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THE DWINDLING PRIESTHOOD: CHURCH'S GLOOMY PROSPECTS IN UNITED STATES

The Roman Catholic Church in the United States will face a major crisis due to a shortage of priests. That is the conclusion of two studies by the National Opinion Research Centre (Chicago) and the Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolic (Washington, DC). NORC, an independent social science organisation specialising in Catholic affairs, forecasts that by the year 2000 the Church will have about 50 per cent fewer active priests than at present. And the data produced by CARA, a semi-official ecclesiastical research organisation, confirms that prediction.

There are over 58,000 Catholic clergy in the United States at the present time; by the end of the century there will be less than 25,000. For the first time in decades there are fewer than 4,000 students in seminaries—a 52 per cent decrease on the 1968 figure. According to one commentator: "The priesthood is not attracting the young in anywhere like the numbers it did ten years ago".

NORC gives some reasons why the number of priests will have declined so dramatically by the end of the century. It estimates that about half of those who are ordained this year will resign from the priesthood within 20 years. There were 11,350 resignations between 1968 and 1980. The chief cause of defection is the Church's policy on celibacy.

NORC's findings contain little that will be of comfort to the hierarchy. And its proven ability to uncover facts that the Church would prefer to ignore adds to the bishops' worries. For instance, NORC's investigation into American Catholic attitudes to *Humanae Vitae* revealed a general acceptance that birth control is not immoral.

The NORC and CARA conclusions are reinforced by the outcome of local studies. In Boston, a study commissioned by the Archdiocese forecasts not only a decline in the number of priests but fewer worshippers as well. It predicts that with declining con-

gregations and collections, the Church will become increasingly dependent on bingo and other games of chance for its income.

The critical shortage of priests is aggravated by the Church's failure to exploit enthusiasm by the laity for involvement in its affairs. Professor Richard Schoeherr, a sociologist of religions at Wisconsin University, recently told the *New York Times*: "You have to look at the whole history of the Church, where the laity have always been second-class citizens, not allowed any responsibility which would give them real power". Lay people are coming to realise just how little power they have.

The lay-ministries movement in the United States was dealt a serious blow by Pope John Paul II. He made it known that women were not to act as eucharistic ministers at masses celebrated by him during his visit to the United States in 1979.

The Priestless Church

Since then steps have been taken in some dioceses to prevent women functioning as lectors at Mass or other sacred ceremonies. One bishop said that the purpose of this restriction was "to emphasise the importance, dignity and seriousness of the reading of the word of God".

The priestless parish church is already a phenomenon known to many American Catholics. Parishes which had three priests a few years ago now have to do with one. Regional priests, responsible for several parishes, are a distinct possibility in the not too distant future.

The Roman Catholic Church is in deep trouble. The American bishops are hoping that the lay-ministries movement will be revived and thus alleviate the pressure on the priesthood. But the laity remains disillusioned and increasingly indifferent to Church problems.

The Freethinker

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NEWS

TILTING THE SCALES?

*Oh, listen to the plaintiff's case:
Observe the features of her face . . .
Condole with her distress of mind:
From bias free of every kind,
This trial must be tried!
And when amid the plaintiff's shrieks,
The ruffianly defendant speaks,
Upon the other side;
What he may say you needn't mind,
From bias free of every kind,
This trial must be tried!
(Trial by Jury—W. S. Gilbert)*

"In case you need a quick emetic", a correspondent writes solicitously, "I enclose a photocopy of a passage from Judge King-Hamilton's (boring) autobiography, *Nothing but the Truth*, in which he modestly describes his role in the *Gay News* trial". King-Hamilton presided over the 1977 blasphemy trial which was initiated by Mary Whitehouse. Denis Lemon, a founder and at that time Editor of *Gay News*, was in the dock.

Mrs Whitehouse has already described her outraged feelings over the offending piece, James Kirkup's poem *The Love That Dares to Speak its Name*, publication of which caused her to bring the case. And it could not have been tried by a judge more ready to "condole with her distress of mind". During the trial, Judge King-Hamilton was icily polite and correct. But Myer Barry Alan King-Hamilton, President of the West London Synagogue and an authority on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, has often expressed views on social questions that are curiously similar to Mrs Whitehouse's own.

It is evident by what he now writes that while "from bias free of every kind", Judge King-Hamilton had strong feelings which boded ill for the defendants. He describes prosecutor John Smyth's final speech as "obviously very sincere"; on the other hand defending counsel Geoffrey Robertson's was "a classic example of rhetoric . . . seemingly equally sincere". (Mrs Whitehouse is reported to have said that after Robertson's speech she felt there was bound to be an acquittal.)

More seriously for the defendants, King-Hamilton was undergoing an odd experience which he recounts thus: "From the trial began, I had an extraordinary feeling of unreality: that I was watching the trial, instead of presiding over it. I have never experienced a similar sensation before or since. As for the

S AND NOTES

summing-up itself, I can confidently assert that it was the best, by far, that I have ever given. I can say this without blushing because, throughout its preparation, and also when delivering it, I was half-conscious of being guided by some superhuman inspiration".

We must assume the learned judge imagined that "superhuman inspiration" was bestowed upon him by the Judeo-Christian deity, and not by Mary Whitehouse who was swanning around the Old Bailey during the proceedings.

Had Denis Lemon and his colleagues realised Judge King-Hamilton's state of mind they might have decided to save time and money by pleading guilty at the outset. And if the Court of Appeal had known that during his summing-up the trial judge "was half-conscious of being guided by some superhuman inspiration", would they have quashed all, and not just part of the sentence which he imposed?

FLYING VISITS

F. A. Ridley, a familiar name in radical and free-thought circles for 60 years, is the author of an interesting and very amusing pamphlet, *Our Celestial Visitor: the Flying Virgin and Space Age Astronomy*. The veteran lecturer and writer, whose published works include *The Papacy and Fascism*, *Pope John and the Cold War*, *The Jesuits* and *Julian the Apostate*, celebrated his 85th birthday earlier this year.

The "celestial visitor" is, of course, the Virgin Mary. The dogma of her assumption bodily into heaven was promulgated by Pope Pius XII. But as Ridley points out, she is obviously nostalgic about her previous habitation. There have been many local stories about her earthly appearance, although the author confines himself to three principal visits (Guadelupe, Lourdes and Fatima).

Mary is on the wing usually when the Church is in a state of crisis, thus providing the hierarchy with a useful diversion. She invariably touches down in a country where there is a particularly reactionary political Establishment. Her momentous messages are passed on either to bewildered children or superstitious peasants. Ridley uses the stiletto and the sledge-hammer with equal facility in his assault on superstition and gullibility.

Our Celestial Visitor is published by the London Secular Group and distributed by G. W. Foote & Co, 702 Holloway Road, London N19, price 37p which includes postage.

JIM HERRICK

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DENNING DEPARTS

The departure of Lord Denning after 38 years as a judge—the past 20 as Master of the Rolls—was marked by controversy. Black barristers announced they would boycott a farewell reception because of remarks in his last judgement when he ruled that a headmaster's exclusion of a turbanned Sikh pupil was justified.

Lord Denning's admirers claim that he upheld the spirit rather than the letter of the law. But exactly the opposite applied when he and his fellow judges ruled that Sikhism is a religion and therefore not protected by the Race Relations Act, 1976. It was evident during the parliamentary debate that it was the intention of the then Labour Government to protect Sikhs on this issue. An amendment moved by a Conservative MP to illegalise discrimination on grounds of religion attracted wide support but was withdrawn because of Government assurances.

Whether the Sikhs are a religious or an ethnic group, or both, and even if the turban is a customary requirement rather than a strictly religious one, it is foolish to pressurise and harass them. Does it really matter if a Sikh bus driver, train guard, barrister, judge or school pupil wears a turban so long as it does not interfere with his duties? The Sikhs for their part are not so dogmatic as some people imagine. They do not insist on wearing a turban when playing games, swimming or piloting an aeroplane. The whole matter is a non-issue blown up out of all proportion by people who have abandoned common sense.

Some good has come out of the judgement, though perhaps not intended by the Court: the liberty to discriminate on the grounds of religion has pinpointed a defect in the 1976 Act. This should be rectified, so that discrimination on grounds of religion or irreligion can be illegalised.

A MODERN VICAR OF BRAY

The news that Dr F. H. Amphlett Micklewright is now a book reviewer for the *Catholic Herald* will provoke gleeful hoots among those who encountered him in bygone days. His piece on Gregory Tillett's biography of the religious charlatan, Charles Webster Leadbeater, is headed "Psychic Farces"—which some may regard as an unfortunate title in view of Micklewright's own farcical career as a gentleman of the cloth (Anglican, Unitarian, Anglican again) and a Catholic-bashing crusader who embraced Catholicism.

However, it was as a Rationalist pamphleteer that Amphlett (nicknamed "Pamphlet") Micklewright became best known. His anti-Catholic tirades were of quite exceptional ferocity; the Rev Ian Paisley's thunderings against the Whore of Babylon are mild stuff by comparison.

References in Micklewright's *Catholic Herald* review to one F. S. Willoughby as "a disreputable Anglican", and to the Liberal Catholic Church as appealing to "a few jaded people seeking a new experience" somehow strike a chord. He can still turn out the mildly tart comment. But Dr Amphlett's conversion to Catholicism has evidently mellowed the man who once wrote insultingly of "the Roman Catholic rabbit-warrens to be found in the slums of Glasgow and Liverpool".

The pompous and snobbish Amphlett Micklewright will no doubt be chuffed by having his name in the review section of a leading religious weekly. He can reasonably hope to spend his declining years in the odour of sanctity, respected by all who don't know him. Such recognition of the great man will be equally gratifying to the pious knitting needlewomen of Honey Cottage, his loyal admirer over many years.

One almost hesitates to cast a shadow on the blissful scene by recalling Micklewright's assertion that "... nothing but an arid mind can result from a retreat into the myths and legends which formed the mental climates of the pre-scientific past".

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Humanist Friendship

Although, historically, the National Secular Society and "The Freethinker" have had strong international links, most of them have weakened in the past few decades. A positive decision was therefore made last year to strengthen them. Accordingly, former "Freethinker" Editor Jim Herrick represented us at the World Union of Freethinkers Congress in Lausanne (reported in our March issue), and NSS President Barbara Smoker at the 8th World Congress of the International Humanist and Ethical Union held in Hanover last month. Here is her report.

As part of our renewed internationalism, the NSS applied for consultative membership in the International Humanist and Ethical Union some weeks before the Hanover Congress in which I was to participate, and two or three of us filled in the application form together. It included a demand for five sponsors, and we felt that an applicant like the NSS, with its 116 years of proud, well documented history, could hardly be expected to supply references to an organisation founded a mere three decades ago. Rather than simply leave the space blank, it seemed an amusing idea to give as referees five of the world's religious leaders, who might well testify to our campaigns against their creeds, their practices, and their continuing disproportionate influence, and whose existence, indeed, makes secularism necessary. We therefore entered the names and addresses of Pope John Paul II, Archbishop Runcie, Ayatollah Khomeini, President Begin and Rev Sun Moon.

Arriving in Hanover for the Congress, I found that this forgotten *jeu d'esprit* loomed large in the minds of the IHEU Board, and soon became a talking-point of the Congress. Were we being serious, I kept being asked, and I oscillated between dismissing it as a joke and justifying it as above. Some of the participants (especially those from the Mediterranean region) thought it uproariously funny, while others (especially from Germany and Yugoslavia) were utterly mystified by it—though they too were ready to smile once convinced that it was not to be taken at its face value. In the end, however, I was forced to comply with bureaucratic demands and supply five genuine referees.

This incident exemplifies what is perhaps the initial impression of any international gathering: the amazing degree to which most people follow their national stereotypes. Then, however, one gets to know some of them as individual personalities, and the superficial national characteristics—even including sense of humour—lose their importance. Indeed, the most important outcome of an international congress is undoubtedly the overseas friendships one makes and renews.

Around the World

BARBARA SMOKER

There were 260 participants at this Congress, from 40 different countries, by far the best represented countries being the USA, Germany and Holland. Three languages—English, German and French—were used, with simultaneous headphone translation at plenary sessions, but English-speaking people are always at an advantage in the IHEU, not only because of the high proportion of conferees from North America, but because most of those from Holland (the Mecca of Humanism) choose English as their conference language.

Hanover, 80 per cent of which was destroyed by bombing 40 years ago, has been magnificently rebuilt, and provided a perfect setting for the Congress, which took place in the impressive domed *Stadthalle*. German and Dutch thoroughness also ensured good forward planning, even if it also meant that speeches and discussion sessions were sometimes rather long and guided tours rather resembled history lessons.

The theme of the Congress was "Anti-Humanist Trends: Challenge and Response", though this was variously interpreted, and sometimes lost sight of altogether.

Mixing Business and Pleasure

At the opening session, VIP speeches were interspersed with fine singing by a massed male choir numbering about 70. Other social events included two supper-dances, at which the people who let their hair down most readily were exactly those who took everything else most solemnly and had to be informed that a joke was a joke. Then there was the presentation of the Humanist of the Year Award, of gold medals, silver medals and other awards of Germanic quantity.

It may seem frivolous to say that for me the highlight of the Congress was an open-air curry party held by our Indian friend Lavanam, but it provided the best opportunity to turn acquaintances into friends. And it was there that I met, for the first time, Joachim Kahl, author of *The Misery of Christianity*, which had impressed me greatly when I read the English translation on its publication by Penguin Books about 12 years ago. Meeting the boyish-looking author, I could hardly believe he was old enough to have written it, but it is, of course, the work of a very angry young man, who had just left the Lutheran priesthood on realising that he had been duped by theology.

There was a good display at the Congress of free literature (including our prospectus of Jim Herrick's history of *The Freethinker*) and a well-stocked book-stall on which excellent, if high-priced, American

Prometheus publications tempted me into penury.

The Congress theme was subdivided into (a) Disillusioned youth, (b) Institutionalised violence, and (c) Mass society and alienation, each of these titles being the subject of two papers in plenary session followed by discussion sessions in one German, one French, and two English groups, some of which were further subdivided (anarchically, owing to the heatwave) into indoor and outdoor groups. This enabled everybody to participate, though there was some dissatisfaction among the intellectuals at the low level of debate, and among the non-intellectuals at what they saw as mere theorising. As chairman of one of the English groups, I found it difficult to keep everybody happy. However, a tri-lingual peripatetist told me that our group was sweetness itself in comparison with the warring German group.

Conflicting Views

Another, more specific, civil war divided the Israeli participants—on one side, those who understood the Arab viewpoint in the larger conflict; on the other side, those who steadfastly opposed it. Each side put mutually exclusive motions on Lebanon to the Congress. Naturally, it was the less partisan side that won the day.

The last morning was devoted to formal resolutions, no fewer than 14 motions having been put forward. They dealt with world peace, with the foundation of a humanist peace movement, with the Lebanese war, with the isolation of the elderly, with multi-national corporations, with unemployment, with over-population, with treatment of the mentally ill, and with particular instances of political oppression.

It is not possible to attempt any summary here of the resolutions or of the six papers read, let alone the discussion on them, but Proceedings of the Congress will eventually be published.

The Congress was mentioned in local newspapers, and a local television station included a five-minute interview with Norbert Schwartz on the Congress and on Humanism in general, and, on the final evening, included film coverage of part of our last plenary session.

The IHEU set up an international Humanist Ombudsman in 1979, and this project is now operative—but, almost inevitably, is in urgent need of funds if it is to continue. An appeal for this cause from Congress participants raised a four-figure sum, but much more is needed if the cases already taken up are to be pursued. The Humanist Ombudsman is assisted by a so-called Ombudsteam, consisting of about ten volunteers.

For decades her friends and apologists have presented a picture of Israel as a progressive democracy, insecure among hostile neighbours and deserving our sympathy because of the atrocities practised on Jews by Nazi Germany. The holocaust let loose by the Israeli armed forces in Lebanon has opened the eyes of many. Perhaps a different assessment of the complex reality is now possible.

European conquest of the non-European world, based on superior military technology and organisation, has produced two different types of results. Where no European settlement was possible or contemplated (as in India) Imperial rule gradually gave way to Independence. However, where European settlement has been attempted, ruthlessness and repeated violence against the indigenous population has been the rule. The latter has sometimes been killed off, like the Tasmanians, or driven from pillar to post like the Red Indians.

This process may be termed violent settlerism or settler-racialism, and it has often evoked support even from those who have fought for the exploited at home. For example, the Labour Party was not unwilling, when in power, to tolerate the White Highlands policy in Kenya and Rhodesia.

The Israeli settlement in Palestine is a part of this same process. The Zionists' moral claim to a land the Jews were dispersed from in AD 85 is patently absurd when pressed against the Palestinian Arabs who are the continuous descendants of all the tribes and races of the region, including Jews, who are partly Islamicised and fully Arabised.

Jehovah's Chosen

The Zionists have a further claim of a different kind: Jehovah himself promised this land to them as his chosen people. When religious faith and fanaticism enter the field, justice and morality are out.

Jehovah's moral standards are different from those of mere mortals. He exhorted his chosen to possess the lands of other tribes by wholesale massacre, sparing only the virgins. Even so, this spurious claim seems to attract substantial Christian support.

Many European liberals argue that the Jews deserved a state because of their sufferings in Europe. In short, "our" cruelties against "our" Jews must be atoned for by despoiling the Arabs. Such an unjust attitude is possible only because even violent settler-racialism commands some support from the home base.

A few landmarks in the history of Israel's "progress" are worth noting. Jews formed about 12 per

cent of the population of Palestine when the Zionists secured the Balfour Declaration in 1917, favouring a national home (not a state) in Palestine for the Jewish people.

By the end of the Second World War the Arabs still formed 70 per cent and the Jews 30 per cent of the population. Violating its own principles of self-determination, the European-dominated United Nations proceeded to sacrifice the Arabs by proposing a partition plan. The plan was unacceptable to the Arabs (over two-thirds of the population) in principle and in detail because of its unjust apportionment of territory.

The Terrorists Take Over

The partition plan enabled the Zionists to seize as much land as they could and declare Israel a state on 15 May 1948; by 17 September the Stern Gang had assassinated Count Bernadotte, the UN mediator.

The Arab armies which came in to support the Palestinians were no match for the Zionists' superior military power. With the Armistice, Israel had occupied much more territory than proposed under the UN plan, and thus created many more refugees.

Sporadic Arab pin-pricks were always a good excuse for massive retaliation. In 1967 Israel initiated another war and defeated the combined Arab armies in six days. Israel is reported now to possess nuclear weapons. Her alleged insecurity is nonsense which enables home-based liberals to support the settler-racialists.

It is the inevitable logic of violent settlerism that settler-fascists will win more public support than settler-socialists. That is why under Begin (whose Irgun gang bombed the King David Hotel, hanged three British soldiers and booby-trapped their bodies) Israel has blossomed fully into a terrorist state. It could seek peace by granting the Arabs a state on the West Bank and Gaza. Instead it aims to liquidate the Palestinian Liberation Organisation militarily and politically so that Israel can absorb territories conquered in 1967.

The *Observer* of 1 August reported that the invasion of Lebanon was agreed upon by Sharon and Haig in May. President Reagan's reported displeasure with Begin is either a sham or it is a futile gesture. Israeli military effort is entirely dependent on American military and financial aid. Ironically, although American taxpayers' money cannot be used for establishing religion, it can be used, with no repercussions, to bolster a state based on religion.

The next few months will show that Israel will attempt to annex a part of Southern Lebanon. It is interesting to note what plans the religious settler-maniacs can conceive of. In May 1943, President

Bicentenary of British Atheism

DAVID BERMAN

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the first British work of avowed atheism: *An Answer to Dr Priestley's Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*. Both the book and its author, Matthew Turner of Liverpool, deserve to be better known.

Turner, as I noted in *Question 11* (1978), was a man of extraordinary attainments. As well as being the first professed British atheist, he was an anatomist, classical scholar, physician, republican and draughtsman; he was also the practical chemist who first introduced Priestley to chemistry and who supplied Josiah Wedgwood with "several receipts . . . and other appliances of great utility in his manufacture". I can now add that Turner was a pioneer in medical research. His *Account of the Extraordinary Medicinal Fluid, called Aether* (1743) — his only other known publication — played a leading role in establishing the place of ether in medical treatment.

Professing Atheism in 1782

But Turner's main claim to fame was, undoubtedly, his bold defence of atheism in 1782. Not only was his *Answer to Priestley* the first English work of professed atheism, but it remained the only one for nearly 30 years, until Shelley's *Necessity for Atheism* (1811). It seems appropriate to celebrate the bicentenary of the *Answer to Priestley* with a selection from it. I have chosen a dozen of its more aphoristic passages as samples of its style, themes and tone. Page references are to the original London edition of 1782.

... what cannot bear discussion cannot be true. (p ix)

Be it therefore remembered, that in London in the kingdom of England, in the year of our Lord one thousand

seven hundred and eighty-one, a man has publicly declared himself an atheist. (xiii)

That society which suffers by truth should be otherwise constituted; as I cannot think that truth will hurt any society rightly constituted . . . (xix)

If upon sick beds or in dying moments men revert to their old weaknesses and superstitions, their falling off may afford triumph to religionists; for my part I care not so much for the opinions of sick and dying men, as for those who at the time are strong and healthy. (xxvi)

By nature I mean to express the whole of what I see and feel, that whole, I call self-existent from all eternity; I admit a principle of intelligence and design, but I deny that principle to be extraneous from itself. (xxvii)

I think truth should never be hid, but few are those who mind it. (xxxiv)

... people who are moral will not deny, they would be so though there were not a god, and there never yet has been a civil lawgiver, who left crimes to be punished by the author of the universe . . . (2)

That lesser evils exist instead of greater is indeed but a poor proof in favour of the benevolence of an all-powerful being. (20)

... if evil and pain are good and necessary now [in this life], why will they not always be so? (22)

We make a Deity ourselves, fall down and worship him. Its the molten calf over again. Idolatry is still practised. The only difference is that now we worship idols of our imagination; before of our hands. (36)

The wisdom of nature supplies in reality what is only hoped for from the protection of the Deity. If the world has so good a mother, a father may well be spared . . . (47)

... is it not absurd to reason with a man about that of which that same man assents we have no idea at all? (48)

Israel Makes Progress

Roosevelt's personal representative in the Middle East reported: "The Zionist organisation in Palestine had indicated its commitment to an enlarged programme for (1) a sovereign Jewish State which would embrace Palestine and probably eventually Trans-Jordan; (2) an eventual transfer of the Arab population from Palestine to Iraq". (United States: *Foreign Relations of the US, Near East and Africa*, Washington DC, 1964, Vol 4, pp 776-7.)

Jehovah's promise was even wider: "From the river of Egypt to the Euphrates".

Israel has shown that military force decides the argument while the world acquiesces and allows her to keep the gains of aggression. Those who campaign for peaceful co-existence of peoples and the pro-

gressive abandonment of armaments cannot allow such terrorism to continue and let Israel secure her expansionist aims. And yet what can ordinary people do while Israel, supported by the United States, does exactly what she likes to her neighbours?

There is no reason why Israel should not be pressurised with the same intensity as South Africa is. Indeed all the more so, because the sufferings of the Arabs have been caused by America and all those members of the United Nations Organisations who voted for the partition plan and for acceptance of Israel into UNO.

The United States had to yield to world opinion on Vietnam. She can be made to yield on the Palestine Arab issue also.

In this centenary year of Charles Darwin's death there has been considerable debate on the relevance of his teachings. Dr Charlesworth, a lecturer in biology at the University of Sussex, asserts that modern biology confirms their correctness. This article is based on a lecture to the British Humanist Association annual conference.

Charles Darwin was the dominant figure of 19th century biology; he created an intellectual revolution comparable with those initiated earlier in the physical sciences by Copernicus, Galileo and Newton. From having been created the Lord of the central part of the universe, the human species has become just one of millions of species of living organisms on a small planet, in a universe whose size defies the imagination. Darwin showed that all contemporary species have arisen by evolution (what he called "descent with modification") from previously existing ancestral species. Over millions of years, the gradual accumulation of small changes, imperceptible in any single generation, has led to such profound transformations as our own evolution from a fish-like ancestor in the Devonian period 400 million years ago, an ancestry which has nevertheless left its trace in structural features of the early human embryo (such as its gill arches).

According to Darwin these changes are solely the result of mechanistic processes at work in present-day species. Foremost among these is natural selection, which explains the apparently purposeful nature of many characteristics of living organisms (adaptations). The evolution of such a characteristic by natural selection requires three conditions: the existence of variability between individuals within the species, a correlation between such differences in the character and "fitness" (the survival ability and reproductive capacity of individuals), and some degree of genetic determination of the variability. If these conditions are met, the population in one generation will differ from that in the previous one, because the fittest members of the old generation will have contributed most offspring to the new one, and these offspring will resemble their parents. Over many generations, the population will come to contain more and more individuals with characteristics associated with increased fitness.

Modern research in biology has added greatly both to the evidence that evolution, as an historical process, has actually occurred, and to our understanding of its mechanism. With respect to the first topic, it is now possible to compare the genetic constitutions of different species directly, instead of relying on traditional anatomical methods. This is

because we know that the genetic information required to specify the development of an adult individual from a fertilised egg is stored in a large molecule (DNA), which effectively consists of a long sequence of sub-units, just as a written message consists of a sequence of letters.

In the case of DNA, there are four alternative sub-units capable of occupying a given place in the message. The alphabet of the genetic message is thus a four-letter one, although the length of the message runs into hundreds of thousands or even millions of letters. The words into which the DNA message is divided are called genes, which are usually several hundred letters long. Each gene specifies the structure of an individual type of protein molecule. The numerous chemical processes responsible for life are carried out under the control of these proteins, of which there are several thousand different sorts in a human being. The form (but not the content) of the genetic message, and the mechanism by which it is decoded into the structure of proteins, are remarkably uniform throughout the living world from viruses to man. This fact is unintelligible except in terms of evolution.

By comparing the DNA messages of the same genes in different species, it is possible to assess the extent to which they have diverged over time. The greater the amount of time that has elapsed since a pair of species last shared a common ancestor, the greater the amount of difference we would expect in the contents of their genetic messages, just as the number of words shared by English and German has steadily decreased since the Dark Ages.

Similarities

This is exactly what is found. For example, various genes of man have been compared with those of a chimpanzee, gorilla and other vertebrate species. We are astonishingly similar to the chimpanzee and gorilla, differing in less than one per cent of the letters of our DNA. Such a small difference is consistent with our having common ancestors with these species four to five million years ago. We are less similar to monkeys, less still to rabbits, dogs and other non-primate mammals, but closer to these than to reptiles or birds. The degree of genealogical affinity between species can thus be very precisely assessed by modern techniques.

As far as the mechanism of evolution is concerned, modern biology has amply confirmed the correctness of Darwin's theory of natural selection as an explanation of adaption. We have a much better understanding of the mechanism of inheritance than Darwin had, which has enabled precise mathematical theories of evolution to be constructed. We know that the source of the genetic variability on which

natural selection acts is mutation, the spontaneous chemical alteration of one or more letters in the DNA message of a cell, which may cause a corresponding change in the structure of a protein coded for by the relevant region of the DNA.

Mutations arise at a very low but measurable rate, and are random in the sense that their nature is not determined by whether or not they increase the fitness of their carriers. Furthermore, adaptive characteristics acquired during the life of an individual (such as the strong muscles of an athlete) are not transmitted to its offspring, since the DNA message carried in the cells that give rise to eggs or sperm cannot be influenced by such changes.

Since it is most likely that a random change in a complex piece of machinery will impair rather than improve its performance, most mutations are harmful. If the species finds itself in a new environment, however, some previously harmful mutations may become advantageous, and will spread through the population because they increase fitness. Many examples of such changes have now been observed in present-day populations. The evolution of insecticide-resistant pests in response to spraying, and drug-resistant bacteria because of indiscriminate use of antibiotics, are examples of great practical, as well as theoretical, significance.

In Agreement With Darwin

One evolutionary force not known to Darwin has been recognised as a result of the modern understanding of inheritance. This is "genetic drift", which involves changes in the genetic composition of a population purely as a result of the fact that there is a process of random sampling in the production of each new generation. Hence, the new generation does not necessarily have precisely the same genetic composition as the previous one, even in the absence of selection and mutation, just as we do not usually get exactly five heads and five tails when we toss a coin ten times. Given time, genetic drift can occasionally result in the spread of a new mutation right through a population, provided that it does not lower the fitness of its carriers too drastically. It is therefore possible to understand how characters of no adaptive significance can undergo evolution. It seems likely that many of the observed evolutionary changes in DNA have occurred in this way, since they do not seem to have significant effects on the performance of proteins.

Apart from this process, however, modern evolutionary biology is in close agreement with Darwin's main ideas. It seems clear that all living species on this planet have descended from some primitive self-replicating type of molecule similar to DNA, formed as a result of purely chemical processes some 3,800 million years ago. The major features of the anatomy, physiology and behaviour

of highly organised forms of life have evolved by the gradual accumulation of natural selection of mutational changes in the DNA of their ancestors. Even though we do not understand the mechanisms responsible for human consciousness, the most remarkable product of evolution, it is clear that it is an intensification of processes observable in other mammalian species, and there is no reason to doubt that it too has originated in the same Darwinian fashion.

OBITUARIES

Mr F. Sparkes

Frederick Sparkes, a professional musician, has died at the age of 71. He held no religious beliefs and there was a secular committal ceremony at Tunbridge Wells Crematorium.

Miss W. Shinton

Winifred Shinton, who died in hospital at Christchurch, Dorset, had been associated with the free-thought movement for over 50 years. Aged 83, she was a member of the National Secular Society and a *Freethinker* reader until the end of her life.

Miss Shinton had a long career in nursing and social work and was actively involved in community activities until a few weeks before her death. She lived in a home for retired nurses and was held in high regard by the staff and fellow residents.

There was a large gathering of relatives and friends when the secular committal ceremony took place at Bournemouth Crematorium.

Daniel Woodward

Daniel Woodward has died from meningitis at the age of eight weeks. There was a secular committal ceremony at Barham, Kent.

Freethinker Fund

Thanks are expressed to the latest list of contributors given below.

Anonymous, £25; W. Aikenhead, £2; K. M. Barralet, £3; P. Brown, £4; F. T. Chirico, \$9; H. G. Easton, £2; P. Forrest, £10; S. N. Fuchs, £2; E. A. C. Goodman, £5; Y. Gugel, £1; V. Harvey, £2; F. C. Hoy, £3; J. L. Hutchison, £5; J. Lippitt, £5; J. A. Milburn, £2; R. P. Ratcliff, £2; D. Readhead, £1; D. M. Ross, £2; M. Savage, £1; P. Somers, £2; J. W. White, £5; G. Williams, £1.

Total for the period 7 July 1982 until 9 August 1982: £92 and \$9.

CONTROLLING WOMEN—THE NORMAL AND THE DEVIANT. Edited by Bridget Hutter and Gillian Williams. Croom Helm £10.95 and £6.95.

Controlling Women is the result of a programme of seminars organised by the Oxford University Women's Studies Committee in 1980. There are nine essays in all, and they indeed read as if written for a live audience. It is possible to dip into this book in any order and still emerge with the theme intact. On the other hand, the level of presentation is variable—some essays are by established authors and theorists, a few are written by practitioners describing developments, such as Programme For the Reform of Laws on Soliciting—PROS—whose ultimate aim is to remove from the Statute the offences of loitering and soliciting for the purposes of prostitution.

Controlling Women approaches the subject of the position and behaviour of women in Britain today along a sociological method known as the "deviancy perspective". This is a "sceptical approach" which raises questions as to the whole concept of deviant behaviour and its control, rather than investigating the physical and psychological characteristics of subjects and their histories and social origins in such a way as to imply that those in the deviant categories are somehow quite different from the rest of society. The approach informs all the essays, which cover an interesting range of scenarios in which "deviant" and "normal" women find themselves. These are: prostitution, alcohol use, Broadmoor Special Hospital, pregnancy and motherhood, long-stay female geriatric wards, older women, the law and female sexuality, and abortion.

Throughout the book, which seeks to expose the controls exerted over all aspects of women's behaviour, attention is repeatedly drawn to the portrayal of the "normal" women as a person with something of a childish incapacity to govern herself and in need of some protection, which continues all through the life-cycle. The pervasiveness of the multiple controls over women exposed in each succeeding chapter suggests that attempts by women to free themselves from their unequal position in society poses a strong threat to existing social arrangements. Indeed it is suggested that a sort of "moral panic" over this apparently "new" phenomenon is in full force now. It shows itself in the anti-feminist back-lash and is linked with a cluster of social themes—the permissive society, breakdown in law and order, abortion, pornography, sexual promiscuity, drugs, public acceptance of homosexuality and, no doubt, humanism too.

One of the distinguished contributors to this collection is our own revered and scathing humanist

FREETHINKER

specialist on the battle for free, safe abortion—Madeleine Simms, whose descriptive essay debunks the "Myth of the Golden Age" prior to 1967 and the Abortion Act. It is concise, informative and of course witty!

Controlling Women is not a difficult book to read, and the scales will fall from your eyes as you are exposed, showing how we appear to be puppets in the hands of powerful societal forces that condition us from childhood to categorise and stereotype women. It requires a major mental effort to accept what is plainly happening before our very eyes, and linked as it is with themes so tenaciously pursued by freethinkers everywhere, we must take it seriously and not simply dismiss the mind-control demonstrated here as just an interesting and workman-like little foray into real sociology by a group of women with a "thing" about "women's lib".

I thought I was a pretty aware feminist before I read this book: it depressed me to appreciate the extent of what I hadn't even realised were controls over women, unwittingly subscribed to by myself.

RITA CRAFT

LIZZIE PYE by Edward Blishen. Hamish Hamilton £8.50

With *Lizzie Pye* Edward Blishen has given us another fascinating slice of his and his family's life. Lizzie Pye was his mother, so uncomfortably yoked to his father for 54 years till his death parted them, leaving her experiencing a strange mixture of grief and exhilaration. Alas! her unsociable husband had deliberately cut her off from neighbours, and her attempts at making friends with them were many years too late.

Nevertheless, though she had to spend her last years in old people's homes, the proximity of loving children and grandchildren, the success of a cataract operation, and her own indomitable spirit kept her, on the whole, happy.

Edward Blishen also tells us something of his own life as a young husband and father, confronting the familiar problems of keeping a family on a small income. But how different in spirit he is from his father, and much more fortunate his wife is than his mother! We witness, too, his struggles with his first book, and his amazement at finding himself an author. It comes as a surprise towards the end of the book to see him emerge as a grandfather.

REVIEWS

This delightful and pathetic book, dealing with ordinary enough events, makes one realise again how strange and wonderful a creature a human being is—what depths may lie beneath the most commonplace exterior. Few can have guessed what a wonderful person Lizzie Pye was. We doubtless pass unseeing and unhelping many such people daily. They are, of course, the first victim of the current attack on the health and welfare services.

MARGARET McILROY

Countryman Versus Cover-up

PETER COTES

It has been customary in the past for most judges, magistrates, politicians and journalists to automatically defend the police against accusations of corruption and other malpractices. The police themselves investigated charges against their colleagues, usually with predictable results. The work of Operation Countryman, a serious exercise to discover facts, was hampered by police and legal officers of all ranks.

The recent Independent Television programme, *World in Action*, came up with a pretty high-smelling kettle of fish when the Operation Countryman team of detectives called in some years ago to investigate the possibility of police corruption in London was disbanded. A number of cases had been brought to trial: most of them were dropped or dismissed through lack of evidence.

When Mr Arthur Hambleton, former Chief Constable of Dorset police, was retired, Scotland Yard put its own men in to finish investigating cases still on file. In 1979, Countryman had listed allegations against nearly 70 police officers of various ranks. Three years later we hear Mr Hambleton, a stocky West countryman, deeply resentful that the outcome of so much hard work involving intensive inquiries had been aborted. His main complaint was: "Basically you may say that we were stopped from clearing up the Yard. The DPP said he would have to resign his office if I persisted in my statements that he and his staff had not supported us".

There was no disputing the fact that police morale had been badly hit by the suspension in 1978 of Detective Chief Constable Philip Cuthbert of the City of London Police. Cuthbert, kept on a holding

charge, was released by order of the DPP's office. The Countryman team — the country bumpkins detecting the urban city slickers — came up with evidence that was later dropped. Hambleton complained to his television audience of many millions: "We were the last to be told of the DPP's decision. That finally indicated to me that we are not going to get the help and support I had expected".

Detective Chief Constable Cuthbert and his colleague Detective Sergeant John Golding eventually became the first two police officers to be successfully prosecuted as a result of the Countryman inquiry. They were sentenced to three years' and two years' imprisonment respectively at the Old Bailey after being found guilty of conspiracy.

Mr Alfie Sheppard, described as a middle man between the police and criminals, was also on the programme. No coppers' nark, he. Alfie said that crime was becoming unprofitable: "Like working for the police, rather than yourself", was his argument.

A grey area, then, peopled by crooks and cops where you didn't know who was who, which was what, or whether they done it or did it; all very reminiscent of Edgar Wallace some years ago. . .

Earlier, in *The Times*, the crusading Ludovic Kennedy had argued with all his customary zeal and lucidity that the scales of justice are tipped against the accused in many criminal trials. He went on to point a way to restore the balance, presenting a cast-iron case for taking prosecution out of the hands of the police. Kennedy—Lude to his friends—is always fair and balanced, one of the few media "regulars"—if I may refer to him in such a disrespectful manner—who is more interested in the matter in hand than the manner of presentation. Never afraid to show the "other side"—he is typically Shavian in that respect—as well as being unconscious of the figure he cuts, he consequently cuts a very good figure, especially when on the side of those who he feels have had a raw deal.

Ludovic Kennedy castigated the appalling complacency of the Bench and Bar in his *Times* article. One of the incidents he described was an after-dinner speech he made to a gathering of judges, barristers and the like at which I happened to be present: "The chairman, a former Director of Public Prosecutions, concluded the evening with remarks so personally denigrating that I asked him afterwards whether he had been giving a vote of thanks or a vote of censure".

Yet all that Ludovic Kennedy had been doing, as an experienced writer about such happenings, was to substantiate his claims concerning certain miscarriages of justice and to argue for Justice. That is all the Operation Countryman team have been doing, although the DPP—successor to the one who attacked Ludovic Kennedy—appears to have given them little thanks either.

Making Fun of Miracles

J. R. SPENCER

J. R. Spencer continues this series with the case of Thomas Woolston, an Anglican clergyman who questioned the veracity of biblical stories. His enemies in the Church saw to it that he was prosecuted for blasphemy. The State played its part in silencing Woolston who, unable to find securities for his good behaviour, had to remain in prison for the rest of his life.

For some 30 years, Thomas Woolston lived in comfortable obscurity as a bachelor clergyman Fellow at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. Unlike most dons in Restoration Cambridge, he passed his time not in eating, drinking and intrigue, but in unremitting study. Over the years he polished and repolished a single idea, which in time became a total obsession for him: the notion that the Bible was not all literally true, but partly consists of allegories.

In 1705, his book applying this theory to some of the more improbable bits of the Old Testament was published by the University Press. Convinced that his theory was the medicine which would heal all the divisions in the Church, he expected it to be acclaimed. To his chagrin, his clerical colleagues gave it the ecclesiastical bird. Unshaken in his conviction, he set off for London, determined, like John Traske in reverse, to launch a religious revival with the message that the Bible was not all literally true. As befitted a don of 50, his method of evangelism was to write learned tracts, have them printed, and hope that people would read them.

Surprisingly, though half-crazy, Woolston turned out to be a born pamphleteer. His style was vivid, his humour pungent, and his attacks on his fellow clergy—whom his Cambridge experiences convinced him were conspiring to suppress his glorious vision of the truth—added just the touch of scandal needed to make him sell. Needless to say, the clergy were annoyed and sought means to shut him up. So, when he unwisely mentioned in a pamphlet that the historical evidence for both the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection are slender, the Bishop of London persuaded the Attorney General to start a blasphemy prosecution against him. But Woolston's friends from academic life—notably William Whiston, the mathematician—exerted pressure, and the prosecution was dropped.

Woolston took this as a victory, and celebrated it with a new and even more daring series of tracts: his *Discourses on the Miracles*. In these, he applied his allegorical method to the New Testament, and

sought to show that the miracles of Jesus are allegories, and not literally true. And a very thorough demolition job he did upon them—to the delight not only of his followers in the Church, but of the growing body of sceptics and infidels outside it. The efforts of various counter-pamphleteers to knock Woolston's arguments down tended in many cases only to reinforce them. Woolston said that if the miracle of the Gadarene swine was literally true, it made Christ guilty of criminal damage against the owner; to which Bishop Smalbroke replied: "This permission of Jesus to the evil spirits was amply compensated by casting a whole legion of devils out of one person—that is, by suffering about three of them to enter into each hog, instead of about six thousand of them keeping possession of one man!" The *Discourses* sold tens of thousands of copies, and the controversy produced some sixty different pamphlets, some supporting Woolston, mostly against him.

But by now Woolston had gone too far. For the *Discourses* he was prosecuted in earnest. On 4 March 1729 he was tried in the King's Bench for blasphemous libel in attacking the miracles, and the jury, without even retiring, convicted. In arrest of judgment, his counsel—like counsel in the *Gay News* case—tried to argue that he had written with no intention to attack the Christian religion, but this objection was set aside.

Woolston was fined £100, sentenced to one year's imprisonment, and—the real sting—ordered to find securities of £4,000 for his good behaviour for life. As he could not pay the fine, let alone find the securities, he had to stay in prison at the end of his sentence. Various influential friends lobbied the King to release him. But the King, who had pardoned the notorious rake, Colonel Charteris, on his conviction for raping his servant-girl, understandably thought blasphemy a more serious matter, and Woolston stayed in prison until his death in 1733.

Even at the time, there was disquiet about Woolston's imprisonment for saying what every Sunday-school teacher would be saying about the miracles a few generations later. Various figures in the Church felt the need to justify it. "Hard liners" said that no one should be allowed to contradict the truth of Christianity. And others said that he was rightly prosecuted, not for what he said, but because he needlessly resorted to *irony* and *ridicule*—the modern apology for blasphemy prosecutions which rings distinctly hollow after it has been applied to such a case as this.

Look Back in Petulance

DEIRDRE FARNFIELD

One of the more tiresome products of the "anti-permissive" lobby is the person who is constantly looking to the past as a golden age of beauty, high moral standards and human perfection. Disseminators of the myth have little knowledge of social history or else prefer to ignore reality. Joanna Bogle recently published another version of her homily on the theme. The author of this article, a medical journalist and sex educator, probes a little deeper.

I am a devotee of what I call "Lot's Wife Literature". Lot's wives are forever looking back, bewailing the state of the nation: be it today's teenagers, today's Government, today's fashions or today's food. To a Lot's wife, children used to be clean and polite, the ruling party really did know best, clothes were sensible and food wholesome. Lot's wives can be found writing in Roman times (lamenting that modern women were not what they used to be), among medieval chroniclers (complaining about apprentices playing rowdy football in the streets) and 18th-century diarists (bewildered by outlandish new fashions). Last month the doyen of The Responsible Society, Joanna Bogle (*née* Nash) yet again contributed to this long and respected tradition with a perfect example of the *genre* published in the *Daily Telegraph*.

Wielding the cat-o'-nine-tails of gentle self-reproach, Joanna bewails the deplorable behaviour of her peers: "Looking at my generation, product of the 60s, I am slightly sickened. By and large we are disagreeably materialistic and soft centered. We can't seem to do the normal things that most other generations have done because we simply don't have the will power". A product of the same generation, I confess to being somewhat puzzled by this description, which does not fit any of my peers. Might it tell us more about Joanna and her friends than be a broad description of a generation?

Joanna looks back and ponders "on just how disagreeable it was to grow up in the late 60s and early 70s", an era "when Comprehensive schools replaced Grammar schools, when the race relations industry took over all discussion of immigration, when television threatened family life, when patriotism became a sort of joke, when the Health Service began to offer free abortions and free contraceptive devices to teenagers, when planners ruined towns and cities". An era, she concludes, "of pretty well unmitigated nastiness including the decimalisation of our currency"!

Poor Joanna, what a nasty world! It makes one wonder what this particular Lot's wife would prefer? Looking at the key words she uses to express her

horror at the society she has to live in, a return to L S D would appear to loom high, followed by Julian Amery as Prime Minister, laws to prevent you from laughing at King — whoops! — Queen and country, and censorship of television to prevent any programme that shows or discusses sexual activity or sexuality in any overt or adult manner. (Programme makers and actors involved in such revolting, puerile, sexist and covertly sexual shows like the "family" entertainment favoured by M. Whitehouse —Benny Hill shows, for instance—need not worry; I'm sure we would be allowed to continue to snigger and teach our children about sex relationships in this traditional manner.)

Next in order of importance would of course be swingeing fines for teenagers "caught" enjoying sex (ie becoming pregnant), in the shape of expensive rather than "free" abortions. Oh—and we'd all be able to live in cottages with roses over the door.

All Things Nice. . .

For someone who was educated by nuns, Joanna shows understandable gaps in her education. But I would hope that more of us who might have benefited from the broader curriculum of a Comprehensive are aware of the sad, human trait in individuals and societies to remember the cream and forget the indigestion. Joanna doubts, for instance, that her generation will ever produce "nice old ladies with graciousness and courage", forgetting that such nice old ladies might well have been promiscuous flapper girls in their carefree youth.

And what about "the Naughty Nineties"? Arguably the most explicit pornography ever produced was published for the Victorian *paterfamilias*, that upright pillar of respectability. And of course those nice, sweet old grannies were usually drawn from the upper classes. If you were of the working class you died long before attaining that state, worn out by hard work and childbearing. The unemployment, bad working conditions and malnutrition were horrific. Before talking about graciousness and courage, one should be aware of what foundations underpinned a society of outward serenity and beauty.

It takes a special kind of arrogance—understandable, normal and acceptable in a teenager—to retain into your 20s and 30s the belief that you invented a rebellion, or anything else for that matter. Joanna appears to believe that she and her friends are the only teenagers to ever decry the norms of their parents' society (in her case, voting in school debates in favour of pre-marital sex, pot, pop and pills). Of

(continued on next page)

LETTERS

THE CASE FOR HUNTING

The most important basis for free thought is an accurate view of reality. Ted McFadyen appears to have been woefully misled about the Co-operative Wholesale Society's hunting ban on its land. ("Not Quite What Priny had in Mind", July.)

I would welcome the opportunity to state the field sportsman's case. All fieldsportsmen, including shooting people and fishermen, not just foxhunters, have been upset by the Co-op's proposed move. The field sports community in this country amounts to over four million individuals. If this is taken together with their families and relatives who might also be expected to act in concert, it is not just a matter of a few Masters of Foxhounds who may take their trade to Fortnum and Mason as Mr McFadyen suggests. It is in fact a very large body of opinion.

The men who actually farm the land in question,

Look Back in Petulance

course, unlike the rest of us, she, endowed with special virtue, managed to pull herself out of this degenerate state. How childish!

The one most important change in the society of the 80s to which I would point is a refreshing break in the walls of hypocrisy. Marriages have always failed—but they used to be papered over with indifference, retained for financial or social reasons, and supported by infidelity. There were always unwanted children—but they were accepted as inevitable, tolerated rather than loved and brought up with discipline rather than care and understanding. Young people have always had premarital sex—but they used to hide pregnancies in hasty marriages or support the flourishing illegal abortion trade.

The Importance of Being Joanna

Teenagers have always been "smug, self-centred and very certain of their own importance" and "utterly convinced . . . about everything", whether contemporaries of Plato, Augustus, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Pepys or Bogle. Most of them grow up to recognise that this is an essential part of maturing that we all go through and that our parents and grandparents have shared this rite of passage. Some of us retain a few ideals and a freshness of mind from that outgrown youth.

Smug, self-centred and very certain of her own importance, Joanna Bogle believes that her return to Christianity and reaffirmation of the solid virtues of "family traditions, humour, loyalty and God" make her and her society somehow unique. Rather, she is acting as generations have done before her—eating her cake in the heady days of irresponsible youth and self-righteously going on a diet in the sober days of her second quarter century.

Plus ça change . . .

the Co-op farm managers, were not consulted before the decision was made. This is hardly democratic. When many of them sought to make their opinions felt in opposition to the decision, their views were treated by the directors with open contempt.

Mr McFadyen is wrong to refer to the Co-op Directors as landowners in any meaningful sense. They are not landowners. When they are elected they gain a certain amount of control over Co-operative Society assets. This includes 38,000 acres of land and many millions of pounds; it is as wrong to refer to them as landowners as it is to refer to them as millionaires. The land is part of the Co-operative Society's assets and it is the duty of the Directors to look after the best interests of the land, of the men who farm it and of the shareholders. The banning of foxhunting will do nothing for any of these groups.

It might be argued that the Directors' move could be supported on the grounds of humanity. I am afraid this claim will not hold water. Whilst the Directors have courageously banned foxhunting they have failed to mention fox snaring, trapping, shooting, gassing, poisoning or digging out. None of these practices have been banned on Co-operative Society land. Co-operative and farm workers will be free to use them 365 days a year.

Is this what Mr McFadyen and the Co-op mean by humanity?

IAN COGHILL
British Field Sports Society

RADICAL FEMINISM

So Terry Liddle's diatribe was based merely on the view of some "radical feminists" he has talked to. (Letters, July.)

I would describe myself as a radical feminist—meaning that radical change is needed in outdated laws and attitudes. But I am not a man-hater nor a lesbian. It is nonsense to say that feminist publications are forbidden to men. Anyone can buy "Spare Rib". Anyone can join the Fawcett Society. There are feminist newsletters on any College campus for a few pence, or free.

Having generalised from small data, what does Mr Liddle conclude? That racialism, religious intolerance, woman-hating and pornography should be allowed to flourish without check from the law, but man-hating is "pathological". Racialism leads to fascism. It led to Hitler and his "final solution" to the "Jewish problem", and subsequently to Zionism and the Palestinian problem. We have all seen the cruel results of religious intolerance. Pornography leads to violence against women.

Woman-hating has flourished for thousands of years, from the authors of the Old Testament, to Herodotus, St Paul, the priests, the rabbis, the ayatollahs and male homosexuals through the ages down to our own times. Man-hating, on the part of a few lesbians, has done no harm, except to some fragile male egos.

MARGARET MOULTON

WOMEN NEGLECTED

Surely it is detrimental to the cause of freethought that "The Freethinker" gives so little space to the situation of women, specifically women under the tyranny of Christianity. As in the popular Press, women's affairs are represented as the business of a few lunatic lesbians. The repression of all women under Christianity and the persistence of Christian myths and metaphors in our present society is ignored. It is not enough to subsume women within the "broad mass of the working-class" or to invite the odd famous woman to speak.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 3 October, 5 pm for 5.30 pm. Michael Duane: "Education—for What?"

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

Glasgow Humanist Society. Information regarding meetings and other activities are obtainable from Norman Macdonald, 339 Kilmarnock Road, Glasgow, G43, telephone 041 632 9511.

Harrow Humanist Society. The Library, Gayton Road, Harrow. Wednesday, 13 October, 8 pm. Peter Heales: "The Future of Work".

Humanist Holidays. 24-28 December: Christmas at a central Brighton hotel. Details of this and other holidays from Mrs Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Swarthmore Institute, 4 Woodhouse, Square, Leeds. Tuesday, 12 October, 7.45 pm. Gordon Pemberton: "Pemberton's Progress: a Personal View of Humanist Ethics".

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

National Secular Society, 702 Holloway Road, London N19, telephone 01-272 1266. Annual Outing, including visits to Hever Castle and Down House (home of Charles Darwin), Sunday, 12 September. Cost: £5.50 including entrance fees.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Details of activities obtainable from Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, telephone Kenilworth 58450.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House Annexe, Page Street, Swansea. Tuesday, 24 September, 7.30 pm. Ray Billington: "Declaring God Redundant".

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 26 September, 5.30 pm. Maevie Denby: "The Future of the British Humanist Association".

Mrs Marjorie Cocksedge of Eastbourne underwent an operation for lung cancer which was a complete success. The registrar at Brook Hospital, London, told her family that she would live to a ripe old age. However, the patient had lost six pints of blood during the operation and a transfusion was necessary. But Mrs Cocksedge belonged to the Jehovah's Witness sect which prohibits such practices and she refused the transfusion although fully aware of the consequences. Six days later Mrs Cocksedge died of anaemia. After the inquest her daughter commented: "My mother held religious views and I am proud she died for her views. Mother will be resurrected in heaven where I am sure she will be happy".

The attitude of "The Freethinker" towards women contrasts greatly with the sympathy and publicity allowed over the years to male gays, rightly in my view, but what about women, gay or het? Furthermore, books which describe the sexist nature of Christianity and the persecutions, moral, ideological and actual which that religion has inflicted on women, are not reviewed in your columns though space is found for the most obscure works.

The reason that many feminists (radicals, lesbians or otherwise) hold closed meetings is that they are usually misrepresented in the public media generally—if they get a hearing at all, that is.

BRENDA ABLE

Mary Kenny, the Roman Catholic author whose book, "Why Christianity Works", was reviewed in the October 1981 issue of this journal, was recently quoted in the "British Weekly and Christian Record" as saying: "Catholicism has a higher proportion of drunks, pimps, prostitutes, inveterate gamblers and general con-men than any other religion in this country".

Mr Mellish Exits Right

Bob Mellish, who recently left the Labour Party to a chorus of praise from Fleet Street hacks, is one of the Roman Catholic Church's most dependable lobbyists in the House of Commons. Accusations of "Mafia tactics" against Mellish's critics ring hollow in view of his own political and business career. The Tammy Hall-style machinations of Catholic activists in his area of London, and in other sections of the Labour Party, have been conveniently overlooked by most journalists and commentators.

It is likely that Mellish will sponsor a candidate to stand against the official Labour nominee at Bermondsey. One possibility is John O'Grady, a Southwark councillor; another is Michael Ward, a former Labour MP for Peterborough.

In common with Catholic MPs in all parties, Mellish was sympathetic to the Franco and Salazar regimes in Spain and Portugal. He visited the Portuguese colony of Angola in 1964 but "saw no signs of suppression".

Mellish's Right-wing views alienated him from a large section of the non-Catholic members of the local Labour Party and Trades Council. But block votes and control of various factions by his henchmen protected him. It was by openly backing other candidates against Labour that he over-reached himself. Had he not resigned, expulsion was virtually certain.

Mellish has been a member of the Knights of St Gregory since 1959. He is also believed to belong to the secret Knights of St Columba.

Apartheid: Split in Dutch Reformed Church

The Dutch Reformed Church, principal architect of South Africa's racially structured society, seems set for one of the most turbulent periods in its history. For there have appeared in this hitherto inflexible monolith cracks that could have far-reaching repercussions throughout the Republic.

Barry Duke writes: In earlier reports for *The Freethinker* I have plotted the course of "change" in South Africa over the past nine years or so, showing that, by and large, reforms carried out by the ruling Afrikaner-dominated Government, in power for close on 35 years, have been little more than exercises in painting over rust. In an attempt to placate overseas critics, a certain amount of tinkering occurred in relation to the apartheid laws; but no fundamental reforms were attempted.

Granted, petty apartheid—which manifested itself in signs like "whites only" on park benches—was phased out. But the Grand Scheme itself, couched in more palatable terms such as "separate development" ("the blacks separate while the whites develop", a friend once wryly observed) and "plural development" continued to be pursued with relentless zeal. This policy was aided and abetted all the while by the Dutch Reformed Church which has always insisted that its objection to racial intermingling has strong theological justification.

The Church, of course, was right. If one believes in God, and accepts the authority of the Old Testament, the logical conclusion to be drawn is that South Africa's non-white races were conveniently placed there by the Almighty, not only to hew wood and carry water, but to dig coal, gold and uranium as well. In both theological and economic terms, this was an ideal situation. Both the Old and New Testaments go to great lengths not merely to defend slavery, but to actively promote it.

Biblical Origins of Apartheid

Thus was the doctrine of apartheid founded—a doctrine that steadily expanded into a complex system of institutionalised racism that had no equal anywhere in the world. It was ugly, dehumanising and costly in terms of both human and financial resources. It cried out to be dismantled, but, despite a growing realisation among many of the country's whites that they faced the stark choice of seeing either apartheid, or the country, collapse, the Dutch Reformed Church tightened its stranglehold on the legislature, and set its granite-like face against the merest hint of reform.

But no organisation—even one as monolithic and intolerant of dissent as the Dutch Reformed Church—is immune from doubt. And that, possibly, is

where South Africa's salvation lies. For doubt seems to have crept into the Church; it fomented and, without warning, erupted a few weeks ago into a small but, in South African terms, highly significant result. The bombshell took the form of a letter in the Church publication, *Die Kerk Bode*, in which 123 white Dutch Reformed leaders called for an end to the apartheid system.

They stressed that a social order built on racial separation "is unacceptable because it alienates the nation's races". They criticised laws which prohibited mixed marriages and those which required the races to live apart. Such laws "have become symbols of this alienation and cannot be defended scripturally". J. P. H. Serfontein, a religious journalist in South Africa, called the statement "a passionate scriptural challenge of the most sacred belief on which the structure of Afrikaner nationalism has been built for more than 40 years".

The fact that the statement, which went on to say that apartheid "cannot be reconciled with biblical demands for justice and human dignity", places the 123 dissidents firmly up a theological gum tree, is of no real consequence to the rationalist. However, it is worthy of contemplation if only to remind us of the danger of attempting to use the Bible, which is essentially an anti-social document, as a moral or political guide.

Fundamental Questions

The real significance of this outbreak of dissension is the fact that it is bound to carry the seeds of doubt much deeper into the Afrikaner ranks. For the first time since they gained power, Afrikaners are being directly confronted with the realities of the iniquitous system they helped to construct.

By openly allying themselves with the struggle against racism, and by refusing to fight in what they see as an unjust border war, a number of Afrikaners have come into direct conflict with the Government and its "security" laws. They are experiencing treatment hitherto reserved only for black people and white English-speaking opponents of apartheid.

The question that now remains for the thinking Afrikaner to ask is: "If the Dutch Reformed Church has, during all these years, been wrong about apartheid, how many other things has it been wrong about?" From this point it is only a short step to questioning the fundamentals of Christianity itself.

They could find the answers illuminating. That is possibly why the South African authorities fear atheism even more than "die Swart Gevaar" (the Black Menace).