Bombay in founding the first modern rationalist organisation in India in 1930. The inaugural address was given by an eminent judge of the Supreme Court of India, Mr Chinnappa Reddy, who castigated in no uncertain terms those forces who were encouraging the spirit of revivalism in the midst of the technological progress being made in the country. The conference was presided over by Dr P. M. Bhargava, an eminent cellular and molecular biologist.

A federal constitution has been adopted to reflect the vigorous work being done in many states. Mr P Ramamurty, a veteran Radical Humanist, has been appointed General Secretary and the office is expected to shift to Hyderabad, which is more central than Madras.

TERMINAL CATHOLICISM

The Roman Catholic Church is taking part in an experimental use of Teletel Video terminals in the Versailles area. The Roman Catholic church is to spend £25,000 to buy space for use screening facts on religious education, marriage, birth and baptism.

The Head of Religious Programmes, Radio, Colin Semper, answered a query that religious broadcasts are on the increase. He says that there is "a slight increase in the number of documentaries" from the religious department and "there is a slight possibility that our worship output may be increased marginally".

Contraception, But . . .

TERRY LIDDLE

It is now some months since the passage through the Dail of an act legalising contraception in the Irish Republic. This Act was not the product of a change of heart on the part of the staunchly Catholic Fianna Fail government, but the result of a decade and a half of active, and often angry, campaigning. During the campaign family planning clinics were set up in defiance of the law, pro-contraception doctors supplied the pill using the medical reason of regulation of menstruation and the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the ban on the import of contraceptives for personal use was an infringement of individual liberty.

The Catholic Church, realising that public opinion was against it, dropped its campaign against the new legislation and instead contented itself with issuing dire warnings to the faithful that no matter what the government did or said any form of contraception other than the uncertain rhythm method was against the Church's teachings. It is surely a monument to the grip of superstition on the human mind that ordinary Irish men and women should heed a celibate clergy when it tells them how to regulate their sexual affairs.

The author of the act was the present Prime Minister Charles Haughey who drafted it when he was Minister of Health. To ease its passage through the Dail its wording was extremely ambiguous. For example, under the new regulations persons who supply "artificial" means of contraception must obtain a license. Contraceptives, including "non-medical" types such as condoms can only be obtained by means of a doctor's prescription. Doctors and chemists can refuse to supply contraceptives on moral, i.e. religious, grounds. They can also do so if they think that the contraceptives will not be used for "bona fide" family planning. Just what bona fide means in this context is anybody's guess.

The pro-contraception forces in Ireland regard the new Act as at best a very limited victory and are carrying on with their campaign for free contraception on demand. Some family planning clinics have decided to apply for a license which means they are legally obliged to employ a full time chemist. Others have continued to operate outside the law and as yet remain unprosecuted. Although the medical union has remained silent on the issue, some doctors are supplying contraception on demand. The Contraception Action Programme has continued its activities and the Students' Unions at University College and Trinity College have continued to supply contraceptives and information on contraception.

As yet it is not possible to gauge the success of the Act. But it seems that in some areas of Ireland chemists are not even stocking contraceptives and that many doctors and chemists have obeyed the Church's instructions and availed themselves of the

Act's conscious clause. Also many of those most in need of contraception are unable to afford the high prices demanded by doctors and chemists or are put off by the rigmarole involved in obtaining contraceptives. The government claims that the Act is working well and therefore does not need reform to strengthen it.

The partial legislation of contraception in Ireland is a small but meaningful victory for the forces of reason and progress over those of superstition and reaction. Yet the church still retains a stranglehold over the thinking of many Irish people as was evidenced by the millions who turned out to greet the Pope. In particular the Catholic Church maintains a virtual monopoly of education and this despite the fact that it contributes less than one per cent of Ireland's educational budget. The only alternatives are Church of Ireland or expensive private schools. The new, so-called community schools have changed nothing, the religious maintaining their majority on the Boards of Management and the selection boards for teachers. Also the "faith and morals" clause in the rules of conduct for teachers clearly states: "a teacher shall not . . . seek to undermine the religious belief or practice of any pupil. . .". The Church has made it plain that it is its wishes and not those of parents which count. In Knocknaheeny in Cork a survey conducted by the Parents' Education Action Group showed that 65 per cent of the community wanted co-educational primary schools. The Church, however, insisted on single sex schools, those who objected being denounced from the pulpit. Only the threat of legal action caused the clergy to stop these denunciations. Ireland has a long way to go before it leaves the era of theocracy and enters the age of secular democracy.

OBITUARY

DR A LOVECY

We regret to report the sudden death of Dr Albert Lovecy aged 73. He was a leading activist during the past decade in South Place Ethical Society and the Humanist Housing Association. He had worked hard for the success of the SPES High Court case about its charitable status. A vigorous opponent of racialism, he successfully opposed the letting of Conway Hall to the National Front.

Dr Lovecy was active on many South Place committees and on the Committee of Management and Building Committee of the Humanist Housing Association. He will be remembered for his vitality and alertness, and he was active to the very end. The secular funeral took place at the City of London Crematorium on March 5, with Barbara Smoker officiating.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY CENTENARY

The Leicester Secular Society celebrated the centenary of the opening of the Secular Hall in Leicester on 1 March. A lecture about "Socialism and Secularism" was given by Michael Foot, leader of the Labour Party. The chairman of the Group, Mr Peter Miller, when welcoming Michael Foot, referred to the many famous speakers who had lectured there in the past hundred years, such speakers as Bertrand Russell, Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Prince Kropotkin and Charles Bradlaugh. G. W. Foote, the founder of the *Freethinker*, lectured there several times.

The Secular Hall is the only secularist hall surviving from the nineteenth century. Its impressive facade displays five terra cotta busts representing Socrates, Voltaire, Thomas Paine, Robert Owen and Jesus. The modern shopper, if he looks up, is reminded of a humanist tradition while passing by; it at first shocked people that Jesus was placed in a secular context. The active secularist and historian of the Leicester Secular Society, F. J. Gould, wrote: "They stand in a general way for wholesome criticism, for revolt against priestly pretensions, and for endeavours after a happier social environment."

At the opening of the hall on Sunday, March 6th, 1881, G. J. Holyoake delivered an address entitled "Secularism, a religion which gives heaven no trouble". Present on that occasion were Annie Besant, Charles Bradlaugh, Mrs Harriet Law and James Thomson ("B.V."), the poet who recited a dedicatory poem.

Tribute Paid

One hundred years later, Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society and Nicolas Walter, editor of the *New Humanist*, for the Rationalist Press Association, paid tribute to the Leicester Secular Society and wished the Hall a further successful hundred years. Messages of congratulation were read from Dora Russell, the Thomas Paine Society and Mr Edgar Eagle, who recalled attending a Sunday school run by F. J. Gould.

At a subsequent meeting the Leicester Secular Society's commitment to free speech was severely put to the test. Mr Tariq Ali, speaking in the Hall on socialism and democracy, was heckled by extreme right-wingers from the Leicester British Movement. After aggressive and intimidating behaviour police were called and the talk was halted.

It is hoped that a summary of Mr Foot's lecture will be printed in a future issue of the "Freethinker".

"Things are entirely what they appear to be and behind them . . . there is nothing."—Jean Paul Sartre.

NEW HUMANIST GROUPS

We have been informed by the following individuals that they wish to start a humanist group in their area. Would anyone who is interested in helping and participating please write to the individual concerned.

Mill Hill and Hendon Areas

Edgar Eagle
47, Flower Lane
Mill Hill
London NW7 2JN

Richmond-Kingston-Surbiton Area

Peter Danning
44, Morley Road
Twickenham
London TW1 2HF

York

David Scarth
21, Gascogne Walk
Nunnery Lane
York YO2 1BY

Freethinker Fund

The Fund this year will contribute towards the Centenary Fund, and the generous donations received so far will be put towards the expanded activities of the *Freethinker* this year. Many thanks to the following for their contributions:

A. M. Ashton, £1; P. Barbour, £7; S. J. Barnes, £2; D. Bresson, £3; C. A. Brierly, £20; B. A. Burfoot, £2; A. R. Cook, £1; P. Cromelin, £10; P. Crowden-Longstreath, £2; W. Donovan, £2; F. B. Edwards, £2; R. J. Fennell, £7; A. Garrison, £3.75; T. Grocott, £1; J. D. Groom, £1; J. S. Hamilton, £2; J. Haydn-Smith, £4.50; P. J. Hein, £1; In memory of Wm. Ingram, £3; H. J. Jakeman, £7; F. W. Jones, £2; A. J. McKenna, £20; A. Madoc-Jones, £2; G. S. Mellor, £7; M. Mepham, £2; B. Mogy, £2; J. W. Mooney, £2; H. & U. Neville, £3; D. Nickson, £2; K. Pariente, £17; A. Parry, £7; M. Perkins, £1; V. S. Petheram, £3; F. J. J. Pidgeon, £4; M. Russell, £2; 'Spartan' £100; G. Stowell, £6; G. Swan, £1; D. C. Taylor, £3; N. Toon, £2; D. Tribe, £20; A. Van Montagu, £2; F. White, £2; A. Williams, £7; D. T. Wood, £2; A. E. Woodford, £5; D. Wright, £4; R. C. Peterson, \$12; M. Santoro, \$3.

Total for the period 18/2/81 to 19/3/81: £312 and \$15. Total for the year to date: £654.40.

National Secular Society membership. Only £1.
Details from NSS, 702 Holloway Road
London N19 3NL

RELIGION IN SCHOOLS

The Secretary of State for Education and Science, Mr Mark Carlisle, has told a Commons Select Committee on Education and Science that the government have no intention of repealing the law requiring schools to hold daily religious assemblies and to provide religious instruction for all pupils, although many schools are in breach of the law. On the contrary, he indicated that the department was encouraging teacher-training colleges to increase the number of places for students who would teach RE.

In Rochdale there was a recent example of a breach in the law, which shows that traditional attitudes to religion in schools are irrelevant to a multi-racial society. The headmaster of a school where 16 per cent of the pupils are Asian replaced the Christian assembly with a non-Christian ceremony acceptable to all faiths. Mr Carlisle has ruled, after the case was referred to him by the Liberal MP, Mr Cyril Smith, that the headmaster was within his rights to develop a non-Christian assembly. So Mr Carlisle will not change the law and will not enforce it!

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, in a letter to *The Times* commented on Mr Carlisle's remarks to the Commons Select Committee: "He intends to increase the number of teacher-training places for students specialising in religious education. This, presumably, at the expense of the more relevant school subjects. Taking this retrogressive move to its logical conclusion, are we to see science give place to alchemy?"

Pointing out that the law is manifestly a bad law, she continued, "It demands a corporate act of worship every day in every state school, as though the 1944 Parliament that enacted it was in a position to guarantee the existence of a deity to be worshipped. Children who, having no other belief, attend schools where the law is obeyed in this respect must either persuade their parents to 'opt them out' of assembly (with concomitant disadvantages) or must participate in a daily act of corporate hypocrisy which is not only a misuse of school time but also a flagrant denial of freedom of thought."

Turning to RE, Barbara Smoker wrote: "Although the British Humanist Association's representatives on the Religious Education Council apparently consider it possible to get the RE syllabuses widened sufficiently to include non-religious 'stances for living' on an equal footing, most humanists, including practically all members of the National Secular Society, regard this as a totally unrealistic objective, at least as long as RE remains in the hands of specialist teachers who are nearly all committed Christians.

"The National Secular Society has increasing support for its long-held view that teaching about religious beliefs has its place in history, literature,

NEWS

and sociology lessons; that moral education has its place in social studies, philosophy, and the general ethos of the school; and that the place for religious indoctrination and worship is outside the school altogether."

The National Secular Society is submitting evidence to the Commons Select Committee on Science and Education.

CLOBBERED BY GOD

A Communion Service, aimed at bringing the "curse of God" down upon thieves who broke into a church near Cirencester, Glos, has been held by the church's vicar, who believes that the curse he placed upon the culprits will result in them having a "nasty accident". "They will be clobbered, probably by the civil authorities. Or God may clobber them on his own," the Rev Robert Nesham said after conducting the service in Down Ampney's thirteenth century All Saints' Church. "All I have done is turn to God and say: 'It's up to you.' I'm not out to punish them; God will do that."

He claims that the service—which first appeared in the 1662 Prayer Book—proved effective after previous church thefts. After holding two, the respective culprits were caught, sentenced and punished by the authorities. The vicar said retribution for the latest theft could take the form of a road accident, or nothing more serious than a fall downstairs and a broken collar bone. "On the other hand," he added, "God might let them off completely if they had jolly good reasons for stealing. But I wouldn't like to be at the receiving end of a Communion Service."

SYNOD'S SEX MUDDLE

The Synod of the Church of England debated homosexuality in March. The Church of England continued on its muddled way in this as in all other fields related to human sexuality. There was no vote on the confused Gloucester Report, *Homosexual Relations—a contribution to discussion*, published in 1979 (see the *Freethinker*, November 1979).

The Archbishop of Canterbury gave with one hand and took back with the other. He was anxious for informal discussion, though offered platitudes not information; he wanted to combat mockery and innuendo, but provided an equally damaging stick with which to beat gays—the concept of handicap. The Archbishop's view that homosexuality is a handicap was widely reported. Many gay people

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would prefer their sexual variation to be seen as a sin rather than as a handicap—at least sin is an absurd concept rejected by much of society. The Archbishop refused to accept that homosexuality and heterosexuality could be given equal validity, thus showing how incapable he is of conceiving the worth of different life-styles.

Maybe to be a bishop is a handicap: it separates them from the rest of society, gives a narrow vision, and shuts out a vast range of experience.

The Gay Christian Movement commented that: "If the Archbishop had meant that homosexual people were handicapped because of the hatred and prejudice of others, one might be less angry with him. However, this is wishful thinking; and it is clear that by 'handicapped' the Archbishop meant less than whole, lacking in something essential, and not having true validity."

The Gay Christian Movement have a worthy task in trying to enlighten and remove prejudice from established religion; but it is hard to see how anyone can remain Christian and homosexual without unendurably painful intellectual and emotional contortions.

The Gay Humanist Group issued an ironic open letter to non-believers, calling for tolerance towards the Christian minority, and said: "Religious people are not so much sick or wicked as mentally handicapped. They have to cope with the limitations and hardships of not being able to reason clearly and of feeling guilty all of the time. They live in dread of the 'last day' when most of them expect to be consigned to a place of torment known as 'hell'. They are denied the fulfilment of freethought and the joy of living life to the full. . . It would be tragic indeed if we saw all religious people as potential members of the Festival of Light or the Klu Klux Klan and I hope you will join with us in working towards a better understanding of this unfortunate minority."

PAST PRAYING FOR

Brighton local councillors have decided to print a prayer on their Council agenda paper. In a statement opposing the move Brighton and Hove Humanist Group have commented that "A considerable number of rate-payers and others concerned with the town's environment and welfare services have long been of the opinion that the policy makers at the town hall are past praying for."

The leader of the majority Conservative group on

the council has said that "We are a Christian country". But the Brighton group have pointed out that it is not unbelievers but national religious leaders who are constantly complaining that Britain is, in the words of the late Cardinal Heenan, "A land of former believers".

"We are not a Christian country even in the legal sense," said Mr. McIlroy, the press officer of the group. "That was established as long ago as 1917, when Lord Chief Justice Sumner declared: 'The phrase "Christianity is part of the law of England" is not really law it is rhetoric.' (Bowman v Secular Society Ltd.)

"Those who insist on making a public display of their faith can assemble on the town hall steps and, together with friends from the world of property speculation, sing 'Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow.'" Mr McIlroy told the *Freethinker*: "Being of a charitable disposition I spurned the temptation to suggest they alter the words to 'Praise God From Whom All Contracts Flow'."

CONSPIRACY AND MORALS

Tom O'Carroll, chairman of the Paedophile Information Exchange has been sentenced to two years imprisonment. He was charged with conspiracy to corrupt public morals. His crime was publishing a contact sheet in which paedophiles could exchange views and information. There was no evidence given that Tom O'Carroll had caused harm to any child.

Tom O'Carroll has become a victim of the vague offence of "conspiracy to corrupt public morals"—a law invented by the Law Lords in 1961 and never clearly defined since. He is entitled to contact others with similar views, to argue publicly for lowering of the age of consent, and to exchange fantasies with other adults—there is no law against this. We may disagree with his views and suggest that child-adult relationships cannot involve equivalent responsibilities (opinion will vary widely), but that does not justify a two year custodial sentence.

This is essentially a case in which to remember the Voltairean tag: "We do not like what you say, but defend your right to say it." It is to be hoped that Mr O'Carroll's appeal succeeds.

CHRISTIAN STANDARDS

"The Christian teacher, whether an RE specialist or not, has a responsibility to communicate absolute Christian standards in the classroom and in the staff room." This comment was made by Mr David Day, lecturer in religious education at Durham University, at a conference organised by the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship. He also said that RE students must fight for the very existence of religious studies in the classroom.

BOOKS

CRAZY FOR GOD by Christopher Edwards. Prentice-Hall. \$8.95.

How loony are the Moonies? What makes them tick? Chris Edwards' racily written account of his seven months' involvement in this not-so-comic cult doesn't give clear-cut answers to these questions, but it does provide some interesting clues to the psychology of cult-ism.

Why are such preposterous belief-systems as Moon's Unification Church or Hubbard's Scientology pulling in millions of youngsters nowadays? Firstly, says Edwards, because of the development in recent decades of psychological techniques and technological tools for influencing, controlling and dominating the human mind and nervous system. Anyone familiar with Dr William Sargant's classic *Battle for the Mind*, first published as long ago as 1957, will realise how formidable such brainwashing techniques have now become.

Secondly, the disillusionment with American and Western European society engendered in the "Vietnam generation" of adolescents, and their mistrust of the excessive emphasis upon consumerism, science and technology—none of which have solved our contemporary problems. This failure has caused them to seek romantic, idealistic and supernatural creeds which might fulfil their hopes. But they have never abandoned the technologist's belief in the need to search for rapid, certain results. Their compulsion to learn everything about God, man and the world in seven days reflects both their shallowness of thought and their desperation.

Thirdly, their feelings of alienation and lack of support from their families and the established institutions of society. They yearn for comradeship, for love which isn't compulsively sexual, for mutual support and for a shared common purpose—all of which are so strikingly absent from so much of our contemporary world. "Why is my generation so hungry for love that they can be attracted so easily by saccharine promises?" Edwards asks. "I believe the answer is simply this: we as a people seem to have forgotten how to care about and for each other."

This hunger lures them into set-ups like the Moonies. Once involved—picked up as a new arrival in town at the bus station, invited back for supper, then out into the country for a weekend, followed by a week's "lecture course", then a second, and a third, by which time he's a signed up permanent member of "The Family" — the new recruit is allowed no time to be alone (even in the loo), to think, to reconsider, to question: every objection is met by appeals for patience and for greater faith so as to attain the necessary degree of understanding.

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Soon he is adhering to a fantastic cosmology (based upon a Biblical gloss) which reveals the Rev Sun Myung Moon as the New Messiah — Edwards' account of a four-hour anti-Communist rant by this peculiarly unprepossessing person is one of the highlights of the book—and ends up half-hypnotised and willing to do virtually anything for "Father's" cause, including the practice of "Heavenly Deception" (lying, in common or garden language) in the furtherance of flower-selling and other fund-raising activities. And God! how the money rolls in. . .

After seven months, Edwards was "rescued" (kidnapped) by his own father, who employed a notorious "deprogrammer", Ted Patrick, to restore Chris's mind. His account of "deprogramming" makes it sound almost as bizarre and inanelly sinister as the original Moonie indoctrination.

What stands out from this book is that not only big money (mostly extracted from unaware little people) but also a ruthless drive for big power and a paranoiac God-complex is involved in this as in other newly-founded cults. The hysteria, the irrationalism, the lies, the disregard for any values which conflict with the aims of the cult (in this case the deification of Moon), are repulsive and totalitarian. But what, ultimately, is the difference between the excesses of such cultism and those of the older, orthodox religions? Contemplating the unedifying antics of modern Islam, of the present Pope and of the Fundamentalist Protestant sects, contrasting the clergy's weasel words about "human rights" with their strenuous efforts to prevent people from thinking for themselves if this involves disbelief in the existence of "supernatural" powers, one may well wonder if the difference is even one of degree. Brainwashing and indoctrination in irrationalism are, after all, essential to the survival of any forms of religious belief.

ANTONY GREY

FEMALE CIRCUMCISION, EXCISION AND INFIBULATION: THE FACTS AND PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE. The Minority Rights Group Report No 47. Edited by Scilla McLean. £1.20 plus 25p postage and packing from MRG, 36 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NG.

In their Report No 27, "Arab Women", the MRG make fleeting mention of the custom of excising small girls' external genital organs and, in some cases, closing them with a metal clasp or with stitches, to ensure their virginity up to the time of their marriage and fidelity thereafter. This practice is still widespread in the Yemen and the Republic of Oman and also in many parts of Africa, especially

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the Sudan, Somalia and Mali. In July 1980 the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women was held in Copenhagen. Subjects on the agenda included health, education and employment, and at the parallel Non-Governmental Organisations Forum, 8,000 women from 120 countries discussed such issues as genital mutilation. This Forum is given generous, and very illuminating, coverage in the MRG Report on Female Circumcision. It is a compendious work, just 20 pages, crisp, readable and thoroughly annotated. It includes a map showing those areas "where most women are infibulated", those where excision and circumcision are widespread and those where some cases have been reported; and two line-drawings — one of normal female genitals, and one of an infibulated vulva. These drawings are very valuable for helping clarify anatomical terms possibly unfamiliar to the layperson. There is also a full-page photograph of the face of a seven-year-old Sudanese girl, with a caption describing the after-effects of her clitoridectomy. This portrait must have been inserted to add a personal touch, to help us identify, perhaps even identify *with*, one of the millions of nameless victims, but I find this approach self-indulgent and manipulative. Opening as it does with a full-page quotation from the Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 1 through 7, and 16, 25 and 28, and following on with a graphic description of the "operation", the document speaks for itself cogently. Touches such as the photograph, the isolated sentence, "If you can stand the pain," and the overtly judgmental, "An amazing 83 per cent (of Egyptian nurses) believed there were no disadvantages. . ." add little, and at times the cross-referencing is too imprecise to be of any real use.

On the whole, though, it is an excellent Report, carefully thought-through and full of insights into the complexity and delicacy of the problem, into the difficulty of obtaining any kind of consensus on a national or an international level as to how it should be tackled or indeed whether it ought to be tackled at all. It is a wide-ranging and authoritative survey with such section headings as *Physical Consequences; Sexual Problems; Psychological consequences; Legislation; History; Is it Dying Out?*; *Attitudes of Doctors and Nurses* and a large portion of the report is devoted to *Programmes and Practical Proposals for Change* including suggestions for action by readers. It is refreshing to read a report on this subject which is so positive and which sees it as a Human Rights issue, twice invoking Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

To my mind, the most interesting parts of this Report are those which focus the dangers of taking too crusading or emotional a stance (even though, as I have pointed out above, the Report is at times a little too journalistic itself). For example: "Westerners discussing sexual practices in cultures other than their own must be wary of moral judgments, for although Western women may not be physically mutilated, they do to this day suffer sexually inflicted pain and degradation."; "To Western readers unfamiliar with the force of this particular community identity, the very concept of amputation carries a shock value which does not exist for most women in the areas concerned. For them, not to amputate would be shocking."; "Western efforts to eliminate the practice on the part of missionaries or colonial administrations have simply served to confirm in people's minds that colonial destruction of traditional customs weakens their societies and exposes them to the ill-effects of Western influence."; "The sensation-value of the subject for the media (after the Copenhagen conference) was felt to be regrettable in many ways, since it can make it more difficult for those in the countries concerned to accept and understand the interest shown by the Western world, and might slow down the progress of activities aimed towards abolition." Also on the subject of the conference at Copenhagen on the topic, reporting the reaction of some of the African delegates at the Forum, "They stressed that the abolition of these practices is not a priority for them —sufficient food and clean water having a far greater importance."

Most eloquent, and ironical of all: "In order to ease the anguish of women of all ages, and speed the eradication of the customs, attention must also be given to the bitterness of older women. How can they be expected to bear the double burden, not only of having been mutilated, deprived of pleasure and possibly in pain all their lives, but also of admitting that it was unnecessary?"

VERA LUSTIG

TWELVE TAROT GAMES by Michael Dummett.
Duckworth, £5.95.

It was for gaming that the tarot cards were invented in northern Italy in the fifteenth century—so argues Michael Dummett—and for gaming alone they were employed until the late eighteenth century. At this point their use was sullied by French occultists, who put forth claims that the cards embodied hidden doctrines of ancient Egypt (the Book of Thoth), that they held special potency for divination, and other such nonsense.

In later accretions, the tarot cards were linked to the Hebrew alphabet, numerology, the Kabbalah, theosophy, gypsies, gnostics, heretics, Rosicrucians, the Knights Templar, the Masons, and much else.

At the present time, the tarot cards are popularly thought of as devices for fortune-telling, fraught with deep occult signification.

Professor Dummett is indignant over this betrayal of the tarot game. Properly so. Most books on the tarot—and there are hundreds—merit contempt at best, as their “interpretations” consist of little more than the free association of shallow and untrained minds: rubbish.

However, I feel that Dummett may be overzealous in his rationalism when he attempts to reduce the figures on the trump cards to “just what someone of the time (fifteenth century) would be likely to pick if he were asked to select a series of subjects for a set of twenty-one picture cards”. Some trumps do portray familiar symbols: Death (as the Grim Reaper), Father Time (the Hermit), the Wheel of Fortune, the Devil, etc. But others are definitely strange and puzzling: the Star (a naked woman simultaneously pours liquids from two vessels—one into a flowing stream and the other onto the earth), the Moon (moon, two towers, dog, wolf, pond, crab), the Hanged Man (sacrificial victim?), etc. It does not necessarily compromise Dummett’s primary thesis to maintain, as I do, that some of the tarot trumps illustrate myths or literature from classical antiquity, while others may depict aspects of pagan religious doctrine or ritual.

Suffice a single example: Trump VII, the Chariot. Though recognised by none of the tarot “interpreters” I’ve read, this card clearly illustrates one of the most famous symbols in all literature: the Charioteer in Plato’s dialogue, *Phaedrus*. Literally depicted (best in the version of the Marseilles pack) are the noble white horse of modesty and reason on the right, the unruly dark horse of desire on the left, with both horses moderated by Love as the charioteer of souls. Thus, the symbol is ancient—nearly two millennia older than the first tarot pack. And it is profound, as only a philosopher knows who has himself experienced the divine madness and the willing constraints of love. All this is not to suggest that the card has any special occult properties or efficacy for fortune-telling, or that its inclusion in the tarot pack is particularly mysterious — by the fifteenth century a revival of classical learning had taken place in Italy.

Following the Introduction, Michael Dummett describes twelve surviving tarot games: their fascinating histories, and how to play them. His instructions are splendidly clear and comprehensive.

Each tarot game requires an appropriate deck. Believing that the proof would be in the playing, in New York, where I live, I visited an occult bookshop, a gaming supplies store, and a “warlock” supplies establishment. From these I acquired Tarocco Piemontese, Tarocco Bolognese, Tarocco Siciliano, and Austrian Tarock packs. I then recruited players. And we played.

The basic tarot is a trick-taking game for three players—sometimes two against one and sometimes each for himself. Everything proceeds (like witch dances) in a counterclockwise direction. Dummett’s enthusiasm is justified. The tarot games are fun to play, challenging, and unspoiled by the over-analysis, systems, and conventions of modern card games.

There may be a diabolical power in the cards after all, for they have twice kept my roommate and me up half the night playing a two-handed version of Austrian Tarock.

JOHN LAURITSEN

FLUORIDATION AND THE FORGOTTEN ISSUE by Doris Grant. National Anti-Fluoridation Campaign, 36 Station Road, Thames Ditton, Surrey, KT7 ONS, 65p post free

A simple method of virtually eradicating caries in children’s milk teeth, if such could be found, would obviously be attractive to health authorities. With this desirable end in view, for many years water fluoridation has been pressed upon governments throughout the world, the initiative coming from certain manufacturing concerns with large stocks of fluoride for which they need a market.

Fluoridation schemes were started in many countries, and soon there were reports of harmful side-effects, ranging from mottled teeth—a symptom of chronic fluoride poisoning—to increases in cancer and child deaths. Governments and bureaucracies do not like admitting mistakes, but over the years fluoridation has been dropped in one country after another. This has been its fate throughout the European mainland, together with some 3,000 cities in the United States.

Fluoridation is still government policy in Britain, and water authorities are under constant pressure to implement it. More than four million people now have no option but to ingest one of the most poisonous substances known, in daily doses varying according to the amount of water they drink. Complaints of damage to health are dismissed by the Department of Health as unfounded.

Doris Grant’s booklet has been written out of “her deep concern for all who are being slowly poisoned by the artificial fluoridation of water supplies”, an assertion supported by plenty of medical evidence, fully documented and up-to-date. One learns, for example, that after 13 years of fluoridation Birmingham has had an eightfold jump in its rate of increase of cancer deaths, and now has an extra thousand of such deaths every year. The Department of Health promised an inquiry, but more than a year later none appears to have been held, and fluoridation continues. Studies in the United States and elsewhere have also shown more cancer deaths following fluoridation.

“The side-effects of fluoride toothpaste,” says Mrs Grant, “have been reported as widespread and

LETTERS

ASTROLOGY

Barbara Smoker (Letters, March 1981, p. 46) is mistaken if she thinks that the US Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal has discredited Michel Gauquelin's Mars effect. After some five years, and at least one previous attempt (in which Gauquelin did the computational work), what CSICP achieved was a classic "failure to replicate". Gauquelin's reply was a classic "they didn't do it properly," and the petty wrangling I referred to in my review concerned only the conduct of the test. Both sides indulged in post-hoc fooling around with the data that did neither of them any service, but the recent CSICP test is not the one at issue. I accept that the Committee failed to replicate, and I distrust Gauquelin's subsequent manipulations of the numbers, but the test does not even address the original findings.

Gauquelin's original correlations—of which the Mars effect is the strongest among many—still stand, unless Barbara Smoker has evidence that Gauquelin cheated or blundered. Those correlations are neither "apparent," nor "discredited", as Barbara Smoker claims. They are real correlations, and they have not yet been shown to be other than genuine.

Whether Gauquelin's effects are of any significance in a non-statistical sense is another matter entirely. Personally, I reject them, but not on the basis of what I still consider petty wrangling that puts all parties in a bad light.

Make what you will of the Mars effect, bearing in mind that it has not been replicated, but do not allow one test to stand as evidence that the other effects are discredited.

JEREMY CHERFAS

DEFENDING CUPITT

Those who only read Anthony Grey's unfortunate review of Don Cuppitt's book "Taking Leave of God" (February Freethinker) will naturally be inclined to dismiss it. That would be a pity. Having read and reread the book I am of the opinion that it is one of the seminal works of our time and deserves to stand beside Kuhn's "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions". May I whet your readers' appetites a little?

On the negative side: "So far as we can tell, there is no objective personal God. (p93). It is clear by now that revelation-beliefs are mythological. (p120). Religion is dying. (p154). The church is a museum and museums are not in the business of pioneering. (6155). It is a great help to be a religious person who does not believe in life after death. People clutch at the thought that there might be, well, just the faintest chance of even a temporary reprieve, to get themselves off the hook. There is no such chance. Death is death." (p161).

Cuppitt dismisses the relevance of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Ascension and the rest. In so far as they have any meaning at all they are ways of describing internal personal experience. "Gods personify religious values. (p108). Religion is inner clarity and simplicity. (p 101). We will be fully capable moral agents only when we have become spirit, that is, when we have a universal, disinterested, rational and autonomous consciousness that loves the good for its own sake." (p146).

He accepts that, historically, much of religion "is a tool for keeping other people in order". (p159). But "that is the way religion dies". So is it, he says, that: "History lays upon the Christian theologian the duty radically to transform Christianity and by so doing to preserve its identity. (p75). A fully modern Christianity

serious", as many of us can testify from personal experience. She points out that doctors receive no training in recognising the symptoms of fluoride poisoning, relying on the assertions of public health officials that fluoridation is harmless. Almost invariably such poisoning is wrongly diagnosed.

Does fluoridation really prevent dental caries? In Birmingham extractions of children's teeth have fallen by half, but fillings have quadrupled. This suggests better conservation treatment, not a lessening of decay. The Department of Health's own figures, published in 1969, show that fluoridation merely delays the onset of caries for up to two years, after which decay proceeds at its normal rate. Readers of this booklet—which should be everyone—may feel the respite is dearly bought.

R. J. CONDON

MEDITATIONS by J. Krishnamurti. Gollancz, £3.50

Krishnamurti, Annie Besant's protege Messiah, refused to become a religious guru and has rejected the conventional messages of religion. Yet he has acquired a guru-type following and can easily be misleadingly classified with religious gurus from the East.

In this slight collection of quotations, from his earlier lectures and notebooks, on the subject of meditation, he says: "Always to seek for a wider, deeper, transcendental experience is a form of escape from the actual reality of 'what is', which is ourselves, our own conditioned mind." I constantly find myself being surprised by my agreement with many of Krishnamurti's statements. And yet I find his talk of the "religious mind" a barrier: "This meditative mind is the religious mind — the religion that is not touched by the church, the temple or by chants."

The book is not good value. Despite all Krishnamurti's strictures against religious systems and leaders (elsewhere) a white page with only the sentence "Meditation is the action of silence" printed at the top encourages a reverence for tautologous aphorisms rather than thoughtful awareness. This book is not therefore the best route to Krishnamurti's ideas.

He speaks of "inward silence" which brings about the "religious mind"—"That mind knows what is sacred". I suppose this is close to a form of religious humanism—a label I particularly dislike for its lack of clarity: but then Krishnamurti would warn us against labels.

JIM HERRICK

It is reported that Uri Geller—one-time television spoon bender is now selling health food in a New York delicatessen.

scarcely yet exists. It lurks, I believe, in people's private opinions, but it has not yet won public recognition and acceptance."

It is exactly at this last point, where he admits the weakness of his case, that a constructive humanist critique is called for and where religious humanism, leaving the label of Christianity behind, has a powerful case to make in the names of Blake, Nietzsche and D. H. Lawrence. The trouble is that that case is so poorly made, and by so few, that were it not for its essentially dynamic content it would be worse off than collapsing Christianity.

I have been in correspondence with Don Cupitt (who sees the future in terms of Christian Buddhism). He writes "I still consider myself a radical Christian, with admittedly a highly revisionist idea of God, rather than a religious humanist." Among Christians he is the arch-heretic of the 'eighties who has taken the path that Moncreu Conway took in 1869. I feel sure that Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant would have hailed his book as a light shining in Cambridgeshire and I do not see how or why we should do less.

PETER CADOGAN

WHO IS THE ENEMY?

Peter Cadogan's real enemy is Peter Cadogan. There are a number of crossed lines in his article (February, Freethinker).

In his first paragraph he says the demise of God was postponed until 1960 when the publishers of "Lady Chatterly's Lover" were acquitted. In his ninth paragraph we are told "With the collapse of empires and the rise of scholarship, God departs." Would this be 1881, when The Freethinker began?

In the article he departed from the Marxist fold in 1959, but in a previous article I understood he departed in 1956 after the events in Hungary. If he had read the Communist Manifesto of 1848 he would have known that Marx anticipated that a part of the ruling class would join the revolution and so he should have had no problem over the Aldermaston march and its class nature. None of his remarks about Marxism suggest that he has visited Eastern Europe in the last 25 years.

The conclusion of his article is quite amiable, but contrasts strongly with his statement in the January New Humanist where he appears to identify with Captain Kidd. There he says that if the rationalists and secularists persist in "some kind of take-over" of South Place "they stand to get bloody noses. Repel boarders, I say!" This is from the leader of the East-West Peace People.

He says "Every change in the political history of a people is duly reflected in a religious change." If this is so, the particularly warlike form of the Evangelical Revival under Reagan and the Moslem revival in the Middle East are a more serious menace than Marxism.

As for Cadogan's cult of Blake, I find it hard to believe that the author of "And did those feet" and "Little lamb, who made thee?" was a humanist and I know there are nearly as many interpretations of Blake's "Prophetic Books" as of the Bible.

SAMUEL BEER

GEORGE ELIOT EXHIBITION

In an item on the George Eliot exhibition at the British Library (March issue), the writer asks "what was the 'pop' concert which George Eliot attended at St. James's Hall in 1880?"

St. James's Hall was a famous concert hall on the site of the present Piccadilly Hotel (opposite St. James's Church). It held popular Ballad Concerts on Saturdays and popular Classical Concerts on Mondays.

In Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Mikado," the Mikado when listing the famous "punishments that fit the crime" sings: "the Music Hall singer attends a series of Masses and Fugues and Ops. (Operas), by Bach interwoven with Spohr and Beethoven at Classical Monday Pops." There is also a reference in "Patience" to a lesser poet than the hero who "Thinks suburban hops more fun than Monday Pops."

TERRY MULLINS

If as Jim Herrick says (it appears he has not read the book himself) George Eliot's "Romola" is "not now thought to have brought Renaissance Italy alive," so much the worse for our modern novelists and critics.

Eliot spent three years in Florence researching this book (how many have they spent?) It is not a life of Savonarola (a purely incidental figure) but a great study of the Florentine civilisation, and an absorbing picture of the corruption of power. Its principal male figure, Tito, is probably the first serious characterisation of an "anti-hero," Romola herself an early example of the woman scholar. The analogy is with Tolstoy's "War and Peace" (also a massive novel of civilisation) rather than "Anna Karenina"; but as with Tolstoy the basis is still human fallibility.

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

EARTHQUAKE APPEAL

I should like to thank those readers who supported the El Asnam Earthquake Appeal. A humanist donation to UNICEF totalled £435. In view of the cost of postage would contributors please accept this as the only acknowledgement of their generosity.

MARGUERITE S-WELLS
BHA representative on UK
Committee of UNICEF

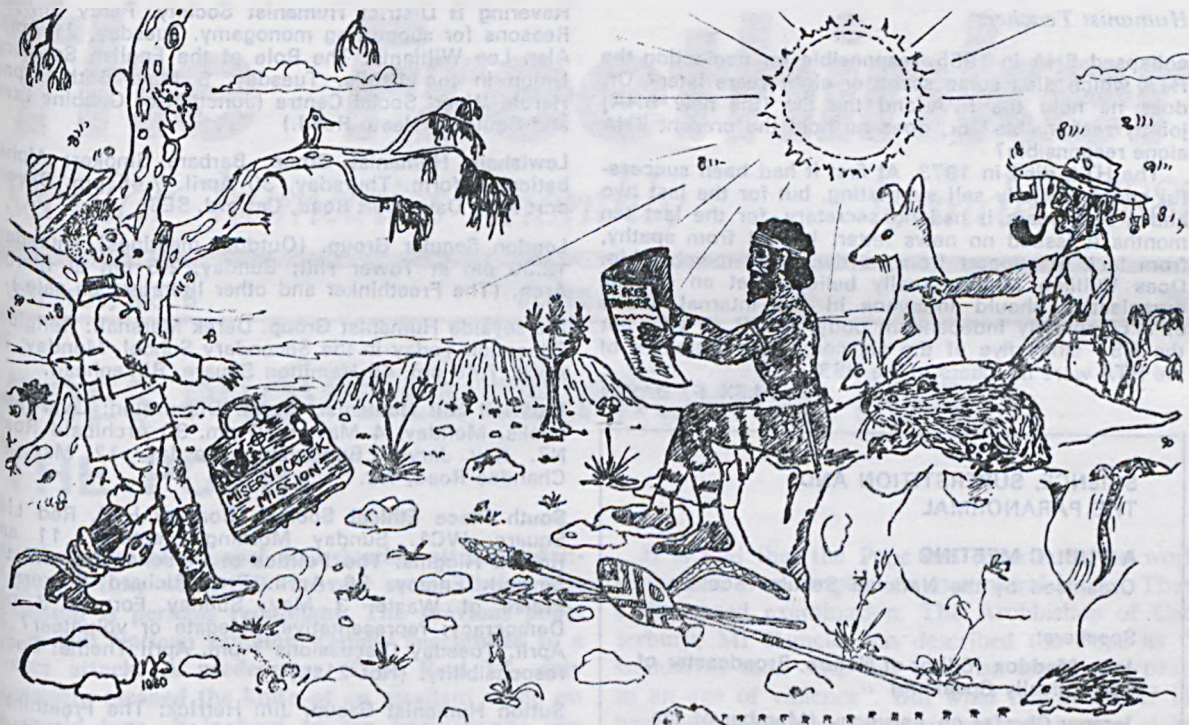
HUMANIST TEACHERS

As one who has been closely associated with the Humanist Movement for sixty years, and as a member of the British Humanist Association's Education Committee from its inception, and also as a member of the National Secular Society which is doing a good hatchet job on dogmatic reactionary fundamentalist beliefs, I deplore the baseless and unsubstantiated allegation of Mr McIlroy that the British Humanist Association "killed off" the Humanist Teachers Association. Not only is it false but the accompanying emotional disparagement malicious. The Education Committee, which included Harry Stopes-Roe, were very concerned at the demise of the Humanist Teachers' Association. Now William McIlroy writes: "If the Humanist Teachers' Association was not 'killed off' it was certainly allowed to die through neglect" which raises a nasty question: Whose neglect?

The BHA—a jointly sponsored organisation by the Rationalist Press Association and the Ethical Union, with its secretary and treasurer a member of the RPA—in May 1965 called into being the HTA as a completely independent body of humanist and secularist teachers to deal with discrimination against humanist teachers and parents, with indoctrination of children, and to determine its own policy. In July 1965 the EU lost its charitable status. This compelled the RPA, which had recently been granted charitable status, to withdraw, thus destroying the status of the BHA as a jointly sponsored and financed body, at the same time depriving it of its secretary and treasurer. The EU, of which I was the treasurer, at my suggestion, changed its name to that of the BHA as had originally been planned.

Does William McIlroy hold the jointly sponsored

(Continued on back page)



The Freethinker: read all over the world

CENTENARY ISSUE

THE FREETHINKER — MAY 1881-1981

Barbara Wootton: Retrospect and Prospect

Hermann Bondi: Free Thought and Science

Margaret Knight: Free Thought seen 25 years after a "notorious" series of broadcasts.

Brigid Brophy: A Personal View of the Freethinker

Dora Russell: How Religion Sees Women

Edward Blishen: Where does thinking get you?

Maureen Duffy: A poem for "The Freethinker Centenary"

H. J. Blackham: Philosophy as Free Thought

Plus: News, reviews, comment from regular contributors

THE FREETHINKER—secular humanist ideas and news for 100 years

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Humanist Teachers

collapsed BHA in 1965, responsible for neglecting the HTA which died some seven or eight years later? Or, does he hold the RPA and the EU (the new BHA) jointly responsible? or, does he hold the present BHA alone responsible?

The HTA died in 1973. At first it had been successful and financially self supporting, but for the last two and a half years it had no secretary, for the last ten months it issued no news letter. It died from apathy, from lack of support from its dwindling membership. Does William McIlroy really believe that an outside organisation should intervene in the internal affairs of a completely independent body, and if so why not the NSS since five of the six committee members of the HTA were members of the NSS.

ALEX F. DAWN

SCIENCE, SUPERSTITION AND THE PARANORMAL

A PUBLIC MEETING

Organised by the National Secular Society

Speakers:

John Maddox (Editor of Nature, Broadcaster of Scientifically Speaking)

Jeremy Cherfas on Astrology (Member of the Committee for the Scientific Study of the Paranormal)

THURSDAY, 4 JUNE, 7 pm

CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE,
LONDON WC1

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. Discussion. Is Class still important? Thursday, 9 April. AGM. Thursday, 7 May. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co Antrim. Tel: Whiteabbey 66752.

Berkshire Humanists. AGM. Friday, 8 May. 8 pm. Friends Meeting House, Church Street, Reading.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Tea Party and AGM. Sunday, 3 May. 4.30 pm. Queen's Head, Queen's Road, Brighton. (Junction Road entrance opposite Brighton Station.)

THE FREETHINKER

Editor: JIM HERRICK

News & Notes edited by Barry Duke

702 HOLLOWAY ROAD
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Havering & District Humanist Society. Percy Sowter: Reasons for supporting monogamy. Tuesday, 21 April. Alan Lee Williams: The Role of the English Speaking Union in the 1980s. Tuesday, 5 May. Both 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (Junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road.)

Lewisham Humanist Group. Barbara Smoker: Alphabetical Reform. Thursday, 30 April. 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. Derek Marshall: Religious Education Today in the Secondary School. Monday, 20 April. 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. Discussion: Over-rated books. Monday, 4 May. 8.30 pm. 30 Archibald Road, N7. Roy Jarvis: Buddhism. Tuesday, 12 May, 40 Chandos Road, N2.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. Ronald Higgins: The Politics of Persons—Beyond the Seventh Enemy. 26 April. Prof Richard Scorer: In Praise of Waste. 3 May. Sunday Forums 3 pm. Democracy: representative, delegate or volunteer? 26 April. Tuesday Discussions 7 pm. April Theme: Social responsibility. (Not 21st.)

Sutton Humanist Group. Jim Herrick: The Freethinker Past and Future. Wednesday, 13 May. 8 pm. Friends' House, 10 Cedar Road, Sutton.

Tyneside Humanist Society. AGM. Wednesday, 29 April. 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House, 1 Archbold Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne 2.

Worthing Humanist Group. Open Discussion. Sunday, 26 April. 5.30 pm. Worthing Trades Council Club, 15 Broadwater Road.

Gay Humanist Group. Elsa Beckett & Trevor Thomas: Disabled Gays. Friday, 8 May. 7.30 pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Scottish Humanist Conference 1981. Guest speaker, Jim Herrick: The Freethinker—Yesterday and Tomorrow. 10.30 am-5.30 pm. The University of Stirling. Saturday, 25 April. Further details from 4 Dovecot Loan, Edinburgh EH14 2LT.

THE FREETHINKER CENTENARY

A CELEBRATION

All welcome. Drinks and snacks.

Saturday, 16 May, 7 pm.

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.