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MPs REINFORCE CHURCHES' STRANGLEHOLD ON NATION'S SCHOOLS

Although the Second Report from the Parliamentary Education, Science and Arts Committee contains some good ideas, the National Secular Society declares that "those recommendations concerned with religion in schools are almost medieval in their single-minded bigotry". The NSS submitted a memorandum to the Select Committee, followed by oral evidence and a supplementary memorandum. All have been rejected by the Committee which proposes, the NSS declares, that "secondary education should be put under the 'guidance' of the churches to an extent unknown in this country since 1870".

The toadying attitude of Committee members to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Runcie, and to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Hume, is reflected in the report. Much importance is given to Dr Runcie's claim to know a number of parents who are "unable to have the religious conviction but would like their children to have the opportunity". Cardinal Hume's and the Bishop of Bristol's claims of detecting "considerable interest in religious experience" among the young were also accepted without demur.

No Committee member was so insensitive as to suggest that there are plenty of vacant places in Sunday Schools if parents wanted their children to receive the benefits of religious truths. Or that those young people who discuss their views with Cardinals and Bishops are likely to be interested in religious experience. The vast majority of young people regard the clergy as figures of fun or, if they live in Scotland or Ireland, as tyrants.

It is not particularly surprising that a Committee with a preponderance of fundamentalist MPs, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, should insist on the retention of the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act. But as the NSS points out, it demands a much more rigorous implementation of

those clauses than has been the general practice in the past three decades.

The NSS comments in a Press release that, with church attendance low, the churches are anxious to infiltrate our schools. The Select Committee backs them in this aim, "although (or perhaps, because) teachers are, according to the Archbishop of Canterbury's evidence, 'inclined to be hostile towards religious education'.

"While only a small minority of adults practise any religion, adolescents are expected to take part in a daily act of worship. According to the Report, this is 'in danger of falling into disrepute', but instead of recommending that the act of worship therefore be discontinued, the Committee recommends that 'the Secretary of State should now begin discussions with all interested bodies, including the church authorities, about guidance to schools'".

The Committee recommends that the term "Religious Instruction" should be replaced by "Religious Education". This will give official sanction to a cosmetic job that was carried out years ago by Christian educationalists and their allies.

Criminal Products of Catholic Classrooms

At a time when education services are being drastically reduced, the Committee recommends that "more properly qualified religious education teachers should be appointed". Local authorities "should prepare revised syllabuses in consultation with religious leaders in their communities".

The proposal of Patrick Cormac, MP, to insert a recommendation "that the continued existence of voluntary denominational schools with the maintained sector be guaranteed", was accepted. The Committee ignored evidence that Church of England and Roman Catholic schools, funded almost

(continued on back page)

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NEWS AN

YOUR SLIP-UP IS SHOWING, MRS WHITEHOUSE

Mary Whitehouse made an unconvincing attempt to cover her boob, if she will pardon the expression, when the trial of theatre director Michael Bogdanov, which she initiated, was halted at the Old Bailey last month.

Secular humanists and the theatrical profession were dismayed by Mrs Whitehouse's action to stifle controversial theatre by a private prosecution against Mr Bogdanov, who directed Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* at the National Theatre. However, having brought the prosecution, it is ludicrous that she lacked the nerve to proceed when the judge ruled there was a case to go before the jury. Her confusing claim that she has established her point is meaningless in view of the unknown outcome of the case.

To exploit loopholes in the law, and then leave the situation even less clear than it was before, is no service to reasoned, free and controversial discussion in society. Mrs Whitehouse has the right to protest about plays she has not seen. But her waste of public money will be widely regarded as mischievous and anti-social.

It is now up to Parliament to amend the Theatres Act, 1968, to prevent any further ridiculous private prosecutions of this kind.

THE ROMAN IN BRITAIN

Fears that Pope John Paul II is getting too big for his boots were increased by the manner in which the upgrading of diplomatic relations between Britain and the Vatican to ambassadorial level was announced in January. There was no prior reference to the proposal in Parliament, nor were the Free Churches consulted. The announcement was not made simultaneously by the parties concerned. The Pope informed an audience of diplomats from countries accredited to the Holy See, and his announcement was later confirmed by the British Foreign Office.

There are now signs that the welcome on the mat will not be unanimous when the Pope arrives in Britain next month. Epithets like "conservative" and "reactionary" are being increasingly applied to him by commentators who are by no means opposed to the visit. Ecumenists are anxious in case what is

S AND NOTES

being described as a pastoral visit turns out to be a monarchical procession that will stiffen resistance to their aim of making the Pope the acknowledged leader of world Christianity.

The public relations exercise to sell John Paul II to the British public was given a mighty push forward by his fellow-Christians who howled insults and religious slogans at the Archbishop of Canterbury, a keen supporter of the papal visit, during a Liverpool church service last month. The ugly, intolerant, authentic face of Christianity was revealed when Dr Runcie was forced to leave the pulpit by hymn-singing, Bible-brandishing followers of gentle Jesus.

Monsignor Derek Worlock, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool, commented with unintentional irony that the demonstration may be "God's way" of achieving church unity. Certainly it aroused widespread and justified sympathy for Dr Runcie and for Archbishop Worlock who was subjected to the same outrageous treatment by Orange bigots a few days previously. And it will prevent many Protestant leaders from expressing their doubts and fears about the Pope's visit. Who wants to be identified, even mistakenly, with the Rev Ian Paisley, Pastor Jack Glass and their odious followers?

The Pope's visit to Britain marks a further development in the long-term strategy aimed at forging a Canterbury-Rome alliance. Of course there are all kinds of awkward obstacles. For instance, number 22 of the Church of England's 39 Articles denounces "the Romish doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration" as being "a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God". Article 31 describes the sacrifices of Masses as "blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits".

Papal infallibility, married clergy, ordination of women and Rome's refusal to recognise the validity of Anglican orders are other trip-wires in the legal and theological undergrowth. But cynical opportunism and an adeptness at papering over cracks will very likely result in a merger of the two firms, maybe before the end of the present century.

Such a possibility would have been unthinkable 50 years ago. But the labours of High Church (pro-Rome) elements within the Church of England have been highly effective. The cosy ecumenism generated by Vatican II induced a state of euphoria on all sides. Most importantly, the realisation that Christianity is "over the hill" in Britain, has compelled Anglicans and Roman Catholics to forget past

rivalries and ignore present differences.

The Roman Catholic Church is superior in political skill, organisational drive and intellectual calibre to the "fainting sheep" of the Anglican fold. She will be the dominant partner in any union and will expect the status and privileges enjoyed by a national church.

Freethinkers' misgivings over the Pope's visit are not motivated by hatred and intolerance as are those of his Christian attackers. We want no part of the "No Popery" campaign now being conducted by assorted Protestant groups. Their brand of religious superstition is just as daft and their social policies are just as wrong-headed as the Pope's.

We reject Pope John Paul's irrational, inhuman and irresponsible teachings on personal relationships and family life. So do a large number of Catholics in Britain. It is regrettable that they are not supported and encouraged by Protestant leaders like the Archbishop of Canterbury. Dr Runcie prefers to join in the sychophantic adulation of the most reactionary Pontiff since Pius XII.

The Irish Republic's first crematorium was opened last month. It cost £160,000 and is situated on the outskirts of Dublin. The idea of a crematorium for the city was first put forward 20 years ago, but it was delayed because of opposition by the Roman Catholic Church.

LOTTERY FOR THE LORD

Manchester Group of the National Council for Civil Liberties has questioned the allocation to churches of money raised through civic lotteries by the Borough of Trafford. Mr T. H. Appleby, group secretary, wrote to the Town Clerk after a report appeared in the Council's publication, *Trafford Times*, stating that churches appeared in the list of organisations benefiting from the lottery. He also wrote to local newspapers, but the Press has remained silent on the matter.

Alan Bancroft, Town Clerk of Trafford, confirmed that grants have been made to churches. He told Manchester NCCL: "To be approved for a grant from the Civic Lottery, a project or scheme must come within one or more of the following categories—social, cultural, recreational or environmental. Each application is considered on its merits and a decision is taken as to whether it falls within any of the stated categories".

The largest donation, £7,200, has been made to the Church of England Family Centre at Partington. Various groups associated with churches, including committed religious organisations like the Boys'

Brigade, have also received grants.

In addition to such groups, the Council has handed out donations to the United Reformed Church, Old Trafford (£3,000); St Warburg's Church, Warburton (£500); St Clement's Branch Church, Urmston (£1,500); All Saints Church, Stretford (£1,500); Church of St John the Evangelist, Old Trafford (£500) and St Peter's Church, Stretford (£100).

A small panel of councillors and officers known as the Finance (Civic Lotteries) Sub-Committee considers applications for financial assistance by organisations. Since the Council launched its lottery in November 1977 grants totalling over £400,000 have been made.

It may be argued that an Anglican Family Centre falls into one or more of the categories specified as being eligible for assistance. But making donations to churches is a rather dubious method of spending money raised by a local authority.

Shrewd representatives of harmful religious cults could argue plausibly enough that they are contributing something to community life. They often have a seal of approval in the form of recognition by the Charity Commissioners. Would the Borough of Trafford hand out money to the Moonies or the Children of God? Mr Appleby's answer is: "We think that Government bodies, local or national, should never give preferential treatment to the adherents of any belief system".

Promoters of Trafford's highly successful Civic Lottery are to be congratulated on their enterprise. But no part of the profits should be donated to churches which already enjoy considerable financial privileges.

Freethinker Fund

Readers continue to generously support the Fund. We are grateful to the latest list of contributors which is given below.

Anonymous, £9; A. Ashton, £1; D. G. Baker, £2; P. Barbour, £7; S. Bonow, £7; V. Brierley, £17; P. Brown, £2; B. J. Buckingham, £3; D. C. and F. Campbell, £10; H. L. Clements, £1; A. R. Cook, £1; W. Donovan, £1; F. B. Edwards, £2; S. J. England, £2; D. Fyfe, £1; K. Gill, £5; P. Harding, £1; J. G. Hillhouse, £2; L. Hanger, £20; J. M. Joseph, £12; A. G. Jowett, £5; M. Knight, £50; J. Lavety, £1; P. D. C. Longstreath, £7; H. Madoc-Jones, £2; S. Moge, £2; A. Montague, £2; C. J. Morey, £3; T. Morrison, £2; D. Nickson, £2; M. O'Brien, £1; R. Orr, £2; K. Pariente, £17; M. Peterson, £2; M. Russell, £2; M. Santoro, £2; W. Standfast, £10; K. M. Tolfree, £2; N. Toon, £2; I. A. Williams, £7; A. E. Woodward, £5; J. C. Wyn-Lewis, 2; I. Young, £2.

Total for the period 2 February 1982 until 4 March 1982: £224 and \$4.

Our Pagan Past

The celebration of Hallowe'en, the eve of All Souls Day, is on the increase in English schools, and the Association of Christian Teachers is quite alarmed about it. The festival has been popular in America since the 1840s, when it came in with the great Irish immigration. It has now degenerated into open warfare between householders and gangs of children who go around demanding "trick or treat". The "trick"—damage to property—can be bought off with a "treat", which these days may well be a razor-blade sandwich or something of the kind.

It is to be hoped that such nastiness will not appear here, but the ACT is more concerned with the religious implications of Hallowe'en. In common with many other traditional festivals, its roots go deep into our pagan past, being originally part of the celebration of the Celtic New Year on 1 November. It was called Devil's Night or Mischief Night, when ghosts and fairies roamed about, causing trouble which could be averted by putting food out for them.

In 601 Pope Gregory ordered that the pagan temples in Britain were not to be destroyed. The idols they housed were to be removed and Christian altars set up their stead. Gregory reasoned that the people could be won for Christianity more easily in familiar though slightly altered surroundings. Similarly the pagan festivals were transformed into Christian feasts. The first day of November became All Souls Day, having earlier been associated with the cult of the dead.

The ACT does not care for its members taking part in the rituals of a "hag-haunted" past. It can hardly approve either of Hallowe'en's polar opposite, May Day, being celebrated in schools with maypole dancing. This also is of purely pagan origin, a simple expression of joy at the beginning of summer. The connection of the maypole with fertility is obvious enough, and is the reason why the Puritans suppressed it wherever they could.

Evidently the ACT believes in ghosts and fairies, for it wants to hear from teachers willing to join in "a struggle against more than flesh and blood". Whether or not they realise it, these Christian teachers have, in a scientific age, the mentality of the earliest bishops of their religion, who never doubted the infernal reality of the pagan gods and goddesses.

Anyway, the fight against Hallowe'en 1982 is on. An "informed public statement" will be made, if possible, and mutual prayer support is to be organised, or so it is hoped. If this is the best they can do, our ancient and picturesque festivals are safe for a good many years yet.

R. J. CONDON

All Too Familiaris

BARBARA SMOKER

The Catholic Truth Society has published the English translation of Familiaris Consortio, Pope John Paul's "Apostolic Exhortation on the Christian Family in the Modern World". In this hard-line document, the celibate head of the Roman Catholic Church lays down rules for family life and human relationships. He also ignores the grave problems already resulting from increased population in many parts of the world.

Rather than rely on secondhand comments on the original Latin version of this "Apostolic Exhortation", published in the Vatican on 22 November, *The Freethinker* has waited for the official English translation. But in all its 175 tedious pages there is not a word that justifies a revision of the general impression that the author, J.P.II, is utterly pig-headed on all matters concerning sexual mores, the population explosion, and the role of women.

This wordy pronouncement is his authoritative reply to the list of questions and propositions put by the 1980 Synod of Bishops on "the family". As reported in *The Freethinker* (December 1980), the Synod watered down the proposals put by the more progressive bishops; now the Pope has jettisoned what little substance remained.

Though a bachelor who has (presumably) never (in the biblical sense) known a woman might not be the best person to attempt to solve the matrimonial problems of a considerable proportion of the world's population, he could at least have tried to use his imagination to better effect than metaphorical word-spinning along the lines that the preservation of unhappy marriages reflects God's fidelity to man.

Whilst writing confidently of "God's plan for marriage and the family", he nevertheless indicates the contempt he has for this alleged plan by echoing St John Chrysostom's reason for not denigrating marriage: since virginity is higher than marriage, with which it has to be compared, "Whoever denigrates marriage also diminishes the glory of virginity".

The heading of one section, "The Rights of Children", raised my hopes a little, but it referred only to the dependence of children, not to any autonomous rights, such as the right to come into contact with the ideas of any other religion (or of none). Indeed, there is the duty of a Catholic parent, even in a mixed marriage, "to ensure, as far as possible, the Baptism and upbringing of the children in the Catholic faith". There is also something in the home curriculum called "education for chastity".

Talking of which, periodic chastity within marriage is still the only allowable form of family planning. So there is no advance on Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*—which is, indeed, the source from which the present pronouncement quotes most copiously. Its only concession to the blatant fact that a high proportion of Catholics in developed countries now defy the ban on artificial means of contraception is an appeal to theologians "to collaborate with the hierarchical Magisterium and to commit themselves to the task of illustrating ever more clearly the biblical foundation, the ethical grounds and the personalistic reasons behind this doctrine".

But suppose that periodic chastity within marriage prove an inadequate method of birth control? Not to worry. After all, the chief motive of family planning is nothing but selfishness and "an anti-life mentality"—"a certain panic deriving from the studies of ecologists and futurologists on population growth, which sometimes exaggerate the danger of demographic increase to the quality of life". (Does he not realise that the present world population, already outpacing basic resources, could well treble within the next two generations?)

Other themes dealt with are the pastoral care of the family, family prayer, the family role as an "evangelising cell", and such horrors as trial marriages. The only areas of discussion in which I felt any sympathy for the Pope's viewpoint were those concerned with State intervention in personal relationships, particularly "any violence applied by such authorities in favour of contraception or, still worse, of sterilisation and procured abortion".

However, there is one minor point on which I admit puzzlement: why "Apostolic Exhortation"? How does it differ from the traditional Encyclical, or even the Letter or Message—all three of which the present Pope has already issued in his short reign? I asked the CTS staff, but they could only suggest that an Apostolic Exhortation may be addressed primarily to bishops—though, in fact, the full title says "to the Episcopate, to the Clergy and to the Faithful of the whole Catholic Church".

Finally, I asked a Jesuit, against whom I happened to be debating on euthanasia. He obviously did not know either, but Jesuits are never at a loss for some answer or other. "Well, whether it's called an Apostolic Exhortation or an Encyclical, at least it's not *ex cathedra*", he said—meaning, of course, that it does not pretend to be infallible, rendering it almost impossible to gainsay at any future date. And he breathed a sigh of relief at that. Jesuits are not what they were.

Charles Darwin, the great nineteenth-century naturalist, died on 19 April 1882. His works continue to arouse fierce passions amongst both his freethinking admirers and religious detractors. The writer examines some of the questions that are unlikely to be considered by scientific and social commentators on the centenary of Darwin's death.

The theory of evolution appealed to the creative instincts of the ancient Greeks and Romans and the poetic imagination of Erasmus Darwin. But it was not until the geological discoveries of the eighteenth century and the biological investigations of the nineteenth that a speculation became a well-based scientific explanation of natural processes. So "Darwinism" has come to be associated not with Erasmus but with his grandson Charles Darwin.

In retrospect, the modern theory of evolution, with its related concepts of "natural selection" and post-Darwinian genetic inheritance, towers as probably the most important scientific theory of all time. Though today one of the least read, *The Origin of Species* remains one of the best-known non-fiction works from any period, as well as being one of the best-written. (Apart from being more original, it is more comprehensive and unemotional — and often more comprehensible — than any of the popularisers that have followed it.) The theory itself has captured the imagination of more freethinkers and raised the hackles of more religionists than any other before or since. It has led more non-scientists to read about science, and even to make fossil collections, than any other theory, and continues to provoke more obscurantist attacks.

Part of the reason is its conflict with the assertions of Genesis I (now euphemistically called, in many American states, "creation science"). But there are many other theories, of cosmology, astronomy and relativity, also in conflict with Genesis I and with other outpourings of biblical inspiration. None of these has provoked such ongoing devotion among upholders and wrath among opponents, resulting in endless recapitulations and rearguard attacks.

The real reason for these reactions is a very personal one, which first appeared 250 years before. The heliocentric theory was attacked because it removed planet earth from the centre of the solar system and hence of the universe. Mankind felt diminished as his home was diminished in terms of cosmic centrality. Consciously or unconsciously, this was more galling than discoveries of inaccuracies in God's book and hence of fallibility in its supposed author. The more central issue of divine omnipotence was

not really undermined. Though many proponents of the theory were atheists, not all of them were for God could just as easily cause the earth to go round the sun as the sun round the earth. And so with the theory of evolution.

To a freethinker the most irritating thing about *The Origin of Species* is Darwin's nod in the direction of the "Creator". On philosophical grounds however, God is just as likely to have created man by the medium of evolution as by special creation, and both media lead to a special niche for *Homo sapiens*. Moreover, the biblical account of the creation of man is no more inaccurate, or "poetic", than other biblical accounts, and a determined religious apologist can even rescue divine providence in the same way. After all, the interspecific bloodthirstiness of nature is an observational fact, however one accounts for the diversity of species in the first place.

Clearly, the creation of man is of much greater interest than the creation of the firmament. To most people the evolutionary account of human origins not only is, but sounds, more mechanistic and less glamorous than the biblical account. That is why religionists have proved more reactionary, and modern humanists have become more fanciful, over this than over any other scientific theory. Where was Darwin ever rash enough to speak of man "in the saddle" directing the course of evolution, or lyrical enough to speak of "the ascent of man" instead of "the descent of man" from prehuman ancestors?

Questions for Evolutionists

Darwinism has had continuing impact in ways other than religious and biological. It is of profound importance in the philosophy of science and in the development of inductive logic. No one was around during the course of evolution, much less at the onset of life on earth, and the theory is thus one of circumstantial evidence. But, as Darwin himself pointed out, this is the "method used in judging of the common events of life, and has often been used by the greatest natural philosophers". The evidence of fossil layers, unique ecosystems in isolated situations, varieties within species blurring their boundaries and the discoveries of plant and animal breeders, coupled with modern genetic engineering, makes "creation science" an untenable proposition.

This does not mean that the theory of evolution is without its difficulties. The simplest forms of life live side-by-side with the most complex and have not been supplanted in the "struggle for existence". Species are not only "selected" by their environment if they are best "adapted" to it, but can themselves,

if mobile, elect microenvironments which suit them best. Though evolution is purposeless in an ultimate sense, it is not unmodified by purposeful actions, even before the advent of mankind. Evolution is commonly represented as unidirectional, with man as its "pinnacle", yet under the earth and in the sea are complex ecosystems with non-human pinnacles of their own. Above all, if natural selection operates through ensuring the "survival of the fittest", how does one define "fittest"? Is it, as evolutionists originally thought, through some normative quality like strength, size or speed, or is it, as modern population geneticists believe, through longevity multiplied by fecundity? Then where does family planning fit in? In particular instances, does the "survival of the fittest" reduce to the tautology of the survival of those with a capacity to survive?

Some of the foregoing questions are of less concern to Darwinism in the narrow sense than to "social Darwinism". Like the theory of relativity, Darwinism has been applied willy-nilly in fields beyond the intention of its initiator. This development has been deplored by those who disagree with the conclusions drawn and assert that they are based on the concept of "nature red in tooth and claw", which is seen as a Spencerian aberration rather than a Darwinian truth. While this concept undoubtedly discounts the considerable amount of intraspecific and even interspecific cooperation which exists in nature, especially in times of abundance, it is an essential ingredient of the evolutionary process. To freethinkers Darwinism should appear as more than a handy stick with which to beat the churches but as a tool to probe some of the deepest problems facing humanity. Here are a few of them.

Problems to be Faced

Mankind's claim for preeminence is largely based on powers of cerebration, but are these conducive to ultimate happiness, or even survival? Having arrogantly destroyed many other species by direct extermination or indirectly through destroying their habitats, *Homo sapiens's* creativity has led it to exaggerate the importance of status in its own society, to be disposed to fight to the death in any confrontation, and to develop weapons of mass extermination.

Social considerations are almost as important as this ethological one. If evolution is continuing "naturally" as well as through psychosocial human intervention, it is likely to be through "selection" of a dominant variety (race) within the human species. If so, should racist theorising be seen not as the psychopathological phenomenon that humanists tend to regard it as, but as a psychological consequence of evolutionary forces? On the other hand, if evolution is now scheduled to continue "artificially"

ally" by eugenic intervention or genetic engineering, do we have any knowledge at all of how genes control attributes like creativity or sensitivity, and which of these, if there is a conflict of influences, should be selected? As great benefits have in the past derived from large gene pools subject to random mutation and production of biological "sports", or better able to preserve life at times of major climatic change or natural disaster, should we try to intervene at all?

On the assumption that intervention in a supposedly eugenic sense is a good thing, what is to be said for supposedly anti-eugenic intervention as supported by modern humanism? Providing special medical and social services for the "incapacitated", "handicapped" or "disadvantaged" is a form of intervention in the "struggle for survival" and could be interpreted as anti-evolutionary. Of course, such conditions of dependence may be temporary and definitions of inadequacy may highlight one aspect of life to the detriment of other, more important features, but many conditions give every indication of being permanent and theoretically "undesirable". Is "common humanity" therefore unscientific and to be discouraged? If pursued, should it be perceived as a social good or as a form of short-term political expediency? This is the real nub of an argument, now decreasingly heard, over whether freethinkers or rationalists are necessarily humanists, and *vice versa*.

Some of these issues have become so sensitive that even academic debates over whether certain races have, on average, higher or lower IQs than others provoke accusations of Nazism and eruptions of campus rioting. They are deeply disturbing and are understandably refuted with passion, but in a world of finite resources and differential population growth they will not go away.

OBITUARIES

Mrs P. Gleaves

Phyllis Gleaves, who was well known in humanist circles, has died at the age of 71. She was actively involved with Age Concern, Help the Aged and the Humanist Counselling Service, and chairman of Sutton Humanist Group. There was a secular committal ceremony at South London Crematorium.

Mrs I. B. Lloyd Williams

Ivy Beatrice Lloyd Williams died suddenly at her home in East Wittering, Sussex. She was aged 74. There was a secular committal ceremony at Chichester Crematorium.

Secularisation and Secularism in Modern Britain

EDWARD ROYLE

This article, to be published in two parts, is based on a lecture given last year to commemorate the centenary of Leicester Secular Hall. Dr Royle, Reader in History, University of York, is author of several works on the history of the British freethought movement.

*But it seems that something has happened that has
never happened before;
though we know not just when, or why, or how,
or where;
Men have left GOD not for other gods, they say,
but for no god;
and this has never happened before.
(T. S. Eliot—Choruses from The Rock)*

In this way, T. S. Eliot sums up the secularisation of modern culture, and in this article I want to examine the relationship between this process and Secularism. Does Secularism belong primarily to our modern secular culture, or was it a part of that older culture which has passed away under the impact of secularisation? I ventured to argue the latter in my recent book on British freethought between 1866 and 1915 (*Radicals, Secularists and Republicans*, Manchester University Press, 1980), and wish now to develop the thesis a little in response to its critics.

It is important to begin with some definitions and some appreciation of how words have developed, for much scholarly controversy has centred upon the topics of religion and secularisation. Secular basically means "of time" or "of the world". As such its use is not incompatible with the vocabulary of what we would call "religion"; indeed the theology of Incarnation means that Christianity as a religion has built into it a secular element—that which is of this world. In the Middle Ages, the "religious" clergy were those set apart from the world by religious vows, and who often were physically separated in monasteries. Those clergy who continued to serve in the ordinary parochial church were known as "seculars".

By the 18th century, however, when the word "secularisation" appeared, meanings had undergone an important shift. Secularisation referred to the conversion of ecclesiastical or religious institutions or property to secular use—secular now meaning the equivalent of civil, or lay, or temporal, or material. The notion of the "secular" remained in contrast to that of the "religious" but now, instead of both being applicable to Christianity, the latter

was being identified only with the religious. Secular had been emancipated and could now move into outright opposition.

One reason for this shift in meaning, curiously, was the Reformation. Although we might interpret the attack on the clergy and their religious houses in the 16th century as a forerunner of secularisation, we might also see the Reformation as a proclamation that henceforward all Christians were to be "religious"—the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. As the German religious radical, Sebastian Franck, put it: "You think you have escaped from the monastery, but everyone must now be a monk throughout his life". Thus within Protestantism grew up that modern distinction between the "religious" and the "secular".

But what is religion? The lack of a clear definition has caused many problems for sociologists of religion. Some would be prepared to define religion in such an all-embracing way as to render the concept of secularisation meaningless. If religion can truly describe any cultural activity involving worship and adoration, then one can speak of a religion of football or a religion of popular music. This might be defensible. Both football and popular music have their fans—a word short for fanatic, which means "devotee of the temple". If we accept this broad definition of religion, then the present age can be described as being as religious as any of its predecessors. The current religion may have changed, but not the fact of the existence of religion; there has been no secularisation.

The Emergence of Secularism

One wonders, however, whether such a broad definition is really defensible in common sense. To call football a religion is really to confuse analogy with reality. A narrower definition might then be sought. One suggestion by A. D. Gilbert in his *The Making of Post-Christian Britain* (Longman, 1980), is that "any system of values, beliefs and norms, and related symbols and rituals, arising from attempts by individuals and social groups to effect certain ends, whether in this world or in any future world, by means wholly or partly supernatural". This definition re-introduces the notion of the "other-worldly", the "supernatural" and the "transcendental" as the hall-mark of religion.

For some people this is too rigorous. They feel there can be a religion which is not exclusively supernatural but which does not include such banal things as football. They view as being religious

those activities which serve the cultural function of traditional religion. They might thus wish to speak of the "Religion of Science", the "Religion of Humanism", or even the "Religion of Secularism", which begins to look rather strange.

Secularism as a word began to emerge in the later 1840s, and I see no reason to doubt G. J. Holyoake's claim to have coined it. The word "secular" was increasingly being used in the 1840s in discussions of the education question, secular education being education stripped of its religious content. Holyoake described his weekly periodical, the *Reasoner*, as a "Secular and Eclectic Journal" in 1848; by 1851 he was beginning to describe his freethought movement as Secularist, and the name Secularism soon followed. Secularism was, according to Holyoake in an 1853 definition, "the province of the real, the known, the useful, and the affirmative", by which he meant that it offered a wholly this-worldly and non-transcendental view of life and morality. His main reason for developing the philosophy of Secularism was to counter the claims of those who said that morality was dependent upon religion. He wished to present an alternative, naturalistic view of life which would give a surer basis for morality. He did not wish to change contemporary morality, but merely to secularise it.

Declining Interest

We are now in a position to suggest the nature of the relationship between secularisation and Secularism. In two respects they may be seen to be allied: Secularism has contributed to and benefited from the secularisation of institutions, and also, to some extent, of culture. But Secularism may be seen as the victim of secularisation in two further respects: the decline of religious cultural activities and also of interest in theological argument. These four areas may be examined in turn.

First, one should note that some sociologists are unhappy with the whole concept of secularisation. They prefer to follow the French in using the word "de-Christianisation" instead, which keeps open the option as to whether the present age has actually abandoned all thought of the supernatural. There is a point here, for undoubtedly many people in our so-called western, secularised society appear to believe in magic, astrology, luck and fate. Fringe cults, such as spiritualism and scientology, are thriving, as are non-Christian religions such as Buddhism. Nowhere does this appear to be more true than in "secular", materialistic California.

One explanation for this persistence of religions has been sought in the nature of man as a "religious" being. Man is seen as being basically "pagan"; that is, a believer in the religions of the countryside—cults, animism and magic. Christianity as a developed, urban and to some extent rationalised religion

was slowly and with difficulty superimposed on this pagan man. The process was completed surprisingly late; perhaps no earlier than the 17th or early 18th centuries in England, and possibly as late as the 19th century in France. Now Christianity is once more in retreat, leaving behind not "secular" man but "pagan" man once more. Hence there is the preference for the term de-Christianisation, not secularisation.

Nevertheless this is to take a very narrow view of Christianity, and it overlooks the applicability of the concept of secularisation to much that has been going on in the modern world. In the narrower sense of secularisation as "the conversion of ecclesiastical or religious institutions to secular use", the process is clearly evident—in Britain at least.

The Anglican Retreat

In early 19th-century Britain there remained vestiges of that Anglican version of the old Catholic vision of the unity of Church and State—the two faces on the one body politic—which was embodied in the political philosophy of Richard Hooker. All citizens of England were Anglicans, and traditionally religious activities such as education and philanthropy were the proper province of the Church. But this principle had been breached in the late 17th century, when the legal existence of Dissenters from the Established Church was recognised, and under licence they were allowed to nonconform. Then in 1828 Protestant Dissenters were recognised as full citizens; and in the following year Catholics were given grudging recognition.

During the 1830s the State (i.e. the secular face of the body politic) began to involve itself in traditionally Church affairs (i.e. those which had belonged to the religious face of the body politic). This heralded the beginning in fact of the separation of Church and State and the beginning of the modern secular State. The Whig Government in the 1830s began to take an active part in popular education, and by 1843 the Dissenters were strong enough finally to kill the idea that education was the legitimate preserve of the Established Church.

Gradually in the 19th century further institutions were secularised. What had been an acceptable—though old-fashioned—view of the State-Church relationship in 1800 had become totally outmoded by 1900, the actual Establishment of the Church of England itself remaining as some kind of curious relic of a bygone age. The State registration of births, marriages and deaths from 1836, and the Secular Burials Act of 1880, for example, removed from the exclusive control of the churches even the most sacred rites of passage. And the House of

(continued on page 63)

BOOKS

FROM DESCARTES TO WITTGENSTEIN: A SHORT HISTORY OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY, by Roger Scruton. Routledge & Kegan Paul, £9.50

Some professional philosophers will doubtless argue that there is no need for this kind of book, just as teachers of literature turn up their noses at "manuals". Nevertheless, some manuals are better than others; and Roger Scruton's survey of modern philosophy (or, strictly speaking, of modern Western philosophy—the author never even refers to the East) must count among the most helpful of contributions in this difficult field. Less entertaining than Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, it is also more balanced and reliable. Besides, this is indeed *multum in parvo*. The essential ideas of each philosopher discussed are conveyed with great cogency and economy. Nor does the author fall into the trap of mechanical enumeration. Every chapter attacks its particular topic in fresh and vital fashion, while the larger themes of the book receive due emphasis as they are repeated and inter-related.

It would be foolish to expect a Procrustean unity from a subject as comprehensive as this; at best one might look for a certain number of leit-motifs to appear. Nor is very much ever definitively resolved in the history of philosophy. Each new thinker to emerge provides in some degree an extended commentary on one or more of those who have gone before him. It may of course be the case that certain trends are seen to take their rise and subsequent fall during a particular time-span, such as the two schools of rationalism and empiricism which constituted the philosophical horizon in the Enlightenment and were to lose their favour when Kant arrived to demonstrate the inadequacy of each. So far as the entire book has a unifying theme, it probably lies in the decline of importance in the "first-person case", the privileged subjective view of the world upon which Descartes laid so much emphasis. Invaluable for the development of epistemology, for the empirical scepticism of a Hume, it came under attack from Kant and Hegel and received, in the author's view, its final quietus with Wittgenstein. Only a greater distance in time from the latter will, however, be able to show whether Wittgenstein is himself the final actor in a completed cycle.

But the book is, necessarily, much more diverse than this. It contains searching discussions of not only those philosophers already mentioned but also Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Hegel, Marx and Frege. There are brief but illuminating accounts of Berkeley, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Hobbes, Bentham, Mill, Bradley, Heidegger, Sartre and many others. The author makes clear from the first that he is not writing a history of ideas. To

FREETHINKER

gain admission to these pages, a writer must have expounded concepts of intrinsic philosophic cogency and significance; ideas that have exercised influence upon human affairs do not receive attention on that account alone. On this basis, quite understandably, the thinkers of the Enlightenment (with the exception of Rousseau, who himself is only briefly discussed) go virtually unnoticed. The criterion generally works well, though one wonders whether Marx deserves as much space as he gets, on his internal validity alone.

This survey has the added merit of being reliable while never being dull. Towards the "Old Masters" Roger Scruton is properly respectful. We gain a sense of the greatness of imagination that came from Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and, above all, Kant, whom the author considers the greatest philosopher since Aristotle. In particular, the nobility of Kant's moral philosophy is stressed, as too the remarkable extent of its achievement: "Kant's claim . . . to have discovered the fundamental presuppositions of morality may not be entirely unfounded". Through such measured tones of academic caution there emerges a deep sense of admiration. Perhaps Mr Scruton might have indicated whether the large ambiguities he finds in Kant's metaphysical thinking do or do not affect the latter's pre-eminence and whether that distinction rests on his whole output or on just one side in particular.

Equally, the author can be ironic or even downright scathing about some of his subjects, like "the notorious Martin Heidegger . . . the darkest [thinker] of the existentialist school". Hegel, he reports, "has recently been execrated as the greatest intellectual disaster in the history of mankind". But this, he adds, is unfair—there have been even worse ones. Nietzsche is seen to end in confusion, Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard in the futility of going on at length about the unsayable. Rousseau's belief that man is good by nature and made bad by institutions is a "doctrine which most people believe during their adolescence, and which some continue to believe, with varying degrees of hysteria, as they grow older".

Such forthright statements will inevitably arouse protests in some quarters. The remark on Rousseau, for instance, is merely flippant; worse is the subsequent argument, both hackneyed and false, that Jean-Jacques had a "murderous" influence upon the "aftermath of revolution". There are, indeed, some errors and misstatements: the abbé de Saint-Cyran and Geulincx are wrongly spelled, and Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* appeared a year earlier than stated here. Less emphasis should have been placed on

REVIEWS

Sartre's 1945 lecture *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, which its author later repudiated as shallow. The source of quotations is not always given, and this sometimes means a loss of valuable information. Karl Popper does not get the barest mention. Nor does the author attempt to show on what philosophical basis modern scientific thought may be said to take its rise. He seems to favour Cartesian rationalism, ignoring the thesis of Popkin and others that sceptical thinkers from the Renaissance on are the real progenitors.

But these are venial matters in an excellent compact, which will doubtless be as valuable to the undergraduate as to the larger world outside which seeks to know more about the province of philosophers yet is so often dismayed by the esotericism of their writings. One welcomes Roger Scruton's book with warm gratitude and applause.

HAYDN MASON

FALLEN IDOLS by Michael Clarke. Junction Books, £4.95.

As well as being an informative narrative of a dozen or so financial scandals from late 1960s onwards, *Fallen Idols* also tries to analyse why these events took place, why so frequently and why the public outcry.

Michael Clarke is of the opinion that since the end of the last war institutions have become ever larger; be they of Government, business or trades unions. This triple oligarchy has led to a development which Clarke calls "Welfare Corporatism". Briefly, in return for the tax payer or national insurance contributor supporting these institutions they likewise have a duty corporately to provide for the welfare of the individual members of the nation.

From this it can be seen that development of free enterprise to a position where it is dependent upon the state is closely related to the set up when a Labour government is in power. Hence the reason why some of the worst financial scandals that have rocked the city have taken place during a Labour term of office. Obviously if an entrepreneur becomes successful enough to be part of the Establishment, there are certain advantages and guarantees in becoming part of the ruling oligarchy. In this category could be placed John Stonehouse, Jim Slater and the fringe banking episodes, all of which took place during a Labour administration.

Further embarrassment to Labour was caused by the John Poulson saga. Although it initially came

to light when a Conservative Government was in power, it had repercussions for the Labour opposition since most of the beneficiaries (or victims) of Poulson's "generosity" had connections with the Labour Party, albeit at a local level.

Of the cases mentioned in this book it would be true to say that just as many scandals had taken place during a period of Conservative rule. But that is hardly surprising as the Conservatives have traditionally been supporters of free enterprise, for all its faults. I found myself in agreement with an interesting point Michael Clarke makes in the last chapter—those on the Right of the Conservative Party are more likely than other groups to expose wrongdoing in the City as it blackens the reputation of others trying to "play the game".

Indeed *Private Eye*, which has been instrumental in exposing a few of the cases mentioned, has more of a High Tory lampooning spirit than a socialist style about it. But for leaks dropped to the Press, the public would be none the wiser about some of these scandals. Even so, as Clarke explains, the Press tends to be over cautious. And Press exposure is no guarantee of prosecution (as in the case of Reginald Maudling) if the person concerned is prepared to sit tight and say nothing.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this series of case studies is that due to the inherent nature and structure of large corporations there is no safeguard that we will be free from such scandals in future. And as the author points out, company law is hardly adequate to cope with the economy of the 1980s. With a trade recession and fierce competition, it would seem that a whole new batch of financial scandals and corruption could easily appear.

KEN WRIGHT

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The ten-day-old baby son of Jehovah's Witnesses was given a blood transfusion in a Southampton hospital after a court hearing last month. The boy, a twin born prematurely, had a chest infection and was anaemic. A couple who refused to allow their infant daughter to have blood transfusions because they were Jehovah's Witnesses were sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment in Cagliari, Sardinia. The child died of anaemia.

Sexual Orientation and the SDP

FRANCIS BENNION

My wife and I have been sent our certificates. Printed in patriotic colours of red, white and blue, they proclaim us to be founder members of the Social Democratic Party. The organisers understandably asked us to fill in our own names on the dotted line. They explained that the new people's party were a little too busy to do this themselves. Flushed with pride, we eagerly complied.

Invited at the same time to remit our subscriptions for the second year of the SDP, we noted without astonishment an increase on the first year of just over 22 per cent. It was not that un-Thatcherian rise that made us decide against. Just as I was about to send off the cheque, something happened at the SDP Constitutional Convention held in London on 13-14 February.

Before describing that incident I should explain why we decided to join the SDP in the first place. I had been happy to vote Labour, but then came two crunch decisions. Labour are determined to bind us to unilateral nuclear disarmament. That I will have none of. Pacifism is a Christian notion. It is an act of faith. Surrender to the thug, and the thug is sure to be kind to you. That is not a gamble I will take. The thug will get from me the promise of receiving as good (or bad) as he gives; or I know well enough which of us will go under.

The other crunch decision by Labour was to insist on leaving the European Economic Community. I'll have none of that either. Ten years ago I started up a charity with large ideas calling itself Towards One World. It still exists, with money it can't spend because of the sheer magnitude (presumption even) of its objects. Still, that is the way I mean to go because it's the only human way. A united Europe is a step towards a united world. Retreating to little Englandism denies that, and a lot else humanity needs.

Those are the reasons why my wife and I flocked to join the SDP. Many others flocked too (probably for the same reasons), so all is well. The Alliance will win the next election, or the Thatcherians will. Either way, Europe and our defence are safe.

Now for the decisive SDP happening. At their Constitutional Convention the party debated a motion to remove from their constitution a statement that the SDP would have concern for the individual regardless of "sexual orientation". A Mr Kenneth Brown from North West Derbyshire moved the deletion of this. Only the right sort of sexual orientation would do for him, namely the one he happened to enjoy himself.

Polly Toynbee, to her credit, spoke for humanity. According to the report in *The Times* (15 February) this is what she said about the reference to "sexual

orientation": "It was put into the constitution as a sign of the party's commitment to the fair treatment of minorities of all kinds. One in ten of the population was homosexual through an inescapable fact of nature. They were harassed and persecuted, many lost their jobs and lesbian women often lost the custody of their children". Coldly, the SDP conference rejected this plea. Instead, they passed Mr Brown's motion by a comfortable majority. The new people's party turned out to be very much like the old people's parties.

That's it then. We'll have no more of them, though we expect them to do the job for us and help keep this country, with its precious deterrent, safely inside Europe.

LETTERS

CENSORSHIP JUSTIFIED

I have been surprised and saddened to see attacks on feminists in two successive issues of "The Free-thinker". As a feminist who has been a freethinker for 40 years, may I take issue on the points raised?

In your February "News and Notes" under the heading "The Company She Keeps", you sneer at "assorted wets, particularly women's rights campaigners"; and you tell us that a significant proportion of the women's movement are petty, narrow-minded and intolerant bigots. No examples are given, no evidence adduced. Please explain, and give us the opportunity to reply.

Feminists and freethinkers should be allies, not enemies. Both are oppressed by religious unreason and intolerance. And women have suffered far more from Christianity than men have. Or are women and men forever doomed to mutual incomprehension?

Terry Little in "Sex Shop Censorship" (January) is more definite. Radical feminists, he tells us, regard sex as a male chauvinist plot to enslave them. Not so, and I'm sure Mr Little knows it. Women may be enslaved by marriage, by unwanted children, by individual men, but not by sex per se.

Feminists had great hopes of the permissive society. Women were at last allowed—encouraged even—to enjoy sex. But it turned out that what they got was not better sex, but merely more sex of the same mindless, mechanical unfeeling kind as before. Not surprisingly, some women concluded that men, and enjoyable sex, were incompatible.

I now come to the main point at issue: censorship. There seems to be an assumption that all censorship is inadmissible, an intolerable fetter on one's rightful freedom. But there are laws against libel and slander—a form of censorship. The Race Relations Act is another form of censorship. Would Terry Little have it repealed? Would he allow every racist to insult our coloured citizen, and stir up strife, as the fascists did?

Negroes protested (and rightly, in my view) at films which portrayed them as stupid, rolling-eyed victims of white violence. Yet women are expected to put up with sexual stereotypes and portrayed as sex objects by male perverts. Anything goes, as long as it pleases some man.

We feminists find it impossible to understand the mentality of someone who enjoys watching women being tortured and murdered—just as hunt saboteurs cannot understand the mentality of a fox-hunter who hunts for the fun of seeing animals maimed and killed. We do not believe that you can watch women being raped, tortured, murdered, treated as mindless sex objects, toys for men to play with and cast aside: that you can revel in all this, and still have any respect for real live women. Certainly we would censor such films. Indeed, many of us would regard men who made such films as unfit to be at large.

Censorship has a bad reputation among freethinkers because it has mostly been used by organised religion, and by the Muggeridges and Whitehouses, against us. But I'll bet there are many freethinkers who wouldn't hesitate to censor the Pope (not to mention Ian Paisley and the Ayatollahs) if they got half a chance.

MARGARET MOULTON

A DIVERSE MOVEMENT

Perhaps the Editor of "The Freethinker" has failed to grasp the true nature of the Women's Movement, otherwise his attack on it in "The Company She Keeps" would not have been quite so gratuitously sarcastic and simple-minded.

He begins by showing his blatant contempt for the movement by the tortuous use of the Miss/Ms/Mz cliché, and then descends to misconceived and misinformed snidery against something he seems to know very little about, for example asserting that Ms Tweedie is a "champion" of the movement simply because her profession makes her unusually prominent in the public eye. He should know that it is fruitless to judge a social movement of such diversity as that for women's liberation from the pronouncements of just one of its adherents.

The Editor's assertion that "a significant proportion of the women's movement consists of petty, narrow-minded bigots" simply reveals how close he is himself to treading the path of righteousness where his faction alone has all the answers to everything; surely he is guilty of the same crimes as some of those groups which he would be better employed in criticising.

Before throwing accusations of bigotry around, perhaps he should look a little closer to home!

JANET CRAGG

MALE VOICE

I have been an atheist since my teens but only recently discovered your magazine many of whose articles I find are a good informative read, but increasingly I find some of the contents quite nonsensical and sometimes infuriating.

Like you I regard supernaturalist belief systems as having much to answer for in this divided and confused world. But I differ from you in not regarding the supernatural per se as the most damaging element. This pride of place surely goes to that most insidious doctrine, that which unites almost all world religions, the assertion of supremacy of maleness over femaleness. This is deeply entrenched in our society today, cutting right across the political and social spectrum as well as plaguing many relationships with distorted expectations.

This imbalance is so pervasive as to appear invisible to many people, some humanists amongst them, to judge from your gratuitous and sniping insults towards the women's movement. I can read that any day in the regular Press! Many women I know are involved in or sympathetic to this movement. Some would call themselves feminists and they have enough on their plate without sneers from the humanist movement.

You say they are "petty, narrowminded and intolerant". Quite the reverse! These are the attitudes of many men to feminists or those even faintly sympathetic.

I, a male, have always found openness, energy and depth in contacts I have with such women. Indeed I find the distrust and incomprehension towards the women's movement amongst supposed "free thinkers" and "progressives" itself a sign of a deeper conservatism, and antithesis to a facet of social change which this reader regards as about the most important a society can hope for.

DAVID LOVELACE

VICTIMS OF RELIGION

Why make Jill Tweedie's attendance at a gathering of religious fundamentalists the excuse for sneering at the Women's Liberation Movement? Obviously this movement, like many others, contains all sorts of people and needs all the support it can get. Seeing that women are one half or more of the human race, and to a greater extent than men are the victims of three profoundly anti-woman religions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, why doesn't "The Freethinker" publish more articles analysing the sexism of patriarchal religions? After all, these religions validate and underlie those laws which punish women in the West for fighting back against a male rapist or batterer.

BRENDA ABLE

USA—JEWEL OF LIBERALISM

The "News and Notes" item, "Year of the Humbug" (March), merely confirms a perceptible leftward trend in the opinions of leading secularists over the years, which must only succeed in attracting the wrong sort of recruit to the movement, as well as alienating many existing freethinkers.

Much of it was factually wrong. The United States is not ruled by big business but by an elected Congress. Indeed, most economic activity is emasculated by a vast array of regulations and the monitoring nosiness of many Federal agencies; there is a vast public sector of the economy which is even larger than Britain's. The military sector sees its fortunes rise and fall almost yearly as hawks and doves thrash out their differences on the political front; the "religious fundamentalists" are a laughable bunch of loonies, and scorned by the eastern seaboard intellectuals. There is no reputable evidence whatsoever that "agents" have murdered foreign trade union leaders.

I think it is quite wrong for "The Freethinker" to peddle the message that the West is no better than the East. The United States is in a position to pass moral judgement on Russia and Poland. America and her western supporters embody virtually all the humanistic values that "The Freethinker" stands for, especially liberalism and secularism. In contrast, the Catholic Church in Poland is unusually influential in civic life only because it acts as a counterweight to the oppressiveness of the Polish Communist Party.

Secularism reigns in the West not because of the activities of Humanist groups but because of a histori-

cally unique form of cultural pluralism which arises from the ethos of a regulated capitalism and from no other system of government that we know of. Indeed, the western alliance is now a beleaguered jewel of liberalism in a world of growing doctrinal monolithism, and this includes much of the Third World, virtually all of the Middle East and the Communist bloc.

America friend or foe?

ANTONY MILNE

FREEDOM FIRST

Although I consider that, whatever their public pronouncements, the ultimate aim of political theorists or activists (as with religious propagandists) should always be regarded with suspicion, it may be true, as Gordon Beeson says (Letters, February), that Marx sought nothing but a humane world and that, as Ray Watkinson asserts, he is frequently misrepresented. But can it be denied that, whatever his attitude towards evolution, where politics are concerned those who profess to follow his teachings have so far produced as much human misery, denial of freedom of thought, curtailment of liberty in general as any other totalitarian political or religious ideology?

As a liberal and a life-long atheist believing in the maximum individual freedom consistent with social stability, providing one does no harm to others, I consider opposition to authoritarian political regimes whether of the Right or Left (and this includes Marxism) to be as important as rejection of the obscurantist, stultifying irrationality, frequent anti-sexual puritanism and occasional theocratic despotism, sometimes barbarism (as in Islam) of organised religion. I would suggest that those politicians who seek power in order to impose illiberal ideologies, those who would restrict individual liberty, curtail intellectual or artistic freedom, limit scientific research and prevent the free dissemination of knowledge, interfere in the personal affairs of the individual, are as contemptible as those clerics who endeavour to use their dubious authority for similar ends.

ALASTAIR CHAMBRE

MARX AND HIS CRITICS

Ray Watkinson (Letters, February) denies that Marxism is a religion. I maintain that it is. Like religion, Marxism postulates the existence of an intelligent supra-individual power working for the benefit of mankind, since its founders proclaimed that there is a "dialectic" of "the productive forces" which will one day lead us all into the heaven of communism. Like religion, Marxism thus ascribes casual efficacy to abstractions.

Not only this, but the Marxist conception of history is very much like the Christian, despite differences in terminology. According to Marxism, human beings once upon a time lived in a sinless paradise called "primitive communism". There they knew neither State nor property. Then they fell from grace by eating of the tree of private property and have remained in that fallen state ever since. However, redemption is now at hand in The Revolution which will cleanse us of our sins, abolish private property, and "wither away" the State. Whereupon communism will return in a "higher" form and paradise will be regained. Despite its pseudo-scientific trappings, Marxist eschatology is essentially the same as that of the Christian and other messianic religions.

Critics of Marx and Marxism are dismissed as obscurantists, reactionaries and defamers. This is the manner in which all true believers react when their

faith is attacked. And recent history has shown that when Marxists seize power they are as zealous in suppressing the heretic and the infidel as any church.

S. E. PARKER

THE DARWIN-MARX LETTER

Gordon Beeson states that Marx wrote to Darwin asking if he could dedicate "Das Kapital" to him, but Darwin declined the honour. (Letters, February.)

According to the researches of Lewis S. Feuer and others, this is completely untrue (see "The Case of the 'Darwin-Marx' Letter", published in "Encounter", October 1978). It was the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow which was responsible in 1931 "for publishing Darwin's letter of 1880 as one to Marx, and then promulgating the myth that Marx wanted to dedicate some volume or other to Darwin".

Feuer shows that in fact "Karl Marx never tried to dedicate any book to Charles Darwin", and Darwin's letter "purportedly sent to Karl Marx was not a letter to Marx at all. It was indeed a letter that Darwin had sent to Edward Aveling who wishes to dedicate his handbook, 'The Student's Darwin', to the revered scientist himself".

Feuer also mentions that Marx "detested the whole Freethought movement" and showed a "fierce animosity" to Charles Bradlaugh.

L. R. PAGE

THE OPEN MIND

E. A. W. Morris states: "By my own simple thought processes and observations I have rejected all religions, but I am open-minded enough to allow other people to hold different views". (Letters, February.)

Bully for him! What a pity his open mind does not allow such tolerance towards trades unions, socialists and republicans. Is he being open-minded by stating "The absurdity of nationalised industries is proved by their continual losses, borne by the tax payer". I suggest it is more than absurd—it is offensive—that over three million people are subsidised by the taxpayer to do nothing when we are short of houses, hospitals and schools.

Is he being open-minded by placing all the blame upon the unions for our industrial decline. Are the managers of industry and the investment institutions blame free?

He does not begrudge the Royal Family their wealth. I do not begrudge them their earnings. But I do feel slightly peeved that millions of pounds of tax-payers' money is handed over to one of the richest families in the world.

GEORGE VALE

HITLER THE CATHOLIC

In reply to Ursula Mackenzie (Letters, February) and P. M. Rambaut (March), my remark about Hitler being a Catholic in good standing was not intended to imply that he was a practising one, though it might perhaps have been better expressed. It was based on a statement in the Catholic "Universe", after Hitler's death, to the effect that he was not excommunicated because he had broken no Canon Law. The paper, and presumably the Church, had no doubt about his standing as a Catholic.

Hitler owed his dictatorial powers to the Catholic Centre Party whose votes in the Reichstag, on Vatican orders, gave him the necessary two-thirds majority. Pope Pius XII kept silent while the Jews were being massacred. His Church protested against Hitler's excesses only when they touched itself, and it sup-

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. York Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast. Thursday, 15 April, 8 pm. Tape and slide presentation: "Living as a Humanist".

Berkshire Humanists. Friends Meeting House, Church Street, Reading. Friday, 16 April, 8 pm. Tape and slide presentation: "Humanism Today".

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 2 May, 5.30 pm. Jim Parr: "Local Radio".

Gay Humanist Group. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Meetings on the second Friday of the month, 7.30 pm.

Harrow Humanist Society. The Library, Gayton Road, Harrow. Wednesday, 14 April, 8 pm. Annual General Meeting followed by discussion: "Should Religions be Protected by Law?".

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, 29 April, 7.45 pm. Barbara Smoker: "The Pope in Perspective".

Scottish Humanist Council. Annual Conference at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, Saturday, 24 April, 10 am-5 pm. Details from Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock.

Summer School at Beamish Hall, Durham, 21-28 August: "Some Aspects of International Arrangements". Cost, £80.75; details from George Mephum, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone 01-642 8796.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House Annexe, Page Street, Swansea. Friday, 30 April, 7.30 pm. David Rees: "Social Work with Adolescents within the Therapeutic Community".

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 25 April, 5.30 pm. Open Discussion.

An organisation known as **People Opposing Papal Edicts (POPE)** has been formed by several groups concerned that Pope John Paul II will use his pastoral visit next month as an opportunity to lecture the whole nation on birth control, abortion, homosexuality, divorce and the status of women. Sponsoring organisations include the National Secular Society, British Humanist Association, Gay Humanist Group, Socialist Secular Association and the Open University Humanist Society. POPE is holding a public meeting at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, on Friday, 21 May, 7.30 pm, to protest against John Paul II's social policies. Enquiries about POPE and the 21 May meeting should be made to the National Secular Society, 702 Holloway Road, London N19, telephone 01-272 1266.

ported him until almost the end of the war. The point I was trying to make is simply this. When Christians tell us what a dreadful fellow Hitler was, they never, never mention the guilty part played by the Church in promoting and sustaining him. We are left to infer that religion had nothing to do with these things. I find this as irritating as being called an "unconscious Christian".

R. J. CONDON

HISTORY LESSON

Ursula MacKenzie is being wise when she expresses no desire to get involved in an argument with R. J. Condon. The past and contemporary history of Europe are on his side.

P. BROWN

"This whole thing is lunatic", said Mr Justice Whitford, refusing to jail David Bowring for opening his shop every Sunday. He let customers browse around his domestic goods showroom in which a notice was displayed: "We cannot sell on Sunday—Come Back on Monday". The judge ruled that no evidence was brought to show that anyone was served in the shop and therefore Mr Bowring was not in breach of the Shops Act, 1950. Yeovil District Council, which brought the case, was ordered to pay its own costs. Mr Bowring said that the Council was wasting ratepayers' money.

Secularisation and Secularism

Commons was itself finally secularised when Charles Bradlaugh carried his Oaths Act in 1888.

It was the loss of the Anglican monopoly and the multiplicity of religious denominations in the 19th century which created the conditions for secularisation in England. In this process the Secularists played a small part as an active minority among the religious Dissenters, pressing the arguments of those Dissenters to their logical conclusions. Left to themselves, the Secularists were not particularly successful, save possibly in the case of Bradlaugh's campaign in Parliament. When the Dissenters called a halt, as they did in the matter of educational reform after they had got much of what they wanted in 1870, the Secularists could do little other than grow angry on the sidelines. Nevertheless the broad story in Britain—and especially in England—has been one of progressive secularisation.

In attempting to explain this process, I have adopted what may be called the old "Whig" view, that religious and civil liberties are closely intertwined. I have avoided the association of secularisation with "modernisation", a concept frequently employed in this context, because I do not think the connection has been established.

• To be concluded next month

Rearguard Campaign Against Abortion Act

Madeleine Simms, well known as a writer and lecturer on the family planning movement, spoke about a campaign that has been conducted in Parliament and the country to wreck the 1967 Abortion Act when she addressed a conference in London last month. The conference was organised by the National Abortion Campaign and the Abortion Law Reform Association for Community Health Councils.

She recalled that a number of bills have been introduced in the House of Commons by MPs Norman St John-Stevas, William Benyon, Bryant Godman Irvine and James White. When John Corrie introduced his Abortion (Amendment) Bill in July 1979, he was strongly supported by the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy "which was by this time desperate to restrict the Abortion Act because the numbers of Irish women coming to London for an abortion was increasing steadily each year".

Attempts in Parliament to emasculate the Abortion Act has the backing of a network of religious pressure groups. "There are now a considerable number of these groups that have rendered sterling service to the cause of the repression of women", declared Mrs Simms.

"Although the initial funding for some of these organisations came from Catholic sources, this was

Churches' Stranglehold on Nation's Schools

entirely out of the public purse, are socially divisive and wasteful of money and resources. Their existence will inevitably lead to an increased demand for similar schools designated Muslim, Sikh and Seventh Day Adventist, which often segregate children according to their skin colour as well as their religious background.

Another aspect of denominational education is the indisputable fact that Roman Catholic schools produce more than twice the proportion of convicted criminals than do ordinary schools. But questioning Cardinal Hume about Catholic criminality would have been rather like serving pigs' trotters at a Bar Mitzvah.

Barbara Smoker, President of the NSS, declares that the Committee's recommendations would, if implemented, put a reactionary stranglehold on the nation's schools. The Report justifies her fears. And it should be a warning to opponents of classroom religion who prefer joining forces with "progressive" Christian educationalists rather than engaging in open combat against those who want to use the nation's schools as part-time churches.

mostly a pump priming exercise to get them going. They then aim to get their hands on as much public subsidy as they can.

"In this they have been conspicuously successful. Life Care and Housing Trust has obtained more than 40 houses so far from local authorities for its own purposes, and grants totalling £17,750 from the Department of the Environment".

Madeleine Simms referred to the way in which "the anti-feminist strategy has veered from Parliament to the law courts, from the open to the surreptitious... Last year a member of LIFE spying network managed to persuade the Director of Public Prosecutions to charge Dr Leonard Arthur, a distinguished paediatrician with murder because he refused to take measures to keep a severely handicapped child alive in defiance of the parents' wishes. The jury refused to convict, even after the murder charge was reduced.

"But LIFE is not allowing the Fifth Column it has set up within the National Health Service to die a natural death from public distaste... This is what the once proud ambition of fighting to the finish to obliterate the 1967 Abortion Act has been reduced to..."

"The forces of anti-feminism have retreated, changed their tactics, gone underground, but they have not disappeared. The Pope's visit will bring them all out of the woodwork, and they expect a great propaganda bonus from the semi-official nature of this occasion.

"The Pope will be received by the Queen and Mrs Thatcher, two women who clearly have the merit of having ignored his strictures on birth control. The Pope, it appears, can be thoroughly broad-minded when this is in the Church's interests".

THE FREETHINKER, 1980

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Raymond Pickess, aged 40, who joined the Christian Brethren sect, admitted at St Albans Crown Court to having caused a public mischief by making over 9,000 obscene telephone calls to women in the London area. Mrs Grace Derwent, defending Pickess, said: "The Christian Brethren are a very strict sect. They are apparently very repressive and anything to do with sex is, as commonly said, a dirty word". Pickess joined the Christian Brethren as a young man and doctors are now, only after lengthy treatment, beginning to find ways of treating him.